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Cuban Migration to Syracuse, NY: "Los Comunicados" and the Evolution of Social Networks and Cuban Identities

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Abstract

This dissertation investigates the phenomenon of Cuban migration and highlights the critical role that social networks play in facilitating the process of emigration, settlement, and the formation of new identities for Cuban migrants in Syracuse. With a focus on the most recent waves of Cuban migrants, the study explores how social networks have become integral in shaping the migration experiences of these new Cubans, enabling them to navigate the challenges and opportunities associated with emigrating and settling in Syracuse, NY, a non-gateway city.

This research employs a qualitative approach, drawing on in-depth interviews of twenty-five participants, participant observations, and analysis of various forms of digital and offline social networks. This study offers insights into the intimate complexities of their journeys, shedding light on the ways in which social networks are instrumental in facilitating migration and supporting the establishment of new lives in new environments.

The dissertation begins by delving into motivations behind Cuban migration, encompassing a range of factors such as economic opportunities, political circumstances, and family reunification. It then explores the mechanisms through which social networks are utilized by Cuban migrants, both in pre-departure phase, the journey phase, and during the settlement process. The analysis examines how these networks provide capital in the form of practical assistance, information sharing, emotional support, and access to resources, which are crucial for successful migration and community integrations. These newest Cuban migrants connect with their social networks in an unprecedented way through the use of social media in each part of their journey, necessitating the introduction of a new wave of Cuban migrants, Los Comunicados.

Furthermore, the study investigates the transformative role of social networks in shaping new identities among Cuban migrants. It explores how individuals negotiate and construct their identities as they adapt to the cultural, social, and economic contexts of their new destination. This research examines how social networks serve as platforms for identity negotiation, providing spaces for individuals to connect with others who share similar experiences, values, and aspirations.

Ultimately, this dissertation contributes to the existing literature on Cuban migration by identifying a new wave and offering a nuanced understanding of Cuban migration dynamics and the ways social networks shape migrants' experiences. The findings provide valuable insights for policymakers, practitioners, and scholars, emphasizing the importance of recognizing and harnessing the potential of both digital and offline social networks in facilitating successful migration outcomes, fostering integration, and promoting Cuban migrants' well-being in their new destination location.

CUBAN MIGRATION TO SYRACUSE, NY: "LOS COMUNICADOS" AND THE EVOLUTION OF SOCIAL NETWORKS AND CUBAN IDENTITIES

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Introduction

Background of Study

Scholars have long been fascinated with migration and how immigrants are incorporated into their new countries (Alba and Nee 2005, Brettell and Hollifield , ed. 2000, Levitt and Waters 2006, Massey and Espinosa 1997, Portes and Rumbaut 2006, Schiller et. al 1995). Recent studies have shied away from arguing that immigrants completely assimilate into their new societies, instead recognizing that ties to their home country remain strong (Eckstein and Barberia 2002, Grasmuck and Pessar 1991). A large body of literature regards the role of social networks as instrumental in the migration process in both sending and receiving countries (Bankston III 2014, Dolfin and Genicot 2006, Eckstein 2006, Menjívar 2000, Miraftab 2016, vanMeeteren and Pereira 2013). Other studies examine transnational activity within communities, describing the back-and-forth movement of people, capital, goods, and information that occurs between the new country and the home country, but it is through social networks that that movement is made possible and sustainable.

The topic of Cuban immigration to the United States has gotten the attention of scholars but also policymakers and journalists. When Cubans first began arriving in the United States in the early 1960s, they settled in Miami, Florida and began to establish ethnic enclaves. This first wave of Cuban migrants was made up of primarily upper-class, white Cubans who were politically active and fleeing from a newly formed Communist government. These Cubans

became known as “exceptional” migrants who not only shared cultural, racial, and socioeconomic characteristics, but also had a unique, motivated organizational capacity and ability to tap into social networks to achieve successful incorporation into the United States. These immigrants were welcomed into the U.S. and applauded for their cultural and economic contributions to the area. As a group identity, Cubans in the U.S. began claiming their status as “exceptional” migrants due to their overwhelming success as an ethnic group in Miami. Over sixty years and four distinct “waves” of Cuban emigrants later, the demographic of Cubans coming to the U.S. has changed as has their settlement locations within the U.S. and status upon arrival. Future waves of Cuban migrants were not almost exclusively “white professionals,” as was the initial wave. Despite the increasing diversity of the Cuban diaspora, the identity label of “exceptional” immigrants remained, largely being fueled by Cuban migrant success in the ethnic enclave of Miami. Cubans have embraced “exceptionalism” as part of an ethnic group identity, taking that identity with them to other parts of the United States.

Another contribution to the status of Cuban “exceptionalism” was the special immigration status outlined for Cuban refugees escaping a Communist regime. For a long time, policymakers such as Florida Senator Marco Rubio and Representative Carlos Curbelo, also from Florida, tried to argue that Cubans were not “exceptional” and deserving of the special immigration status afforded them within the 1966 Cuban Adjustment Act, and the later 1995 adjustment to this policy, better known as the “Wet Foot, Dry Foot” policy. They reasoned that while the policy aided a lot of Cubans fleeing a Communist regime, the most recent waves of Cubans were coming to the United States for economic reasons.[1] Finally, on January 12, 2017,

[1] https://www.usatoday.com/story/news/world/2017/01/13/cuban-americans-migrant-policy-repeal/96545720/

that argument against the "exceptionalism" of Cubans as immigrants seemed to be acknowledged when President Obama repealed the 'Wet Foot, Dry Foot' immigration policy[2], sparking even more controversy amongst scholars, journalists, and Cuban and American citizens alike.

Regardless of whether the special immigration status afforded to Cubans because of the Soviet era was warranted, the fact remains that many Cubans continue to migrate to the United States either to reunite with family or in pursuit of economic or social freedoms unavailable in their own country. Journalists from news sources such as CNN, the New Yorker, the Miami Herald, report on the humanitarian concerns that arise when Cubans attempt to reach the United States via land rather than sea.[3] Cuban migrants cross up to eight Central American countries to reach Mexico and then typically cross the Rio Grande into Laredo, Texas. Once on U.S. soil, under the 'Wet Foot, Dry Foot' policy, they had been able to claim special immigration status and immediately begin receiving welfare services other immigrants often wait months for. During the Presidency of Barack Obama, under the threat of repeal of this policy, the number of Cuban immigrants was continually on the rise. In fiscal year 2009, Obama's first year of Presidency, Cuban migration to the United States had been relatively low at around 7,000 asylum-seekers, but the Pew Research Center reports that this number increased annually each year of his combined terms. The 2016 number of Cuban visa-less entrants was about 7 times

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[2] https://www.miamiherald.com/latest-news/article126276379.ece/binary/Joint%20Statement%20FINAL%20-%20US%20alt.pdf

[3] http://www.cnn.com/2016/03/24/americas/cuban-migrant-crisis/index.html, https://www.newyorker.com/news/news-desk/the-cuban-migrant-crisis, http://www.miamiherald.com/news/nation-world/world/americas/cuba/article45357492.html

more than the 2009 number according to U.S. Customs and Border Protection data, even surpassing 2015's total of 43,159, which had been considered a surge year.[4]

As mentioned, a major factor in the increase in Cuban migration during those years was fear and anticipation. As Obama began loosening restrictions on the Cuban embargo and opening communication between the United States and Cuba many Cubans hastened to begin their journey to the United States. The fear, which did come to fruition at the end of Obama's 2nd term, was that the unique immigration policy available to Cubans would be changed or abolished, and that "now or never" sentiment heavily contributed to the substantial rise in the number of Cuban immigrants entering the United States.[5] Under the Presidency of Donald Trump the United States saw a sharp contrast in stance toward immigration, including refugees, compared with that of Barack Obama. Following the COVID pandemic and during the Biden administration, Cuban immigration has risen again.

This research took place over years during three Presidencies and the Coronavirus-19 epidemic and reflects changes in trends of migration that have taken place since the revocation of the "Wet Foot, Dry Foot" policy of the current Cuban Adjustment Act. We are living in an unprecedented time in terms of Cuban migration and non-traditional destination community integration. It has been over sixty years since the U.S. enforced an economic embargo on Cuba, and we have lived through an entire generation welcoming Cubans into the U.S. without question while other immigrants have a much lengthier and more difficult route to be able to

[4] http://www.pewresearch.org/fact-tank/2016/08/05/cuban-immigration-to-u-s-surges-as-relations-warm/
[5] https://www.dhs.gov/sites/default/files/publications/DHS%20Fact%20Sheet%20FINAL.pdf

apply for their "green card" (LPR status), if they are eligible at all.[6] After January of 2019, Cubans were still eligible to apply for asylum upon arrival in the U.S., but they were required to show proof of religious or political persecution and a founded fear of returning to Cuba.[7]

Recently, and despite a more limiting immigration policy, an NBC News article from December 16, 2022 reported that the over 220,000 Cubans arriving in the U.S. through the U.S.-Mexico border and the 6,000 others who were interdicted at sea during FY 2021 comprised an historic wave of immigrants that would have a lasting impact on Florida.[8] Due to this mass exodus, and in attempt to avoid further humanitarian crises, in January of 2023 the Department of Homeland Security announced new humanitarian parole processes which allows Cubans (along with Haitians, Nicaraguans, and Venezuelans) traveling by air to request to come to the United States as long as they have a sponsor in the U.S. that agrees to provide financial support for the duration of their two-year parole program.[9]

[6] According to the Migration Policy Institute, "As a result of Cubans' special treatment in U.S. immigration law, the majority of Cuban immigrants who obtain green cards do so through the humanitarian protection channel. In FY 2015, 88 percent of the roughly 54,400 Cuban individuals who became lawful permanent residents (LPRs) that year did so via the refugee category, compared to just 14 percent of all new LPRs. New Cuban green-card holders were much less likely than new LPRs overall to obtain green cards as immediate relatives of U.S. citizens (7 percent versus 44 percent), or through family-sponsored channels (4 percent versus 20 percent)." https://www.migrationpolicy.org/article/cuban-immigrants-united-states

[7] According to the Migration Policy Institute (https://www.migrationpolicy.org/article/refugees-and-asylees-united-states), "Refugees and asylees are individuals who are unable or unwilling to return to their country of origin or nationality because of persecution or a well-founded fear of persecution. In the United States, the major difference between refugees and asylees is the location of the person at the time of application. Refugees are usually outside of the United States when they are screened for resettlement, whereas asylum seekers submit their applications while they are physically present in the United States or at a U.S. port of entry." Another difference between refugees and asylees is that "[r]efugees must apply for lawful permanent resident (LPR) status – also known as getting a green card – one year after being admitted to the United States. Asylees become eligible to adjust to LPR status also after one year of residence but are not required to do so."

[8] https://www.nbcnews.com/news/latino/historic-wave-cuban-migrants-florida-impact-lasting-rcna61989

[9] cu.usembassy.gov

Purpose of Research

This study investigates the critical role that social networks play in facilitating migration journeys from Cuba to Syracuse, New York, a mid-sized, Northeast, non-gateway city. Of the twenty-five Cubans that I interviewed, all decided for different reasons to emigrate from Cuba. Despite the culture of migration that exists in Cuba, and overall scarcity of food and resources that many Cuban citizens feel, not all Cubans desire to leave Cuba, nor do all who want to leave emigrate. Those who leave are only able to emigrate when they have the social network connections to do so. Thus, this research focused specifically on those who decided to leave Cuba, successfully followed through on their decision, and ended up as immigrants in a non-gateway city. In ethnographic tradition, I analyzed the migration narratives of these Cubans in response to three main research questions: 1) What are the reasons that these Cubans chose to leave their home country, family, and friends?, 2) How did they eventually arrive here in Syracuse?, and 3) What roles do new and existing social networks play in exit, journey and settlement processes?

This dissertation examines social networks and how they shape outmigration, the journey, and the eventual settlement process. It looks at the impact of social networks on Cuban migrants' abilities to survive and thrive socially and economically in Syracuse, an unknown city to most Cubans. Cubans arrive in Syracuse because (1) they learned about the destination through social networks from a friend or family member already living there, (2) they believed it to be close to or similar to New York City, or (3) an agency or organization in Florida or Texas connected with a Syracuse resettlement organization on their behalf.

This research problematizes treating the Cuban diaspora as homogenous and understanding all Cuban migrants through the perspective of Miami Cubans. Cuban social networks in Syracuse are not institutionalized as they are in Miami, FL. Instead, they change and adapt depending on socio-political circumstances and individual needs. During the settlement stage of migration, the participants of my study formed and activated social network connections to navigate and cope with disappointments, hardships, and everyday needs. Many of the connections these Cubans searched for in Syracuse would be unnecessary if they had settled in Miami where there are built-in social networks supports for economic, social, and cultural needs.

Furthermore, the study investigates the transformative role of social networks in shaping new identities among Cuban migrants in Syracuse. It explores how individuals negotiate and construct their identities as they adapt to the cultural, social, and economic contexts of their new destination. Social networks serve as platforms for identity negotiation, their identities becoming social capital that they use within their current social networks, and to gain access to new ones. While ethnic “rules” in Cuba promoted by the government define what it means to be Cuban, these “rules” shift in Syracuse during identity negotiation, affecting the strength or weakness of social network ties. In Miami, Cuban identity “rules” are more likely to stay closer to that of Cubans in Cuba because of the similar weather and demographic makeup of the city.

Finally, the newest wave of Cubans coming to the United States has increased access to social media apps and information in Cuba, which did not exist for the general citizen population until recently. In 2014 ETECSA, Cuba’s communications company, introduced wi-fi

"hotspots" in parks and other public places, in 2016 ETECSA began a pilot program of broadband internet which allowed some Cubans to access it from home, and by 2019 internet was legalized for private homes with a permit. This changed the face of Cuban migration by widening access to social network connections and providing access to information that was previously closed off to many Cubans, especially those that didn't have family already in the U.S. This access has also opened the door to nuanced uses of social networks, especially in settlement locations outside of Miami, something that is explored further in this dissertation.

Literature Review

A Social Capital Approach to Networks and Migration Culture

The overarching framework for this research project is the idea that social networks are at work in various ways throughout the stages of migration: outmigration, the migration journey, the settlement process, and eventual incorporation into the new society. Moreover, the history in Cuba since its political transformation to communism over sixty years ago has created a culture of migration, which Kandel and Massey (2002) describe as when "international migration becomes so deeply rooted that the prospect of transnational movement becomes normative: young people 'expect' to live and work in the U.S. at some point in their lives" (981). Those cultural aspirations to migrate are communicated and socially reproduced through social networks consisting of multi-generational families and friends and make outmigration possible. During the migration journey and settlement stages, social networks provide support and capital to ease difficulties and remove obstacles. Likewise, in terms of incorporation, especially in non-gateway cities, social networks provide information

and social capital necessary for survival, while at the same time reproducing some of the cultural norms within those communities, whether positive or negative. For Cubans in Syracuse, successful incorporation can be affected negatively by race when not "protected" by culture.

To understand how social networks function in conjunction with different types of capital, and how these networks can contribute to social reproduction within a community, we can look to Pierre Bourdieu's (1986, 1990) and Carl Bankston's (2014) theories on social capital and social networks to see the connections. Bourdieu (1986, 1990) argued that the social reproduction of ideas is made possible by the passing along of different types of capital. This concept helps to begin to explain the complexities involved in social networks, since social networks are made up of a combination of connections between individuals living in and with different social realities and who have access to different forms of capital. Social networks also exist between individuals and larger organizational groups, introducing other forms of capital as well. Bourdieu (1986, 1990) introduced the idea of social reproduction first within the field of education to explain how inequalities are reproduced by the passing along of certain types of capital. Bourdieu discusses four forms of capital: *economic capital* refers to money and concrete possessions, *social capital* consists of connections and networks accessible to a person, and *cultural capital* encompasses education and knowledge of culture and cultural objects; Bourdieu later added *symbolic capital* which refers to honor and prestige available to a person. These forms of capital, possessed by and accessible to individuals, exist and are transferred within social networks. Social networks are the relational structures between individuals and/or groups, and are not only what make migration possible, but also what helps determine where and how migrants settle.

Carl Bankston (2014) discusses social networks at length and employs Wellman's (1999) idea of *whole networks* in his book. Bankston writes that "[i]n whole networks considered as relational structures, the central focus is on the participants as points of connection. If we map out a set of network contacts, we can represent the structure of the network community in terms of any of its properties" (12). Bankston further employs the idea of *multiplexity*, or "the degree to which two individuals are tied to each other in different ways" (14; see also Skoretz and Agneezens 2007). In terms of "ties," Granovetter (1973) names time, intimacy, and emotional intensity as measures that help define whether a tie is weak or strong. He also discusses how acquaintances will be privy to different, and perhaps more useful, information than that of friends because the closer two people are, the more their circles will overlap, and the less "new" information they will be able to offer. For migrants, both weak and strong ties are valuable; weak ties are important in that they offer useful short-term resources such as access to sources of information, whereas strong ties are essential in that they provide things such as concrete financial assistance, places to live, (Granovetter 1973), or employment opportunities (e.g. Sue, et al. 2019).

Utilizing Bankston's explanation of how social networks function, his idea of multiplexity goes hand in hand with Granovetter's concept of weak and strong ties in social networks and it is especially helpful in talking about social networks in the realm of migration. This is because while the quantity and quality of capital a migrant possesses are important, his/her ability to mobilize that capital or those ties within the network is arguably equally important. Bankston's (2014) idea of multiplexity, or the idea that individuals are tied to each other in multiple different ways, is a way of explaining that each individual's social network is made up of both

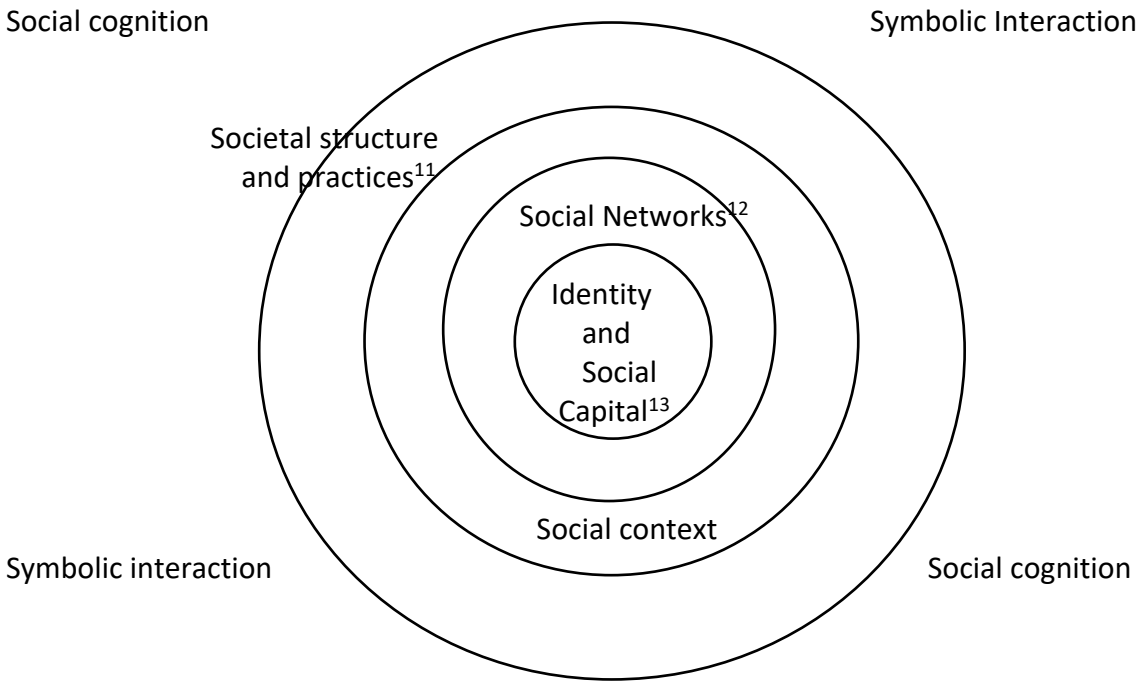
weak and strong ties. Variation in strength of ties is necessary to increase one's own forms and quantities of capital.

In the case of Cuban migrants in Syracuse, I analyzed the connections between migrants' possession and acquisition of different forms of capital. I found that the difference in strength of a tie is closely related to possession of different forms of capital, and the ability to activate the ties in one's network is dependent upon several different factors: (1) the initial origin and purpose of the tie, (2) the length of connection time, (3) the utility of the tie for each individual involved (a cost-benefit analysis which can result in a different outcome for each individual), (4) a mutual interest in investing in the connection, or in other words, the reason for maintaining the tie. Those factors, combined with proximity of place (same city) or relation (ie. family), and the cost to each individual when capitalizing on the connection determine whether the individual will be able to activate the connection in the social network. Thus, the different forms of capital allow one to enter a relationship with another individual, and these relationship ties can be weak or strong depending upon the aforementioned reasons. Ties can also weaken or strengthen over time; social networks (made up of ties of varying strength) are not fixed and are always being negotiated and renegotiated. Hence, social networks consisting of immigrants finding their way in a new place with new people can be expected to change and shift frequently.

Below is a visual interpretation of a network-based social capital approach to immigration (Bankston 2014) with the addition of an identity component which treats identities as "fluid, multidimensional, personalized social constructions that reflect sociohistorical contexts" that are also based on "space, both geographic and virtual" (Howard 2000:367). It

shows how each of the components within the concentric circles affect and are affected by each other, thus illustrating the fluidity of identity, different forms of capital, and social network ties, and how all of the above are affected directly or indirectly by societal structure and practices within the community. The identity component placed in the center with social capital illustrates how identity is different from social capital, but how it can also be used similar to social capital to create new ties within social networks.

Visual Interpretation[10] of a Network-Based Social Capital Approach (Bankston 2014) to Incorporation combined with Fluid, Multidimensional Identity Components (Howard 2000)



[10] Original diagram, ◎ Erika Carter Grosso
[11] Examples of societal structure and practices would be racism (individual and/or structural), established community practices/events/places, political practices and/or inclinations, etc.
[12] Social networks include religious organizations, clubs, politically-based relationships, ethnic connections, etc.
[13] Here we understand social capital as fluid, social constructs, which within networks offer opportunity for reciprocity and cooperation.

To explain this diagram better, I will touch upon each of the outer components of the circle and how they relate to social networks and identity. Social cognition, in short, is a theory of how individuals process and store social information (Fiske and Taylor 1991, Augoustinos and Walker 1995, Howard 2000). In its application to immigrant social networks, it helps explain how new community members categorize information, individuals, and situations they encounter. These categorizations help to form the schemas that society and individuals use to explain and justify social behavior and relationships, and those categorizations take their cues from the sociopolitical contexts of the new community they are entering. It is through a social cognitive lens that we can better understand the formations of social networks, the strengthening and weakening of ties along one's social networks, and unfortunately, the social reproduction of racism and many other inequalities in Syracuse.

Symbolic interaction is the idea that individuals participate in a meaningful process of communication by reciprocal meaning and values triggered by common symbolic understanding. According to Howard (2000) "people attach symbolic meaning to objects, behavior, themselves, and other people, and they develop and transmit these meanings through interaction" and then behave according to those assigned meanings. In initial incorporation stages, Cuban migrants will likely have the most meaningful communication with other Cubans since they have shared cultural symbolic meaning, but as time goes on, they will learn more language and create meaningful communication and understanding with others they meet.

Both social cognition and symbolic interaction are derived from social context, past and present, and are important tools in building common social networks and mutual

understanding and performance of identities. A lack of social cognition or improper symbolic interaction due to lack of cultural knowledge can result in limited access to social networks, social capital, and opportunities in general. On the other hand, common social cognition and symbolic interaction are what initially draw Cubans to other Cubans upon arrival to Syracuse. Furthermore, once Cuban migrants begin to understand social contexts in a new community, they can also use identity as a flexible resource, much like social capital.

Finally, in terms of understanding Cuban social networks, I found the Marxist-feminist understanding of social reproduction offered by Ferguson and McNally (2015) in their work on Mexican migrants also useful, particularly when discussing outmigration and transnational activity. Ferguson and McNally understand social reproduction as "the inner connections of household, neighbourhood and community activities with the monetized social activities (predominantly wage-labour) necessary to market-dependent reproduction, wherein food, housing, transportation, clothing and so on must be purchased as commodities" (2015:2). For these authors 'monetized activities' refer to wage-labor as the principal means of subsistence, but activities such as "street-vending, selling sex and independent domestic production are also part of the social picture" (ibid). All these activities are an enormous part of the Cuban economy, exposing Cubans daily to foreign capital and fueling desire on the part of many Cubans to migrate in search of different opportunities. Ferguson and McNally recognize that in the global capitalist economy, understanding migration and the social reproduction of global capital-labor relations requires acknowledging the interconnectedness of waged/monetized work with decisions, socio-cultural practices, and informal activities undertaken at the household and local levels, and across borders. This interconnectedness would not be possible

without the existence of both local and global social networks and further speaks to how they influence and sustain a culture of migration.

Cuban Migration Literature

Despite shifts in immigration policy, the extensive history and strong political disaccord between Cuba and the U.S. has contributed to what would now be considered a "culture of migration" (Kandel and Massey 2002) within Cuba. A "culture of migration" suggests that migration becomes deeply rooted and ideas of emigration become normative within the culture (Kandel and Massey 2002). Coupled with access to social networks living abroad, a culture has developed within Cuba that normalizes emigration as a path to a better future, economically, socially, and politically. Furthermore, increased access to cell phones and social media within the country, relatively limited for Cubans until 2018-2019, has changed the ways social networks can be accessed and used for future emigration in many ways. Scholars have made sense of Cuban migration by documenting emigration waves made up of Cubans with particular characteristics leaving Cuba during a distinct socio-political time period. This research introduces a fifth wave of Cuban emigration along with its characteristics and demographics.

The first wave of Cuban migration began on January 1, 1959, when Fidel Castro and his rebel army overthrew then Cuban President Fulgencio Batista, there was first a political shift to socialism, and then to communism. This forced many Cubans who disagreed with the new regime to flee Cuba for the United States, initiating the first of four major waves of Cuban-U.S. migration. The Cuban Adjustment Act of 1966 (P.L. 89-732) was a Cold War initiative by the U.S. government intended to help those Cubans living in the U.S. adjust their status to become legal

permanent residents after living in the United States for two years.[14] Cristina García (1996) explains that the U.S. government had three main purposes behind passing this law: 1) to help Cuban professionals meet State licensing requirements, 2) to assist elderly Cubans in receiving welfare benefits available only to U.S. citizens, and 3) to encourage émigrés to establish psychological ties to the U.S. (42).

The Cuban Adjustment Act has gone through three major modifications since its initial enactment in 1966. In 1976, the Act was modified to allow the wait period for Cubans to apply to become permanent residents to be reduced from two years to one (P.L. 94-571).[15] Next, in 1995, under the Clinton administration, the applicability of the Cuban Adjustment Act was reduced with the 'Wet Foot, Dry Foot' Policy. This revision stated that to be admitted to the U.S., a Cuban had to reach U.S. land, and that any Cuban intercepted by the U.S Coast Guard in U.S. waters would be either returned to Cuba or repatriated to a third country if found to be in fear of government persecution. Previously, Cubans reaching U.S. waters were admitted to the country. Finally, in January 2017, President Obama ended the 'Wet Foot, Dry Foot' Policy, which had extended a special parole program for Cubans arriving by land at U.S. borders. Previous to January 12, Cubans intercepted in international waters were still turned back unless they were able to prove reasonable fear of political persecution, but Cubans presenting themselves at a land border of the U.S. without a visa were allowed automatic entry into the country; thus, the

[14] The Cuban Adjustment Act passed in November of 1966 states that "the status of any alien who is a native or citizen of Cuba and has been inspected and admitted or paroled into the United States subsequent to January 1, 1959 and has been physically present in the United States for at least two years, may be adjusted by the Attorney General, in his discretion and under such regulations as he may prescribe, to that of an alien lawfully admitted for permanent residence if the alien makes an application for such adjustment, and the alien is eligible to receive an immigrant visa and is admissible to the United States for permanent residence." Retrieved from http://uscode.house.gov/statutes/pl/89/732.pdf

[15] Retrieved from https://www.gpo.gov/fdsys/pkg/STATUTE-90/pdf/STATUTE-90-Pg2703.pdf

"dry foot" part of the policy. Obama's January 2017 change meant that Cubans presenting themselves at the U.S. border without a legal visa and without apparent need of humanitarian (refugee) relief would be treated as other immigrants according to U.S. immigration law.

Along with Obama's change in reception policy of Cubans to the U.S., which was made in response to normalization efforts of relations between the U.S. and Cuba, he also agreed to end the special parole program for healthcare professionals in third countries. These changes were bilaterally agreed upon and set forth in a Migration Accord in both Spanish and English and signed in Havana, Cuba.[16] Two of the respondents in this study were able to come to Syracuse through this special parole program for healthcare professionals, and given the large number of Cuban medical professionals in Cuba and abroad, the termination of this program blocked a way to the U.S. for many well-educated Cuban professionals.

Silvia Pedraza, a Cuban immigrant herself, has written extensively on Cuban immigration to the United States since the 1966 Cuban Adjustment Act. In her book *Political Disaffection in Cuba's Revolution and Exodus* (2007), she describes four waves of migration, beginning with the Cuban Revolution in 1959 and ending with the Balseros of the 1990s. Pedraza details the majority class affiliation of immigrants in each wave, as well as the political context of their exodus. The first wave of Cuban migration consisted primarily of upper- and middle-class citizens who denounced the Revolution and wanted to escape the political turmoil that went along with the transition from capitalism to socialism. This wave ended in 1962 with the Cuban Missile Crisis. The second wave was from 1965 to 1974, when the Cuban Refugee Program

[16] To read the full agreement and see all its terms go to https://www.miamiherald.com/latest-news/article126276379.ece/binary/Joint%20Statement%20FINAL%20-%20US%20alt.pdf

ended. During this program, the Cuban and U.S governments cooperated in daily 'Freedom Flights' to aid in family reunification. This wave was characteristically more working class, and politically and economically, Cuba was incorporating elements of communism influenced by Eastern Europe. This wave was also the largest in number, with the U.S. Census Bureau estimating 247,726 Cubans immigrating into the U.S. The Cuban Adjustment Act modification of 1976 allowed these Cubans to apply for permanent resident status after living in the U.S for one year and one day.

In 1978, the Cuban government engaged in what was known as "the Dialogue" with representatives of Cuban exiles living in the U.S. "As a result of the Dialogue, the Cuban government agreed to release 3,600 political prisoners and to promote the reunification of families by allowing Cubans in the United States to visit their families" (Pedraza 2007: 7). In terms of gender the first two waves included more females, whereas the next two waves would be male dominated. Cristina García (1996) characterizes the 1970s as a period of transition for the exile community in south Florida in terms of social and economic progress (137).

In 1980, influenced by the family reunification visits of the late 1970s, Cubans from Miami sailed by boat to the Mariel Harbor in Cuba to bring family back to the U.S. These immigrants are known as the Marielitos, named for their port of exit, and the wave was characterized by mostly young, single males. Often, Cuban officials would put the socially "undesirable" of Cuba on the boats with them. Prisoners, mental patients, and gays were amongst those sent away by the Cuban government. This fact is likely why the Marielito generation is the most politically charged of the immigration waves. Cristina García (1996) describes the 1980s as a time of identity reconstruction for Cuban émigrés living in south

Florida, as older expatriates struggled with resentment toward these new Cuban arrivals. She explains that “their very different perceptions of Cuba and the revolution, reminded them that, over the course of a generation, Cuban culture had developed in different ways on opposite sides of the Florida Straits” (115).

The fourth wave of immigrants is known as the Balseros, or those who exited Cuba on rafts. This wave began after the collapse of the Soviet Union in 1989 and continued until the end of 2016, when former President Obama revoked the 1996 ‘Wet Foot, Dry Foot’ provision of the 1966 Cuban Adjustment Act. Balseros were economically and politically motivated due to the collapse of the Soviet Union, Cuba’s main economic supporter. In 1989, Fidel Castro had announced “a special period in a time of peace,” now simply referred to as “the Special Period.” During this period, which does not have a documented end, austerity measures were implemented, and most Cubans were living in extreme need and hunger. Balseros that left Cuba at the beginning of this wave were considered by the Cuban government to be doing so illegally, but in 1994, undoubtedly as an attempt to equilibrize discontent, Castro instructed Cuban Coast Guard officials to let any Cubans desiring to go to do so. While from 1985 to 1993, about 6,000 balseros illegally fled Cuba and made it safely to the U.S., in the summer of 1994, when Castro made his announcement, 34,000 Cubans exited (Pedraza 2007: 8; see also the 2000 U.S. Census Bureau).

The Balsero Wave was characteristically male, due to the large risk involved in sailing on makeshift vessels to the U.S. and initiated one of the first pushbacks from the U.S. policy standpoint. Previously, Cubans were politically seen as refugees fleeing from a communist regime, but the sheer number of Cubans attempting to enter the U.S., coupled with the “push”

from Castro, instigated a temporary rerouting of Cuban refugees by Attorney General Janet Reno. The U.S. Coast Guard redirected the refugees to the naval base in Guantanamo, after which the U.S. and Cuba signed a new agreement which would allow the balseros to be resettled throughout the United States. 1996 was also the year of 'Wet Foot, Dry Foot' provision and the Helms-Burton Act, which strengthened sanctions of the U.S.-Cuba embargo, but allowed Cubans setting foot on American soil to be admitted as refugees.

Cubans continue to migrate to the U.S., some still arriving in Miami, Florida on rafts, but many traveling to South American countries instead, such as Guyana, Venezuela, or Ecuador, and then through Central America and Mexico to arrive in the U.S. via Laredo, Texas or another southern border point. The latest wave of Cuban migration relies heavily on social networks in the form of social media and cell phone communication to make their way from Cuba to the U.S. As previously mentioned, the revocation of the 1996 'Wet Foot, Dry Foot' policy by former President Obama in 2017 further changed how and under what conditions Cubans migrate. Cuban migrants must now prove founded fear of persecution upon return to Cuba to be granted permission to remain in the U.S.

Social networks have so changed the face of emigration for Cubans in the past five or so years that although it was not an original goal of this research, it became clear that it is time to begin to demarcate a fifth wave of Cuban migration. Cristina García (1996) and Pedraza (2007) very clearly laid the groundwork for the variations between the first four waves of Cuban migration, and after looking at the new ways Cubans are using their social networks to migrate, and the sheer numbers of Cubans migrating from Cuba to the U.S., I aim to contribute an understanding of how a culture of migration and unprecedented usage of social networks have

created a fifth wave of Cuban migrants, 'Los Comunicados.' 'Los Comunicados,' as the nomer suggests, is at its simplest, "The Communicated Ones." These Cuban migrants, to begin delineating some common characteristics, grew up in a culture of migration that is no longer dictated strictly by immigration policies that tell when and how they should emigrate and where they should go, but rather guided by social networks in Cuba and abroad that provide opportunities for agency in those decisions.

New Destination Literature

Broadly, new immigrant destination literature encompasses a wide range of strategies that migration scholars are using to understand, study, and theorize about economic, social, and political development of immigrant communities in new places in innovative ways. According to the Migration Policy Institute (Feb. 8, 2011)[17] from the 1990s on, new destinations have been rising in importance as settlement locations for immigrants. Rather than the previous trend of settling in traditional gateway cities such as New York, Los Angeles, Chicago, Boston, Miami, and Houston, immigrants and refugees are being resettled in areas with a lower concentration of immigrants and less of a history of immigrant reception. Within migration literature, scholars name these locales either 'new destinations' or 'non-gateway cities,' and this literature base has been rapidly developing since the 1990s. Religious and non-profit organizations originally played a large role in guiding these migrants to these cities, but with the more recent boom of social media, social networks have contributed to bringing migrants to those cities, even when previous organizations that aided migrants lose funding or aren't able to continue services.

[17] https://www.migrationpolicy.org/article/immigrants-new-destination-states/

From 1990-2000 many of the non-traditional settlement locations were in the southern and central regions of the United States and did not have a strong previous history with immigration.[18] For example, Stewart (1999) wrote about Atlanta's urban expansion and the diversification of its cultural landscape due to a variety of immigrants being drawn to the city and its suburbs for employment or by formal resettlement programs (133). Skop and Menjívar (2001) discuss Phoenix a possible 'new Latino immigrant gateway,' arguing that non-Mexican Latino immigration was being ignored in recent literature and that "novel patterns of settlement and residential behavior in the city" (65) were worth exploring. Skop and Menjívar (2001) interviewed immigrants from Cuba, El Salvador, and Guatemala, in addition to Mexico, to uncover the reasons for new, burgeoning immigration into the city (67). They found that the majority came for job opportunities, because of refugee resettlement programs, or as secondary migrants from California (68). This was similar to the findings of Stewart (1999). It is worth noting, however, that Skop and Menjívar were two of the few, if not the only, researchers writing about Cubans outside of Miami during this period.[19] Thus, this study will be a welcome contribution to the sparse literature base that explores Cuban migration to new destination cities.

[18] MPI reports that, "While the total U.S. foreign-born population grew by 57 percent from 19.8 million to 31.1 million between 1990 and 2000, this growth was considerably more pronounced in the southern and central regions of the country. The immigrant population more than doubled in 19 states, many of which had little prior experience with the foreign born." (https://www.migrationpolicy.org/article/immigrants-new-destination-states/)

[19] See, for example, García 1996, Portes and Rumbaut 2001, or Portes and Stepkick 1993 to read about Cubans in Miami. Cubans were migrating to Miami after 1990 in response to austerity measures implemented in Cuba during the Special Period as a result of the collapse of the Soviet Union, previously Cuba's main economic supporter. In writing about Cubans outside of Miami, Skop and Menjívar (2001) detail the process by which many Cubans have been resettled outside Miami since the 1990s (71), which is a systematic integration into neighborhoods with ties to Catholic organizations linked to the Office of Refugee Resettlement.

Between 2000-2009, 14 states in the U.S. reported population growth of 49 percent or more of the foreign-born, which was at or above twice the national rate, and these 14 states in the southern and central regions represented the "new destinations" of the 21st century in the literature.[20] Singer et al., eds. (2008) discuss the effects of the new trends of settlement in these new destinations in their edited book, *Twenty-First Century Gateway: Immigrant Incorporation in Suburban America.* They name the following topics of interest to the contributing scholars of their book: spatial patterns of residence and the growth of immigrants and refugees living in the suburbs, mixed attitudes and receptions of established residents toward newcomers, local attempts to "manage" immigrant flows, and the role of networks in migrant decision-making (17).

From 2010 to the present, the topics of interest mentioned above within new destination literature have maintained scholarly attention, with added interest and/or nuances in related issues such as race (Price 2012, Winders and Smith 2012), spatial segregation (Hall 2013, Winders 2013), economic assimilation (Carneiro et. al 2012, Marrow 2013), institutional politics (Winders 2012), and community revitalization (Grey & Woodrick 2005, Miraftab 2016). Marrow (2013) makes a general theoretical and methodological call for migration scholars to rethink their measurements of assimilation in new immigrant destinations based upon a shift of "reference groups" and immigrants' "similarity" to whom? (142). Winders and Smith (2012)

[20] https://www.migrationpolicy.org/article/immigrants-new-destination-states/ ; Singer et al. had also written for MPI (April 30, 2008) that, "the fastest growing 'second-tier' metropolitan areas, including Atlanta, Austin, Charlotte, Dallas, Minneapolis-St. Paul, Phoenix, Portland, Sacramento, and Washington, DC, along with 11 other metropolitan areas, house one-fifth of all immigrants in the United States today," and named them the '21st-century gateways' (https://www.migrationpolicy.org/article/twenty-first-century-gateways-immigrants-suburban-america)

draw attention to the importance of contextual differences of immigrant (and native population) experiences in non-traditional Latino South settlement cities, especially due to race issues. And Hall (2013) examines residential segregation in both established and new destinations for 10 immigrant groups and finds that despite new possibilities that are offered via the redistribution of America's foreign-born population (both for immigrants and natives), "the dispersion of immigrants is not leading to greater residential integration" (1890). This is important because it shows the theoretical and empirical issues that become more visible in the U.S. when we examine them in the context of new destinations.

Gaps in the new destination literature

Much of the most recent literature on new immigrant destinations in the U.S. has focused on the South, the Midwest, and the Pacific Northwest (see, for example, Hall 2013, Hardwick and Meacham 2005, Gilhooly and Lee 2017, Winders and Smith 2012). In fact, in Hall's (2013) extensive quantitative study on immigrant segregation from the native white population in new and established destinations across the U.S., he completely omits any data on the Northeast region of the U.S. (1884). While there are recent studies of immigrant populations in the Northeast, they are typically focused specifically on New York City, which is an established gateway city, and are analyzed either with a transnational lens or based on quantitatively determined data to compare particular measurements of immigrant incorporation (see, for example, Kasinitz et. al. 2008 and Smith 2006). What this means in terms of new destination literature in the U.S. is that there seems to be a (mis)understanding that (1) New York City is representative of all immigration to the Northeast of the United States, especially to New York State, and that (2) immigrants are not migrating to new destinations in

the Northeast of the U.S. These (mis)understandings have both resulted *in* and resulted *from* a respective gap in the literature. This is to say that there is both a lack of literature about new immigration destinations in the Northeast of the country and, it seems, a lack of understanding as to what research in the Northeast (outside of New York City) could contribute to migration literature, especially within the genre of immigrant incorporation.

Oropesa and Jensen's (2010) study on neighborhood disorder and social cohesiveness for Dominicans in Reading, PA provides an excellent illustration as to how studying small or medium-sized "new destination" cities in the Northeastern part of the U.S. can contribute to immigrant incorporation knowledge as well as understanding of other phenomena related to urban community life. The authors' study also counters earlier critiques referred to by Hardwick and Meacham (2005) that "population and ethnic geographers remain too focused on spatial patterns and too little concerned with broader social theories" (540). Oropesa and Jensen's conclusions speak to immigrant quality of life, effects of citizenship and language learning, and serve to contrast perceptions of neighborhoods in new destinations against typical New York City neighborhoods.

Local news sources report on community revitalization in cities such as Syracuse and Buffalo due to new immigration to the area,[21] as well as immigration issues facing undocumented migrants living and working in rural communities in Upstate New York.[22] Refugee resettlement, factory employment, and employment on rural farms, are just some of

[21]http://www.syracuse.com/news/index.ssf/2017/02/immigrants_boosting_the_economies_of_syracuse_and_buffalo_study.html
[22]http://www.syracuse.com/news/index.ssf/2018/02/once_tolerated_now_targeted_illegal_immigrants_in_cny_caught_in_crackdown.html

the factors contributing to the changing landscape of Northeast U.S. towns and cities such as Syracuse, in many of the same ways as the new destinations in other parts of the U.S. Marrow (2013) points out that "[b]y definition, new destinations are places with little previous experience receiving immigrants" (107), but she recognizes that re-emerging destinations can be included in the categorization of new destination literature as well[23]. Furthermore, she argues two other important ideas regarding new immigrant destinations: 1) they are diverse, and 2) they have increased the variety of contemporary contexts of reception for immigrants. Thus, communities such as Syracuse offer different contexts for comparison both within the state and region and across the United States. I will discuss the diversity and the variety of reception contexts separately to show their importance and how they have fueled research on new immigrant destinations, and how Syracuse fits in to this discussion.

First, Marrow (2013) reminds us that new destinations are diverse and range from rural, to suburban, to urban locales (108; see also Zúñiga and Hernández-León 2006). If this is the case, it is important for researchers to consider both metropolitan *and* non-metropolitan areas when considering research sites. The recognition of what smaller cities or towns or rural areas can contribute to new destination, diaspora, and international migration literatures is slowly taking shape, and those studies offer not only new insights on migration and place, but also on methodology and theory. For example, Gilhooly and Lee (2017), in their study on the differences between urban and rural Karen refugee communities, find that it is worth paying attention to the material differences between urban and rural resettlement life, especially when it comes to refugee communities who come from originally rural locations. The difference

[23] See Singer et al. (2008) for a more thorough discussion on types of gateways in the U.S.

between smaller and larger cities is also important when studying resettlement and immigrant integration. While most refugees are resettled in urban areas, this may not be ideal due to poverty, poor housing conditions, promotion of unhealthy dietary practices, and general distress due to exclusion from society (Gilhooly and Lee 2017:38). Gilhooly and Lee (2017) argue that these are disadvantages that could be changed by promoting refugee resettlement to rural locations, which would result in advantages for both the immigrant community and the receiving community. Thus, through a study done in a *rural* Georgia community, these authors have provided not only policy insight, but also methodological insight with an example of a distinct spatial approach to immigrant resettlement and incorporation.

Secondly, Marrow (2013) argues that "new destinations have increased the variety of economic, social, cultural, political, and institutional contexts of reception greeting immigration newcomers in the United States today" (108). While Marrow argues this idea in terms of how it affects the ways in which immigrants will assimilate into a given destination, we know also that while immigrants are shaped by their reception context, so also is the place of reception shaped by those immigrants. This type of two-way cultural and economic exchange can best be seen in some of the recent new destination literature that also falls under the categories of transnational studies and globalization. Miraftab (2016), in *Global Heartland: Displaced Labor, Transnational Lives & Local Placemaking,* provides an ethnographic study of rural "Beardstown, Illinois" and theorizes it as a global heartland. In conceptualizing the town this way, her goal was to focus on "localities marginalized by the dominant literature and misrepresented in dominant imaginations of the global spaces, [to show]…transnational relations that shape and are shaped by places in the heartland…and [finally to] seek to make a case for understanding

these places in their own right" (12). Thus, through her ethnography of "a seemingly isolated, small midwestern town," Miraftab "offers a relational theorization of place and politics of placemaking," and at the same time helps us "recognize the global cost and contingencies of revitalization of local places" (2016:23). She makes the case for studying not only marginalized populations, but also marginalized immigrant destinations.

Literature on Social Network Usage in Migration Journeys

Cecilia Menjívar (2000) wrote on Salvadoran immigration to the United States and argued that focusing on networks allows for "the study of migration as a social product, as an outcome of the interaction between decisions made by individual actors and political and economic parameters" (28). Menjívar focused on "the *processes* that lie at the core of informal networks" (4) and understood social networks as dynamic and changing, rather than fixed. Menjívar defined social networks as "the web of family, friends, neighbors, and so on, who can provide material, financial, informational, and emotional assistance on a regular basis" (2) and argued that immigrant networks are very complex and that this assistance depends largely upon the "structure of opportunity" (2) available to them upon arrival to their new destination. Many Cubans in Syracuse have named the support available to them via the government and non-profit organizations as a reason that they chose to join a fellow Cuban in Syracuse rather than elsewhere in the U.S. In Menjívar's study she argued against the romanticizing of immigrant social networks as sources of support, especially in poor receiving communities, since many times the assistance is conditional and uneven and depends upon other immigrants' abilities to accumulate enough resources to help each other. In my study of Cubans in Syracuse, I found that assistance need not be regular, as in Menjívar's definition, to exist as a possibility

within the network. It is for this reason I also rely on the concepts of weak and strong ties in this discussion. Although we differ slightly as to whether regular activation of assistance within the social networks is necessary to be counted as part of the network, Menjívar and I do agree that social networks are dynamic and changing. Consequently, it follows that the social networks will look different and serve different purposes according to person, place, and time, and space, requiring ongoing migration and resettlement studies.

Takenaka and Pren (2010) used data from the Mexican Migration Project (MMP) and the Latin American Migration Project (LAMP) to compare migrants' selectivity from Mexico and Peru, arguing that analyzing human and social capital at play within migrant social networks in sending and receiving countries can help predict who will migrate and when. Migrant selectivity includes factors that initiate the migration of certain individuals or groups from one country to another and is relevant to the outmigration stage in my study in terms of emigration factors at work within Cuban social networks. Takenaka and Pren (2010) found that "a crucial difference [in selectivity] lies in the nature of *migrant networks*, or how networks develop over time and how migrants utilize networks in migrating" (178, italics added). Furthermore, the authors determined that the selectivity of migration (who migrates, when, and to where) is important in the reception context and to development in the sending countries, and that "networks play a critical role in determining who leaves and who does not" (179). To complete their study, Takenaka and Pren (2010) looked at various measures of human capital (ie. education, occupational skill) and social capital to determine predictors of migration and in the end concur with Massey and Aysa (2005) that "long-distance migration requires both human *and* social capital to overcome greater barriers to migration." Takenanka and Pren's study of the Mexican-

Peruvian difference finds that the three most important factors of migrant selectivity are: how widespread networks are, who has access to migrant networks, and a mismatch between education and occupation (2005: 189-190)[24]. We see that two of the three most important factors in determining who will leave and who will stay, in the context of migration, are social networks. This highlights the need to put social networks at the forefront of any in-depth study of migration. Furthermore, although my study of Cuban migration does not focus specifically on migrant selectivity it does ask related questions, such as *why* Cubans choose to leave and how they utilize social networks in their outmigration and during their migration journey, which contributes to the understanding of *who* leaves. When studying migration journeys, it is necessary to articulate concrete, translocal activities to describe how they contribute to the formation and functioning of social networks (Portes 2011). An articulation of the formation and functioning of social networks through storytelling is part of the larger contribution of this study.

Flores-Yeffal (2013) also used data from the MMP, along with qualitative data from Guanajato, Mexico to "identify specific social dynamics by which favors were exchanged" (11) amongst Mexican migrants. She proposes the concept of Migrant Trust Networks as a special kind of social network used by undocumented migrants, especially, to have a safe "space" from which to gain information and tangible benefits. She argues that this undocumented status of members is what differentiates "trust networks" from typical social networks utilized by

[24] Takenanka and Pren's idea of "a mismatch between education and occupation" is when an individual's intelligence, knowledge, and/or education do not provide the life opportunities or outcomes expected. The result is that individuals decide to move to a different place in hopes to receive gains or profits relative to the human capital possessed by the individual.

migrants during a migration journey. Flores-Yeffal finds through her observations and empirical data that the social capital that exists within migrant trust networks (MTN's) is not exchanged based on reciprocity as in typical social networks, but rather due to "a spirit of altruism and gratitude for the previous assistance they received from others through risk-pooling" (172). This gratitude is manifested by "helping other newcomers in the future" (172), ensuring future cumulative migration streams. Within her study, Flores-Yeffal highlighted the need to focus on social context and pay attention to micro and macro levels of analysis when investigating migration flows. She argues that the context and place of origin matters in the formation of the MTN's and the major component necessary is a "clique-like network or peer group" (173) or other relationships of trust established at the place of origin prior to the act of international migration. Trust is also a major component of the social networks that Cubans form and engage with, although I argue that the formation and maintenance of Cuban social networks is more complex, expands beyond "paisanaje ties,"[25] and is precipitated by a common cultural upbringing under a socialist form of government.

Sue et al. (2019) also used a qualitative approach to discuss the interplay between social networks, social capital, and individual circumstances to discuss how each influences the U.S. destination choice of male, Mexican migrants. These scholars paid attention to the geographic diversity of options that ties within a migrants' network presented for destination choice, the form of tie interaction (face-to-face vs. long distance), the strength and type of tie (disposable, acquaintance, family), and individual circumstances to provide an account of the processes

[25] Flores-Yeffal and Aysa-Lastra (2011) define paisanaje ties as weak ties that serve as substitutes for the lack of strong ties available to a migrant. The authors base their definition and function of strong and weak ties from Granovetter (1973).

involved in destination outcomes. This qualitative study contributes much to the discussion of the importance of social network research and analysis within migration studies. As Bilecen et al. (2018) argue in the introduction to the Special Issue on social network analysis in the *Social Networks* journal, "understanding the experiences, needs and resources of these large and heterogeneous populations is essential for the development of public policies (1)," and for understanding social cohesion within communities. Migration scholars have long been arguing that "migratory processes are embedded in social networks" (Bilecen et al. 2018:1; see also Massey et al. 1993, Faist 2000, Waldinger and Fitzgerald 2004). Sue et al.'s (2019) study allows us to take a closer look at the settlement part of the migratory process.

Transnationalism and Cuban Identity

An extensive amount of literature has been produced about the transnational lives and identities of migrants. According to Portes et al. (1999), transnationalism involves "economic, political, and sociocultural occupations and activities that require regular, long-term contracts across borders for their success." Since that early definition scholars have argued that transnational activity need not be regular to be considered transnational, and that it does not require the physical crossing of borders. The International Encyclopedia of Human Geography (2020) now defines transnationalism as "flows and exchanges that take place across national borders. These include but are not limited to the cross-border movements and circulation of bodies, ideas, information, and things." This new definition is especially important in this study because a major argument of this research is that social networks are a source of transnational activity for Cubans, and that social media and cell phone communication across borders ignite

desires and provide information necessary for emigration and border crossing along the journey to the U.S. as well as cultural maintenance over time.

Levitt (2001:6) argues that "individuals are the appropriate unit of analysis for assessing the extent of transnationalism," while Cohen and Sirkeci (2011:81) argue that transnationalism at its core is simply "how these new immigrants bridge the gap between their sending and destination communities." They acknowledge that "[t]ransnational linkages form around cultural, economic, political, and social institutions…[and] can be popular and constructed around broadly shared beliefs, or…limited and organized around an event or practices…[and] can be real or imagined" (2011:82). Other scholars have added to the understanding of the transnationalism of social networks, arguing that "migrants tend to maintain relatively high numbers of cross-border relationships, irrespective of time of residence," (Lubbers et al. 2018), and that individual and contextual features (e.g., legal status, access to the local labor market, proximity of the origin country) affect (social) network transnationality" (Bilecen and Sienkiewicz 2015; Cachia and Maya Jariego 2018; Vacca et al. 2018, Lubbers et al. 2018).

This research supposes that a study of individual social networks must situate transnational activities in a globalized world. Some individuals in developing countries participate in activities within their country to push back against inequalities brought about by the infusion of global capital, many others choose to migrate to a different country in search of "a better life." For example, in *Global Heartland* (2016), a book about migrant placemaking in a rural town in Illinois, Faranak Miraftab explains that "an important force in the dynamics of transnational immigration is the imagination of an 'elsewhere' …a place where one can go and

be set for life, a place that promises a better future and hence provides an incentive to endure the risks…" (147).

Part of a Cuban identity involves not only sending remittances back home, but also mobilizing within social networks to help other desiring Cubans successfully perform their own migration journey and establish themselves in the United States. While the Cuban government doesn't actively encourage its citizens to migrate to the U.S. or other developed countries, foreign remittances make up the largest portion of the country's GDP and help subsidize citizens' needs.[26] Most recently, the identity of this new wave of Cuban migrants, Los Comunicados, involves increased communication across virtual borders. Cubans inside and outside Cuba can band together in support of or in disagreement with happenings in Cuba without any physical border crossing. This is a powerful and important shift in the Cuban diasporic identity which serves to minimize the gap between newer and older migrants, especially in Miami. As Cristina García (1996) explained, the 1980s were a time of reconstruction of identities in Miami due to the disconnect between new arrivals and established Cuban migrants. Nowadays, this disconnect is lessened by the widespread accessibility to social networks via social media, and the shift in understanding and identities are not as harsh.

In terms of Cuban migrants who settle elsewhere in the U.S., this fifth wave of Cuban migrants in our globalized world can perform financial transactions, manage activities, participate in celebrations virtually, and weigh in on decisions in Cuba from anywhere in the U.S. via social media networks and cell phone applications. Nonetheless, identity formation in

[26]https://www.havanatimes.org/?p=94444

new destination locations in the U.S. can still be challenging. In these new locations, Cuban migrants use their social networks to understand and navigate the cultural, social, and economic contexts of their new surroundings. The social networks also serve as platforms for identity negotiation and spaces to connect with other individuals who share similar experiences, values, and aspirations. They can also serve to socially reproduce negative treatment in that society that is gender or racially biased.

Jorge Duany, together with other authors in *Cuba Transnational* (Fernández, ed. 2005), wrote against the framing of Cubans as exceptional amongst Caribbean migrants. Duany argued that while Cuba's political situation in relation to the United States is unique, those political boundaries are becoming blurred with economics. He concluded that, like Dominican and Puerto Rican migrants, "Most Cubans now leave their country for economic reasons, much like other migrant workers. Many visit their families when they can and send money back home, as do Dominicans and Puerto Ricans" (18). At that time, though, still difficult was leaving the country to begin with, and the exorbitant costs of sending money back home. Transnational lives for Cubans were much more difficult and costly than for other Latino Caribbean migrants.

In 2011 Duany shifted his focus from *similarities* between Caribbean diasporas and their transnational activities, to the importance of relationships between countries in considering *differences* in *Blurred Borders: Transnational Migration between the Hispanic Caribbean and the United States.* Duany claims, "I argue that the form, frequency, and intensity of transnationalism largely rely on the nature of the relationship between sending and receiving countries" (2011:7). He points to the importance of the consideration of the "relationship between sending and receiving countries" and suggests the need to pay attention to historical

and political context when analyzing migration and transnational activities. This is increasingly true when trying to understand migration in our globalized world.

Significance of Study

Cuban Exceptionalism and a Fifth New Wave of Emigration

On the island, the idea of Cuban exceptionalism began with the success of the Cuban Revolution and has been perpetuated by the Cuban government through propaganda ever since. The ideals of Cuban independence and sovereignty from the U.S. are filtered through all available mediums, including billboards and sides of buildings (Carter Grosso, observations, Cienfuegos/Havana, 2017). In the U.S., Cuban exceptionalism has been defined by scholars as Cuban immigrant success, economically and politically, especially in Miami (Cristina Garcia 1996, Pedraza 2007, Eckstein 2009, 2022).

If we consider the political history between Cuba and the U.S., Cuban migrants are unique in relation to other refugee and immigrant groups in many ways. For example, politically, and largely due to the tension between Cuban socialism and U.S. democracy, prior to January 12, 2017 Cubans needed only to set foot in the United States to be able to legally remain in the country and begin the process of becoming a permanent resident after one year and one day.[27] Also, unlike the governments of the Hispanic Caribbean nations of Puerto Rico and the Dominican Republic, the Cuban government, at times, prohibited Cubans from returning to visit Cuba for a certain number of years if they left illegally (by sea). Socially and

[27] https://www.migrationpolicy.org/article/cuban-immigrants-united-states

economically, Cubans face more obstacles in communicating with and sending items back to their families and communities, especially given the recent embargo regulations put into effect by Trump in November of 2020 that affect Western Union usage in Cuba. Migration, transnational activity, and social networks involving the Cuban diaspora are definitively distinct from those of other immigrant groups, and even vary across the diaspora itself.

The newest wave of Cuban emigrants, Los Comunicados, belongs to a generation which has grown up during the Post-Soviet Special Period in Cuba and has experienced extended periods of extreme food, transportation, and energy scarcity throughout the island. This fifth wave of emigrants is far removed from the first, 'Golden' wave of exiles who were white, wealthy Cubans that left the island for Miami, FL directly after the Cuban Revolution. Los Comunicados have come to use cell phones and social media in ways that were nearly impossible for Cuban citizens prior to 2018. While Cuba legalized the possession of a home computer or cell phone with a permit in 2008 (no internet), it was not until 2014 that public wi-fi hotspots with limited internet access became available, and only to those who could afford a costly ETECSA card. In 2016 the first home internet services became available through ETECSA with fees which, again, typical Cubans making a monthly salary of the equivalent of $20-$25 USD could not afford. Finally, in 2018 internet mobile data became available and more affordable with a Nauta account and ETECSA card, and it was not until 2019 that the Cuban government legalized State-run private (limited) mobile internet access. Thus, in recent years, especially after the COVID pandemic, Los Comunicados have been able to make use of cell phones and social media in ways that have profoundly changing the dynamic of migration networks.

Understanding the Cuban diaspora in our globalized world involves studying Cubans not just in Miami, but in their new destination locations. In terms of settlement, some members of this fifth wave of Cubans are choosing to use their social networks to select a destination outside of Miami. In Syracuse, in describing why they chose to settle outside of Miami, participants said things like, "in Miami you don't have to learn English," or "it's too hard to find a job there because there are too many Cubans," and in reference to what it would be like to live in Miami, "if I wanted to live in Cuba I would have stayed in Cuba." Once in Syracuse, Cubans utilize their social networks to combat different obstacles and achieve different goals than they may have encountered had they settled in Miami.

The "exceptionalist" identity, first encountered in Cuba, and again in Miami stemming from the relative success of the first wave of "Golden Exiles" (Cristina Garcia 1996, Pedraza 2007, Eckstein 2009, 2022, Duany 2011), is manifested as just one component of the Cuban diasporic identity outside of Miami. New, unprecedented access to cell phones and social media while in Cuba, the usage of social networks to travel through Central America and Mexico to cross into the U.S., changes in the U.S. immigration policy, and increased settlement outside Miami are all characteristics that that have been captured through the stories of the participants from this study. The following sections elaborate further on how this research contributes to prevailing understanding of social networks, Cuban migration, and Cuban incorporation to new destinations.

Social Network Formation and Usage Throughout Migration Journeys

Much of the current research regarding Cuban immigration to the United States

focuses on large cities with established Cuban enclaves and which are extremely politically charged in the Cuban immigration discussion (Cardoso Ruíz 2007, Eckstein 2009, Flores 2010, Pedraza 2007). Cities with established enclaves also tend to have well-developed social networks (ibid.). There is a substantial body of literature that supports the ideas that: 1) social networks encourage migration (Massey and Espinoza 1997, Winters, et al. 2001, Munshi 2003, Colussi 2004), and 2) networks tend to attract members to migrate to the same geographic area (Bartel 1989, Dunlevy 1991, Jaeger 2000). However, little is known about the actual formation of migrant social networks (Dolfin and Genicot 2006), and few studies have provided empirical evidence of the actors involved in the migration process or the details of their participation (Garip and Asad 2013, van Meeteren and Pereira 2013).

Drawing on the conclusions of the aforementioned authors, this research on the characteristics and formation of social networks in the smaller, non-gateway cities of Syracuse is critical if we want to better understand the phenomenon of migration, where and why it originates and how it perpetuates itself. Syracuse is a relevant, current example of a city which is experiencing rapid growth of a particular group of migrants in a new area, without the presence of an enclave. This study helps to fill gaps in literature not only regarding the formation and development of social networks within and across borders, but also the role that those social networks play in new identity formation in new destination resettlement locations. In Syracuse, social networks function as cultural conservatories and to help overcome a variety of obstacles, while also providing certain protections against segregation and discrimination already present in the city.

A Fifth Wave of Cuban Migration

Much has been written about Cubans in the U.S. due to the long political and economic history that exists between the two countries. Because of this unique history, the majority of what has been written has been politically driven, sociologically presented as an example of ethnic niche formation or immigrant assimilation, and/or presented in relation to Haitian immigrants and dynamics of inter-ethnic relations and power (see, for example, Eckstein & Barberia 2002, Cristina García 1996, Pedraza 2007, Portes and Stepick 1993, and Stepick et. al. 2003). These representations of Cubans as an ethnic group have been useful for understanding Cuban culture and politics and for considering generational, occupational, gendered and racial differences between the waves of migration between 1959 and the present.

Perhaps, though, because so much has been written on Cubans in the U.S., it could be reasonable for scholars to believe that there is not much that is novel to be discovered. However, when we shift the focus on Cubans out of Miami and into a new settlement destination, we can gain new understandings of the formation of migration patterns and the variations in settlement experiences. Much of the abovementioned research on Cuban migration has taken place in Miami, a city with an established Cuban enclave and well-developed social networks, known also to be extremely politically charged in the Cuban immigration discussion. In Syracuse, there is a proportionately significant number of Cubans living in the area, but there is not an established enclave, nor do all Cubans settle in the same part of the city. Syracuse Cubans generally express less interest in Cuban American politics than their Miami counterparts do, arguing that the poor economic and political situation in Cuba can be attributed to the policies and corruption of the Cuban government rather than the U.S.-Cuba

relationship. The popular opinion amongst Syracuse Cubans that I interviewed is that change must come from within Cuba rather than from U.S. policy toward Cuba, which is a different stance than older generation Miami Cubans.

As historical and political circumstances change, the experiences and narratives associated with migration also vary. The Cuban case is no exception to these variations in migration. In this study, narrative representation with data collected through interviews, participant observation, and social media analysis, sheds light on the conditions under which Cubans migrate and offers historical and political insight into the current realities in different parts of Cuba and new places of resettlement. In recent years it has become more common for Cubans to travel via land through Central American countries and Mexico, crossing the border in Texas. The Pew Research Center reports that, "The majority of Cubans who have entered the United States by land in recent years arrived through the U.S. Border Patrol's Laredo Sector in Texas, which borders Mexico. In fiscal 2015, two-thirds (28,371) of all Cubans entering the U.S. came through this sector, an 82% increase from the previous fiscal year. In fiscal 2016, the Laredo Sector continued to receive the majority (64%) of Cuban migrants entering the U.S. through a port of entry. [28] Cubans arriving via South or Central America and crossing into the U.S. from Mexico, form a fifth wave of Cuban migration, one that heavily relies on social networks, including social media and cell phone communication, for outmigration, information, and migration route selection. A major contribution of this study is that it names this fifth wave of Cuban migration and specifies the characteristics that set it apart from previous waves.

[28] http://www.pewresearch.org/fact-tank/2017/01/13/cuban-immigration-to-u-s-surges-as-relations-warm/

Syracuse as a "New Destination" Site for International Cuban Migration

According to the 2000 and 2010 censuses, respectively, the number of Cubans living in Syracuse from 2000-2010 more than doubled as it grew from 552 to 1,192 (of 145,170 total inhabitants, and .37% to .8%, respectively).[29] After the 2020 census was taken, it was estimated that 1,728 Cubans are living in Syracuse as of 2023 (1.18% of the total population). The number of Cubans in Syracuse tripled over the course of twenty years, resulting in a proportionately large number of Cuban immigrants. There are very few studies on Cuban migration to smaller, non-gateway cities which receive proportionately large numbers of Cuban immigrants. However, some studies do exist on Latino migration in general to non-gateway cities. These studies also promote the importance of studying newly forming migration networks *outside* the better-known gateway cities (Allen 1998, Skop and Menjívar 2001, Stewart 1999). For example, in their study of Latinos in Phoenix, Arizona, Skop and Menjívar (2001) conclude that

> Latino migration in the area is becoming self-perpetuating. The larger the community becomes, the more opportunities it offers and the larger the community becomes. We know that the best predictor of who is going to migrate is who migrated before (Durand and Massey 1992). The presence of friends and families will serve as connections that progressively draw more migrants. And migration is only likely to increase as social networks become institutionalized" (74).

Sue et al. (2019) argue in their study on Mexican male migrants, that we must challenge assumptions that immigrants naturally gravitate toward large, co-ethnic communities when choosing settlement destinations. They found that many times communities saturated with co-

[29] https://factfinder.census.gov/faces/tableservices/jsf/pages/productview.xhtml?src=bkmk

ethnics can actually be a destination deterrent because it can be seen as an obstacle to assimilation or as a community full of competition in the labor market.

Syracuse as a "new destination" location for Cuban migration offers important opportunities for new insights and intervention in the literature bases of new destinations, and international migration more broadly. First, it offers a chance for theoretical and empirical comparison with Cubans settled in traditional gateway cities. Skop and Menjívar (2001) include Cubans in their study of Phoenix, and Skop (2008) does an additional study of Cubans in Phoenix on her own, but other studies of Cubans outside large gateways such as Miami or New York City have not been done in recent years, if at all. Skop (2008) points out that "'the Miami Model" has become so popularized that the Cuban population living in other areas has been virtually ignored and potential consequences of these émigres living in their new communities have been largely disregarded" (43). A research project on Cuban settlement in Syracuse in comparison to settlement in Miami positively contributes to the relatively non-existent literature base that exists on Cuban comparative studies within international migration.

Also, Syracuse, as a city with a growing immigrant population located in the "Northeast" U.S. (which is not a gateway city such as New York City or Boston) provides an opportunity for intervention in and contextual comparison with regional studies in new destination literature. Much of the recent new destination literature focuses specifically on the South of the United States and argues that Southern racial understandings matter both in terms of incorporation and residential segregation (See, for example, Hall 2013, Wang and Pandit 2003, Winders and Smith 2012, Winders 2013). Syracuse, as a city in the Northeast part of the U.S. provides insight

into how Northern U.S. compares with Southern U.S. in terms of ease or difficulty of incorporation.

Chapter 2

Research Design and Methodology

Research Design

Introduction: Restatement of Research Problem & Questions, Purpose of Study

According to a Brookings Institute study on poverty, out of the 100 largest metropolitan areas in the nation, Syracuse statistically had the highest rate of extreme poverty amongst blacks and Hispanics in 2013. Rutgers University professor Paul Jargowsky performed a study of censuses and showed that poverty has steadily and dramatically increased in Syracuse over the past decades.[30] He showed that in 2000 there were nine census tracts where more than 40% of residents were living in extreme poverty, 19 census tract neighborhoods in 2010 and at the time of the end of the study (2013) there were already 30 such neighborhoods where residents lived in extreme poverty. Paul Driscoll, Syracuse's commissioner of neighborhood and business development, was quoted in the local newspaper as saying that he and other city officials suspect that the increase in extreme poverty in Syracuse can be attributed to a combination of an increase in suburban development and an influx of refugees to the north side of the city since the year 2000.[31] Fast forward to 2022 and Syracuse, NY was ranked 3rd highest in overall poverty in the nation.[32]

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[30] https://www.brookings.edu/wp-content/uploads/2016/06/jargowskypoverty.pdf

[31]https://www.syracuse.com/news/2015/09/syracuse_has_nations_highest_poverty_concentrated_among_blacks_hispanics.html

[32] https://www.syracuse.com/data/2022/12/child-poverty-falls-in-syracuse-but-other-cities-saw-much-bigger-drops-census-says.html#:~:text=The%20national%20rate%20dropped%204.2,behind%20only%20Cleveland%20and%20Detroit.

An article published in September of 2018[33] stated that poverty for Hispanics in Syracuse was increasing at an even higher rate; 58% were living in extreme poverty in 2017, up from 40.5% in 2016. The mayor of the city, Ben Walsh, pointed to the influx of Puerto Ricans after Hurricane María devastated the island to partially explain the increase. Regardless of the reasons, clearly the "architecture of segregation" described by Jargowsky's Century Report[34] dominates Syracuse. Jargowsky explains

> we are witnessing a nationwide return of concentrated poverty that is racial in nature, and that this expansion and continued existence of high-poverty ghettos and barrios is no accident. These neighborhoods are not the value-free outcome of the impartial workings of the housing market. Rather, in large measure, they are the inevitable and predictable consequences of deliberate policy choices.

Any study that can help residents and city officials understand this problem at a deeper level can be part of its solution. I chose to focus on Cubans in Syracuse for the reasons previously stated, but this is just one of the many immigrant groups in Syracuse that I could have chosen. By putting faces and stories to the statistics I hope that long-time Syracuse-area residents will accept greater social responsibility for their fellow community members politically and economically, and acknowledge the resources and social, cultural and human capital that new residents can provide for the community. The questions I asked in this study were formed to capture the reality of the participants of the study and to help explain how they came to live in Syracuse, NY. I ask: 1) Why do Cubans chose to leave their homeland, family, and friends?, 2)

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[33]https://www.syracuse.com/politics/2018/09/syracuses_poverty_rate_spikes_among_hispanics_despite_declines_in_ny_and_nation.html

[34]https://jargowsky.camden.rutgers.edu/2015/08/14/architecture-of-segregation/

How did they eventually arrive here in Syracuse?, and 3) What role do new and existing social networks play in outmigration, journey, and settlement stages? These questions add a human facet to immigration and help to highlight who Cubans are, what they do as a community and how their Syracuse community could engage with networks already in place in ways that the whole community can benefit.

Research Context

This research aims to trace examples of how social networks contribute to the physical and social processes involved in Cuban migration journeys to Syracuse, NY, and vice-versa. These social networks serve not only to initiate and support the migration journey, but also to strengthen and solidify existing networks within the city and transnational ties to Cuba. Social networks exist in the forms of performing physical acts, contributing goods and/or services, and/or providing emotional, logistical, and financial support for other Cubans at different stages in the migration process. For example, Cuban immigrants that I have interviewed use social networks to gain information about the migration process and routes or possible destinations, to receive aid in community integration after arrival (ie. job information, help with paperwork, financial assistance), and to learn how to maintain contact with family and friends still in Cuba.

Syracuse is a mid-sized city located in the heart of Upstate New York and is the fourth most populated metropolitan area in New York State. Within Upstate New York, it is one of the four major refugee-receiving centers, along with Buffalo, Rochester, and Albany. In comparison with its overall population, Syracuse has more than enough Cuban migrants for a viable study. According to the 2010 census, 925 of Syracuse's 145,170 inhabitants were Cuban, up from 552

Cubans at the time of the 2000 census. This translates into a jump from .37% of Syracuse's total population being Cuban in 2000 to .63% of the population in 2010. This means that in 2010 Syracuse's Cuban population (.63%) was even higher than the nation's overall Cuban population (.58%).[35] In 2022, the Cuban population in Syracuse was estimated at 1,728,[36] which would be 1.18% of the total Syracuse population (147,033) as reported for the 2020 U.S. Census. In 2024, the overall percentage of Cubans residing in Syracuse would be even higher if the estimated 2024 overall population decline in Syracuse is accurate (143,349).[37]

The advantage of doing a study in a city which receives a large number of Cuban immigrants but that does not have the large ethnic enclaves that you would find in Miami, Florida or Washington Heights, New York, for example, is that it allows for more concrete identification of the process of the incipient formation of social networks. In larger Cuban enclaves, it is more difficult to trace how Cubans originally mobilized to support each other along their journeys because there are more organizations that are performing activities and services on their behalf. While there are certain organizations set up in Syracuse to aid immigrants and refugees, including Cubans, there are not many businesses run by Cubans as you would find in Miami or Washington Heights. Cubans rely on their networks to find jobs and information. An underlying assumption in this study is that both the migration journey and the daily experiences of Cuban migrants living in Syracuse will be significantly different from those of Cubans living in a city with higher concentrations of Cubans.

[35] http://www.census.gov/2010census/
[36] https://stacker.com/new-york/syracuse/biggest-sources-immigrants-syracuse
[37] https://worldpopulationreview.com/us-cities/syracuse-ny-population

Syracuse is home to two refugee resettlement organizations: Catholic Charities and Interfaith Works. Interfaith Works was originally founded to build bridges between people of different faiths and racial backgrounds but has gradually expanded its mission to serve other members of the community. According to the Interfaith Works website, "[o]ver the years, the agency added social service programs to address the needs of people who are vulnerable, low-income, targets of oppression, and refugees who arrive through the federal refugee resettlement programs, fleeing war, political repression, and famine."[38] Catholic Charities has a similar mission: "We are dedicated to caring for those in need while promoting human development, collaboration, and the elimination of poverty and injustice."[39]

The location of these two organizations in Syracuse ensures a steady influx of new Cuban refugees as well as secondary Cuban migrants into the community. This is because the Federal Office of Refugee Resettlement (ORR) works with local voluntary organizations to resettle refugees across the country, and in Syracuse, the ORR has a Cuban/Haitian Entrant Program resettlement contract with Interfaith Works. Interfaith Works partners with Catholic Charities and the Syracuse City School District's Refugee Assistance Program to provide various services to refugees. According to the local newspaper,

> Nearly all refugees resettled in Onondaga County are placed on Syracuse's North Side, within walking distance of refugee service centers like the North Side Catholic Youth Organization (an afterschool program run by Catholic Charities) and Interfaith Works. That part of the city has seen an unparalleled increase in the concentration of

[38] http://www.interfaithworkscny.org/about-us/
[39] https://www.ccoc.us/

extreme poverty since 2000, according to a report by a Rutgers University professor. Extreme poverty means at least 40 percent of people in the area live in poverty.[40]

Another indicator that the Cuban population in Syracuse is continually growing comes from informal conversations with a Cuban woman I met through a mutual friend. She and her husband, a Cuban pastor, were resettled in 2016 in Syracuse from another town in New York by members of an independent church. Due to the large, Cuban, Spanish-speaking population in the congregation, this pastor and his family lived on church premises, and were supported by the church congregation, which is a mix of American and Cuban members. Although he wasn't originally hired to work specifically with the growing, Spanish-speaking, Cuban population in Syracuse, necessity on both the family and church congregation's parts kept him living and working with the church still three years later when I revisited them. Churches are in a unique position to see the growth or diminishment of populations, and this pastor's wife assured me that the Cuban population in Syracuse is growing and changing.

A concentration in one area, such as the North Side of the city, is not the case for Cubans. I interviewed Cubans on the North, West, and East parts of the city. It has been reported that 62% of Syracuse's Hispanic population is living in poverty, which is the highest percentage in the nation for metropolitan areas.[41] This is significant contextual information

[40] http://www.syracuse.com/poverty/2016/03/refugees_in_syracuse_benefit_burden.html
[41]http://www.syracuse.com/news/index.ssf/2015/09/syracuse_has_nations_highest_poverty_concentrated_among_blacks_hispanics.html

for this study because it highlights the strong need for and importance of social networking in the Cuban community for sustainability and economic success.

Cubans in Syracuse are unique from other immigrants because in that they are many times settled as refugees and generally able to avoid the extreme poverty described above for Hispanics because they receive subsidized rent and other welfare aid from the government, at least at first. In my experience, I have also found that many Cuban immigrants are supported by other Cubans who have been living in the area longer. Some Cubans may move in with friends or family for the first year to save money, or choose housing offered by the resettlement agency near other Cubans. In these ways, Cubans can share labor and financial burdens, network to find each other jobs more quickly than might be possible for the resettlement agencies and rely on other Cubans for transportation until they can purchase their own vehicles. While Cubans are not concentrated in any one area of the city, there are certain areas that I have found to have higher percentages of Cubans than others. This study highlights the locations that form part of Cubans' social networks, further illustrating physically where and how the networks are forming, and where networks are strongest.

Another major piece of this study is the use of social media within social networks. This study uses examples as to how social media apps such as Facebook, Instagram, Tik Tok, and WhatsApp serve as communication ties within social networks, and how YouTube and other websites are passed along via social media and serve as ways to socially reproduce and maintain culture.

Over the course of doing interviews with Cubans in Syracuse, I noticed that although all are literate, some are better educated than others. This is apparent at times in the depth of conversation, but more so in written form. In arranging interviews, thanking participants for their time, or in congratulating life events on social media, I have informal conversations with each of my participants. Besides learning Cuban colloquial phrases and expressions I learned that Cubans who have less formal education spell many words phonetically. I had the opportunity to travel to Cuba and visit two families of participants in Syracuse, one in Havana and one in a rural town. In my informal conversations with and observations of Cubans both here and in Cuba, I learned that although education is universally accessible in Cuba, the quality of education varies based upon hometown location, proximity to major cities (especially Havana), generation, class, and race. These differences can also affect the accessibility and use of social networks in Syracuse. While Cubans of different social classes and races may interact with each other within the same social network(s) in Syracuse, not all possess the same socio-economic, racial, and cultural capital that provides the ability to activate nodes within the networks.

Participant Selection

The process of selecting participants for this project began through my personal connections with Cubans living in Syracuse. Other participants were accessed through snowball sampling (asking existing respondents if they know anyone else in the area that would be interested in contributing to my study) and by word-of-mouth contact through friends of friends and colleagues. The qualifications for participating in this research were that the respondent be over 18 years of age and have migrated from Cuba to Syracuse within the ten

years prior to the interview. I purposefully strove to interview close to an equal number of male and female Cubans, actively searching out participants of the opposite gender if recommendations for future participants weighed too heavily on one side or another.

Besides gender difference, there are other differences between respondents that I observed during the interviewing process. Some migrated from rural areas in Cuba, while others came from larger cities, such as Havana. Additionally, there were notable differences between those who were from Western vs. Eastern provinces, one of those being skin color. Those respondents hailing from the "Oriental," or eastern part of the island as it is called, tended to be darker in skin color, although this may not be representative of Cubans on the island. Also, although education is free in Cuba, the amount and type of education varied, creating class and professional differences. Racially, Cubans ranged from very light skin to very dark skin. Cuban respondents also varied in age, relationship/marital status, and whether they had children prior to coming to Syracuse. Also varied were how many times the respondent attempted to leave Cuba, the length of time it took for participants to get from Cuba to Syracuse, and the travel route and difficulty. These differences will serve to add detail and nuance to the multiple ways social networks are formed and migrants resettle in non-traditional destinations.

The Cubans I worked with for this project are recently arrived from Cuba and all are the first generation of their family to migrate to the United States. By focusing on recent, first-generation migrants, the narratives not only are politically relevant, but also illustrate more clearly the current situation for new Cuban refugees living in Syracuse and how these Cubans are creating and accessing social networks, and how transnational those social networks are in

nature. This study looks at how the composition of social networks for Syracuse Cubans shifts and changes over time, dependent upon factors such as life changes, citizenship status, and individual needs. Another important consideration in this research is that most Cuban émigrés living in Syracuse are 4th and 5th wave immigrants, meaning that they do not hold such strong political views as the 1st, 2nd, and 3rd waves who came to the U.S. in the 1980s and who tended to settle in or near Miami. Being newly-arrived and living outside Miami, I hypothesized that the ties the to their home country would be strong since their immediate family still lives in Cuba, and that relationships with family in Cuba would be maintained in a variety of ways, including the transnational practices of sending of remittances and visiting their relatives in Cuba once attaining Permanent Resident status. In addition, relationships are being formed daily with other Cubans living in Syracuse, in attempts to survive in a new place while trying to create a sense of familiarity to home.

Positionality

This research, at its very incipient stage, was born out of an intense desire to understand other human beings and their situational context. I am an avid learner and care deeply about my community and the people in it. I feel a strong conviction to do my part in making my community a better place for my children and to teach them that all kinds of people make up the world we live in and we all have a responsibility to each other. At the time I began my foray into this research, I had just taken a maternity leave from my prior career as a high school Spanish and English as a New Language teacher and was becoming enamored with Latin dance as a hobby. My career and hobby worlds came together while I was a young mother taking time off full-time paid work to raise my children. I began teaching part-time as an

adjunct at Syracuse University and salsa dancing one night a week at what was at the time the only venue in the area that offered it. The DJ at that venue is Cuban and we quickly became friends. The story he shared of his migration from Cuba, coupled with my already existing love and knowledge of Spanish language and culture, inspired me to learn more about Cuba, socialism, and migration. Eventually I enrolled in a Social Science doctoral program at Syracuse University with the proposed intent of researching how it was that there were so many Cubans ending up and living in Syracuse, and how this large immigrant community was practically invisible to native Syracusans. At the time I did not attribute this conviction to help make a group of people "visible" to social justice or an activist role; I just knew that it did not make sense that entire groups of people were excluded from "view" in a community. This is the place from which this research was born, and from there I have been privileged to hear the many migration stories that were the sources of this written work. Academically, I aimed to contribute new voices to the immigration conversation, and socially I aimed to help make visible the idea that a community is only as strong as *all* its members, and if those members are disconnected from each other a community cannot thrive. The latter has been the case for the Syracuse community.

I have lived and worked in Syracuse for my entire adult life, which is an advantage in this project, since I am familiar with the city and am able to draw on existing community relationships for access to participants. I am also a white, married female who has children, I speak fluent Spanish, and have previously taught all levels of Spanish and English as a New Language. Throughout my career and via my hobby of Latin dance, I have had the opportunity to meet and know a variety of Latinos, including Cubans. In my case, I believe that speaking

Spanish, being a teacher, and previously having connected with Cubans socially helped me enter the field and gain trust to do this research.

Data Collection Methods

The data for this project was collected through life history and semi-structured interviews from 2017-2022, with the majority being conducted between 2017-2018. Those interviews were supplemented with participant observations, ethnographic go-alongs (Kusenbach 2003), and content analyses from 2016 to 2022. I interviewed a total of twenty-five male and female Cuban migrants over the age of 18 who had been in the United States and in Syracuse for less than ten years at the time of their interview and observed participants in several different settings. Regarding interviews, I focused on participants with less than ten years in the U.S. because I hypothesized that the more recently arrived a participant was, the more visible the formation of his/her social networks would be. In terms of participant observations and ethnographic go-alongs, there were various numbers of participants involved and numerous different events. I took field notes following each of these opportunities.

The respondents for this project consisted of fourteen men and eleven women from the ages of 20-51, from various provinces of Cuba, and with varying educational/professional backgrounds. At the time of the interviews, some of the participants were married while others were single, and some had children while others did not. Racially, the respondents varied from being very light-skinned to “moreno/a” or “negro/a,” but most fell into the light-skinned category, even if there was variation in what “light” meant. Throughout the course of this research, respondents found new jobs, got married, got divorced, had children, moved to a different apartment or house, bought a new vehicle, and made a first, second, or even third trip

back to Cuba to see family and friends still living on the island, or in two cases to visit a new wife that they had married on one of their previous trips back to Cuba. Two participants were able to bring their children and/or spouse from Cuba to live with them in Syracuse through family reunification. Another has brought his mother and sister to live with him in Syracuse by saving enough money to pay for a coyote to help them on their journey. This is to say that while I can describe each of the respondents at the time of the interview, it would do them a disservice not to acknowledge how they have changed since arriving in Syracuse and since sharing their stories with me; the same goes for their social networks that form and adapt with the passing of time. These facts are important to understand and acknowledge since it shows that social networks are not fixed, but rather grow and change according to life events, individual needs, and personal and professional growth.

The interviews were in-depth and semi-structured, lasting between thirty minutes and two hours, depending upon the situational context and availability of the respondent. Most interviews tended to lean toward the longer side falling between 1 ½ -2 hours. I conducted the interviews in Spanish and then transcribed them in English. I began each interview with a grand-tour question regarding when and why the individual decided to leave Cuba and how he/she ended up in Syracuse. By beginning with such an open-ended question, I hypothesized that respondents would take the interview in the direction that was most important to them. Hancock and Algozzine (2006) write that "semi-structured interviews invite interviewees to express themselves openly and freely and to define the world from their own perspectives, not solely from the perspective of the researcher" (40). Life-history interviews also allow participants to create the trajectory of their own migration story or narrative. For example, by

asking an open-ended, general question, rather than directly asking about “networks,” I could get information about his/her life that is pertinent to my research question, but that I may not have thought to ask. I was then able to derive more focused follow-up questions, or mini-tour questions from those narratives. Following the advice of Bogdan and Biklen (2007), these interviews helped me to learn about the formation and functioning of local and international social networks, and more importantly, hone in on patterns of daily life as well as issues that matter to my participants.

As mentioned, during the interviews I asked each of my participants an open-ended question about when they first decided to leave Cuba, what steps they took to do so, and how they ended up in Syracuse. Some of the participants spent a lot of time talking about life in Cuba to make sure that I understood the severity of their situation, the reasons they chose to leave, and/or how things fell into place and allowed them to eventually leave the island. Other participants spent more time explaining their actual journey, either by boat or by land, to arrive in the United States. These participants were ones who experienced a significant amount of difficulty along the way, who spent a long time getting from Cuba to the U.S., or who were very recently arrived in the United States and had the journey fresh in their minds. And still others spoke the most about their lives since arriving in Syracuse. Those who fell into this last category were participants who had been living in Syracuse for more than three years and/or who had gone through major life events since arriving in Syracuse, such as having a child or getting married. By allowing the respondents to take their time and choose where in their story they wanted to give the most detail, I was able to see what impacted them most along their journey as well as where they stood in processing this stage in their lives.

After recording the interview, which was typically 1 ½ - 2 hours long, whenever possible I would go home and write fieldnotes about where the respondent and I met (both originally and for the interview itself), thoughts I had during the interview, ideas that had emerged while listening to their stories, and other details that would later help me to remember the context of the interview and let me mentally go back to the conversations we had. Writing fieldnotes was an important part of the research process because on more than one occasion I had scheduled two or three interviews for the same week, and I wasn't able to begin to transcribe the interviews right away. Also, I only formally interviewed each respondent one time, but at times I would be involved in participant observation opportunities where previous respondents were present. These were also opportunities to add to fieldnotes that I had written directly after the interviews.

All the interviews for this project were conducted in Spanish and translated and transcribed by me into English. This was an extremely time-consuming process, but I felt that it was important to do myself so that I could stay close to my data and be able to see when the data was saturated. Once the interviews were translated and transcribed, I used NVivo software to separate and code the data into themes, which eventually developed into the answers to the original research questions along with ideas that I had not initially planned on writing about. I coded the data sentence by sentence, at times keeping multiple sentences together to maintain context. Furthermore, each sentence or section of the interview that was coded into a particular theme was allowed to be placed under a second or third theme, if applicable. This left some flexibility when writing about the categories or themes since I didn't

pre-label them; rather the themes emerged organically, and data sometimes supported multiple themes.

Each of my participants offered at some point in their interview to help me again in the future if I came up with more questions or thought of something, once I was home. About four of my participants expressed interest in having a copy of their transcribed interview, either to pass along their story to their children or to share with their families in the future to avoid telling and re-telling their stories multiple times. Given this interest, I prepared the transcripts of the interviews to pass along to any participants with whom I remained in contact with at the time of writing this dissertation. As previously stated, not all the respondents remained in the same apartment or house or even the same state over the course of this project. None of the respondents, however, returned to Cuba to live; all remain residents of the United States, and most still reside in Syracuse, growing their social networks.

In addition to interviews, I also used participant observations and go-alongs to gather data. The participant observations took place in varied locations and during different formal and informal events. During the participant observations many times I would also informally ask questions related to my main research questions. Participant observation offered additional insight into the lives of Cubans in Syracuse. By involving myself in social situations, I was better able to understand the current situation of Cubans in Syracuse and gain more insight into the formation and usage of their local and international social networks. I attended birthday parties, a gender-reveal party, a church picnic, a church service, casual (but typical Cuban) in-home dinners, a soccer-watching event at a bar, and multiple other "hang-out" situations. Go-alongs provide access to "some of the transcendent and reflexive aspects of lived experience *in*

situ" (Kusenbach 455), which allows a researcher to better understand the complex and often subtle meanings of place for the participant, both imagined and remembered. I "went-along" to the mall, to a restaurant, to the grocery store, to Walmart and other stores where participants purchased items to bring to Cuba, to a local Carpenter's Union meeting, doctor's appointments, a dentist appointment, and a job interview. Field notes written during and after interviews, participant observations, and go-alongs added context to my research, and prompted different questions later in the interview process.

Finally, I relied on multiple online news and information sources for demographic and political information needed to answer any relevant questions left unanswered by other forms of data collection. I also paid attention to social media posts by participants and posts on Facebook or Instagram by groups such as 'Cubanos Shoutout' and 'Cubanos por el Mundo' which report on border issues and other humanitarian-type issues that affect land travel and entrance into the United States.

Methodology

Methodologically I approached this project by alternating between data collection, transcription, and analysis simultaneously, which is typically referred to as grounded theory methods since it allows the researcher to go back and forth between data collection and analysis and then generate themes based upon data, rather than hypotheses (Charmaz 336). Deterding and Waters (2018) argue that twenty-first century qualitative research is usually in dialogue with existing research, and that this is not actual grounded theory. They present an alternative in their article "Flexible Coding of In-depth Interviews: A Twenty-first-century Approach". The authors describe their method saying, "we start from the premise of an

empirical qualitative sociology that is in dialogue with existing theory and findings from previous studies, including quantitative research" (14). My research questions were based on previous research going into the study and using flexible coding during analysis allowed me to find the most salient themes surrounding respondents' migration journeys based on the literature that exists. I then focused on finding relationships among these themes to answer my original research questions and build more general theory regarding immigrant social networks and their roles in emigration, identity formation, and cultural conservatories in non-gateway cities.

In interpreting my data, I employed a relational, transnational lens, similar to how Faranak Miraftab (2016) strove to explain the process of globalization and migration in a small, rural Illinois town. Miraftab argued that "we need to use political-economic structural explanations along with sociocultural ethnographic insights to achieve a relational understanding of what is occurring" (*x*). What this means is that as transnational researchers interpreting data, we need to keep in mind the political and economic relationships between the sending and receiving countries, while also paying attention to cultural and social specificities of our respondents. This allows us to attain a *relational* understanding of our data. This project examined relationships Cuban migrants have with others in Syracuse, with Cubans in other parts of the U.S., as well the transformed nature of the relationship they have with family and friends back in Cuba. The result was a more robust explanation of how social networks are formed, used, and maintained by Cubans in Syracuse. One assumption I brought to this research is that each recently arrived Cuban living in Syracuse would have familial, social, and/or cultural ties to Cuba that he/she would seek to maintain while living in Syracuse. I

hypothesized that the desire to maintain those ties would motivate him/her to navigate relationships in Syracuse and in Cuba simultaneously, and that these relationships may be further complicated by ties in other parts of the U.S. or with those individuals currently involved in their own migration journey. Maintaining a relational framework in understanding those local, national, and transnational relations enhanced my understanding of the roles, functions, and complexity of these migrants' networks.

The participants included in this study all settled in Syracuse but were living in different geographical sections and neighborhoods of the city Likewise, the places where I engaged in participant observation and ethnographic go-alongs were all in Syracuse as well, albeit in different areas and spaces. Thus, the local social networks are not consolidated into one area, but rather stretch all over the city. This settlement pattern and social network conglomeration looks very different from what you might see in Miami or Washington Heights, cities with more established social networks, both in number but also placement. Large, established ethnic enclaves do not exist in Syracuse and many non-Cuban residents of the city are unaware that there even is a Cuban population in Syracuse, let alone social networks at work. In preliminary research, I found that Cubans network through the domains of food, work, and leisure activities, and that these Cubans are concerned with social and economic issues both here and in Cuba. The formation and activation of social networks make transnational activities such as communicating with family or sending money or goods to Cuba possible.

In both analyzing and interpreting my data, I paid attention to how social reproduction and reciprocity play a role in Cuban migrants' social networks. In her book, Miraftab (2016) reminded readers of the much-neglected fact that social and cultural resources flow multi-

directionally, and in fact many times make possible the economic viability of migration. Like other groups of migrants, Cubans often leave behind small children in the care of grandparents with the hopes that they will be able to subsidize their family with income earned in the U.S. It is important to remember that this caregiving is one of the many "invisible" resources within the home community that Cuban migrants regularly rely on while living in the U.S., and it is also an acceptable cultural practice given the culture of migration that exists in Cuba. In addition, remittances are being sent to Cuba, and these home communities are forming vital parts of Cubans' social networks and social reproduction activity both in Syracuse and in Cuba.

In terms of methodology, I conducted all my interviews in Syracuse, NY, but the foci included stories along the entire journey from Cuba to Syracuse. Besides the framework of that informed this study was culture of migration. While this type of study included discussions around transnational activities, the interviews themselves took place in one site, although the answers to my research questions involved thinking about the Cuban diaspora in Syracuse as members still connected to Cuba in multiple ways through family, friends, culture, and traditions. Levitt and Glick Schiller (2004) propose what they call a 'transnational social field' methodology, which asks the researcher to "rethink and reformulate the concept of society such that it is no longer automatically equated with the boundaries of a single nation-state" (1002). This 'transnational social field' perspective requires the researcher to "move beyond the binaries, such as homeland/new land, citizen/noncitizen, migrant/nonmigrant, acculturation/cultural persistence, that have typified migration in the past" (1012). The authors recommend a combination of foci on transborder processes and connections as well as social relationships within a single nation-state so that an *interrelationship* of the two emerges (ibid).

This is what I strove to do in my research within the framework of a culture of migration. A transnational social field methodology allowed me to avoid binaries and achieve the relational understanding described by Miraftab (2006).

What was promising about the methodology that Levitt and Glick Schiller (2004) propose is that although the analysis is "transnational," it does not necessarily mean that the research must be multi-sited. They argue that the 'transnational social field' can be captured from a single site by using proper data collection tools. They write, "[a]lthough multi-sited research is ideal…, the impact of transnational relations can be observed by asking individuals about the transnational aspects of their lives, and those they are connected to, *in a single setting*" (1012, italics added, see also Gielis 2011). Thus, although it may have been fruitful to study the experiences of the family members and friends of the migrants who still reside in Cuba, in the case of my project, it meant instead speaking to family members via phone or video chat, corresponding via email, communicating/observing via social media, and by asking the migrant to relay stories about his/her loved ones' experiences or feelings in Cuba. Studying the dynamics of transnational engagement provides the opportunity to "document how persons simultaneously maintain and shed cultural repertoires and identities, interact within a location and across its boundaries, and act in ways that are in concert with or contradict their values over time" (Levitt and Glick Schiller 2004:1013).

Finally, Levitt and Glick Schiller (2004) put forth caveats regarding transnational studies. They warn that transnational interactions should not just be studied at one point in time as one would do with an event, because transnational migration is a *process* (1012). They also point out that even if a migrant embedded in a transnational social field has never engaged in any

transnational activity before, a moment of crisis or other family event could transform that migrant's "diasporic identity" into a "transnational identity" (1013). For my own project, I avoided the mistake of using data stuck in one moment in time by interviewing multiple respondents, twenty between 2017 and 2018, and five more following COVID between 2021-2022. In addition, between the years of 2016 and 2023 I had numerous participant observation opportunities and informal conversations to check in with previous respondents. I also continued to speak informally with other Cubans in Syracuse between those years, and I paid attention to life events and activities of many of the respondents that I am connected with on social media.

Analysis of data

I analyzed the migration narratives of my participants in response to three main research questions: 1) What are the reasons that these Cubans chose to leave their home country, family, and friends?, 2) How did they eventually arrive here in Syracuse?, and 3) In what ways do they form new and use existing social networks to help in their journey and settlement processes? While the answers to the first two research questions presented in this study are somewhat fixed and can be answered by stories told by the respondents, the third question is perhaps more complicated because it can be described in one space and time but can also change as time moves on. This is one of the characteristics of social networks; ties wax and wane and sometimes disappear altogether. Also, social network formation may be somewhat predictable given immigrants of similar ethnic background, but the type of formation, strength, and duration of the network is less predictable. Thus, while analyzing the data in search for answers to my original research questions, I found that social networks have

a relationship with each stage of the immigrants' journeys and that I could not discuss social network formation in Syracuse as separate from the journey itself. Relationships and social networks were catalysts for beginning the journey, sustenance for the physical journey itself from Cuba to the U.S., and key for the settlement process once in Syracuse. Respondents also spoke about their hopes and plans for the future, which provided more insight into how social networks are used, and how certain ties fade or increase in strength. The original research questions yielded the themes I chose to turn into the chapters of my dissertation.

Chapter 3, "Journey Out of Cuba," focuses on the strong role of social networks in emigration and migration journeys. It discusses how particular relationships are transformed into social capital for the Cubans I interviewed, resulting in their ultimate decisions to leave Cuba, or how they were presented with chance opportunities to pursue life opportunities outside of Cuba that would not have been available to them while living in their home country. I then describe other factors, such as religion, schooling, transportation, and politics, that contributed to a culture of migration and dreams of a "better" or different way of life in a new country, and ultimately a decision to activate social networks and access available social capital to leave Cuba. Chapter 3 includes first-person narratives of journeys and how the participants used social networks to arrive in the United States and/or Syracuse, laying the groundwork for what I argue is the fifth wave of Cuban migrants, *Los Comunicados*. These new Cuban arrivals, Los Comunicados, are distinctly different from previous waves of Cuban migrants because of their high level of communication and connection with social networks in Cuba and in the U.S., in all stages of their migration journey. Having access to cell phones and information via social media channels has begun to shift how and why migrants are choosing to leave Cuba and

changing how social networks are formed, used, and maintained. At times, this access to cell phone communication and social media mediated racial, gender, and class obstacles that inhibited previous Cuban generations' emigration possibilities.

Chapter 4 is about social networks and their role in absorbing culture shock in new destination settlement locations for Cuban migrants. I talk about the arrival and settlement of the participants in Syracuse, New York and what the implications are for these Cubans living in a non-gateway, non-Cuban-saturated city. This chapter argues for the need to study Cubans outside Miami to dispel the long-accepted myth of Cuban exceptionality that is based on dated studies of Cuban migration to the Miami ethnic enclaves. I argue that Cubans use their social networks, including virtual ties through social media, to integrate themselves socially and economically into their new city, and to combat loneliness from not having direct physical access to their Cuban friends and family from home. The participants talk about dreams and disappointments they had upon arrival, as well as hopes and desires they have for their new futures. We see how despair can turn to optimism, and in some cases optimism to discouragement. Participants demonstrate through their narratives how social networks influence, support, sustain, and empower their lives on a regular basis, but how this happens in starkly different ways from Miami Cuban enclaves.

Chapter 5 discusses social networks and their role as cultural conservatories and how choosing to employ different facets of identities as social capital can provide entry into new social networks and provide protection against discrimination. We can observe how Cubans use their individual and group identities to shape and reshape their stories, make decisions for their own futures, and affect the life choice options of their families and future family members. In

terms of migration, group and individual identities are major factors that affect how different ethnic groups integrate into a community and those identities help them to access social networks that help to expand their life choices. Social networks function to preserve memory of their culture that the participants do not want to leave behind, and cultural capital is framed as a source for learning local culture, including racism and segregation. This chapter reinforces the magnitude of which social networks, including social media and cell phone apps influence the identities of *Los Comunicados* and further explicates the identity characteristics of this new wave of Cuban migrants. Further, I argue that Cubans learn what identities are useful when, and how these identities function in interactions with native or long-time residents.

Chapter 3

Journey out of Cuba:
How Social Networks Sparked a Fifth Wave

Emigration has long been a part of the Cuban culture, despite the shifting ease with which Cuban citizens have had the opportunity, or have been forced, to leave. Thus, one of the major topics of research on Cuba has been when, why, how, and which Cubans choose to leave their country, so much so that the emigration is characterized in literature by waves, which coincide with a combination of exit dates, pathways, and reasons, along with characteristics of the Cuban citizens who leave. This chapter details the traits of the first four waves of Cuban emigration, and introduces a new, fifth wave of Cuban emigrants, similar in some ways to previous generations, yet distinctly different in their pathways, resources, and abilities to communicate with family and friends in Cuba and other countries, including the US, throughout their emigration journey.

This chapter includes the emigration stories of Cuban migrants that arrived in Syracuse at the end of the fourth wave of Cuban migration as well as those who would be classified under the new, fifth wave of Cuban migration. Those stories are used to help illustrate the economic and sociopolitical contexts in Cuba and the U.S. that created new opportunities along with new urgency that sparked a wave of emigration out of Cuba that was larger than that of the Marielitos and Balseros combined.[42]

[42] https://www.nbcnews.com/news/latino/historic-wave-cuban-migrants-florida-impact-lasting-rcna61989

Eckstein and Barberia (2002) wrote more than twenty years ago about what they called the first and second waves of Cuban Americans, those who left Cuba for political reasons after the overthrow of Batista by Fidel Castro in 1949, and those who left later. Eckstein and Barberia's (2002) article focused heavily on how visits back to Cuba forced the Cuban State to change and redefine policies, including reforming its ideological stance on national identity to include the émigrés, bucking the idea of state allegiance, and instead referring to Cuban identity as one of a "shared culture." Cuba has repeatedly adapted different versions of its system of government and consistently capitalized on what it cannot directly control, including family visits and remittances. The U.S. government, on the other hand, has continued to focus on using the embargo and Cuban émigrés as political tools of influence within the U.S. The migration dynamic of twenty-plus years ago continues today, even though the context and specific emigration reasons have shifted. U.S immigration policies for Cubans have changed as have opportunities for emigration within Cuba. Emigrés and their visits back to the island continue to have intended and unintended consequences socially, culturally, economically, and politically for Cuba, including shedding light on alternative ways of life that spark further interest in emigration.

Pedraza (2007) laid out the personal characteristics of those first two waves of Cuban migration, including a discussion of a third wave named the "Marielitos" from the port (Mariel) they left from in Cuba, and coined a fourth migration wave as the "Balseros". Both the Marielitos and Balseros left Cuba via raft or boat, but this new wave of Balseros were different from the Marielitos because they chose to emigrate after the collapse of communism in the Soviet Union and Eastern Europe. This collapse came with both political and economic

consequences for Cuba and sparked the economic crisis in Cuba known as "The Special Period." During the Special Period, Cubans were asked to accept certain ideas and inconveniences in the name of remaining independent from the United States and the rest of the world. Cuba had become accustomed to receiving aid and supports from the Soviet Union as an ally in promoting communism and was not prepared to lose the economic and social support that that partnership had provided. After the collapse of the Soviet Union, and without outside foreign powers to help the economy, Cuba was forced to begin to integrate into the world capitalist market.[43] This marked a slight shift in the economic policy that had been an early goal of Castro's. Cuba also began to promote international tourism to offset the economic losses it suffered after the dissolution of the Soviet Union, again, a shift in its socialist political economy deemed necessary in the desperate situation Cuba found itself in.[44]

In her book, *Political Disaffection in Cuba's Revolution and Exodus* (2007), Pedraza also tied each of the emigration waves to political circumstances in Cuba and the U.S. to show that disaffection stems from cumulative disappointments and lack of opportunity in their home country. Eckstein and Barberia (2002) and Pedraza (2007) discuss how each generational cohort influenced the way their transnational ties changed both Cuba and the Cuban community in Miami.

The participants in this research help to introduce a new, fifth wave of Cuban migrants whose members I name "Los Comunicados," due to their unprecedented access to cell phones

[43] See Mesa-Lago (1994) for a rich description of the austerity measures and structural adjustment program launched to save Castro's regime and the Cuban economy.
[44] See Domínguez et al. (2004) for a more in-depth discussion of Cuba's economic transition after the fall of the Soviet Union.

and social media in Cuba, and their ability to communicate with other Cubans throughout their migration journey. This access to expanded modes of communication changes the form and functioning of these international migrants' social networks. The moniker is also a play on the term used when a group member is officially expelled and excluded from participation in the Catholic Church. In Spanish, that person would be "ex-comunicado," or excommunicated. The early members of the Cuban diaspora were also excommunicated in a non-religious sense; they were officially excluded from life in their former homeland and were not able to travel back frequently or at all until "The Dialogue" in 1978 when Cuba agreed to allow Cubans in the U.S. to visit their families. Recent Cuban migrants do not experience the same exclusion and stigma; they travel back home and send remittances with a great deal of freedom and are welcomed back by family and by the Cuban government for visits. Remittances are, and always have been, vital for the survival of the Cuban people as well as the Cuban economy since the Cuban government began relying heavily on those remittances to provide social services to its citizens after the collapse of Communism. Recent Cuban émigrés are not out of touch or excluded like "ex-comunicados" as were the first waves; instead, they are very much in touch with what is going on with their families and in Cuba as a nation. Thus, between the increase in overall access to communication and media, and the political acceptance of recent Cuban emigrants by their own country (as opposed to the "excommunication" of earlier waves), the title of "Los Comunicados" describes this fifth wave of Cuban migrants well.

Research surrounding Cuban migration typically highlights the political situation between the U.S. and Cuba and focuses on emigres living in Miami. Eckstein and Barberia (2002) conducted interviews in both Miami and Cuba and their investigation reinforced the

widespread recognition of how visits to Cuba serve to bolster cultural connections for émigrés, but also highlighted how those visits also serve as a source of income and unrest for the Cuban family and friends they visit. Eckstein and Barberia recommended that Washington rethink travel restrictions (ie. the embargo and its components) for two main reasons: that restrictions are largely unenforceable and that they are serving the interests of the Cuban government. Pedraza (2007) used in-depth interviews with Cuban exiles in Miami to document the motives, manners, and experiences of migration across the different waves and to capture their processes of political and economic disaffection.

In contrast, the interviews and participant observations for this project were conducted in Syracuse, NY and focused on social networks available to Cubans and how they are used by migrants in the outmigration, journey, and settlement stages as well as how they are formed and maintained (or not) while in their new destination. The participants for this research are categorized under the fourth and beginning of the fifth waves of Cuban migration, with major differences between the two waves being: (1) a transition in primary mode of emigration (sea vs. land), (2) the date and political circumstances the migration journey took place, and (3) degree of access to cell phones, internet, and social media before and during their migration journey.

In Cuba, prior to 2008 a permit from the Cuban State was required to obtain a computer or a cell phone, and then at the end of 2018 Cuba began to allow full internet access for its citizens versus the previous state-run email option. In between those years, there was still limited (censored and expensive) internet availability by purchasing an internet card to use in designated internet hot-spot parks or hotel lobbies. Cell phones and social media access quickly

became forms of social capital for this latest wave of Cuban migrants, which was unprecedented while in Cuba prior to this fifth wave of migration.

The end of 2016 brought Obama's revocation of the Helms-Burton Law, also known as the "Wet Foot, Dry Foot Policy." Coupled with new access to cell phones and internet on the island in Cuba at the end of 2018, 2020 began further political, economic, and social change on the international migration landscape. Then new, restrictive U.S. immigration policies and social policies were brought on by COVID-19 and U.S President Trump that encouraged people to "stay at home" from 2019 through 2020. 2021 demonstrations in Cuba fueled desperation on the island and in turn, throughout 2022 the U.S. saw the largest ever exodus of Cuban migrants from Cuba as social media communication created fear amongst Cubans on both sides of the water that Biden would further restrict entry to the U.S. Most recently, January 2023 brought a new humanitarian act by President Biden that was intended to encourage safe migration after another unprecedented surge in 2022.

The embargo and travel between the U.S. and Cuba continue, but policies have shifted, dramatically changing the way migrants are pushed from their country or pulled to the U.S., and the way social networks are being formed, used, and maintained. The fourth wave of Cuban migration could be marked at its end with COVID-19, but a fifth wave had already begun by early 2021, growing into 2022 and continuing into the present.

Social Networks and Social Media, and How They Are Reinventing Cuba's Culture of Migration

While this research focuses on how social networks and social media have changed the face of migration for Cubans, this is within the context of an already established culture of migration. In previous chapters we have seen how macroeconomic and political factors that

contributed to mass exoduses from Cuba, as well as times of austerity, have forced Cubans to look for an economic and political alternative in the United States. By shifting the framework and situating this research inside a culture of migration, we can both "acknowledge the various ways in which migration decisions are made," while also demonstrating how "individual decisions are rooted in the social practices and cultural beliefs of a population" (Cohen and Sirkeci 2011).

Hence, this research is understood through a "culture-of-migration approach" (Sirkeci 2009, Cohen and Sirkeci 2011) that recognizes "security and insecurity issues" as integral to understanding the process and development of migration decisions (2011:116). These authors explain that migration ideations can be encouraged by a lack of security (in food, jobs, various opportunities, etc.), but that an overabundance of security (too rigid thinking, religious or political beliefs, etc.) can restrict an individual's security, thus also encouraging migration. At the same time, Cohen and Sirkeci (2011) acknowledge that "security and insecurity are dynamic and shift over space and time" (116). This research builds first upon the culture of migration approach but focuses on social network connections that initiate ultimate migration decisions made by individuals within this migration culture. Pedraza (2007) also influences this research through her idea of Cuba's culture of disaffection, which she uses to specifically describe how conflict (overt or subtle) accumulates and builds dissatisfaction with life in its present condition. This study finds the understandings of the culture of migration and the concept of disaffection to be complementary and very useful for understanding ultimate individual decisions to migrate.

In terms of international migration, to utilize the ideas of Cohen and Sirkeci (2011), problems of insecurity or (hyper)security can originate in the sending country, or area of origin, and cause the migrant to be driven out of the area or country in which he/she is living. Other times, ideas that originate in the receiving country, or the area of destination, spark the migration decision. Ideas stemming from the receiving country usually hold hope for the migrant that life will be better upon arrival and offer new chances and opportunities. Insecurity/(hyper)security factors in the sending country make life so difficult in the location of origin that little choice is left but to leave. In my research on Cuban migration to Syracuse, I acknowledge the differences between individual factors and environmental factors related to life security/insecurity; individual factors are incidences in the migrant's life that affect them personally and usually with either high intensity or longevity, while environmental factors would be those that are an everyday reality for most people in that same area. When individual and/or environmental security/insecurity/disaffection factors are coupled with or enhanced by individual social networks, those networks serve to put the migrant's decision into motion. The ultimate factors influencing migration decisions and making migration possible are unique to each migrant's social network, and this research aims to highlight how those networks function.

Despite living within a culture of migration, Cubans desiring to emigrate must overcome obstacles to make that desire a reality. Examples of obstacles that need to be overcome before the migration journey takes place are cost, distance, transportation, and one's personal situation. For the participants in my study, these obstacles are extremely complicated and varied, and depend on aspects such as where in Cuba the participants are from (ie. distance from the capital, a coast, or an airport), if they had relatives already living in the U.S. providing

regular remittances (existing external social network ties), and what social capital or social network ties exist for them within Cuba to rely on. In general, participants in this study discuss the aforementioned obstacles in combination with underlying reasons as to why they decided to migrate, acknowledging that those obstacles needed to be overcome before embarking on the actual migration journey. What the definition of overcome meant for each participant was different. For example, lack of finances or access to capital can be an insecurity/ (hypersecurity) factor in migration, but it also serves as an obstacle that needs to be overcome to successfully migrate. Cubans regularly rely on or look for social network ties within and outside of Cuba to overcome financial obstacles to migration.

In addition to overcoming obstacles, there are demographic and geographic characteristics that affect migrant decision-making in Cuba. These are factors such as age, sex, race, marital status, and education. In Cuba, specifically, the province where a migrant is from becomes part of their identity and affects the ease with which the Cuban could leave the country. Cuba does not allow its citizens to freely move from province to province, and it is difficult and expensive to move or travel from one province to another. Once in the U.S., these factors also affect the ways in which the migrants incorporate into their new society and community and what social networks are available to them, so it is important to pay attention to these details within migration stories. By listening to the participants' stories, we are better able to understand how demographic and geographic characteristics affected their decision-making, and the extent to which they functioned as social capital and played a role in their outmigration.

Life in Cuba, The Dream, and The Journey

Excerpts from the stories of Syracuse Cubans in this project give context and bring to light specific reasons for their decisions to migrate and ways these migrations were made possible. While some of the stories may include multiple factors, each participant emphasized a decisive reason for their actual emigration and this reason is summarized in the heading of each story excerpt and categorized accordingly. This section uses excerpts from participants' interviews to create categories of reasons for emigration. These categories are grouped under the more general categories of destination ideation, security/(hyper)security factors, and serendipity.

Also important to note, is that some Syracuse Cubans who participated in this study fall into the end of the fourth wave of Cubans, or Balseros, but most are better classified into a new, fifth wave of Cuban migration, which I refer to as "Los Comunicados," or "the connected ones." As previously mentioned, for this new wave of Cuban migrants, the magnitude that the roles of social networks play in their migration decisions and journeys, and their access to and use of cell phones and social media is much greater. The ways these new migrants have access to their social networks sets them apart from previous waves, which will become clear through the stories in this section. While the fourth wave of Cuban migrants was a mix of Cubans choosing to leave the country by air and sea, the fifth wave of Cuban migrants almost exclusively chooses to exit by air to a third country and enter the U.S. by land. This is largely due to the revocation of the U.S. policy ("Wet Foot, Dry Foot") that automatically granted residency upon contact with U.S. soil, and the U.S. decision to turn many Cuban migrants away at sea, relocating them to a third country or returning them to Cuba.

The fifth wave of Cuban migrants typically exits Cuba by getting permission to fly to a third country such as Ecuador or Guyana, or most recently Nicaragua, and then travels through Central America and Mexico crossing into the U.S. at a Texas border. It is important, especially in more recent studies of Cuban migration, to differentiate this current wave of Cuban migrants from previous ones because increased communication and access to social networks through social media and other communication apps has changed the way Cubans are migrating to the U.S. Social media makes it easier to request money or information for the journey, and less necessary to settle in Miami to take advantage social networks. This was the case for Miguel, a childhood friend of Chucho and Mario, who left Cuba just two years after they did. In talking about the friendship between himself, Chucho and Mario, Miguel explains

> M: Our houses are like a few blocks from each other. We've been friends since childhood. We studied in the same school. Me, Chucho and Mario. We've all known each other since we were little… we were more than friends, like brothers…we were always together, always together ("unidos"). They made plans for vacation and to come here (the U.S.), but at that time I couldn't. I was in another situation. And so I couldn't. After they came, I tried 2 or 3 times, on vacation at the sea, but it didn't go well.
>
> Me: Why?
>
> M: Because the police caught us there trying to get to the water or because the police caught us trying to carry a motor on vacation. In Cuba, it's different there… in respect to things. Here nobody is "an immigration official" (la migra), but there yes. So, I couldn't leave like that… by sea. So…
>
> Me: So how long has it been since you tried to leave?

M: Like 10 months… 11 months. I left Cuba the 15th of January.

Me: Of this year.

M: Of this year. I sold my house. I was the only one that sold it because no one else lived there. I didn't have to sell the things inside because there wasn't much.

Me: Did you live alone?

M: No, I was in a relationship… with a girl there. So, I decided to leave for here in search of a better life, a better life economically… because really the people come here, they say because of political problems, but in reality, Cuba is a place where you can live peacefully without fear of drugs, without fear of guns… it's different… there isn't anyone, none of that delinquency, those things that are in these countries… every place is like that, but no… it's because those places are bigger. The people have another way of thinking, and they have bad leadership. So, I left for here looking for a better economy… for me, for my family. So, I sold my house in Dec… in November and between getting my paperwork together… I had to get my passport, I had to book my flight.

Me: For where?

M: For Guyana. Guyana Inglesa (English Guyana). And I got to Guyana… and really, I didn't come with much money. Since Chucho and Mario hadn't been here long… and so I went to the jungle, to the mines, to work as as a heavy equipment sodderer. Of this equipment, there in the gold mines… we worked directly in the gold mines to sodderer that equipment when it broke, we would repair it, things like that. In the jungle, I got to know Guyana, and I had a lot of experience there.

Although circumstances didn't allow for Miguel to leave at the same time as Chucho and Mario, it was always the plan for him to eventually come to the U.S. too. While Chucho and Mario had left Cuba by raft two years prior, Miguel instead flew to English Guyana and then traveled through Central America and Mexico with the help of his two friends who had recently arrived in the U.S. (and who were living in Syracuse). Although Miguel worked small jobs in mines in English Guyana, and later in Tumeremo, Venezuela, to make money, he also relied heavily on Chucho and Mario to send him money through Western Union to continue on his journey. When Miguel finally reached Tapachula, Mexico, he was detained by immigration for fifteen days, and while in the detention center he met another Cuban woman who was also making the journey to U.S. This woman's destination was Miami to meet her boyfriend/ husband. Miguel and this woman connected romantically and eventually combined their resources to be able to reach their respective final destinations. Miguel's story describes the use of established social network connections, and how he activated a new social network connection along the way.

> The next day, about midday, I crossed the border, got a taxi that took me to Tapachula (Mexico). This was the first city with immigration, and I went to get a salvo conducto… and this is so that you can cross Mexico without problems. There, when I got there, they weren't giving them out. Like I knew to do, I got on a bus to cross Mexico, but having gone 2 or 3 hours, they stopped me on the bus and they put me in prison for two days until …they brought me back to Tapachula and put me in prison there. When they put me in prison, they told me that they deport 50% back to Cuba and 50% they give papers to come here. But it had

already been about 5 days since they had deported 150 Cubans to Cuba. They were there. And so, I had to call, and thank God with the money that they had sent me, I had had a lot of money to keep going…. I didn't spend it on silly things, only what was necessary… to get as far as I could. There, after being there for 5 or 6 days, I had to call to get a lawyer because you need that to see if they're going to deport you. It takes about 2-3 hours, and they prepare you. It's like a business they have, to take your money from you. And thank God, after being in prison for 15 days, hungry, mistreated because you're a prisoner. I slept practically on the floor without anything to cover you, without anything to dry you off…well, conditions of prison. Not normal prison, but prison more for as if you were a dog or something like that. I was 15 days there. After 15 days, they gave me at night, like 10pm, you could say the permission to leave. There, I was with the girl, I met this girl in prison, and we left together. We went to a hotel, we spent the night in the hotel, well, together (we both laughed, knowing what that meant). The next day… no this same day like at 12 at night, without sleeping that day, I called Chucho and Mario. So, they sent me money. They sent me money to get the ticket to cross Mexico. And so I went, with the girl, that also, her husband had sent her money… he was there in Miami and had sent her money.

Me: Her husband was already in Miami?

M: Yes.

Me: And she was crossing like you?

M: She was crossing like me. We only met each other in prison. There were as many women as men. So, we met each other there.

Me: Yeah, but I'm thinking of this man in Miami, and his wife is…

M: Yes, because she was living in Cuba, so they weren't married by paper (legally). Do you understand?

Me: Yes.

M: He was her husband, and she was his wife, but… so, we met each other in prison, and we got to know each other as friends… we were both Cuban… and we got along well and…

Me: I get it. (I laugh)

M: Ok, so we got to the hotel, and we stayed. I called Mario like at 12 at night or 1 or 2 in the morning, I don't know, telling him I had just spent 15 days in prison. And so, the next day they sent me money in the morning. Then we went to a travel agency and bought plane tickets. With the money they sent, we bought tickets to cross Mexico to Reynosa, the border… to cross Mexico by plane without having to put ourselves in a bus, because it was like 4 or 5 days by bus. I don't know… we got the tickets, and we left the next day at 4am. And so, I stayed the night in the hotel. We left at like 4 in the morning by plane to D.F., which is the capital of Mexico. There we spent 4 or 5 hours waiting there in the airport in D.F., until the other flight left for Reynosa. And so, in one day we crossed all of Mexico to Reynosa. When we got to the airport, we got off, we went into a room to discuss the money. So, we finally agreed on the money, and we caught a taxi

> to the U.S. border, and we crossed the gate. We walked through and up till now I still can't believe it. The emotion was so great because after all I had worked so hard…because even after I was here 5 or 6 days, I still couldn't believe I was here. It felt like I was in a show, and you're there, like I don't know what. But no, we crossed that day. They took us to a place in Texas, there they gave us immigration papers and there we said goodbye to each other. She had to go to Miami, and I was coming here, so we couldn't stay together… two different paths. So, we said goodbye there and I got a taxi to the terminal to see how much it was to get here, but at this time I couldn't get a bus so I had to stay in a hotel. And the next morning I caught a bus with the ticket that K and R bought me from there to here. I had to pay like $70 per bus. Like 6 or 7 buses I rode, without bathing, like 3 days on buses, from there to here. When I got here, Mario's dad (visiting the U.S. from Cuba with a Spanish citizenship passport from before the Revolution) came to get me because Chucho was working and so was Mario.

Both utilized social network connections already in the U.S., and Miguel did not have to go through Miami as many previous Cuban refugees, because he utilized his social network connections in Syracuse.

The newest wave of Cubans migrating to the U.S. travels through Central America and Mexico following routes disclosed to them by friends or acquaintances, or friends of friends, who traveled just before them. They share information about safe houses, land routes, coyotes, transportation, police patrol, changing politics, and a host of other things. Cubans in the U.S. are also more easily able to wire or transfer money to friends or relatives along the journey,

shortening the amount of time it takes to traverse the countries, and allowing the migrant to stay in better contact with family along the way. Los Comunicados use social media and cell phone calls to reach out to compatriots already living in the U.S. to take the political temperature of the U.S. and other countries along the way to determine such things as when and where to try to enter the country, which routes to take on their migration journey through Central America to Mexico, and where to choose to settle.

As we have seen with Miguel, migration journeys do not begin when a person physically leaves their home in search for a new one, but rather in the mind of the migrant. The physical, emotional, and financial planning and work required to get ready to leave is a real and significant part of the journey. This initial part of the journey is where I began the conversations with my participants. I asked my participants in each of the interviews, "Why did you choose to leave your country, your family, and your friends to come to the United States?" This is something all migrants must answer for themselves first and foremost to make that initial decision. It is also a question those who have never chosen to, been forced to, or had the courage to emigrate are curious about. The initial answer I would get from many of the participants was like Miguel's, along the lines of, "I wanted a better life (for me, for my family, for my children, etc.)," but what varied was: 1) how they decided that the life that they had been living in Cuba was no longer satisfactory, reasonable, or justifiable for them, 2) the age at which they made that decision and whether or not that coincided with their actual age at

emigration, and 3) the manner that they would choose to leave the country and whether it was "legal" or "illegal."[45]

Migration decisions were always affected either directly or indirectly by members of participants' social networks and what social and financial capital was available to them. The following sections address different migration motivations by engaging with primary interview data about life in Cuba and stories of idealizations of what the United States might be like. In terms of ultimate emigration decisions, I broadly group the reasons into three general categories, titled "destination ideation," "insecurity/(hyper)security factors," and "serendipity." The first category represents those participants who named their main reason(s) for leaving Cuba as something *outside* Cuba that eventually put their journey to the U.S. into motion. In other words, a person or idea outside of Cuba ultimately drove them to emigrate. The second category represents those participants who describe situations or conditions of insecurity or (hyper)security *within* Cuba that propelled them out of Cuba and into their migration journey. Many of these Cubans may not necessarily have desired to leave Cuba, but a breaking point forced their decision. The final category, titled "serendipity," encompasses the stories of Cubans who may or may not have previously contemplated leaving Cuba, but who found themselves confronted with a unique opportunity via their social networks to emigrate amid living the life in Cuba they had planned. The "serendipity" category encompasses obstacles being removed and/or opportunities that were not previously available being suddenly and

[45] Note here that I refer to the exit from Cuba as being legal or illegal and not the manner of arriving to the U.S. The Cuban government deems any exit by sea as illegal, whereas leaving by air is considered legal since to purchase a flight ticket one needs to have permission from the government. The countries that a Cuban can travel to are decided on by the Cuban government in conjunction with the receiving country, but once a Cuban leaves Cuba the only government requirement to maintain their rights as Cuban citizens is that they must return in under two years.

unexpectedly presented. One of the main characteristics of the "serendipity" group was that participants explicitly insisted that they had not actively been looking to leave Cuba, but when an opportunity to leave presented itself, it offered prospects for a quality of life that Cuba could not possibly extend to them. As with most migrants, Syracuse Cubans all named factors that could both encourage them to leave Cuba or make the U.S. more attractive, but those categorized into the "serendipity" group were in the right place at the right time and were presented with the right social network connections to take advantage of opportunities not widely available to other Cubans.

These categorizations are not an attempt to separate and group individual participants, but rather to organize and illuminate the ultimate reasons some Cubans choose to migrate. Reasons any individual chooses to migrate are always multiple, and social networks and social capital are unique to everyone, but the objective of this section is to pinpoint and highlight the reason or event that transitioned the migration journey from an idea to action, within an already existing culture of migration.

The following section discussing ultimate migration reasons, and a final section looks at secondary factors within Cuba which contribute to participants' ultimate decisions to leave the country, but that are not issues that definitively put the participants' journeys into motion as the categories above described. Pedraza (2007) explains that factors that make life difficult or impede health or happiness can contribute to a general disaffection for their country, which is a precursor to a migration decision. This section, titled, "The Umbrella of Politics," discusses the three most mentioned complaints throughout the interviews about daily life in Cuba that make it difficult for Cuban citizens to live and grow and may have planted the seeds that eventually

grew into an ultimate migration decision. These complaints revolve around religion, schooling, and transportation, but I seat them under the umbrella of politics because it is the form of governance in Cuba that creates the difficulty in these three areas. [46] These factors influence some Cubans' desires to leave the country and contribute to the overall culture of migration that exists in Cuba, but to emigrate, the Cuban needs both social network connections and some form of capital to overcome obstacles and put the actual process in motion.

Destination ideations: Chucho, Mario, Sofia and Lidia

Chucho and Mario: Dreaming of La Yuma

For participants like Chucho and Mario, the ultimate decision to migrate was born from ideas about life opportunities in the United States rather than the insecurities of life in Cuba. This is not to say that there were not circumstances in Cuba that were less than optimal that influenced their migration decisions, but rather that the strongest influence on their decision was the idea of the possibility of different circumstances specifically available in the U.S. Chucho and Mario grew up in the same neighborhood as best friends and both had dreamt of coming to 'La Yuma,' as Cubans call the United States, since they were young boys. Chucho says that he had dreamt of coming to the U.S. since he was about 11 years old but had to wait until he was old enough to live on his own by U.S. standards. While he had been working on a government-run farm since about age 8 to buy his own shoes, clothing, and backpack for

[46] I found it interesting that lack of food in Cuba was not regularly complained about until later in the interviews when participants began talking about their lives in Syracuse. I hypothesize that this could mean one of three things: that Cubans felt they had enough food to survive and that it was not a major issue, that they had grown so accustomed to the lack of it, or lack of variety of it, that it ceased to be a conscious thought, or that the lack only became evident relative to the standard of living in Syracuse.

school, he recognized that he wasn't yet of age to attempt to live on his own in the U.S. He explains his home situation living with a single mom:

> She (his mother) was a housewife, she worked at home and there wasn't any money. And so I went to school away from there, and sometimes they talked to me in school and they said I needed shoes, and so I had to collect potatoes. And I would go and collect potatoes from the field for the business, and they paid me one peso per bag. A convertible peso isn't the same as here. In Cuba, one U.S. dollar equals 25 Cuban pesos. And if I wanted to buy a pair of shoes, it cost $25. $25 is 500 pesos. If I go to buy a backpack it costed 22 pesos and I had to make more. I was always working because my mother had taught me that I shouldn't steal, and that I shouldn't get mixed up in anything illegal.

It is common in Cuba for students to travel to a different town to go to school, especially if the student is from a rural area. The students live at the school during the week and then get a weekend pass to travel home to visit for a few days, and then return to school. Chucho would go on to finish school in Cuba, work on his father's farm in his hometown, and not make his first attempt to leave Cuba until he was 20 years old. This first attempt would be with his friend Mario, 'illegally,' by 'balsa,' or raft.

Mario was around the same age as Chucho, 10 years old, when he first remembers thinking about coming to the United States. He talked about an aunt that was already living in the United States who would come to visit family in Cuba once every year or two. He recounts, "Maybe it was a childhood thing, but it caught my attention, to live one day in the U.S. My aunt, (when she would visit) would always tell stories about things and such. Not because she would

be teasing, but rather just talking about her life here (in the U.S.). And I don't know, you know, things of childhood." Most Cubans, like Mario, have a friend or relative who already lives outside of Cuba, and that network provides a window into life outside Cuba that is presented as an attractive alternative to the difficult life they are living in Cuba.[47]

Chucho and Mario were both part of each other's social networks in Cuba, and Mario's aunt became social capital for them through provision of information. Chucho and Mario would both be considered as part of the fourth wave of Cuban migration, since their social network connections within Cuba were physically present and facilitated by in-person encounters. Chucho and Mario pooled their financial capital and resources to obtain and pay for materials to build a raft, and then reached out to other members of their social network to find a house to rent in Havana in which to build the raft in secret. The friends who helped Chucho and Mario find a house in Havana decided that they wanted to go with them, and used their Havana contact as social capital with which to persuade Chucho and Mario. Chucho's cousin, whose family lived in the same neighborhood as he did, found out about the plan and threatened to tell their families about the plan to leave if he could not come with them. Thus, a plan for two best friends to leave Cuba became a plan for five through activation of social networks connections.

Sofía, Lidia and Yubran: Love and the Lottery

Sofía and Lidia were also drawn to the idea of leaving Cuba for the promise of opportunities elsewhere, but it was first as adults, and they both desired to exit "legally,"

[47] This idea of filtering out certain information is one which came up in many discussions regarding communication with family and friend remaining in Cuba and will be discussed later in this chapter.

indicating that their situation in Cuba was not one that warranted immediate exit. Also worth mentioning is that Sofía and Lidia were amongst the first Cubans I interviewed in Syracuse, and since they both emigrated before cell phones and social media were widely available in Cuba, they would be classified into the fourth wave of Cuban migration. Sofía and Lidia did not have to rely on social networks to arrive in the U.S., but they did both immerse themselves in Cuban social networks once they arrived and settled in Syracuse.

Sofia and her family applied for the Cuban "lottery" and waited three years before they received the letter saying that they had won and should begin preparing to leave for the U.S. The U.S. Immigration and Nationality Act (section 203c)[48], also known as the "diversity lottery," affords a limited number (up to 55,000 total, annually) of visas to be available for immigrants from countries with historically low percentages of immigration to the U.S. The "winners" of the lottery are randomly chosen and then must arrange for an interview with the U.S. consulate in their country to be sure that they meet the criteria and are eligible for entry into the U.S. Cubans are eligible to apply for this lottery through the U.S. Embassy in Cuba. This is an attractive option for exit from Cuba for those who want to emigrate along with family members since spouses and minor children (who meet criteria) can emigrate with the original lottery winner. There is no guarantee that an applicant will be selected, and anyone convicted of a crime in Cuba is not eligible. Applicants must apply between specified dates in October and November for entrance two years ahead, so that 2021 entrants would have applied in late 2019. Sofía said that by the time they received the letter saying that they had "won the lottery," they had almost forgotten that they applied. Once they received the letter, they had

[48] See uscis.gov or travel.state.gov for more information regarding application and admissibility.

six months to schedule their interview, be approved, and pack their bags to exit Cuba and head to the U.S.

Lidia, on the other hand, met a man who came to vacation in Cuba from Argentina and maintained a long-distance relationship with that man (who would eventually be her future husband) for three years before making plans and readying the documents necessary to visit him and meet his family in Argentina. When she finally made it there after three years, Lidia and her now husband decided to get married, and planned a wedding within the three months allotted to her by her tourist visa so that Lidia could avoid further restrictions on exiting her country. Lidia ended up in the U.S rather than Argentina because her husband was sponsored by a U.S. university, and she was permitted to immigrate with him. Lidia was drawn out of Cuba by her dreams of marriage and life with her new husband.

Yubran, a 35-year old Cuban man, is on the opposite side of Lidia's story. He met his now-wife through Facebook after he had already migrated to Syracuse. She was living in Cuba and from the same town as Yubran, although they had never met previously. His wife was still living in Cuba while the paperwork is being prepared for her to be able to join him in Syracuse through family reunification. Yubran spent months getting to know her before going to Cuba to meet her in person and had bought her an engagement ring to present to her when he met her. Yubran and his wife got married on his next visit back to Cuba. Due to the changes in the Cuban Adjustment Act imposed at the end of the Obama Presidency, along with tightened restrictions imposed under the Trump Administration, Yubran had been all but forced to wait until his wife could join him legally through family reunification. In previous years he may have tried to bring her to the U.S. via a third country and then through Central America, but he could have also

decided that this option is no longer worthwhile since her entrance into the U.S. would have been illegal and much riskier in terms of deportation. As it happened, in the beginning of 2023, with the Biden administration's change to parole processes for Cubans, Yubran was able to petition for his wife to come to join him in the U.S. legally if he could prove that he could support her economically. In August of 2023 this became a reality, and they are now living together in Syracuse.

"Driven out" by issues of insecurity or (hyper)security: Santos and Mariana

For other Cubans, the idea of leaving Cuba comes after encountering an experience or a certain disillusionment with life possibilities living in Cuba that no longer allows them to live there peacefully and forces them to make an almost immediate decision or plan to leave the country. This was the case for Santos and Mariana.

Santos: "I had no choice"

Although Santos recognized that many Cubans grow up thinking about leaving Cuba and going to live in the U.S., he says that he never had that idea in mind as a child. Santos appreciated the education he was given growing up in Cuba and looked forward to beginning his career as a doctor. But, after completing his medical degree, the Cuban government sent him to practice medicine in Venezuela. Since the government subsidizes the education of its citizens, it also reserves the right to send those citizens abroad to practice their profession for a certain number of years in service to the Cuban government. The living conditions in Venezuela were much worse than what Santos was used to living in Havana, Cuba. According to Santos,

> Being in Venezuela it was hard being a doctor. One of the stories, or something small that I can tell you is that being a doctor, I lived in a room… I don't know… of 10 square

> meters with very bad conditions, including not having running water. I had to wake up in the early morning hours to collect water for the day's use. And there were things… that I just said to myself, 'If this is the life of a doctor, that they follow the rules and laws that there are in Cuba, I don't want to be a professional and live my whole life under these conditions. I studied for twenty years of my life, and I don't want to work for money, but I need money to live.'

Santos was earning the equivalent of about $20 US per month while living in Venezuela, the same typical monthly salary a doctor earns living and practicing in Cuba. Any additional salary that was paid for his services by the Venezuelan government went to the Cuban government. Thus, Santos decided that as a professional he needed and deserved a better life. He could not live with the economic insecurity and lack of comfort that he was being faced with. They were in conflict with the life that he believed that his career choice would have afforded him in Cuba. Santos justified his reasoning for "defecting," or abandoning his mission, along those lines.

> I agree that the Cuban government should make a profit, but you see the difference between the $10,000 (per year) that they pay the government for each doctor to $200 (per year) … it's $9800 that the government keeps. And the doctors continue to live under poor conditions, like was my situation in Venezuela… very bad, very bad… without water, water which is vital for you physiological health. Water to bathe yourself, go to the bathroom… and that was one of the things that motivated me. It affected me, as a doctor. How are they going to treat me like this? Living like, I don't know, inhumanely.

Santos traveled from Venezuela to Colombia and went to the American Embassy there to claim asylum through a special program for Cuban doctors that the U.S. had in place at the time.[49] Upon being asked how he was able to travel from Venezuela to Colombia, he recounts his story as follows:

> I went by bus. It was approximately twenty-four hours without stopping. I was legally recognized as a doctor in Venezuela and by traveling to Colombia, upon crossing the border… I crossed the border by bus, normally, like the people living in Venezuela or Colombia. Once in Colombia I went to the American Embassy, like I told you before, to ask for political asylum from a program that the American Embassy has called The Program for Doctors from Cuban Medical Sectors in Venezuela (Programa Para Médicos de Sectores Cubanos en Venezuela). The process of getting the visa takes you approximately three months, between three months and 100 days was waiting period. During this time, I was able to work as a doctor in Colombia, but with limited permission, up to 90 days, until they arranged for my visa to the United States.

Santos' story is substantiated by other medical professionals who were also sent to Venezuela to serve under Cuba's Program to export doctors and other medical professionals. A 2018 article in the Miami Herald reported that Cuba currently has health professionals stationed in

[49] The Cuban Medical Professional Parole (CMPP) Program began on August 11, 2006 when the U.S. Department of Homeland Security decided to allow Cuban medical professionals residing in third countries to apply for parole through a U.S. Embassy or Consulate. Spouses or children under 21 were permitted to be included on the request, whether they were residing with the medical professional or still in Cuba. This Program ended on January 12, 2017 at the same time the Cuban Adjustment Act was modified to exclude the previous agreement known as the "Wet Foot, Dry Foot" provision. These changes were initiated at the end of the Obama Presidency as an initiative to normalize the (migration) relationship between Cuba and the U.S. More information is available on the U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services website found at uscis.gov.

62 countries and that the Cuban government earns more than $11.5 billion per year from this work.[50] This same article tells the story of other health professionals and their reasons for defecting and leaving their assignments in places like Venezuela and Colombia, and why they continue to try to apply for asylum in the U.S. despite the end of the Cuban Medical Professional Parole Program.

Mariana: "The (Emotional) Cost is Too High"

Mariana also emigrated to the U.S. with a visa, but in her case, it was eventually a religious visa rather than the tourist visa that she had initially applied for. Mariana and her husband had been pastors in Cuba, meeting, preaching, and fellowshipping in private homes. Mariana's husband had received permission from the Cuban government on three separate occasions to leave Cuba to visit the U.S. on a religious visa because he had stated on his applications that he had a wife and two daughters remaining in Cuba during his travel. As Mariana explained, "as a matter of fact, it's one of the questions that they ask people (during the visa interview). 'And where is your family?' And you say to them, 'I have them here in Cuba, my wife with my two children. I'm leaving her here in Cuba.' Then they say, 'Oh ok, you have something here that ties you to returning to Cuba. You're not going to stay (in the U.S.)'." The Cuban government is more likely to approve a visa if a person has family staying behind as an incentive for the person to return. Cubans are well-versed in what to say or what not to say when they are applying for an exit visa from their social networks. Much of the information in Cuba comes from friends or family who have gone through the situation or who know someone else who has gone through it.

[50] https://www.miamiherald.com/news/nation-world/world/americas/cuba/article204678329.html

After Mariana's husband's last trip to Houston, having been invited each time by pastors in his social network in the U.S., he returned to Cuba with more concrete plans to help plant and grow churches in the U.S. So, Mariana and her husband decided that it was finally "God's time" that they should come to the U.S. So, Mariana went to the Mexican Embassy to apply for a tourist visa for her and her two daughters so that they could journey as a family. She was denied. Mariana explains

> It's almost impossible. We went to the Mexican Embassy in Cuba and I presented myself a tourist visa for me and my two daughters and I was denied. This was precisely because once you travel to Mexico you present yourself at the border, and you can cross and ask for political asylum. So, I was denied. We waited a few months more and then worked with a Mexican pastor (who had previously visited them in Cuba) who helped us through the whole legal process of getting a religious visa. It was through that religious vis that we were able to leave together as a family.

Mariana and her husband's reasons for leaving Cuba originally were not simply because they wanted to pastor a church in the U.S., but also because of the political requirements in the schools in Cuba. In fact, Mariana's reasoning falls under the issue of (hyper)security. Cohen and Sikleci (2011:116) would argue that the "overabundance of security" in Cuba restricted her family's religious and lifestyle options. Mariana's husband accessed his social network of pastors for information and resources to begin the process of attaining a religious visa. Being Christians, it tugged at Mariana and her husband's religious convictions that their oldest daughter, then of school age, was required to declare that she wanted to be like the patrons of their country rather than Christ. Pedraza (2007) would argue that her Mariana's family lived

under a culture of disaffection because of the lack of freedoms that Cuba offered them. Mariana describes what it was like for her daughter at the beginning of each school day. My oldest daughter went to school, and she had to get up every day and sing the

> national hymn. That wasn't a problem, it is the national hymn of our country, but afterwards they would have to confess, 'We want to be like Che' or 'We want to be like Camilo' or We want to be like Fidel. But those… they aren't patrons/father figures for me. I am a Christian, I am a daughter of God. So, I have brought up my daughter teaching her not to confess that, to not say those expressions, but that also brings repercussions for her because then there is a society around her that then criminalizes her because she doesn't want to confess it; because not everyone in the school is against it, there are many people that are in favor of that system (socialism), even when they suffer the consequences of the system, and then they are the first to oppress those that are against it.

Thus, Mariana and her husband's situation in Cuba became more dire for them after their oldest daughter began attending school. They decided that they could not stand by and let their children by persecuted for personal beliefs that did not match those promoted by their government. Due to this insecurity, Mariana had to make the decision to leave her extended family behind to provide a different life for her nuclear family. She told me

> I left my mom with my grandmother, who is 102 right now, all alone. I had to leave them. It was the moment in which I had the opportunity to leave, and I knew I couldn't wait until something changed in my family, or my grandmother dies, because there are opportunities that have their moment and when you let them pass by, it's very difficult

> for them to repeat themselves. So, if I hadn't come in 2015, I wouldn't have been able to get in.

Mariana ultimately decided to leave Cuba, despite the timing not being ideal because it became their family's highest priority to find a way for them to raise their family outside Cuba. They were only able to do this through accessing and activating their social network of Pastors who live outside Cuba whom they had met during visits to Cuba. Mariana's husband was able to acquire the paperwork necessary for a religious visa for their family to travel to Mexico thanks to the Mexican Pastor, and that pastor helped connect them with a Pastor in Texas. Otherwise, it may have been almost impossible, and much more dangerous, for a family of four with two small girls to emigrate to the U.S. together.

Serendipity/ Chance Opportunities: Carlos and Marcos

Some of the respondents who told their stories did not attribute their ultimate decision to destination ideations or issues of security/insecurity, but rather framed their decision as a response to a serendipitous, unexpected opportunity. In these cases, when the time came to take advantage of an opportunity, they quickly did a cost-benefit analysis and decided to take the chance life handed to them. The following stories are stories not only about chance opportunities, but these participants also chose to activate their social capital within their social networks when the opportunity arose.

Carlos: The 'Architecture' of Exit

Carlos was twenty-five years old when he met the man who would give him one of his first jobs as a architect in Havana, but he would be 32 years old when he met the Cuban expatriate that would ultimately change his life course while visiting one of his worksites in

Havana. Carlos was working for a company that restored old buildings within the capital city and was living with his girlfriend at the time. Both were working on projects for "la Casa del Obispo" in Havana, but for different companies with different purposes. Carlos worked as an architect for the Office of the Historian of the City and his girlfriend worked for a different type of engineering/design company. Carlos enjoyed his profession even though his position required more hands-on, physical work than would an architect position in the U.S. or Canada. Carlos was designing and planning, as well as doing physical labor to restore historical buildings within Havana. Members of an association called the Association for Preservation Technology International (APTi) had come to study building restoration in Havana and had received permission from the Cuban government to visit and learn about a project on which Carlos was working. One member of the organization happened to be of Cuban descent and expressed interest in having Carlos join the group at an international conference to discuss his work. Carlos talks about their first meeting and how the conversation led to her telling him about how her family left Cuba when she was a child and happened to find herself again in her home country at that moment. He recalls

> She was only months old when her parents brought her from Cuba to live in Los Angeles in 1959 (the year of the Cuban Revolution). She moved to Los Angeles when Miami wasn't Miami… Monti Culebra it was called. There she grew up and got involved in the world of restoration and art. She was a painter also and got involved with APT international (Association for Preservation Technology) and they were like, 'oh, you're Cuban, you were born in Cuba, you speak Spanish, and what have you.' And so she was perfect to go there (to Cuba) with all of those Americans and Canadians. After they were

> all done talking and I was done explaining things to them, they said to me, 'Well look, you know what? The entire group wants to invite you to the APT conference that is going to be in Vancouver on the island of Victoria this year in October.'

Although he was flattered, Carlos did not think that attending the conference was a possibility because he knew that he needed permission from his government, but also because travel would be expensive. He explained to the woman of Cuban descent that this conference was only a few months away at that time and thought to himself that she was a little naïve for thinking that it was possible that he attend and present at this conference. Carlos explained

> Yes, yes. It was really soon. I looked at her like she was a little bit naïve. I told her, 'Look, this is all very nice but this is a prison island. Nobody leaves here.' She told me, 'No, yes, yes, seriously. Look. You'd have money, you'd have backing.' We were talking from two different, parallel universes. She had the mentality of the free world, and I smiled because of her naiveté. Then they all (the group) said to me, 'So, what are you here?' and I told them, 'I'm the architect.' They looked at me, and they were seeing how I was dressed like a laborer, because that was what I was doing at that moment. I worked as a laborer and at the same time I had to do the plans and the budget for the job. I had to do everything.

Carlos went home to tell his girlfriend about the invitation that was extended to him, and it was she who pushed him to apply to the conference. She made the decision that both would work on a presentation to talk about their work related to la Casa del Obispo. Carlos explained that she had a little bit more preparation in English than he did, and so she said, "ok, we're going to do it," and made her own presentation and helped him with his presentation as

well. There were about 2000 presentations submitted from countries worldwide for the conference in Victoria, Vancouver that year and theirs were among the first 500 initially approved. In the end, their presentations both finished within the final one hundred accepted, and among the sixty that would be invited to present in half-hour speaking sessions throughout the conference. The others would have to present their various works at the end of the conference in a separate place, without as much recognition. From Cuba, it was only him, his girlfriend and one other person from Trinidad, Sancti Spiritus who were given a half-hour presentation slot within the APT program in October of 2011.

After acceptance into the conference, the issue still remained of how they would go from Cuba to Canada when neither of them even had a passport to leave the country, let alone the money to pay for the conference registration or finance the trip. Carlos explained that the Association took care of everything. What Carlos did not overtly acknowledge is that although it seemed serendipitous to be given this opportunity, he actively connected with the Cuban American architect in his social network, and most likely through feelings of reciprocity she provided an opportunity for Carlos to travel out of Cuba, paying forward the opportunity that was given to her as a young girl. Carlos' girlfriend possessed the social capital of being able to speak and write English and was able to help put together a presentation which was accepted to the conference. The Association had the information necessary to make the financial and legal aspects of travel possible for Carlos and his girlfriend. Carlos supplied the social network connection through an architect association, and his girlfriend helped him decide to activate that connection. Carlos explains that through social networking with the Association

> It paid for everything, it did everything. They overcame the obstacle of communicating with the foreign consul, in this case Canada where the event was being held, to writing the letter getting them to approve us… because it is well known that everyone that wants to leave Cuba wants to emigrate. Then they sent all the money to complete the passports, and for this, that, and the other. They supported us a lot from funds earmarked for the association's event. And later, the final obstacle of leaving the country with the Canadian visa, a process of providing a place, an address for us to supposedly stay, and the name of an architect in Alberta that was supposedly going to pick us up from the airport. It was like a breeze… we arrived at the consulate, we introduced ourselves, we went with a letter from the association directly to the consul. The consul read it and said, 'ok, perfect. Here is your visa.' And it was like, 'What? Seriously?' There were people waiting in line for years, that have family in Canada, and they weren't giving them visas. These were powerful people. And so that is how we arrived in Canada. We flew from Cuba. It was the first time we flew in our lives. It was like, 'wow, we're flying, how great is that!'

Carlos and his girlfriend were two of just twenty conference attendees and presenters that received travel support through The Getty Foundation that year. Carlos had not planned to leave Cuba permanently when the opportunity first arose for him and his girlfriend to present their work at the conference in Canada, but once they were there they could not imagine going back to Cuba. They were both in agreement, but Carlos explains that while his girlfriend directly said to him, "I'm not going back," he was more fearful about what they might face. On the day they were supposed to be flying back to Cuba they had a layover in Toronto. Within his

diasporic social network, Carlos' mother had a sister living in Toronto, a doctor who had "deserted," and she was waiting for them at the Toronto airport. Even at that point Carlos had not been sure about his decision not to return to Cuba but standing there with his girlfriend and his aunt it became clearer. As they watched the plane leave Toronto for Cuba without them, Carlos said, "There. That's it. It's over. I'm never going back." Carlos and his girlfriend ended up staying for one week in Toronto, Canada, with his aunt and then took advantage of the U.S. law at the time welcoming Cubans fleeing the political regime in Cuba. This conference was an opportunity that could not have been planned but by actively pursuing a professional social network connection, it changed the course of their lives completely. Carlos and his then girlfriend both live in Syracuse and remain friends, but they are no longer romantically involved. In fact, Carlos met another Cuban woman while in Syracuse and they just recently gave birth to a first-generation Cuban American.

Marcos: 'Veterinarian in Opposition' to 'Artesan Vendor' to the Turkish Embassy

Marcos graduated from his university in Havana with a degree in veterinary medicine, and although he did not necessarily agree with his government's politics, he was not actively working toward leaving the country because of them. His first job out of college was in the José Martí airport in Havana working for customs. I asked how that related to his degree or training and he explained that he oversaw the dogs that were used to detect drugs and such. He worked at that airport from 2011-2015 but explains that he had to put up with a lot due to his difference of opinion from the accepted Cuban political agenda and was eventually fired for it. He explained, "I was fired for believing differently, for having an opinion against, for having my own opinion about, Cuban politics". After being fired from the airport, Marcos went on to sell

arts & crafts, cigars, flags, and other such merchandise at the Morro[51] in Havana. He said with a mix of disbelief and disgust, "Imagine, a veterinary doctor selling souvenirs," trying to point out the absurdity of his situation and the waste of talent that it represented. He worked at the Morro for about a year, during which some friends he met (including one with whom he had entered into a romantic relationship with) told him about some connections they had and the ability to get him a job working for the Turkish Embassy in Havana. Since salaries paid by the Cuban government, like that which he earned at the airport, only average around $20-$25 per month, Marcos contributes his being able to eventually leave the country to the salary he earned from the Turks at the Embassy. He explained that after just two-months salary working with the Turks he was financially able to leave the country, which would never have been possible with the salary he made as a veterinarian. It also would not have been possible if he had not actively pursued friendships with other Cubans who had network connections with employees in the Turkish Embassy.

> Yes, they (the Turks) pay well, but to get a job with them is very difficult. I had the opportunity to be able to begin to work with them through a friend. In reality, I didn't actually know anyone at the Embassy. A few years back I met a person who knows people. So, it was a connection of friends, and I began to work there. I got the money, and once I had money in hand, the first thing that went through my mind was to leave the country, of course. It had already gone through my mind a couple of years back to get on a raft and cross the ocean, but I hadn't gotten the opportunity.

[51] The Morro is an historical fortress in Havana where tourists can take advantage of views of the city and the sea from up high for an entrance fee. At the entrance there is also a small artesan market where tourists can purchase souvenirs.

Marcos didn't leave the country by himself, but rather with a small group of the same friends that had gotten him a job at the Turkish Embassy. At the time when Marcos and his friends left Cuba, most Cubans desiring to leave the country would go through Ecuador if they didn't leave by boat. This was because Ecuador was a country "libre visado," which meant that it was an "open visa" country or considered legal by the Cuban government for Cubans to go there as tourists. Once in Ecuador, they would be approved for a 90-day stay by the Ecuadorian government. Other foreigners would be able to extend their visa, solicit a work permit, and/or create some kind of legal life there in Ecuador, but these options were not open to Cubans. Cubans were not permitted to legalize themselves in any way in Ecuador, so after three months one would have to return to Cuba or stay illegally in the country.

Out of the small group of friends that had left Cuba and flown to Quito, Ecuador, only Marcos and one other woman (his girlfriend) decided to stay. The rest of the group had decided to go back to Cuba. When asked why, Marcos explained that "they got scared, they went back, they regretted it (leaving Cuba), simply that." After three days of staying in a hotel and unsuccessfully trying to find a job or a place to rent, Marcos and his girlfriend decided to leave Quito. They headed toward Guayaquil, to the south of Ecuador, without a place to stay and with their money running out. Together, they had only enough money to rent a place for a month, maybe two. Referring to why they combined their money, Marcos explained, "when one wants to do this type of thing, one has to do it as a team, otherwise you can't." So, Marcos and his girlfriend took an 8-hour bus ride south to Guayaquil, just two hours from the border of Peru.

In Guayaquil, Marcos and his girlfriend counted themselves lucky because they found a good place to rent, and the next day they went out and were able to find jobs. In Marcos' words, "we were tremendously lucky, a tremendous blessing and it was a miracle that we found a good apartment with a good leaseholder at a good price." Months passed and the two were soon illegal in Ecuador. They had tried unsuccessfully to legalize themselves to no avail. Yet, Marcos was able to continue working (illegally) in a restaurant, and his girlfriend first in a restaurant and then as a receptionist, and from December to May they continued to gather money together. In May, after five months in Ecuador, they made the decision to begin to head to the United States. Marcos recounted this decisive moment as follows

> What were we going to do? We were living in a country in which we were illegal. So, what was the most logical decision? Either to return to Cuba, and I was not going to go back to Cuba, at least not with my head down. If I return to Cuba it's with my head very high. I wasn't going to do it that way, I wasn't going to return defeated. And what I was going to do… what we agreed to do, is go ahead and continue forward.

Marcos and his girlfriend eventually made it to the United States, after travelling an additional five months through Central America and Mexico under very harsh conditions. Neither Marcos nor his girlfriend had social network connections in the U.S., so it took them a long time to travel from Ecuador to the U.S. Marcos and his girlfriend are currently no longer romantically involved, but they remain friends. Marcos was relocated to Syracuse, NY, by Church World Services, but his travel companion and friend remained and currently lives in Miami. Marcos got his first job in Syracuse working with other Cubans that quickly became part of his social network, and through those connections he was able to transfer to a position more closely

related to his profession in Cuba, and most recently he received a job transfer to Virginia and will soon begin another chapter in his life in a different state in his new country.

Discussion of migration factors: destination ideations, issues of security/insecurity, serendipity

Carlos had an enlightening explanation when asked why he had not planned from the beginning to leave Cuba permanently when he went to the conference in Canada, and his description also serves to explain why most of Marcos' friends returned to Cuba from Ecuador instead of continuing on. The choice to leave one's home, family, friends, and everything familiar is not an easy decision; even when familiar is not ideal. Carlos explained

> I wasn't planning on leaving Cuba for good. At least *I* wasn't. I wasn't because, I don't know, I had my fears, the different climate. It's like raising an animal all the time in a cage and then later you open the door. It's like it's open, but… the cage for you was always closed. How are you not going to leave? But you don't leave. Even if you call to the animal to come out, it doesn't come out because it's so used to being in the cage. It was pretty difficult. The climate was different. The language. I was terrified of English. A general lack of knowledge. General ignorance of life. You have to be reborn. I had to be reborn. Change for human beings is what stops them. Change is something that makes you afraid. It can terrify you.

So, regardless of whether it was destination ideation, security/insecurity factors, or opportunities that presented themselves unexpectedly that ultimately influenced these participants to leave behind their lives in Cuba, the decision depended on each person's personality and their evaluation of self (identity, belonging, purpose in life), along with an

evaluation of gains versus losses. These characteristics provide access to social networks that ultimately help a migrant to leave his/her country. As Marcos described, even when a person desires to leave his/her country and pursue a better life or different opportunities, other factors such as fear, comfort of familiarity, and friends or family can cause a person to not take advantage of that opportunity, and lack of social network connections can make leaving impossible. Ultimate decisions are usually attributed to one or two major factors by the migrant, but we must continue to pay attention to the varied factors that go into these life-changing decisions, such as individual and group identity characteristics, and access to social capital and social networks. This last section discusses some contributing factors within Cuba that Syracuse Cubans named as influencing their ultimate decision to leave their country. These factors can also serve as obstacles to their ultimate emigration in that have to be overcome before leaving can become a possibility. It is through social network connections that Cubans are able to overcome those obstacles.

The "Umbrella of Politics": Religion, Schooling, Transportation as disaffection

While social networks often provide the information and resources necessary to ultimately emigrate from Cuba, it is crucial to recognize that there are underlying social and political issues within the country that make citizens activate or pursue those networks. Silvia Pedraza (2007) labels this underlying dissatisfaction with daily life that accumulates over time, disaffection. Those underlying issues are both subtle and impossible to ignore at the same time. In Pedraza's book, *Political Disaffection in Cuba's Revolution and Exodus* (2007), she refers to James C. Scott's (1990) idea of cultural patterns of resistance in describing what she says happens for many Cubans during and after a "gradual and cumulative" process of political

disaffection (231). Scott introduced the theoretical concept of everyday resistance in his book "*Weapons of the Weak: Everyday Forms of Peasant Resistance"* (1985), arguing that when faced with a culture of oppression, those with less power may rebel against either those with power or a system of power with subtle, everyday forms of resistance rather than overt, organized actions. Pedraza (2007) includes stories of Cubans' lives in her book to show how they became gradually "disaffected" by the ideas of the Revolution and took part in small acts of personal resistance in Cuba, resulting in consequences within the country and many times in their decision to emigrate. The U.S. has had an embargo against Cuba for sixty years now, and anyone who knows even just a little bit about the history of Cuba knows that there were times when Cuba thrived (ie. with Soviet Union support) and other times when it is almost unbelievable that the government was able to come out of its hard times intact and without rebellion (ie. the Special Period). Politics and propaganda play a major role in who emigrates from Cuba and who does not, but it is not quite as simple as that, and it is vital to understand that everyday resistance to oppression can take place for many years in Cuba before it accumulates and results in a citizen searching out and taking advantage of social networks to facilitate eventual migration. This fact is even more important to understand in current years, especially since the revocation of the Wet Foot, Dry Foot provision of the Helms-Burton Law in the United States. Cubans who desire to immigrate into the U.S. must now prove fear of political persecution in their homeland to be paroled into the country, as opposed to being virtually unconditionally accepted into the U.S. under the Helms-Burton Law.

As explained in the previous paragraph, political persecution and oppression can be subtle or overt and can directly or indirectly motivate one to leave his/her country. To fully

understand this, one must first understand how politics affects practically every component of everyday life for Cubans. By focusing on religion, education, and transportation stories within the interviews we can see how Cuban politics, or more specifically socialist beliefs and propaganda, filter into all aspects of life in Cuba and contribute to the disillusionment, or disaffection (Pedraza 2007), necessary to propel someone into taking action to leave their home country. In this section I use firsthand interview excerpts from Cubans to illustrate the complicated nature of living in Cuba day to day. These Cubans are experts in recognizing how politics shape other areas of authority and influence in their lives and their stories provide concrete examples of how political persecution need not be overt to influence migration decisions.

Religion

From 1959 until 1992, Cuba was officially an atheist country. [52] In 1992 Cuba changed its constitution to allow for separation of church and state and relaxed its restrictions on religious practices. When asked if he had any experience with religion in Cuba, Marcos laughed and said, "Imagine, a Cuban who is not religious," continuing by explaining that there is a saying in Cuba that goes, "The one who doesn't have of black has of Carabalí." Marcos went on to say that, "You are always going to be something. In Cuba we are very religious people. We are very faithful." Marcos was taking a popular Cuban expression, "El que no tiene de Congo tiene de Carabalí,"[53] and interpreting it not only in terms of descendancy but also in terms of religious

[52] https://www.thecubanhistory.com/2011/11/religious-activities-in-cuba-actividades-religiosas-en-cuba/
[53] See https://www.thecubanhistory.com/2017/06/cuban-popular-phrases-the-one-that-does-not-have-of-congo-has-of-carabali-frases-populares-cubanas-el-que-no-tiene-de-congo-tiene-de-carabali-video/ or https://www.cibercuba.com/lecturas/aqui-el-que-no-tiene-de-congo-tiene-de-carabali for more explanation on this popular Cuban expression.

roots. He was claiming that everyone believes in something. In his own case, he said that he *also* had experience with a Christian church in Cuba, and that he would sometimes gather with them. What was interesting about Marcos' response was that he said "también," meaning "also," which reinforces that there are multiple religious roots in Cuba influencing individuals within the country. Also interesting is that Marcos would be considered "white" by U.S. standards, but acknowledged that every Cuban has African roots, something that would be ignored in the United States without an outward appearance of color.

Within the country as a whole, Roman Catholicism, Protestantism, and Santería (a syncretic religion with roots in Africa and elements of Catholicism) are amongst the religions most widely represented in Cuba, along with smaller percentages of Muslims, Jews, and Mormons. While freedom of religion is officially espoused in Cuba, religious organizations are still under obligation to report finances, membership, places and times of worship, and affiliation with foreign organizations, amongst other information, to the Ministry of Justice. Furthermore, if it is suspected that a religious organization or group is promoting opposition to the government, this is grounds for harassment or surveillance of that organization. Thus, while more freedom has been extended to religious groups, the Cuban government still reserves its right to intervene in civil society groups when it feels that their beliefs are not in line with the socialist creeds that the government stands on. Furthermore, as we saw in Mariana's case, religious freedoms are not extended to the state-run schools. In the case of schools, socialism functions as the religion, and Fidel Castro and Che Guevara as the "saints" or "leaders" of that "religion" in thought and ideals.

Schooling

Education is provided for free by the Cuban government for all its citizens, and this is perhaps one of the things that Cubans are most proud of and something many other countries admire. Cuba has a high literacy rate; above 99% of citizens over the age of fifteen can read.[54] After the age of what would be considered completion of high school in the United States, Cuba also offers free technical or university education to those who have high aptitudes for certain professions. If a student chooses not to continue their education, they are required to complete a military service requirement. What is perhaps lesser known is that Cubans can only choose their future professions to an extent. In the words of Santos, "In Cuba, everything is mediated by the government and the government is who tells you, 'You should go here, you should study here.' It's very different. Here (in the U.S.) there is freedom of the press. You can do with your life what you want, study… in Cuba it's different. In Cuba, they tell you where to go, what you must do." To continue their education in a certain field, Cuban students must prove intellectual competency in subject areas according to their chosen field. Mario is an example of the lack of freedom that students have in choosing their field of study; while most countries require basic competence in certain areas for a field of study, in Cuba the requirements are more extreme. Mario recounts

> And so, what I did is that I went (to pre-universitario) to study computer science and I really liked it, as a matter of fact. And it's a field that has a future. And well, I thought, 'what I learn here will serve me in the future,' and that's what I did. So, I decided to do it in order to get into university to do engineering, to study design. But they were asking

[54] https://www.indexmundi.com/cuba/literacy.html

> for a scale, they were asking for a very high grade. I had an average of 92 and they were asking for a 95 in mathematics. It wasn't that I was bad, but rather in our first year we didn't have a teacher, because teachers were very scarce. And in that first year (of pre-universitario), my grades fell. Not just mine, but everyone's. Our group didn't have a teacher. A few groups didn't have a teacher and they gave us grades in math that year based on what we could pass on tests, and my grades fell. I got a 61 on one of them and my average fell. And so, I couldn't… I got a 91.72 on the aptitude exam and had a 92 overall average and they were asking for a 95 so I couldn't enroll in the engineering program.

In Mario's case, although he had a high aptitude in math, his situation was such that he could not show proof that he would excel in the engineering program and was not allowed to enroll in university. His options were to pick another major or study on his own by hiring a tutor to teach him. To enter an engineering program, he would be required to take a math and history exam as entrance exams, which were more difficult than the aptitude exams given in pre-universitario. If a student could do well on the entrance exams, they would be permitted to enter university. Mario tried to learn the material, but due to transportation issues, which will be described in the next section, Mario ended up frustrated and discouraged and emigrated to the U.S. shortly thereafter when the opportunity arose.

Once accepted to a program, students also must maintain certain grades to stay in that program. Furthermore, resources for hands-on programs, such as architecture or computer technology, may or may not be available in certain areas of the country. If resources are not available, students are responsible for finding them or acquiring them on their own, which is

oftentimes difficult or impossible, hindering their ability to maintain certain grades and stay in the program. Carlos gave examples in the fields of computer science, and his own field of architecture and design.

> You pay for everything. For example, let's say you are studying computer science; you must buy your own computer. You can work with the ones that the university provides but they are very old, and they don't have the software you need and so forth. In the case of architecture and design, or rather all that are design in general, industrial design, those careers are doubly difficult because you must buy a lot of material. I was here (in Syracuse) with some friends in the School of Architecture, and they have their own material store in the basement, which is great, isn't it? You get a loan, and you can buy it. Us no. We had to go to the garbage dump that you see there and work with cardboard that was thrown away, the cardboard of the product boxes. Or go to the stores, of which there weren't many at that time, we're talking stores that sell frames or pictures and such. We would go there and ask for the layers that go between the photograph and the glass that they cut, and the leftover. When we would go would ask for those kinds of things. We were almost always looking in the garbage.

What Carlos was describing here is the Cuban government's disconnect between touting free education for all and actually providing what is needed to educate the students. A 99% literacy rate is impressive, but it is a tragedy when an educated people desiring to learn more are not provided with access to more or tools necessary to increase their knowledge.

Transportation

When talking about transportation with participants, most didn't overtly complain about the system of transportation in Cuba; rather, they framed it in terms of scarcity and cost of time. Regarding scarcity, there was the scarcity of modern vehicles or buses, and there was also scarcity of reliability when it came to transportation. Cars and buses would often break down, and there were not always materials to fix them. Coupled with the scarcity of availability of reliable transport was the cost of time in relation to getting from point A to point B. Much of the transportation within the city or province where these Cuban participants lived was either by car (not necessarily their own) or by bus. Traveling by car is significantly more expensive than by bus, so many times it was more economical, albeit more frustrating, to take the bus. This was the case for most Cuban citizens, so the buses were always crowded and there were many stops along the way from point A to point B, especially in Havana.

Traveling to a different province required more planning, had a high cost, and required permission from the government. Many Cubans who did not readily have access to U.S. dollars or CUCs couldn't afford to travel within the country. A rare exception was when two people decided to get married; the government would pay for the honeymoon, which typically took place at a tourist resort where food and drinks are included. More than one of my respondents knows of someone who got married because of this government perk rather than because they were in love.

Can we predict who will stay and who will go?

When Cubans discuss politics as being one of the main reasons they chose to emigrate, they can either be referring to political persecution or restrictions or to less overt examples of political control exercised in the country. Religion, schooling, and transportation are all part of

the umbrella of politics in Cuba; that is, these areas cannot be uncoupled from the socialist system of government that exists in Cuba. If a Cuban citizen is bothered by or complains of the lack of general resources or resources in schools, lack of food, scarcity of reliable transportation, inability to freely travel, or limitations imposed on practicing religion, they are essentially pushing back against the system of government that imposes those restrictions by way of political operations. At the same time, it is those restrictions and lack of resources that make it so difficult to leave the country. Those who recognize scarcity brought on by the Special Period after the fall of the Soviet Union, or who are aware of the hypocrisies or propaganda engaged in by the government, and who have grown up during the rule of Fidel Castro but after Fulgencio Batista are more likely to leave the island than their older counterparts who remember pre-Castro times. Newer emigrants also tend to want to settle outside of Miami to avoid political tension and to have the opportunity to learn and practice English, which would be an unnecessary skill in Miami due to the number of Cubans already living there.

As we saw earlier in this section, financial resources are required to leave Cuba, as is permission from the government if one desires to leave the country legally. This money either comes from access to people with U.S. dollars, borrowing from others who have that access, or funding by an outside entity, be it an individual or a company. Also, men are more likely than women to emigrate unless those women are part of a couple. Two women I interviewed, and two other women with whom I had informal conversations, made the migration journey on their own without a brother or significant other to travel with, but all four had family here in Syracuse financing their journey, guiding them via social media communication (ie. WhatsApp and Facebook Messenger) and providing a place for them to stay upon arrival. This option was

not as accessible to previous waves of Cuban migrants because they did not have such ready access to internet, cell phones, or social networks via social media. The reasons that women are historically less likely to migrate on their own continue to be both practical and cultural, but this may change given the increase in immediate access to social networks via social media. Future studies will help us to better understand the intricacies involved. It is clear, however, after speaking to those women who did emigrate and settle in Syracuse that they also want better lives and opportunities for themselves, their families, and/or their children.

It is not easy to predict which citizens will decide to emigrate, and which ones will not. This is largely because of the changing nature of social networks and relationships, and access to social media. While one person may have no intention to leave Cuba one year, situations change quickly and new relationships are constantly forming, causing these Cuban citizens to change their minds and utilize new nodes in their social networks to leave the country the following year. It would be interesting, for example, to speak with Yubran's new wife (they met on Facebook, her living in Cuba and him in Syracuse) so that we could understand if she had been actively searching for a husband living in the U.S. so that she could emigrate, or if it was accidental that they met and perhaps serendipitous that they are both from the same town in Cuba.

Finally, as the political climate changes within Cuba and in the United States, as well as in countries along the land migration path, especially Ecuador, Venezuela, and Mexico, Cuban citizens may be forced to consider options they may not have considered in the past. Precisely for this reason, it is important to consider circumstances relationally as Miraftab (2016) explains in her book "Global Heartland." Miraftab argues for the need to pay attention to the political,

economic, and structural factors as well as social and cultural components that contribute to migration movement. The relational understanding that Miraftab describes is key to understanding who will migrate, how, and when. Thus, in any given moment security/insecurity factors may be stronger for one Cuban citizen desiring to leave, while for another destination ideations may be the ultimate cause of their decision to leave, but overall, the ultimate decision to leave is, over time, a combination of different individual factors, including arguably the most important factors of social capital and access to social networks. This is especially true for the fifth wave of Cuban migration due to their access to broader social networks via social media and cell phone communication. As Pedraza (2007) points out, "the intersection between moment in the life cycle and moment in history is crucial in determining social outcomes that are markedly different from one generation to another" (15).

Los Comunicados are a generation not only living in a world where social media and access to cell phones have become ubiquitous, but they also come from a Cuba which has become more globalized and capitalized than ever before (Carter Grosso 2019). Together these factors have reshaped migration in terms of access to information not mediated by governments and opportunities via social networks and social media in terms of financial, informational, and emotional support. Not surprisingly, these factors have also led to distinct identity and social network characteristics for this new wave of Cuban migrants. Access to cell phones and social media allows these migrants to stay in almost constant communication with family and friends within Cuba and social network connections in the U.S. throughout their migration journey. Los Comunicados residing in the U.S. are truly able to remain connected, if only virtually, to their home country and compatriots in ways not possible just ten years ago.

This fifth wave of Cuban migrants are traveling to Central or South America and heading to Mexico to cross the southern U.S. border, while the fourth wave of Cuban migrants were amongst the last to be able to arrive via sea and take advantage of the former "Wet Foot, Dry Foot" provision of the Cuban Adjustment Act. Los Comunicados are taking advantage of the increase in overall access to communication and media and traveling by land, using social networks as an invaluable resource during this long and dangerous migration journey.

Chapter 4 looks at the process the participants of this study went through to choose their new settlement location, and their feelings, thoughts, and ideas upon arrival in Syracuse, New York. It aims to differentiate the ways in which social networks are formed, activated, and used in Syracuse that may be different or unnecessary if these Cubans had settled in Miami, Florida, with the highest percentage of Cubans in the nation. The participants of this study acknowledge some of the benefits of settling in a non-gateway city but have also learned how social networks can help them navigate and cope with some of the unexpected hardships they encountered in their new home.

Chapter 4

How Social Networks Absorb Culture Shock in New Destination Settlement Locations

New destination literature has shown us that reception context matters in terms of the kind of experience both newcomers and natives will experience (see, for example, Okamoto, et al. 2020, Massey, ed. 2008, Singer, et al. 2008). In regard to networks, Cecilia Menjívar (2000), in her seminal work on Salvadoran immigrant networks in the U.S. reminds us that "[s]tructural forces, such as policies of reception and dynamics of the local economy, together with the organization of the receiving community, impinge on informal networks…by shaping the structure of opportunities that immigrants encounter [and] the kinds of resources that immigrants will have available to help one another" (2000:35). So, shifting the analytical lens to a non-traditional research site exposes nuances of phenomena, such as networks and ethnic identities, that were previously thought to be understood. For example, Cuban immigrants who settled in cities across the U.S. post-1990 and into the early 2000's are vastly different than those who settled into Miami's Cuban enclave before 1990. There are also differences across the most recent wave of Cuban migrants, Los Comunicados, such as method of journey, life perspective, political beliefs, age/class/race, and settlement destination. One thing remains consistent across this recent wave is its unprecedented access to social networks via cell phones and social media and how this access changes how Cubans are able to communicate with each other pre-settlement and in their diasporic communities, especially outside of Miami.

How Cuban migrants experience incorporation and daily life outside of Miami, especially in non-traditional settlement locations, is starkly different from what they would experience in Miami with built-in social networks. Going into this research I expected to find that like other ethnic groups, Cubans in Syracuse would look for ethnic social networks to engage with to (1) increase their social capital and (2) to maintain cultural ties with others of the same ethnicity. While my research reinforced this hypothesis, it was not entirely in the way I had expected, and it was very distinct from previous literature on Cuban immigrants in Miami, FL, which tends to focus on political views and participation (see, for example, Grenier, G. 2006 or 2017) rather than social networking and cultural maintenance. Overall, the participants for my research focused less on their political views in their stories, and more on the reason for their migration journey and how life in Syracuse compared with their expectations. I found that social networks showed up differently for Cubans in Syracuse in terms of maintaining cultural connections. While in an ethnic enclave, such as Miami, an immigrant does not need to form new social networks to maintain cultural connections because those networks are already established. In a new destination area without established ethnic social networks, immigrants are more motivated and creative in forming and maintaining those connections. The fifth wave of Cuban immigrants currently settling in the U.S. has the advantage of being able to grow their social networks over social media, maintaining that important connection with their culture, but also opening up opportunities for growth within their destination city and beyond.

This chapter challenges the reader to break with previous assumptions that all Cubans migrating to the United States want to settle in Miami to be with other Cubans and live in well-established Cuban enclaves. It illustrates how Cubans choose their resettlement city, even if

that choice is simply just “not Miami,” and incorporate into their new destination. For example, many Cubans in Syracuse, like those in Skop’s (2008) study of Cubans in Phoenix, have expressed the idea that living in Miami is just like living in Cuba and that one does not need to learn English to survive there. But, settling in a city like Syracuse, Cubans will experience things like snow for the first time as well as encounter language barriers and possible racial discrimination in everyday social interactions. At the same time, social media and cell phones have expanded the possibilities of social network connections Cubans can take advantage of and the overall knowledge available within their networks, even outside of Miami.

Finally, chapter 4 also adds to the knowledge about the social and psychological decision-making of members of the Cuban diaspora outside Miami, FL and how these Cubans rely on their social networks differently, especially to counter disappointments and hardships in their new destination location. This qualitative study affords the opportunity for researchers and communities to understand more deeply the social network and integration practices of the Cuban diaspora living outside of Miami. The most recent members of the Cuban diaspora have the advantage of being able to stay in touch with compatriots in Cuba and in other parts of the U.S., including Miami, without being near them physically. While this aids in cultural maintenance objectives, it does not help in making local connections for everyday physical needs.

Destination Syracuse

Syracuse Cubans that I interviewed stated that they ended up in Syracuse because of a refugee/immigrant resettlement program (with or without a visa), family reunification, and/or

because of a social network shared with a Cuban already living in Syracuse at the time of their arrival to the country. I examined the social networks that these Cubans engaged with prior to their arrival and while in Syracuse, as well as their identity formation while socially integrating into the city because, as Skop (2008) argues, "forces that are hidden at the larger scale become pervasive in [a] smaller community" (41). The combination of social network connections with other Cubans living in Syracuse, the location of two refugee resettlement organizations in the city (Interfaith Works and Catholic Charities), a Catholic church that provides skill-based training and runs an English language school, and multiple Cuban-led Protestant churches in the area all but guarantee future Cuban immigration to Syracuse.

One participant I interviewed, Mariana, who is married to a pastor, told me that her family used social network connections with pastors in Mexico and Texas to leave Cuba in 2015 using a six-month religious visa for Mexico, and then eventually ended up in Syracuse. She tells her story like this

> Finally, they approved us to leave the 26th of December, we got on the airplane, and we went to Mexico City. We arrived in Mexico City, stayed one night in a hotel close to the airport and the same pastor that had helped us during the visa process, the permission on the part of the Mexican government so that we could work there as pastors for six months, and so that they would give us a legal contract for six months, where the girls had to be in schools, and everything had to be a completely legal process, even though he knew that no, he knew the ending. So, then, after that, well, we crossed…

I asked Mariana if they crossed by airplane, and she explained further

> We went by plane. When we stayed the night in Mexico City, the next day, early, we took another airplane to Tijuana, that border with California and then there we crossed, and were in San Diego one night. Well then, once we crossed (into the U.S.), we got into contact with our pastor friends from Houston. Then, we, first before coming, well, we had determined that we should stay here for a year. That is to say, God put in my husband's heart to come for a year and make a life up here until… a little bit (of time) maybe empowering the Church, to work a little through sports ministry, which had been the area that he had worked in in Cuba. We used to work with orphan children in Cuba also, and we were thinking that what we had learned there, well, we would apply it here. We didn't know that there were Cubans here. We thought that we would be the only Cubans that would be up here.

I was surprised that they hadn't known that there were other Cubans in Syracuse before they arrived, and I asked her how her family ended up in Syracuse once they met up with the pastor in Houston that they had known from his visits to Cuba. It was then that it became clear that they were resettled from Houston to Syracuse by Interfaith Works, a refugee resettlement agency. Mariana explained the process

> So after all the, well, we spent a week in Houston, we came here, and began all our appointments at Interfaith. Interfaith is the organization that picks you up… that works with immigrants, from Haiti, Cubans, and I don't know what other nationalities… I think also the Congo, something like that. Refugees too. Then going there to Interfaith and going to welfare we began to see Cubans and we said to ourselves, 'Well good, there are Cubans here,' and we began to establish communication little by little with them and we

> figured out the road they were on. Some of them were Christians, that came as Christians from Cuba, others had gone to church at some point, and we began to invite them to have Bible study in Spanish because almost all would say, 'To the American churches we can't go because we don't understand.' And we began to have, little by little, this Bible study which eventually converted into a church, that is what it is today.

The interview with Mariana had been done in the living room of the apartment above the Protestant church that they were pastoring, and I asked where she had been living when she first came to Syracuse. She explained that they had always lived there, above the church. Mariana explained that upon arrival, Interfaith Works had put her family there in the small apartment above the church. I knew that there was an American/English-speaking part of the church and a Latino/Spanish-speaking part of the church because a mutual (American) friend of ours attends, so I asked Mariana if her family had known anyone from the English part of the church before moving in. Mariana answered

> From the church? The other part of the church? No… we didn't know anyone else. Not Cubans, not Americans. We didn't know anyone. But going to the doctor appointments, to welfare to ask for help and social assistance and going to Interfaith, which is where they take everyone, all the refugees, the first step of help for all the refugees. There we began to meet Cubans.

When I asked if the people from the church where her family was living had some kind of connection with Interfaith Works, Mariana said that they didn't. She told me that it was the English teacher at the English school for the refugees (a program through a local Catholic

Church) that had eventually told them to ask Interfaith to help with asking for financial aid and welfare because they hadn't known what to do. Leydi and her family had been living in Syracuse for close to two years when I spoke with her, and she was witness to a lot of growth in the Spanish-speaking part of that church, which was representative of the growing Cuban population in Syracuse.

Hardwick and Meacham (2005) highlight the importance of resettlement agencies in the lives of refugees sharing that in their study undertaken in Portland, Oregon, "90 percent of newly arriving refugees chose to stay in the area primarily because of the network of support provided by IRCO[55]. In addition, and equally important, is the social support provided by co-ethnic religious, family, and clan networks" (554). The outcome in Syracuse is similar. Out of the Cubans I interviewed throughout the community, I know of only three that have moved out of the area; one because of a job, one because of a romantic relationship, and one because of the weather (this participant moved to Florida, but not Miami).

In Syracuse, Interfaith Works and Catholic Charities partner with the local and federal governments to determine the placement of incoming refugees. The number of Cubans currently living in Syracuse coupled with the probability of an increase in that number, largely due to social networking, make Syracuse a promising site of research for new destination resettlement for Cubans, the formation and usage of networks in new ways, and nuances of Cuban identity that are created in response to their environment. The number of Cubans living in Syracuse in 2024 has been estimated to be around 1,728,[56] which would be 1.18% of the

[55] IRCO stands for Immigrant and Refugee Community Organization and is an organization in Portland, Oregon dedicated to provide culturally specific services to help immigrant communities thrive.
[56] https://stacker.com/new-york/syracuse/biggest-sources-immigrants-syracuse

total Syracuse population. This is enormous growth, from .63% to 1.18%, taking into consideration that in January 2019 after Obama's change to the Cuban Adjustment Act refugee intake in Syracuse all but ceased due to lack of federal funding. Cubans were still arriving in Syracuse at the beginning of 2020[57], but primarily because of a social network connection with another Cuban rather than organizational resettlement, and in smaller numbers. This influx was halted shortly thereafter in March 2020 due to the Coronavirus pandemic, but one Cuban I was able to interview that arrived after January 2019 was undocumented, living with her cousin, and waiting for her asylum court date. Her migration story was like others who traveled through Central America and Mexico, but she had not received any organizational financial or social assistance during resettlement, whereas the opposite was true for my other participants. In her case, she relied completely on her cousin for her initial needs. Then, she was able to use her cousin's social network to find a job which allowed her to work and earn money despite her undocumented status.

Three other Cubans, two who arrived in Syracuse in November of 2022, and one that arrived in December 2022, have applied for, and are awaiting permanent residency, but have been granted a one-year visa along with housing and food aid from the New York State government. These Cubans were required to apply for their own benefits and be available for phone calls/interviews from immigration authorities. This new wave of Cubans must rely more heavily on their social networks for daily survival and to navigate the social assistance available to them, even as legal pathways are being opened to them to enter the U.S. Yubran, one of my

[57] Due to President Trump's increased restrictions on refugee and immigration acceptance into the U.S. coupled with the COVID-19 pandemic all but halted immigration to Syracuse until pandemic restrictions were lifted.

participants who met his wife on social media and went to Cuba to marry her, was able to bring her to the U.S. because of the new 2023 parole processes, but under the new requirements he is required to support her economically. In the past, Yubran would have used his social network connections to help his new wife receive social assistance, but instead, he likely used his connections to find her work.

Where Cubans are Settling within the City of Syracuse

Although Syracuse does have established ethnic neighborhoods (Italian, Polish, Irish), these neighborhoods are historically dubbed as such from lingering remnants of the first waves of European immigration to the city. Even so, these neighborhoods have become ethnically diverse over time as the original immigrant populations age and sell their homes or come to the end of their lives; what remains are businesses such as restaurants or small grocery stores standing in as representation of past culture and tradition. Some of those neighborhoods, such as "Little Italy" on the north side of the city, have become among the poorest in the city and even in the nation.[58]

While in Miami Cubans rely heavily on social capital[59] and social networks frequently overlap, in Syracuse access to social capital is more limited because social networks do not overlap as much. There is no ethnic neighborhood, or enclave, for Cubans in Syracuse, and there is no visibly tightknit Cuban community such as you would find in Miami. Surprisingly

[58] See, for example, https://www.syracuse.com/news/2016/09/syracuses_poverty_rate_remains_among_worst_in_nation_census_finds.html or https://www.syracuse.com/news/2019/09/census-syracuses-poverty-rate-remains-among-nations-highest.html

[59] Social capital is a term typically associated with the enclave hypothesis, a theory introduced by Portes and Rumbaut, but it is also applicable in the segmented assimilation theory, which is more applicable in the case of Syracuse.

there was only one Cuban restaurant recently in the city of Syracuse, La Esquina Habanera. This restaurant opened in 2019 and just closed at the beginning of 2022, unfortunately. The owners cite "change of ownership" as the cause for the closure, but it is unlikely that another Cuban restaurant will open in its place.[60]

Generally, in Syracuse, it is more common to find small pockets of same-ethnicity residents in ethnically diverse neighborhoods and apartment complexes, rather than large enclaves. Historically, because the refugee resettlement agencies chose the place of settlement for these Cubans upon arrival to Syracuse, Cubans can be found geographically in larger numbers in specific apartment complexes on the north, west, and east sides of the city. According to a joint presentation by resettlement agencies in Syracuse, most refugees prefer to be settled near members of their own ethnic group,[61] and in Syracuse this means apartment complexes scattered throughout Syracuse rather than designated areas within the city. Skop and Menjívar (2001) found similar settlement (non)patterns in their initial study of Latinos in Phoenix, AZ. They state, "what we found instead [of ethnic neighborhoods] were small groups of families and individual immigrants living together in apartment complexes scattered throughout the metropolitan area" (70).

In this chapter, the immigrants' own voices elaborate on why they have chosen to live outside of Miami after immigrating to the U.S. and the advantages as well as ensuing difficulties that living in Syracuse, specifically, poses. Implicit in their stories is how they use their social networks to form new or modified identities in their new communities, and how those social

[60] Syracuse restaurant known for giant Cuban sandwiches closes for 'transition' to new owners - syracuse.com
[61] http://onondagacitizensleague.org/wp-content/uploads/2013/09/Refugees-In-Syracuse-Joint-presentation-for-OCL.pdf

networks, along with an optimistic mindset, help Cuban migrants to cope with disappointments and difficulties.

In the following section, 'Arriving in Syracuse,' Cuban participants discuss the initial barriers and incidences of culture shock that they experienced upon arrival in Syracuse, NY, as well as some of the logistics around the settlement process, including the utilization of social networks. Participants also express why they chose to settle in Syracuse rather than Miami. The next section, 'Life in Syracuse,' depicts some of the worries and regrets that Cuban interviewees had having settled in and lived in Syracuse for at least a few months, and in some cases a few years. They focus on the emotional barriers to integration specific to Cuban immigrants in the community, such as those issues related to loneliness. This section conveys the worries, lamentations, and process of mourning that each of these Cuban migrants goes through when thinking of people, things, or ideas they left behind in Cuba. This "mourning" process is coupled with day-to-day worries that any Syracuse resident may have but which are exacerbated when considered in the context of not knowing the language or being familiar with the culture, amongst other things. Finally, 'Settling In,' outlines the importance and use of social networks in Syracuse for surviving and overcoming disappointments expressed in their new community.

Arriving in Syracuse: "Choque y Decepción" (Culture shock and Disappointment)

Óscar and his sister arrived at the International Bridge Border between Juárez, Mexico and El Paso, Texas and crossed into the U.S. around midnight on July 4, 2015. When I asked how he ended up in Syracuse, he explained

> Once they let us in, we gave them our passports, we gave them everything, filled out the forms, and they gave us a parole number, which they give to Cubans at the border that

> lets you relocate to whichever location within the United States, but you can't leave the U.S. And so, we had some people we knew here, here in Syracuse and they helped us to come up here. We came up here… we didn't get any help from down there (Texas), none of that… we went straight here by plane. I have an uncle here, and he helped us a lot. So once we were here we went to welfare, they did all the paperwork for us. And once one applies for work permission… you have to wait one year and one day to apply for residency. And after that, life continues normally. It was a pretty hard hit, though… the separation, at first. The country, what hits you really hard ("lo que te choca mucho") is the language. It's very difficult to go to whichever place. Because you worry that if he or she doesn't understand me, are they going to mistreat me? This happens in many places here. I've had to go to the doctor, and the doctor wasn't able to get a translator or whatever and that's a lot of pressure. And like that. It's hard when you don't understand. And in many cases, they send you to a place, and not understanding you they mistreat you a little bit. But, that's life and you have to keep going.

Amongst all the positives that Cubans expressed about having arrived in Syracuse, the ideas of "choque" (culture shock, the unexpected) and "decepción" (disappointment) also ran throughout the interviews of all the participants. I define "choque" as how respondents characterized things that surprised them upon arrival to Syracuse, but that they could get used to or change/adapt to, while "decepción" is used to refer to something they talked about that they may not have expected but continued to permeate daily life in a negative way. "Decepciones" are more pervasive, and participants persistently struggle with them, despite their efforts to accommodate those disappointments. "Choques" happened "in the past," and

participants seem to have come to terms with them. Culture shock and disappointment are interrelated and provide windows into the issues that pose the most difficulty for Cuban migrants living outside Miami. These “decepciones” and “choques” are related to living in a community that is opposite in many ways to the lifestyle and climate they are used to. Syracuse Cubans are dependent upon their social networks to either help resolve or cope with these difficult issues.

Given the current wide range of accessibility to social media, including more recently in Cuba, Cubans who migrate to the U.S. tend to understand that to stay in Miami is to continue living in “Cuba” in terms of language, weather, topography, food, and customs, but with access to things widely unavailable in Cuba. The two other Cubans that had traveled to the U.S. with Óscar and his sister chose to go to live in Miami with family instead of going to Syracuse. Óscar explained, “they stayed down there around Miami with some of their family, and my sister and I, the two of us came up here.” Óscar’s uncle had likely shared information with him about the aid that is provided to refugees in Syracuse, so the choice to come to Syracuse was influenced by their family network connection. He described

> We were here living with my uncle for fifteen days until the government gave us the help/aid. They gave us the apartment, they helped us with the apartment, they paid the rent for us, they gave us a futon, food, a little bit of cash. And I was there, more or less, living off of that assistance. And then I went to work with Chucho, there at the casino. And then, from there I went to work at the apple orchard.

While a familiar lifestyle in terms of language and climate may be the goal of some Cuban migrants, especially if they have family in an established community in Miami, many other

Cubans migrate specifically in search for a place where they can begin anew. These Cubans desire to fully experience what it is to live in "La Yuma," as the U.S. is called.

Marcos echoed my other participants' responses describing Miami saying, "I'm telling you that it's Cuba, it's Cuba… it's Cuba, it's Venezuela, it's Mexico, it's Puerto Rico, it's all of those countries… no one speaks English." In addition to not having to learn English to live there, he goes on to talk about the obligation that many Miami Cubans feel living so close to Cuba and having family still there. He argues that if one spends time and money traveling to Cuba once or twice a month, or even once every two months, it's not possible to have the socioeconomic advancement that one could have living in a different city, away from the demands (self-imposed or otherwise) of traveling home frequently. Marcos explained, "When you are trying to get ahead you can't live in two places. You can't work here and try to live there." Marcos is describing the figurative idea of having one foot in the U.S. and one foot in Cuba. He feels that to make the most of his choice to leave Cuba, he must wholeheartedly choose to make his new life in Syracuse his priority. While he does make phone calls to his mother and the rest of his family in Cuba, Marcos doesn't travel there very often because it is more expensive to fly to Cuba from Syracuse than from Miami, and because it is expected that he does not arrive "empty-handed" when he does travel to Cuba. The cost of travel functions as his "excuse" to his family for not being able to visit as often as they would like him to. Marcos is clearly illustrating the emotional and economic dilemma that many Cubans feel upon arriving in the U.S. While living in Miami would offer a sense of familiarity and less of a "choque," choosing to live outside of Miami not only increases one's chances of learning English, but also relieves some of the

economic obligation that Cubans feel about sending money back to Cuba and traveling back to bring gifts/necessities and see family frequently.

Yamila adds that she does "not like Miami because the older Cubans there are constantly politicizing everything." This makes sense when considering that the older generation Cubans lived through the times of the Cuban Revolution whereas the younger generations only hear secondhand about pre-revolutionary times via stories from older relatives or schoolbooks. Furthermore, after the fall of the Soviet Union, life was difficult in Cuba due to the scarcity of food, materials, and daily necessities in general, causing many Cubans who emigrated soon after the 1990s to feel strongly about the failures of the Revolution. It makes sense that they would strongly involve themselves in Anti-Castro politics. Those who emigrated later, including the fourth and fifth wave Cubans I interviewed in Syracuse, grew up during the Special Period and do not have those intense memories of change from pre- to post-revolution. This is part of the reason many Syracuse Cubans chose not to live in Miami, and to focus on things other than politics. They are aware that living in Miami would have caused less of a culture shock for them regardless of whether they know another Cuban living there, and still chose one of the alternative relocation choices given by workers in Church World Services organization or another refugee resettlement organization. Most of the time, the relocation areas are ones that the immigrants know nothing about. Besides Syracuse, the participants in this study were also given choices to settle in places like Portland, Oregon or Houston, Texas, depending on which locations/organizations were prepared to receive more Cubans at the time of their arrival. Life in each of these different locations provides varied

opportunities and life choices, which is why it is important to study immigrants in newer destinations and not just traditional sites of settlement.

Those Cubans who chose to be relocated by Church World Services to Syracuse in the fall or winter were given winter coats and other weather-appropriate apparel either in Florida or upon arrival to Syracuse, yet this could not prepare Cubans for something they had never experienced: extreme cold and snow. Most Cubans could remember in vivid detail what they first thought upon arrival to Syracuse, as it was something that shocked them right away. Chucho compares his arrival in December to the apartment provided him through Interfaith Works in Syracuse as something out of a horror movie to portray the feeling of shock he encountered. He tells the story like this:

> And so, after arriving… they sent us here on a flight… we got here to Syracuse at night, and snow began to fall. When they brought us here to the house, we went up to the third floor, and when we went in, there wasn't anything inside. The only thing that was there were the beds. There wasn't any place to sit, no table, nothing. So we looked outside and said to ourselves, where have they stuck us? How ugly is this? The trees, without leaves, and it was starting to snow. This is like the films you see in Cuba… the haunted house, the people, yelling wherever. We said to ourselves that they stuck us in one of those movies.

Chucho did not say what he had expected, but from his description he was likely picturing Miami or a similar city. As Carlos said, "For us, the United States is Miami. If a guy left for the U.S., you automatically think he left for Miami." Many of the Cuban music artists record their videos in Miami because they can visit with limited visas, or they have moved their family there

to continue to capitalize on Cuban culture and community, but with more freedoms and opportunities to earn money. Also, talk shows, telenovelas, cooking shows, sports shows, YouTube shows, and other television or internet programs produced by Cubans in the U.S. are often filmed in Miami. Very few Cubans come to the U.S. expecting freezing temperatures and snowfall, although this could change now that more Cubans have regular access to social media sites such as Facebook where they can at least see pictures of what to expect if they have friends or family that settled outside Miami, and they want to join them.

Mariana traveled with her family to the U.S. but was still taken aback by the difficulty of the journey and what she encountered upon arrival. Mariana remembers being particularly traumatized not only by the stress and fear she felt on her journey through Mexico with her husband and two daughters, but also by what she faced upon arrival to Syracuse. She says of reaching Syracuse

> Well, it was a very big shock. I arrived in January, the fourth of January 2016, with a lot of snow and it was very cold. It was such a shock for me, that first winter, that I wouldn't even like to remember it. Hands peeling (from the cold), it was such an abrupt change. And on top of all this was the stress of the process to come here, because when you come through a third country, well, it's not easy. You can be detained at customs and they can take you and deport you back to Cuba. Why not? The Mexican police can take you and say, "You're pretending, you're not here for the purpose you're saying. I'm thinking that what you want is to cross." And they take you and deport you or they can take your children and carry them off to a different division and, pathetically, bribe you.

Fortunately, the initial shock of the snow and cold wears off and the new Syracuse residents get used to the weather, and even come to enjoy it. Later in the interview Mariana explains, “At first I thought, ’Where are we? What is this?’ But that’s ok. God, little by little has gone putting love in our hearts for this city and it has gone well.” Mariana has permanent U.S. residency, earned her driver’s license that previous summer and had already driven in the first snowfalls at the time of the interview. She is also studying to take her citizenship test and “rests easier at night knowing that her daughters will grow up without religious persecution.”

Although Church World Services tries to prepare Cubans for what they will encounter in Syracuse and warns them how different it will be from what they are used to, the desire to “know” the United States, including the desire to learn English, is stronger than the fear of the unknown. Marcos remembers a woman from CWS explaining the relocation options to him and his friend and describing Syracuse as one of their choices if they didn’t want to stay in Miami. She said to them, “Well, then, the option we have is to go here (pointing to a map). But, do you understand what cold is? There it’s very cold, you always have to be dressed in heavy coats, and a huge amount of snow falls. Are you sure you want to go there?” Marcos and his friend both said that yes, they wanted to go Syracuse, despite the warning of what they would encounter. And overall, after the initial shock of the extreme cold and snow, and learning to live in and with the weather, the Cubans in Syracuse I spoke with didn’t seem to mind the cold as much as most native Syracusans. This is likely because Cubans are coming from extreme island heat, lack of air conditioning, and because they haven’t lived their entire lives in the cold and snow. Furthermore, in cost-benefit terms, the return of living anywhere in the U.S. for these Cubans

desiring more life opportunities is greater than the cost of occasional discomfort caused by weather or seasons.

Besides weather and topography, another common "choque" encountered by Cubans arriving in Syracuse is the financial stress brought about by the shift from living under a socialist government to a capitalist government, including the accompanying mental shift that must be conquered after arrival. In Cuba, the government provides or strongly subsidizes housing/rent, education, health care, and reproductive care. It also subsidizes food[62], restaurant meals[63], certain medicines (depending on availability), public transportation (especially in Havana), and other products (depending on availability) for Cuban citizens. Scarcity and lack of quality are common issues in Cuba not only for government-subsidized items, but also for items only available in CUC stores such as clothing, particular hygiene and baby products (tampons, diapers, certain over-the-counter medicines), and household appliances (fans, microwaves, TVs, washers/dryers, etc.). The prices of the items in the CUC stores are similar to or more expensive than prices in the U.S., which poses a severe problem to a typical Cuban citizen working a government-provided job for the equivalent salary of $20-$25 per month. To survive most Cubans either work a second job in a sector with access to tourist currency or have family or a friend supplementing their income from abroad. Upon arrival to the U.S., Cubans fortunately find a wider variety and availability of products and services, but nothing is "free."

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[62] The foods that are rationed (by item and quantity) in the "libreta" each month for Cuban citizens are, for example, chicken, eggs, sugar, rice, and beans. Not all foods that citizens are supposed to receive are always available. Fresh fruits and vegetables are expensive to purchase, as is any food variety not in the libreta.

[63] In Havana there are particular restaurants that are government-owned and are priced in CUPs, or Cuban pesos, while in provinces further away from the capital or tourist areas, and/or in the country, restaurants have CUC prices (subsidized) as well as CUP prices. CUCs are valued at approximately 1:1 to the U.S. dollar, while CUPs are valued at about 25:1 compared to CUPs.

Nonetheless, after eight months of government support, given because of their immigration status as refugees, Syracuse Cubans must begin to pay for rent, utilities, transportation (a car and gas are usually eventually necessary/practical to get to and from work), health insurance, education, food, furniture and appliances, toiletries, and other products and services. Cubans also need to learn how to fill out paperwork (for a job, to go to the doctor's office, to enroll in school, to open bank accounts or apply for credit cards, to pay taxes, etc.) in a language that is not their own. This brings about stress and worry of a different kind than Cubans faced in Cuba.

Carlos explains, "in the U.S. there is more stress and financial worry, which can be lessened by working a lot, but in Cuba you work and work and get nowhere." This comparison incorporates the dilemma of whether it is better to not have much, but not have to worry about a place to live or healthcare and such, or if it is better to have the opportunity to work for your life goals with the danger of not being able to pay for a place to live or other daily needs. Chucho describes the cost of his living expenses in Cuba, "I just had to go sow the field. I didn't have to pay for the house, the house was ours. The only worry was paying for the water and electricity. The water cost 3 (Cuban) pesos and the electricity for our house, cost around 60 (Cuban) pesos, and that's it. There wasn't anything else that you had to pay for. Estrella further explains

> Ok, I'm going to tell you something. When someone is in Cuba, one has a different idea as to what this is (the U.S.). It shocks you (te choca). In Cuba you don't have things, in Cuba you don't have anything, but neither do you have this pressure, these things hanging over you, like if you're going to have enough to pay the rent or if you'll have

> enough to pay for the car. You don't have any of that. If you have $20, great. If not, that's ok too. You eat what you can find. When one arrives here there's so much pressure, so much pressure and so many responsibilities. But yes, it's worth it. All this passes, and life lets you relax and get used to things.

In addition to financial costs of living under capitalism, there is a social and emotional cost as well. Chucho contrasts spending time in the hospital during an illness or after a surgery in Cuba with Syracuse and what might happen, and comments that the time and emotional care that is possible to give a loved one in Cuba would not be possible in Syracuse because family members have to go to work to pay bills. He says, "In Cuba if you go to the hospital, your whole family is there with you, the job doesn't matter, they're there with you the whole time. If it's not one, it's another… because they have to go to sleep, but they're there with you. Here (in Syracuse), they leave you because here they have to go to work, pay the bills, and everything." Óscar expressed the same idea of being sick or injured and not having family available to tend to you. He sustained a work injury and no longer can work, but cited his sister being in Cuba a problem for him because he was lonely and could not lift more than 5 pounds. Nonetheless eventually, and usually by a mix of organizational help and by accessing social networks for job opportunities, rides to work, and other information, Cubans can get through their initial shock and adapt to life under capitalism.

A third "choque" that Cubans face upon arrival to Syracuse concerns language. Most Cubans take English classes in grade school while in Cuba, but respondents all agreed that English classes in Cuba insufficiently prepared them for the level of English they need daily in Syracuse. In Miami English would be unnecessary. "For me," says Santos, "personally, I don't

like Florida. It's like going to Cuba. And one of the things that motivated me to come here, to Syracuse, was to learn English. Because if you stay in Miami, you don't have to speak English, everyone speaks Spanish. And I was just talking with friends of mine that are in Miami and they tell me that they don't speak English." While most of the Cubans I interviewed asserted that they settled outside of Miami so that they could learn English, they also acknowledged that most opportunities, from their job options down to menu choices at a restaurant, are limited until they become more proficient in English. Syracuse has a free language school available for new refugees which many take advantage of, but class hours can sometimes interfere with jobs.

Isolation from the host community is yet another shock that Cubans encounter upon settling in Syracuse. Not only do these Cubans not have the family or friends that they are used to seeing on a regular basis, they also quickly learn that non-Cubans are not necessarily as "neighborly" as they are used to in their neighbors in Cuba. In Cuba, if one needs to borrow a few pesos, or needs some sugar, it is understood that you can count on your neighbor to help you because you understand that it might be you next time that needs the help or favor. Chucho reminisces about Cuba, "there everyone would give you a plate of food, but here, you don't know your neighbor… you can't ask your neighbor for a plate of food. There (Cuba) you can go to whichever house and they'll give you some rice, some sugar, but here you don't know anyone, and no one knows you." Estrella echoes, "there in Cuba, you get used to that. You go and ask, 'lend me this,' and they lend it to you. 'Lend me 20 pesos until tomorrow, lend me a little bit of oil'; in Cuba they do that." This reciprocal type of behavior is one of the things that makes Cuban social networking in Syracuse so interesting. To an outsider, one might wonder

why Cubans go so far out of their way to help another Cuban, but to understand this in context one must only look at the style of life in Cuba or even in Miami, where it appears that it is ingrained in Cubans to help others out when in need. This cultural aspect, amongst other cultural affinities, are showcased on TV shows and YouTube shows that take place in both Cuba and Miami.

Cubans who make TV shows or videos/channels on YouTube capitalize on Cuban culture and the parts of it that are either stereotypically Cuban, many times doing so in a comical or entertaining way. Through participant observation and informal social media research I learned that Cubans use social networks to access cultural aspects understood by other Cubans to laugh at themselves and to foster a sense of belonging. Popular cultural traits that are shared are those resulting from living under a socialist government, being a Latino in a romantic relationship, or having a Latino mom. Cristiano and Elian use social media sites and tools such as Facebook, Facebook Messenger, WhatsApp, and YouTube to share videos that describe their lives in Cuba, their lives as Cubans living in the U.S., their love of soccer, and to fuel their competitive nature with games like chess that you can play virtually against a Cuban friend in another city or state. These are all ways Cubans connect and network with each other, and again, not necessarily those who are living in the same city or even the same country. Cubans living far away from their families and childhood friends can close the distance between them with a phone call or message and feel a little bit less lonely. Cubans from the same home city or province who emigrated to different places can keep in touch via a group chat, accessible whenever they feel homesick or nostalgic. Cell phones and social media can strengthen and broaden a Cuban migrant's social network, and they can bring people together physically and

virtually. Thus, social networks can serve to soften the choques and desilusiones that emigration bring about, but it must also be mentioned that such easy access to social networks through social media can also cause problems in relationships and fuel gossip, an issue addressed in a later section on trust and reciprocity within social networks.

In addition to the initial shocks that Cubans described (weather, financial stress, language barriers, and isolation) come inevitable emotional disappointments stemming from a disconnect between expectations and realities of outcomes in daily life. While most of the Cubans I spoke with expressed extreme gratitude to be living in the United States, they could not help but talk about things that they missed about their "old" life and express worries and insecurities about the future. One colossal difference between this new wave of Cuban migrants and previous waves is the ease of access to social networks both locally and globally which provide comfort in times of nostalgia and information in times of desperation or need. This access to social networks, via social media, is available to Cubans in Syracuse and Miami, can serve as a bridge across the diaspora,

Life in Syracuse: Lamentaciones y Preocupaciones

Lamentaciones, or lamentations, are literally expressions of grief or sorrow, and *preocupaciones* are worries. Although worries are a constant presence in the life of an immigrant and they are also present during the migration journey, the worries that are described in this section are day-to-day worries of these Cuban migrants based upon the responsibilities that their new life has brought upon them. Many times, when an individual decides to try something new, they think they have an idea of what that thing is going to feel like or be like. When reality does not match up to the preconception, this sometimes results in

psychological disappointment, and at times even regret about choices made. For Syracuse Cubans, while the wide accessibility to information and social networks via the internet and social media has closed some of the gap between expectations and reality, there still remains some disconnect upon arrival to their new destination. Social networks are extremely important in these moments because loneliness and isolation can become barriers to integration into their new community without access to those networks.

In this section I discuss some of the worries and regrets that these Cuban immigrants expressed that they may not have expected, and I attempt to capture some pieces of the participants' lives in Cuba that they grieve while living their new life in Syracuse. I feel it necessary to point out that the majority, if not all, of the Cubans interviewed were satisfied with and even happy about their decision to leave Cuba; in fact, most made it a point to say how thankful they were to be living in the U.S. or Syracuse. But, as with any form of change, there are always memories and pieces of the previous life or experience that will be missed, creating pockets of loneliness.

A 2014 study published by *The Forum*[64], an organization formed by migrant and refugee community leaders to address immigrant integration needs in British society found that loneliness and isolation, and related issues, were the major challenges facing immigrants in London. Data was collected by interviews with participants in their New Beginnings mentoring program. Researchers conducting the British study found that immigrants mentioned the following isolation and loneliness issues as barriers to integration: loss of family and friends, *lack of social networks*, language barriers, lack of access to services and resources, loss of

[64] https://migrantsorganise.org/wp-content/uploads/2014/09/Loneliness-report_The-Forum_UPDATED.pdf

status, loss of identity, loss of job or career, cultural differences, discrimination, and the isolating impact of government policies (Christodoulou 2014, italics added). Syracuse Cubans face many of the same challenges, highlighting the significance of the role of social networks in their new lives. Important access to services and resources are aided by the community organizations dedicated to helping refugees enter their new community, building new nodes into their social networks. Issues surrounding immigrant loneliness, should interest local, state, and national governments because of the impact they have on these new community members' physical and mental health, and consequently their degree of integration into the community. As *The Forum* reports, "[t]hese challenges are inter-related and overlapping, trapping those who face them into a vicious circle and leading them to more isolation and loneliness and further damaging their health. Loneliness is extremely prevalent among migrants and refugees. Feeling of loneliness is associated with increased morbidity and mortality and reduced quality of life" (Christodoulou 2014). The objective behind *The Forum*'s study was to create awareness and put pressure on the NHS (Britain's public health system) to change policies affecting migrants' and refugees' lives. Community awareness and respective social and economic change are noteworthy goals, so as to take less of a toll on the local service providers, especially doctors, social workers, and school teachers.

Only one of my participants, Cristiano, openly said that if he had known what awaited him in Syracuse, he never would have left Cuba. This was said in frustration after discussing how many hours per week he works and that he doesn't have anyone to enjoy the fruits of his labor with, compounded with a FaceTime call with his family in Cuba, who he says do not understand how difficult it is in the U.S. Cristiano told me, "My father is in Havana, always

asking for money, but disguising it. It's always, 'oh it's the new year,' or 'we haven't been able to eat much meat here'. He never even sent me money when he was living with his new wife in Havana and my mom was struggling with my sister and me in Las Tunas. I will always send my mom money because she raised me." Cristiano has felt pressure to send money to his parents and bring gifts to his family when he visits Cuba, and has become increasingly frustrated with the inability to fully explain the financial responsibilities he has in the U.S. Cristiano says that his family rarely outright asks for money or things, but will instead mention a need in conversation after which Cristiano takes the responsibility upon himself to try to remedy the issue. Pressure to send remittances to one's home country is common amongst many immigrant groups, but nonetheless a very real and almost daily mental struggle that native members of the host society do not have to cope with.

Cristiano left Cuba with his then girlfriend, but they had ended the relationship before they even arrived in the U.S., contributing to his frustrations, worries, and loneliness. She now resides in Miami with a man she met online during her and Cristiano's journey to the U.S. As previously mentioned, this is one of the consequences of widened availability of social media and opportunities to expand one's social network. On the other hand, in other informal conversations Cristiano talked about how there is nothing in Cuba and that he was always hungry, at one time showing me a video circulating on the internet spoofing the news that there is no bread on the island. Conversations such as these, and reels or posts about life in Cuba, showcase the internal conflict and dilemma that goes on in the minds of many Cuban migrants; they miss the familiarity and warmth of the life they left behind while also recognizing the limits that that life holds.

When Yamila thinks about "what might have been," she says her fears and insecurities take over. Her preoccupation with "survival" began in Cuba and followed her to Syracuse, but it is a different type of survival that she talks about now. Now she worries if she will have enough money to survive and if her children will thrive in school, and if she made the right choice changing her career path. Many of the disappointments and regrets expressed by other participants during the interviews were smaller scale, not regret about making the journey in the first place, but rather missing bits and pieces of a life left behind and worries about everyday details.

Missing Family

Family was always the first thing mentioned when I asked participants what they missed most about home. Participants did not have to explicitly say that they missed their family or regretted leaving their family behind; it was apparent in their tone and expressions when talking about who remained in Cuba.

> "Everybody, my whole family is in Cuba. My son, he was 11 when I left. He's 13 now." (Estrella)
>
> "Everyone in my family is in Cuba, my mom, my dad, and my two brothers." (Santos)
>
> "Family? I have my mom, my dad, my sister…my two sisters, my little brother, my grandmother, my cousin, my whole family." (Miguel)
>
> "I would want to see my family because I'm alone here. I really want to see my mom… because I left Cuba and I couldn't say goodbye to her, nor to my father… I couldn't say goodbye to anyone." (Chucho)
>
> "No, I don't regret anything. The only thing that pains me is the separation from my family. I had never been away from my family, my mom, my dad… and my children,

> they're growing up without 'el calor mío' (my warmth/love)." (Óscar)

Most of the responses resembled those above, but the degree of "loss" since arriving in Syracuse was different for each participant. For example, Mario left his mother, father, brother, and wife behind in Cuba, and in the time between his interview and my writing about my findings (about four years), his brother had died of a long illness. On a more positive note, he had managed to bring his wife over to live with him in Syracuse in that time, and in the interim had multiple visits in Syracuse by his father who enjoys dual Cuban and Spanish citizenship (this opportunity for Cubans to travel freely is rare; his father was born prior to the Cuban Revolution). Pablo came to the U.S. with his wife but left behind three children; one from a previous relationship and two with his current wife. When I asked how he was coping with leaving his children behind in Cuba he said

> Ahhh, mis hijos. I told you that I had an older son, my oldest is 14 years old. He was from my first marriage. He lives with his mom, who isn't currently my wife. I am helping him a lot. I help the 3 of them the same, because I don't see any difference between them or treat them any differently. The 3 of them are equal. My other two… the two younger ones (both daughters)… live with their grandparents, with the parents of my current wife. So, I'm missing them a lot too… imagine… we left when our daughter was about 6 years old, almost 7 years old, imagine. It's pretty hard, we miss each other incredibly.

Pablo's wife had had a miscarriage on the way to the U.S, and about a year after arriving in Syracuse they had gotten pregnant again and had a baby girl. Pablo and his wife were able to share pictures and even video chat with their family in Cuba, but the relationships were certainly different than if they had been physically together and able to share life-changing

moments such as these. Pablo's children, including his older son by a previous relationship, were reunited with him, his wife, and their new sister two and a half years after leaving Cuba and they all now live with them in Syracuse.

Carlos and Cristiano both had their first child here in Syracuse, unable to share this special moment with the children's grandparents still living in Cuba; in fact, relatives in Cuba had still not met the newest members of their transnational families at the time of this writing. Some Cubans I interviewed were able to endure not having family around during these major life events, but others are not. An ex-roommate of Cristiano whom I had met during one of our informal conversations had just moved back to Cuba about 6 months before this writing. Cristiano communicates with him via FaceTime and says that he seems happy about his decision to move back to Cuba. When I asked why Cristiano thought this was, he answered that his friend was older than him by about ten years and missed his family. He had separated from his wife and moved to Syracuse, and since returning to Cuba had reunited with her. Cristiano surmised that it was lonelier and harder work making a living in the U.S. than his ex-roommate had imagined and so he decided to be happy with less in Cuba but surrounded by family.

Feeling Removed from Social Life and Customs

Besides talking about missing family, Yamila told me that she missed the noises, jokes, people, and movement that she was used to on Isla de Juventud where she grew up. Carlos misses baseball and "hablando mierda" (talking about nonsense). Santos misses the beaches and the quality of life that goes along with having nothing but time to spend. He says,

> From Cuba I miss my family, my friends, the beaches. The beaches are very pretty and clean. And I don't know, the quality of life is a little bit less social (in

> Syracuse). In Cuba, you don't have a car that is your own. You have to take Omnibus to travel from one place to another. You know all your neighbors. Your neighbors know who you are, your first name and last name. I don't know, life here is a little bit more isolated, in general, from my point of view. You don't know all your neighbors, including ones that live next to you or across the street from you. And this is something that, I don't know, the social life is different. And in certain ways, I miss this social life that I had in Cuba.

What is interesting about Santos' disclosure is that he talks about not having a car that is your own in Cuba but says that life in Syracuse, with access to one's own car, is more isolated. This highlights the difference in access that Cubans have to their social networks in Cuba versus in Syracuse. Cubans make strong connections with their family and neighbors in Cuba, and it is just one of the reasons that they miss the social aspect of their home country. He goes on, "It's beautiful, the beaches, the nature, the society, treatment of people. It's different. Here, the U.S. is a beautiful country, well, I haven't seen much of the U.S., but one relates to the place he/she was born, the customs." By talking about "relating" to the place he was born, Santos was describing the familiar, or feeling "at home."

Mario also reminisces about the feelings he had at home in Cuba spending time with his friends and family. He specifically talked about missing camping on the beach with them. He recounted

> In Cuba what I used to like to do was to go, we would go and we would stay on the beach. It's like camping. I liked it a lot. But here I haven't done it yet for the first time, maybe because I don't have anyone to go with. In Cuba me and all my

> friends would do it together, in a big group of people. We had a good time. Or my family, I would also go with them. But this is for a big group of people to do, not just one or two. Maybe that's why we haven't done it. But this I liked, and I haven't done it here yet.

The idea of "relating" and feeling "at home" is one of the sentiments that Syracuse Cubans also expressed when Syracuse began to feel familiar to them and they began to form new social network connections that were physically accessible. It was what prompted them to talk about Syracuse as their (new) home. In cities like Syracuse, where the native population has a history of outmigration, it is important to pay attention to the new residents of the city. It is those residents that will bring new life to the community and the local economy.

Settling In: Optimism and Cultural Maintenance through Social Networks

It can be difficult for those of us who grew up living in a country with a capitalist government to understand that there may be pros and cons to living under a socialist form of government. It is easy to critique certain ways of life from a distance, but also dangerous because some of the important nuances of those ways of life can be missed if one does not pay attention to detail. Listening to people's stories, in this case migration stories, is an opportunity to gain perspective and knowledge and to see a larger and fuller picture of the human situation. After some of the participants finished telling their migration stories, I was able to ask some informal questions about subtle cultural differences I noticed between the Cuban community in Syracuse and Syracusans that were born and raised in the city, such as the willingness to help other members of their community or the attitude of overcoming that is harder to measure and put into words. As a researcher, the differences were subtle and if I had met just one Cuban

who seemed to encompass these attitudes, I would have attributed it to personality difference; for example, I also know people in the Syracuse community that are willing to help others, and Syracuse community members who have overcome tragedies or difficulties. But, throughout every interview, each Cuban participant had a positive view of future opportunities, expressed a desire to help other Cubans, and aspired to overcome obstacles and difficulties. It was sometimes during, but many times after the interview that participants would make statements or give explanations that expressed what seemed to be their worldview. I had suspected that the differences were cultural and stemmed from growing up under socialism and without certain freedoms/choices. What was not explicitly coming out in the interviews was why, if life was so difficult in Cuba, were the Cuban people emigrating rather than rebelling? And how were these socially positive qualities of helping others and having an attitude of not simply overcoming, but optimism, cultivated under these oppressive circumstances? I posed this question to various Syracuse Cubans in different ways to try to get to the heart of the reasons. Santos' answer encapsulated one key to understanding the mindset of these Cuban migrants.

Optimism and Mindset as Important Survival Tools

I began by telling Santos that in one of the first interviews I did I was struck by how diplomatic the respondent had been when talking about Cuba. I had been expecting to hear something like the attitude of Miami Cubans in reference to the Cuban government, an attitude which the literature portrays as primarily negative and pointing blame toward the Cuban government for the ills of its people. I added other explanations of what I was similarly observing in other interviews, and then Santos responded. Our conversation went as follows:

Me: His attitude (talking about another respondent I had interviewed), toward the Cuban government, wasn't so judgmental… like, there were good things and there were bad things. But in the stories I listen to from those living in Cuba, the situation seems much more difficult and dire. But in all the Cubans, I see something like, a desire to overcome… like, there are difficulties, but there's always a way to "vencer" (beat them/ overcome)…

Santos: … look for a way out, a solution…

Me: Yes, and I think this is one of the things, this mentality, that a majority of Cubans have.

Santos: Yes, it's just that you have to do it. Natural instincts that every human being has… to try to better one's life. Since the times of cavemen… improving, improving… it's like it is in Cuba… working, working, working. And my grandmother, she is 87 years old… she lived under the government that was before Fidel, and from what she tells me, the Cubans at that time…because someone asked me, 'Why don't the people rebel? Why don't they put themselves in opposition to the government?' And this is what my grandmother told me: 'We lived through many deaths. It was a dictatorship. And people would wake up to others dead in the street each day before Fidel. When Fidel came, he collected all the firearms from the street. No one had firearms, the dead people disappeared, and everything was very good, until 1989 when the Soviet Union fell. And everything began to fall, fall, fall. Everyone who lived in the times where people were dying every day and then lived during the times of Fidel, say well, we prefer to do a little work rather than have a son or nephew be killed.' And this is the little bit of fear that

> there is in Cuba, from my point of view, because other countries in Latin America rebel and… what's going to change, I don't know… life is never static…there is always change, evolution. I think it's going to change. And we hope it's for the better for the lives of Cubans. And that they don't have to emigrate to obtain a better life.

This response represents the power of perspective and helps us understand the plight of Cubans living both in and out of the country, as well as generational differences. It also serves as a clue as to part of the explanation why the Cuban people have a history of emigration rather than rebellion in the last sixty years. Other participants' interviews provided even more insight into this "optimistic" mindset of Cubans and showed why social networks are so important in Cubans' lives, not only as migrants, but also while they are/were living in Cuba.

A survey by NORC at the University of Chicago[65] was administered at the end of 2016 in Cuba to 840 adults 18 years of age and older and showed that "Cuban attitudes toward the economy, both present and future, were generally pessimistic." Nonetheless, the 2016 study also found that, "The flow of objective and unbiased news and information in and out of Cuba is limited, as private ownership of mass media is prohibited. Although few Cubans access foreign media sources, *the survey revealed access to be a consistent characteristic differentiating attitudes within the Cuban population*. Those who accessed foreign media tended to be younger and more avid news consumers overall. In terms of their attitudes, they were more positive about the national economy and their personal financial situations (italics added)."

The survey also revealed that "Cubans who accessed foreign media were also more likely to set aspirational goals such as traveling abroad, starting their own business, and buying a car

[65] https://www.norc.org/research/projects/2016-cuban-public-opinion.html

or home." Although we now know that private internet access has recently become legal and more widely accessed on the island, looking at this survey done prior to that wider legalization reveals important information. While the general attitude of Cuban adults toward the Cuban economy is negative, the younger population that had the ability to access foreign media was more positive.

This survey reveals important information about the drastic consequences of access to social networks or social media outlets for Los Comunicados. Social networks via social media work to encourage optimism and incite possibility amongst younger generations, and this attitude carries over to the U.S. when that population emigrates. Thus, the newest fifth wave of Cuban emigrants is more likely to have access to social media and networks outside the country, more likely to emigrate due to increased access to virtual social networks and will likely have a more optimistic attitude toward their future.

Cubans in Syracuse that I spoke with combatted disappointments and worries in various ways, accessing/creating social networks provided optimism and was one of the most prominent survival strategies upon arrival to Syracuse. Optimism, for the Cubans I interviewed, can be understood in two ways: practical optimism and optimism via mindset. *Practical* (or logical) optimism comes from a simple cost/benefit analysis of their previous life situation and choices versus their current life situation and choices. While their current situation may not be ideal, or exactly what they had in mind, for these Cubans the benefits and promise of opportunity always outweighed the cost of the journey or the losses they incurred along the way. This explains the overall attitude of satisfaction for the Cubans living in Syracuse in having emigrated, despite hardships along the way and everyday difficulties.

Optimism for the Cubans living in Syracuse can also be looked at through the lens of *mindset.* The Cubans I spoke with had become accustomed in Cuba to notice the positive and the negative in each situation, but to remain focused on the positive and how they could enact positive change in their current situation. This perspective or mindset allowed them to focus on what they *could* do with their current situation, seeking out social network connections that could help them with their goals, even if a goal was simply survival. Nela's description of her life in Syracuse is a good representation of the optimistic mindset of Syracuse Cubans. When I asked her how she felt about Syracuse, she answered

> And here, we're happy. Really. I would tell you something else, but I would be lying. I feel at peace. I know, at least, that the police aren't going to come after (her husband). We'd like to buy a house here, but I want to stay here until we are able to buy a little house… because I don't want to be here in this building for my whole life. And we're happy. The girls have part-time jobs. It wasn't easy… because in June I began to work cleaning motels…it's very difficult. I would get home and I could barely walk. I had to quit. I worked there for 4 months. And then from there, I'm working in Liverpool in a hospital, in a clinic there, cleaning offices. This is hourly… I go in at 5 and get out at 8:30. My husband is a carpenter y it's tough, but he also works with me these 3 hours. So he'll get here soon, around 4:00, eat, and then we'll go to the other job. And so here, we're well, peaceful, thank God. And we love Syracuse.

A mindset of optimism is apparent even in the language used in Cuban social media posts. On social media, responses to posts narrating their new lives in Syracuse were only positive and encouraging. Phrases such as 'estás luchando', 'adelante', 'estás acabando', keep

people ‘fighting,’ ‘moving forward,’ and ‘getting there’ from their social networks cheered Cubans on in their new lives in Syracuse. Positivity and encouragement come from family, friends, and acquaintances in Syracuse, in other parts of the U.S., and in Cuba, and this helps Cubans to face their disappointments and feel less alone.

Social Networks as Sites for Exchange of Social Capital and Cultural Maintenance

Social networks provide potential for coping with day-to-day problems and difficulties as well as opportunities for cultural maintenance through the exchange of capital. Pierre Bourdieu (1986,1990) introduced the idea of different forms of capital in his research on social and cultural reproduction. Bourdieu names four forms of capital: economic, social, cultural, and symbolic (ie. honor and prestige) and argues that the social reproduction of ideas is made possible by passing along different forms of capital. This idea of exchange of capital helps us understand the possible consequences of the use of social networks because if social networks are comprised of connections between individuals and groups who have access to different forms of capital, those networks are what makes migration possible, determines where and how migrants settle, and determines how they cope in their new destination. Maintaining connection with compatriots and their native culture through the exchange of capital is a useful strategy to combat loneliness and can provide tangible benefits as well, such as information regarding job opportunities, help with moving, or even help planning a baby shower.

The following is an excerpt of a conversation between myself, Chucho, and Estrella talking about how social networks worked for them upon arrival to Syracuse.

Chucho: No, the good thing that Cubans have here is that everybody knows each other.

Me: So how does this happen?

Estrella: How does it happen? Here in Syracuse, what happens is we meet each other in Price Rite, in the markets… we talk… also at jobs, you get a job with other Cubans.

Chucho: So, what Cubans have is that they're very "familial." Everyone gets along…and the other thing is asking "Where in Cuba were you born?" Like I was born in Cienfuegos…

Estrella: Yes, and then someone says, "Ay, I know someone from Cienfuegos," and from that they go getting to know each other. Over there in the corner (pointing to another building kiddie corner) you'll run into a bunch of Cubans.

Chucho: And when you meet another Cuban it's an instant friendship, an instant relationship.

Me: It doesn't matter which part of Cuba they're from?

Chucho and Estrella at the same time: "No importa." (It doesn't matter).

Chucho: Look, I didn't know Pablo… he was from Pinar del Río and I'm from Cienfuegos. We started working together and we got to know each other there. I would give him a ride and that was it, we were friends.

Estrella: And he met Leo because he was your cousin. And I met you and Leo from Pablo.

Chucho: And this chain of Cubans is always going to be a chain… you keep meeting people. It seems like Cubans, it doesn't matter which country they're in, they open up more quickly.

Estrella: Yes, we are very communicative and hard working.

These participants described exactly how Cubans form new social network connections; a combination of previous habit (culture), willingness to share information and personal details, desire to help other Cubans in exchange for connection, and necessity.

Social network formation and use can also produce unexpected negative effects in a city such as Syracuse, where there is no ethnic niche and limited local social network connections. I will give a few examples based on some of the interviews I have done along with some informal conversations I had during my research, but as always, there are differences in perspective.

Typically, a Cuban just arriving in Syracuse does not speak English very well and will ask a compatriot if they know of anyone hiring. If their Cuban network connection works for an employer looking for a laborer or cleaner of some sort, or other position not requiring English language knowledge, the employer normally agrees to hire the newly arrived Cuban based on the compatriot's recommendation. The employer cannot interview them directly since if the employer does not speak Spanish. This is helpful for the Cuban who needs to work to pay for rent, buy a car, send money home to his/her family, etc., but his/her compatriot, being new in the country as well, can only give him/her as much information as they have access to themselves. There may not be multiple options for network connections, as exists in an ethnic enclave like Miami. In the short term, any information or connections are extremely helpful and can bond the coworkers, putting them in the position to continue helping each other in various ways. In the long term, though, this could also have devastating, but avoidable consequences.

One example of social network support that is both helpful and harmful can be seen by looking at what happened to Cristiano, who relied on his compatriot for a job when he was new to the U.S. and Syracuse. Cristiano's acquaintance had communicated the need for a job to his boss, and Cristiano was just told to show up for construction work with his acquaintance on said day. In Cristiano's case, paperwork was filled out, but it was simply to get his name, address and phone number. No taxes were taken out of his paycheck because no social security number was given, and there is no record of this income. This is not uncommon for immigrants in general, especially while waiting for permission from the government to work, but Cristiano did not understand the consequences of this until he had a conversation with another Cuban who had been living in the same apartment complex. That friend had told Cristiano that he and

his girlfriend were buying a house on the north side of the city because it was a better alternative to paying rent. At the time of the interview, Cristiano had been working in the construction business for about three years for the employer recommended to him through his social network. He had been receiving a handwritten check each week from a personal account instead of a business account but did not understand that there was a difference. When Cristiano followed the advice of his friend and went to apply for a home loan, to the bank it looked like he did not have a job or any income, since the employer did not actually put him on his legal payroll. Cristiano could not be approved for a loan, so he went to work as usual and continues to pay rent. Since this time, Cristiano has asked to be "put on the books," and is paying taxes and showing income. He will have to wait at least three years to be approved for a home loan. For now, he is socially reproducing the lifestyle introduced to him by his compatriot that got him his job, and that cycle could continue to reproduce itself with other Cubans, preventing upward social mobility due to lack of knowledge. This can be avoided with interventions of information, such as happened with his other friend who told him about buying a house, but those interventions must come either from immigrant social network connections who have lived in that destination longer and/or learned the hard way, or from an outside social network connection that understands how immigrant social networks function and can give proper guidance before a detrimental situation like described above arises.

Community leaders should pay attention to grassroot incidences of social and cultural reproduction for clues as to how to address barriers to integration to the community in culturally sensitive ways. Migrants are more likely to remain in an area and begin to grow "roots" if they develop friendships and relationships, are afforded job opportunities that allow

for economic growth and opportunities and are given chances to increase their English language abilities. It is the lack of these social network connections and opportunities that encourage outmigration amongst immigrants, thus contributing to area population decline. Some of the Cubans I interviewed in Syracuse told stories of friends or acquaintances that either moved to another location within the U.S. or to Florida from where they were living because they have family or friends in that area and are lacking that connection or "calor" (warmth) as many describe it.

In conclusion, one of the goals of this research was to problematize the treatment of Cuban Americans as a homogenous group living and achieving success in Miami, FL, by focusing on the Cuban diaspora in Syracuse, NY. Syracuse as a new destination location for Cuban migrants represents not only an alternative place to settle, but an alternative way of life from what they would encounter in Miami. By prioritizing the motivations, characteristics, and incorporation experiences of Cubans in Syracuse, we can evaluate the social and economic integration of the Cuban diaspora in a non-gateway city outside of Miami. This aids scholars and communities in better understanding some of the disconnects between preconceived notions of the U.S. and life course expectations and how those play out in places other than Miami. This research also examined the nuanced utility and possibilities of social network usage before and during the migration journey for "Los Comunicados," and its importance in a city other than Miami.

This chapter showed that many fourth and fifth wave Cuban migrants to the U.S. have chosen to live in a destination other than Miami, Florida, despite language and cultural difference challenges. Syracuse Cubans believe that there are different economic opportunities

available to them in places like Syracuse. Carlos, who was one of my participants that had been in Syracuse for the longest, described how his now wife ended up in Syracuse after initially living in Miami for a short time. Carlos had a male Cuban friend in Syracuse, who had a female friend that had just arrived in Miami (now Carlos' wife). Carlos told the story to me (in English) like this

> His friend. Then she was living in... She escaped from the island and she was living in Mexico for around ten months or so. And then she just decided to cross the border and came to U.S. And she was living in Florida, Miami. Then this guy (their mutual friend) told her, 'Just to go to Church World Services. Do this, this, this, and you will have what I have, right? And I can help you because I'm already stablished here.' That was the first time that I met her, when she did all the processing. She came to Syracuse. I met her.

Carlos' wife arrived in Syracuse with the help of Church World Services, but it was a social network connection from Cuba, living in Syracuse, that gave her the information she needed to choose to come to Syracuse. The framing of the information was that in Syracuse, life will be easier and better, and you will know someone. Social network connections in Syracuse are different than established ones in Miami, not only in how they are formed, but also what function they serve. Cubans migrating to the U.S. have likely heard stories about what to expect in Miami and those that settle elsewhere make the conscious decision in hopes of achieving "The American Dream." This dream is made easier in new destinations with social network connection opportunities available mostly through social media and cell phone usage, but it can still be challenging depending on the location, and the amount of information available.

The newest generation of Cuban migrants no longer needs to live in Miami to be around and/or connected with other Cubans, and in fact, many of my participants report that they are choosing to stay and make their new life in Syracuse. After applying for citizenship, Carlos' brother and mother joined him in Syracuse as well. As Carlos described, when weighing the pros and cons of living in Syracuse, even with its difficulties, he prefers to invest in his future here stating, "Si quisiera seguir viviendo como en Cuba, me hubiese quedado en Cuba y no me hubiese ido." Translated, this means, "If I had wanted to keep living like in Cuba, I would have stayed in Cuba and I wouldn't have left." Some other reasons Syracuse Cubans offer for staying are lower cost of living expenses, cooler weather, less job competition, and opportunities to practice English.

Not all Cubans in Syracuse are choosing to stay in Syracuse, but upon deciding to leave, they activate social network connections not necessarily to go to Miami, but rather other cities with high proportions of Cubans. For example, Cristiano brought his mother and his sister to Syracuse after living there for almost seven years, but after about nine months of being in Syracuse, his twenty-one-year-old sister, Rosmery, decided to leave. She went to live with her Cuban best friend and family in Houston, Texas. Her best friend financed her flight, and was supporting her financially until she could get a job. Rosmery now stays in communication with her mother and brother in Syracuse using social media apps and FaceTime.

The next chapter builds upon the work of the two previous chapters by looking at the identity formation of the Cuban diaspora in Syracuse, NY, and how social capital provides opportunities for access to existing and creation of new social networks. One strong theme throughout the interviews for this research was the notion of Cuban exceptionalism as a part of

the Cuban group identity. The following chapter discusses how individual and group identities, including Cuban exceptionalism, are used as social capital to activate or gain access to social networks. Those social network connections can create life opportunities that differ economically and socially from an enclave destination such as Miami, but still provide prospects for cultural maintenance.

Chapter 5

Cuban Diasporic Identities Within Social Networks in Syracuse

Building upon the previous chapter's work focusing on the importance of the use of social networks for combatting disappointments and difficulties in Syracuse, NY, this chapter explores the notion of group and individual identities of Syracuse Cubans, and how they help form and activate social network connections during incorporation. It also elaborates on Cuban exceptionalism as a homogenous group identity component and keeps at the forefront the unique social networking at play within the Syracuse Cuban community, given that there is not an established ethnic enclave.

Thus, this research project provides important current sociocultural and political information about the fifth wave of Cuban migrants, *Los Comunicados*, in terms of social networking in the incorporation stage. Especially in new destination locations, the explication of migration identities and identity formation is doubly essential because it assuages fear of the "other" that can be present during settlement and promotes inclusion to the new community. This is particularly important in current times where politics seems to divide and exclude. The storytelling done by the participants within this projects' in-depth interviews makes the Cuban diaspora in Syracuse easily relatable and helps break down boundaries between native community members and new community members.

In terms of identities, it is important to recognize what identity components Cubans bring from Cuba into the Syracuse community during incorporation. I found that Cubans

frequently use both previous and newly formed identities as social capital to gain access to social networks. For example, when faced with discrimination within Syracuse, Syracuse Cubans were choosing facets of their group and individual identities to activate, gain, or block access to social networks to advance their social and economic opportunities. There is historically based, but clandestine racial and class prejudice in Cuba despite the claim by the Cuban government that this discrimination dissolved with the Revolution. Discrimination in Syracuse mirrors that familiar prejudice and it did not go unnoticed by participants. Although participants spoke less explicitly about class and racial discrimination in their interviews, I was able to observe some examples during participant observations and follow up with other Cubans to ask more direct questions. Syracuse Cubans may be able use their identities strategically and creatively to overcome racial and class discrimination.

Since many of the Cubans settling in Syracuse were directed here by a resettlement agency due to their reception status as refugees, they are not uniform in terms of the human capital that they bring with them to their communities; they vary in terms of educational background, professional interests, and English language skills. They also vary in race, class, gender, marital status, and religious preference. Cubans who recently migrated to the U.S. did grow up during the Special Period in Cuba, and this is something that unites their generation. Living through the Special Period in Cuba required them to become adept at utilizing social capital within Cuba through local social networks. Miren Uriarte (2008) in "Rediscovering *Lo Local"* recognizes this adept use of social capital out of necessity while living and surviving in Cuba. In discussing development of civil society in Cuba she writes

> But as one observes the ease with which Cubans move through these processes…[t]he tremendous organizational capacity, the ability to analyze complex problems and easily grasp the processes of planning, the history of voluntary activity and social responsibility, and the skills and "know how" at the community level…" (110-111).

Uriarte (2008) is arguing that a certain mindset and skill set have become part of the Cuban identity, and I argue that it follows that Cubans carry them over to the U.S. where they continue to utilize them, setting them apart as a migrant group. There are by no means Cuban enclaves in Syracuse, but since refugee resettlement agencies place Cubans in areas where other Cubans are living, Cubans use their skill sets and mindset to quickly become connected to one another via social networking. Using their learned "organizational capacity, voluntary activity, and social responsibility," (Uriarte 2008) Cuban migrants in Syracuse can connect and fulfill social and economic needs in this way, at times without the need to fully incorporate into the local community, and other times as a bridge to incorporation into the local community.

Immigrant Adaptation and Social Integration

There is no shortage of literature documenting how immigrants adapt to their new communities and how they fare in future generations (see, for examples of immigrant health and well-being, Giacco 2020, and political participation, Rapp 2018). It has been many years since immigration researchers believed that all immigrants are able to completely assimilate into the American mainstream, or that they want to. Herbert Gans (1992) pushed back against the idea that assimilation was "straight-lined" and argued that there were "bumps" along the way of becoming part of the American mainstream that required different immigrants to adapt

in certain ways. He offered his “bumpy line theory,” in which he describes the “bumps” as “representing various kinds of adaptations—to changing circumstances” (44). Other migration researchers have also since offered the alternative idea of segmented assimilation, beginning with Portes and Rumbaut (see, for example, Portes and Zhou 1993, Portes and Rumbaut 2006), arguing that different ethnic groups enter different “segments” of society and thus, have very different second-generation outcomes.

Laurentsyeva and Venturini (2017) write about belonging and national identity and how they apply to immigrants and social integration. They argue that social integration depends on the immigrant and whether they develop a sense of belonging to the host society, and the feasibility of acceptance into the host society by the native population, which is dependent upon acceptance of societal norms. Without this mutual recognition, an “us versus them” mentality and discourse develops in the community and social and economic integration become challenging. The “us versus them” mentality is magnified when racial and class differences are involved, such is the case in Syracuse amongst the Cuban diaspora. In Syracuse, there is subtle discrimination amongst Cubans, but Cubans also discriminate when interacting with non-Cubans based on how they view that Syracusan’s potential to contribute to their own social network. Laurentsyeva and Venturini (2017) explain that immigrants typically behave in a certain way to develop a sense of belonging in their community: “This often involves accepting and acting according to that society’s values and norms and, if necessary, building up the social capital that is deemed necessary by the host country’s institutions” (285). They go on to explain that

> The role of the native population is equally important: social integration is only feasible once immigrants are accepted as members of the society. Such mutual recognition, apart from improving individual well-being, leads to better social cohesion and has considerable economic implications, from the provision of public goods and redistribution to teamwork and productivity in firms. Yet, if immigrants and the native population differ in many social and cultural dimensions, social integration poses a challenge. Understanding the determinants of social integration and how to facilitate it thus represents a policy-relevant research area. (285)

One of the biggest visible differences in outward appearance, that also manifests itself as an obstacle to social integration and upward mobility in Syracuse, is race. For black Cubans in Cuba, the problem of race is both cultural and historical, and although many advancements were made toward equality after the Revolution, there remains covert discrimination and cultural oppression. Pedraza (2017) writes, "[m]any black Cubans felt oppressed because, on the one hand, from the beginning the revolution told them they were equal and had access to schooling and jobs, but, on the other hand, it did not allow them to express themselves culturally as blacks" (232). As time went on, pockets of capitalism slowly made their way back into Cuban society, and racial and class inequalities again became more and more pronounced (Carter Grosso 2019). Thus, Cubans are already acutely aware of privileges granted or denied based upon skin color despite the propaganda promoted by the Cuban government. Upon arrival to Syracuse, Cuban migrants learn quickly that skin color also affects their social and economic choices here, which in turn affects their degree of integration into the community.

Emily Skop, in her 2006 article discussing Mariel Cubans and the functions of race and place in terms of segmented assimilation argued that Afro-Cubans may be able to more easily assimilate into mainstream society *outside* of the Cuban enclave in Miami since they typically do not have family or friends already living there from previous waves of Cuban migration that would provide them access to social networks. She also points out the divergent process of adaptation between white and nonwhite Mariels, arguing that, specifically in the Cuban case in Miami, ethnic networks might be more important than race in explaining why nonwhite Cubans are more likely to settle outside Miami (466-467). Skop ends her article pointing out that the exploration of Cuban settlement in particular places outside southern Florida would likely prove fruitful in future investigations. The problem of race permeates both Cuba and the U.S., the history of Cuban migration in terms of opportunities (or lack thereof) to migrate, and the ease (or non-ease) of settlement and social and economic integration.

Alyssa Garcia's 2008-2009 article, "Situating Race, Navigating Belongings: Mapping Afro-Cuban Identities in the United States," echoes the fact that "[t]oo often racial segregation and exclusion are overlooked in discussions of the 'successful' and 'exceptional' Cuban enclave" (62). Garcia utilizes the counternarrative of an Afro-Cuban man in Chicago, Illinois to dispel the myth that all Cubans enjoy the same benefits of Cuban exceptionalism, and instead points out the ways in which Afro-Cubans face discrimination by both Latinos and African Americans and are forced to constantly negotiate very complex social identities. While Syracuse Cubans share similar physical, social, and cultural characteristics with the Cuban diaspora living in Miami, identity formation and manner(s) of incorporation into the Syracuse community differs. One of the values of new destination literature is that it highlights values that are specific to cultures,

but at the same time it showcases geographical variations based on varied factors, including context of reception and use of social networks. A major contribution of new destination literature is that it makes clear how place matters in terms of identity and incorporation for immigrants.

Regarding Cubans in Syracuse, as we have seen, part of studying social integration into the community requires attention to how race, class, and other identity components already function in the community because it can limit or bolster the degree of social integration that is feasible for the immigrant, even if ethnic social networks are available and accessible. In addition, as Howard (2000) argues in her explication of how social identities function, "[b]ecause people are motivated to evaluate themselves positively, they tend to evaluate positively those groups to which they belong and to discriminate against groups the perceive to pose a threat to their social identity" (369). Due to the range of skin color of Cuban citizens, Cubans are already well-acquainted with ways in which race can function against one's life opportunities. So, Syracuse Cubans are taught implicitly and explicitly, via their social networks and daily observations of the host community, and via social cognition and symbolic interactions, that discrimination and segregation are a part of the local culture in Syracuse as well. The resulting behavior for Cubans is to adopt multiple social identities to utilize depending on who they are surrounded by to increase access to desired parts of the receiving community.

How Social Networks and Identities Interact in Syracuse, NY

This research captured the stories of newly-arrived Cuban immigrants belonging to the same generation, but different waves of migration, in one community, during a time in the U.S. of massive policy and institutional change which in turn, also changed reception context and

racial/ethnic politics. By using social networks as a lens to understand the migration and settlement processes, I was able to see how these immigrants combat obstacles within their community by shifting identities and using those identities strategically to form new social network connections and to bolster existing ones.

Robert Courtney Smith (2008) introduced the concept of 'socially neutral operating identities,' within the broader immigrant incorporation theory of segmented assimilation, and this concept is also useful for understanding the Cuban settlement and incorporation experience in Syracuse. Smith (2008) originally introduced the concept of 'socially neutral operating identities' to discuss social and economic mobility amongst children of Mexican immigrants. The idea of socially neutral operating identities stems from social identity theory introduced by social psychologist Henri Tajfel and John Turner in the 1970s (Tajfel, et al. 1979). Social identity theory differentiates between one's social identity and individual identity and aims to describe the conditions under which social identity, or perceived belonging to a social group, becomes dominant over one's identity as an individual. Social identities can be based on race, class, gender, or any number of different physical, social, geographical, or mental characteristics. Smith's concept of 'socially neutral operating identities' refers to the idea that immigrants take on certain social identities without placing a positive or negative value on that identity, but rather consider it as a tool to achieve a certain goal or objective. Cubans, just as other refugee groups (at least in Syracuse), are geographically placed in the most economically disadvantaged neighborhoods. Operationalizing multiple social identities, including socially neutral operating identities, is a strategy that Cubans employ to their benefit to overcome structural and institutional barriers to success. This can have a positive result in terms of

economic and social integration to the community. For example, in Syracuse, Afro-Cubans can choose to try to make 'visible' their ethnic identity (Cuban) first, perhaps by speaking Spanish, to combat perceived negative consequences of a (black) racial identity. Prioritizing a racial or class social identity over an ethnic social identity (Cuban) can prompt differential in-group treatment amongst Cubans and can contribute to the social reproduction of discrimination within both the Cuban community as well as the larger community, an obvious negative result. Although the chance to prioritize their ethnic identity over their racial one seemed to offer more opportunity for Afro-Cubans with native Syracusans, there was still evidence of class prejudice within strictly Cuban social networks. For example, Carlos, a white Cuban who was an architect in Cuba, played the role of gatekeeper during our interview, not offering the contact information for two Cubans that work with him in his business, but instead offering the contact information for a Cuban doctor that was in his network, even after knowing that I was interviewing Cubans who had recently come to Syracuse. This could have been due to racism or classism. On the other hand, Cristiano, an Afro-Cuban who studied computer science in Cuba but works construction in Syracuse, offered a story of racial preference at his job. A white Cuban was offering coffee from this thermos at work, and offered it to Cristiano, who declined, and then offered it to a white American co-worker, who Cristiano described as "not clean," and then a black non-Cuban immigrant worker. He drank from the thermos cup after the white co-worker, but then Cristiano heard him same to another white Cuban co-worker than he would not drink from it after the black co-worker because "he put his lips (bembé) on it." After I asked Cristiano what he did after overhearing that, he said, "I teased him. Because I felt a little offended. You know, I'm black too. But then he said, 'well you're "un moreno clásico" (a classy

black guy). And of course, I am, so...” Although I don’t know if Cristiano was truly satisfied with his co-worker’s answer, he did express that he felt it was normal because there is a lot of racism in Cuba. It seemed that he was not surprised by the exchange.

New immigrants arriving in Syracuse are directed by local resettlement agencies into pockets of the community where others of that same ethnicity live, and while I did find that spatial proximity and ethnic social networks in Syracuse were very important for economic and social survival upon arrival and throughout the initial incorporation stage, it seemed that Cubans placed by resettlement agencies accessed ties within these ethnic networks less as they became more settled and integrated into the city. At times, when I asked interviewees how they connected with other Cubans in Syracuse, the response was that while they enjoyed “compartiendo” (sharing/hanging out) with other Cubans, the people that they spent most of their time with were not other Cubans. In fact, many volunteered that their closest friends in Syracuse were either Dominican or Puerto Rican. The more this information was reinforced throughout interviews, the more I wondered why this was. If previous patterns for other ethnicities typically show that immigrants feel more comfortable around those of their own ethnicity and that ethnic social networks are key for cultural maintenance, why did this not seem as important to some Syracuse Cubans? After all, “Little Havana” and “Chinatown,” in Miami and New York City respectively, along with other ethnic enclaves, have been lauded for the support they offer newly arrived immigrants through ethnic networks (see, for example Zhou 1992 and Cristina García 1996).

The U.S. Census Bureau reported that there were 925 Cubans living in Syracuse in 2010, which was more than double the number from 2000, and Syracuse.com data indicates that

there were 1,728 Cuban residents in Syracuse in March of 2022.[66] We can predict that this migration trend has continued,[67] meaning that there is not a shortage of Cubans in Syracuse with whom to form relationships with, if so desired. If this is the case, why are many Cubans choosing not just to strengthen their ties with other Cubans, but also individuals of other ethnicities? Furthermore, why did some Cubans I spoke with so clearly draw boundaries between themselves and other Cubans living in their same city, calling them *amistades,* but not *amigos*? The answers to these questions were found in exploring and reflecting on individual and group identities and incorporation experiences of Syracuse Cubans, which many times impacted how, when, or why they would activate and utilize their social networks.

In this research project, Syracuse Cubans' migration stories were key in helping to explain the formation and functioning of social networks: first, since experiences shape who you are, getting to know reasons behind choices and actions helps us understand the realities of these individuals' lives and identities; second, individual migration stories allow us to capture the essence of ideas and concepts in a deeper way that quantitative data does not, and third, migration stories heard through the interpretive lens of social networks allow for understanding of the reasons behind the strength or weakness of the ties that hold those

[66] https://www.syracuse.com/data/2022/03/4-of-top-10-countries-sending-immigrants-to-syracuse-are-in-asia-see-full-list.html

[67] As Skop and Menjívar (2001) remind us in their study of Latino migration to Phoenix, [t]he presence of friend and families will serve as connections that progressively draw more migrants [to that area]. And migration is only likely to increase as social networks become institutionalized" (74; see also Durand and Massey 1992).

networks together, rather than simply identifying where the social networks exist and what their initial functions are.

Upon arrival to their new community, social identity characteristics that Cubans may want to accentuate will likely be ones that initiate social network connections, such as Cuban immigrant, Spanish-speaker, or hard worker. These identities function to foster a bond between the new Cuban immigrant and community members who are more integrated into the community, and who can offer immediate, tangible network support, such as job information or a connection to someone who can help them complete their taxes, for example. The initial integrated community members could be other Cubans or possibly a Mexican, for example, but it will likely be another Spanish-speaker. Once a Cuban integrates into the community further, he/she will begin to decide which social identities are most important to them for their current goals. These may be different than those that were highlighted initially. Some examples of other useful social identities that were evident in the research data were parent, entrepreneur, Christian, English-speaker, and even identification with a particular professional background, past or present, which seemed to indicate class identity as well. As the social identities that are most important to them in terms of social and economic advancement become more varied, Cubans branch out from their original social network ties and add others.

Through participant observation of the Cuban community in Syracuse I saw that social identities shifted in importance with time and affected which ties the Cuban immigrants wanted to strengthen in any given moment. When thinking in terms of social networks and weak and strong ties it may be tempting to assign fixed labels of strong tie to an *amigo* and weak tie to a *conocido*, but the idea of a*mistad,* or friendship, indicates that ties along one's

social network should be looked at as continuums in constant motion and as the major driving force in the shifting nature of social networks. The shifting nature of ties is what makes the networks fluid rather than fixed. Some ties became weaker or more "dormant" with time while others became stronger, again depending on which ties support the social identities the Cuban was prioritizing.

Cuban Ethnic Identities

Identity # 1: Cubans as "exceptional"

Historically, the long-accepted idea of Cubans as "exceptional" immigrants has been a major component of Cuban identity, especially in Miami. Eckstein explains, "What really begins as a Cold War policy, becomes grounded in domestic policy."[68] This section traces the foundations of this as an identity component both in the U.S. and Cuba. Due to the long history of Cubans migrating to the United States as refugees fleeing a communist government, and because the first wave of Cuban migrants to the U.S. were "white," educated, and politically motivated, Cubans gained a reputation as "exceptional," or "ideal" immigrants. Although there have been various waves of immigration since the initial exodus, including Cubans with "less desirable" characteristics such as lower educational or professional status and darker skin, that distinction of exceptionalism still stands, both in popular discourse and in the minds of many Cubans. This idea of exceptionalism has served Cuban Americans well in the U.S. in many policy-related ways by making them eligible to receive government and nonprofit assistance upon arrival from Cuba, but it has also hidden many racial and social and injustices that darker-

[68] https://www.bu.edu/articles/2022/cuban-immigrant-story-in-us-is-different-from-others/

skinned Cubans encounter. Darker-skinned Cuban immigrants learn quickly that this identity of "exceptional" may not give them the same advantage as "white" Cubans in Syracuse.

Jorge Duany (Fernández, ed. 2005), along with other groups of both Americans and immigrants had long been arguing that although a communist form of government may have originally been the source of Cubans' desire to emigrate for the first few waves of migration, it is not the same for the most recent waves of Cuban migrants. Duany argued that the most salient reason for Cuban emigration is no longer an opposition to the government but rather economic need. This, contends Duany and opponents to Cubans' previous preferential treatment, is not different from other immigrant groups yearning to come to the U.S. and make a better life for themselves and their families. Thus, they argue, Cubans are no longer exceptional. On a larger socio-political scale, this disagreement has not only created a divide between generations of Cubans, but also amongst Latinos in general. For Cuban migrants, the U.S. exceptionalism debate itself matters less than the fact that this identity causes an internal battle during the migration journey and settlement stages. In Cuba, the government espouses the belief that its citizens are exceptional and imposes this belief in all areas of its citizens' lives, especially throughout the education system and the news reports.[69] Then, as Cubans become old enough to contemplate migration, they become hyper aware of their (previously) preferred U.S. immigration status which ends up causing internal psychological conflict for many along the migration journey. Miguel discussed the idea of privileged entrance to the U.S. during his interview while talking about his migration journey. Miguel had to hide his Cuban passport because of its value to other migrants he encountered along the way. Non-Cuban migrants are

[69] See, for example, https://en.granma.cu; https://www.juventudrebelde.cu

subject to the same hardships along the migration journey, but do not receive the same benefits upon arrival to the U.S. With growing access to social media and news from outside Cuba, Cubans may not be so quick anymore to believe that their culture is more exceptional than others, but rather recognize that they have historically received special privileges and that there are things that they should be proud of and that unite them as a nation and culture. Regardless, these two versions of exceptionalism (the U.S. and the Cuban), are ideas that inform their identities and affect their beliefs, values, options, and choices before, during and after their migration journey.

So, in terms of a group identity, the first introduction of Cuban exceptionalism does not actually come from the U.S. but rather Cuban politics and propaganda. The idea that Cuba is superior to other nations, namely the U.S., is openly promoted throughout Cuba's education system and communication networks, including billboards on the sides of highways. Cuban citizens internalize this idea, and it comes with them when they migrate to the U.S., although Los Comunicados are more likely to have a more realistic view of the positives and negatives of Cuba and its socialist culture due to the increase in access to outside media. Cuba's national system touts the notion that Cubans should be familiar with the arts and world events and that their country is the best of the best, again superior especially to the U.S.

Carlos, a 39-year old "white" Cuban migrant who had been living in Syracuse for 7 years at the time of the interview, describes how he was taught to always try to better himself and his cultural and world knowledge.

> When I worked in Cuba, I was like this guy that was always looking for information, trying to be on the top of, you know, the arts, architecture, what

> was going on. Really, really, like, specific things of the culture. And the best painters, the best writers. The best, the best. The best everything. I was eager to learn the culture. I was hungry for those things. So my friends were, like, very smart guys, not just the reggaeton. Nothing like that. I mean, I didn't go to the clubs, to dance. No. I was more in the theatre, in the cine. You know, good shows, good things. Those are the things I really die for. Ballet. The theatre festivals in Havana, the cinema festivals, the book festivals. I was on the top of all the things. That's what I really loved. The photography. The best photographers in the world. The best of everything. But right now, since I have come to this country, with free internet, free access of information, guess what?

I guessed that he would say that he did not look for those things anymore. Carlos validated my guess and said, “Yes, but that is liberty.” Carlos was trying to relay that in Cuba there is a hunger for learning new things, the arts, ballet, music, theatre, etc. because of the lack of widespread availability of such things, but now that he is in the U.S., he reasons that it is because of freedom that he behaves differently and does not seek out those things. Having spoken with other Cuban immigrants in Syracuse, I found that it is a combination of freedom to choose other things as interests along with a shift from scarcity to abundance upon arrival to the U.S.

Carlos emigrated from Havana, the capital city of Cuba, to Syracuse, NY, but perhaps if he had made his home in New York City he would have maintained his identity as a “cultured” and “exceptional” citizen of the world and maintained the same interests, but perhaps not. This

unknown illustrates the importance of researching migration to new destination communities to bring to light how societies and communities affect migrants' identities and life choices.

Regarding the idea of U.S.-imposed exceptionalism, Los Comunicados are too young to remember the early years of Castro's regime and the unprecedented exodus of Cuban citizens to Miami. Instead, they grew up during the Special Period, after the fall of the Soviet Union and subsequent truncation of supplies, and do not have any previous reality, better or worse, to compare it to. The most recent waves of Cuban migrants may not be as politically active as previous waves, but all the Cubans I interviewed were very aware of the benefits and downfalls of socialism, as well as how migration policies work for or against a group. Although the economic need and scarcity of resources in Cuba is due largely to the socialist style of government, Syracuse Cubans still felt the need within their migration stories to justify why they came to the U.S. to counter the idea that it was due solely to economics. Within the interviews for this project, stories that illustrated the hardships endured in Cuba always accompanied reasons given for emigrating. Stories were framed by the participants in such a way as to serve not only as an explanation, but also justification for why they decided to leave. At the same time, their stories pay tribute to the benefits that they received from their home country, to point out that Cuba, despite its faults as a nation, is full of citizens that are "exceptional" in many ways, echoing the propaganda that permeates Cuba.

Cubanidad and Ethnic "Rules"

For Cubans in Syracuse, identities are based on a myriad of components that make up their *cubanidad*, or Cuban identity, which includes the idea of exceptionalism previously mentioned. This *cubanidad* helps to explain what it means to be a Cuban in Cuba, but also

affects how Cubans behave in their new communities. In Cuba, ethnic "rules" dictate, for example, that Cubans are exceptional, socialist, educated, cooperative, anti-capitalist, and anti-racist. The degree of Cubans' commitment to these precepts once in Syracuse may change and result in identity shifts to avoid discrimination or to gain access to groups deemed useful to social or economic advancements. Syracuse Cubans affirm some identities they came with from Cuba, create new identities, and modify identities due to what they are faced with in their new community. The identity components that were most salient in the interviews and participant observations for this research were Cuban pride and "impression management,"[70] and trust, respect, and reciprocity within friendships/compatriot relationships. In Syracuse, these characteristics are key to accessing capital and activating social networks. Cuban pride and impression management are especially important because they can provoke ethnic loyalty along social networks where ties may otherwise disintegrate completely. At the same time, Cuban pride can also provoke loyalty to a different component of identity if it will lead to social or financial advancement. At times, this loyalty to another identity may lead to the rejection of cubanidad, or specific ethnic "rules" such as social equality or anti-racism.

Identity Component # 2: Cuban Pride and Impression Management ("Presumiendo")

Cubans in Syracuse still socially recognize other Cubans, regardless of "issues" that may come up between them. The Cubans I interviewed are intensely proud of their heritage, revel in memories, and have a strong desire to share their culture with others. During the participant observations that I was present for, I saw that sharing of culture revolves around authentic

[70] Impression management, or self-presentation, refers to the ways that people use to attempt to control how they are perceived by others (Goffman, 1959). In the Cuban case, impression management or "presumiendo" looks more like "showing off" or "boasting."

Cuban foods, playing dominoes, loud music, gossiping, dancing, and sometimes drinking. I observed gossip about other Cubans who weren't present, but then interactions between those same Cubans that had been gossiping about each other. An attitude of ethnic group pride and loyalty seemed to prevail in the end, and while one Cuban may not overtly defend another Cuban's actions, they appear to explain or make excuses as to why they believe the person acted in the way they did, seemingly to preserve the status of what it means to be Cuban. This management, or protection, of image stems from a socialist culture in which Cubans have learned to look out for themselves, but also from the desire to manage their own group identity status as Cubans. "Impression management" (Goffman 1959, Howard 2000) requires respect toward *cubanidad* in all its forms and is also why outward appearances (individual and group) carry "consequences" (Howard 2000) for these Cuban migrants.

The end of my interview with Santos, a white Cuban who was a doctor in Cuba, allowed me to able to get a glimpse of how a white, "upper class" Cuban could negotiate to maintain his group ethnic identity, but also his social and economic power through racial or class social identity. We had finished the "formal" part of the interview and Santos had begun to tell me about a moving business he had started to make money "a la izquierda"[71] until he could finish his studies and get a job in the medical field. He told me that he hires other Cubans to work for him and that he might be able to connect me with a couple of them to help me out with my project in terms of interviews. After he said this, though, his facial expression changed and he said that, on second thought, he was not sure if I would be interested in talking to them. When I

[71] "A la izquierda" is a way to describe making money in the informal economy. In English, making money "under the table" would be a comparable slang translation.

asked why, he hesitated and then said that they were of a “nivel de educación más baja” than him. Translated directly this meant that they had a lower educational level, but in asking other Cubans, this was a polite way of distancing himself socially from these Cubans who were likely Afro-Cubans, and probably in a different class, socioeconomically, as well. In the end, he declined to give me the contact information of any of those Cubans, but instead gave me the contact information for another Cuban doctor friend of his, even after I explained that because he arrived in 1997, he did not fit my participant criteria based upon the amount of time he had already been in the United States. Santos hired other Cubans, despite their race or class, but he was prioritizing either his racial or career-field identity during the interview.

I was consistently able to notice social spatial segregation between Cubans through participant observation at one of the local dance establishments in the city. Although all Cubans, men and women, who know each other greet each other upon arrival or sight, socializing within the dance community was done largely based upon skin color. White Cubans would stand with and socialize with other white Cubans, and dark-skinned Cubans would stand in a different area with each other. Lighter-skinned, “brown” Cubans seemed to shift between groups but tend to spend more time with darker-skinned Cubans. Darker-skinned Cubans also seemed more likely to out-group socialize with other Latinos, such as Dominicans or Mexicans, who also typically have darker skin tones than white Cubans. This behavior mirrored the typical racial segregation in the native Syracuse population both socially and geographically, and socially reproduced not only in-group discrimination but also the overall structural discrimination that is present in Syracuse, again socially and geographically.

Although various Cubans I interviewed insisted that their closest friends were non-Cubans, the fact remains that Cubans in Syracuse (especially the most recent wave, *Los Comunicados*), frequently relate with other Cubans, both in Syracuse and via social media in other parts of the country. Even if they do not consider their Cuban network connections their closest friends, Cubans still make up a large part of Syracuse Cubans' social networks. *Los Comunicados*, with the help of social media, can even connect with other Cubans in their same city without ever actually meeting that individual in person. Sites such as Facebook allow users to access their friends' "friend" lists and adding a new "friend" on the social media is as easy as sending a "friend request." I noticed that it was very common for my participants to "friend" another Cuban on Facebook if they saw that they lived in Syracuse, whether they had met them in real life or not. On Instagram if a user posts a picture and tags a friend in it, someone viewing the picture may be curious and go to the friend's account and "follow" them as well. This was also common practice within the Cuban community, and I experienced this firsthand as I would add a new "friend" on social media after I interviewed them. Although these new "friends" or "follows" are not friends in the true sense of the word in any language, they do open up the opportunity to initiate new social network connections.

In about a third of the interviews I conducted, I asked participants if they thought they knew or knew of all the Cubans in Syracuse. In each case they stated that they thought they did for the most part. My follow-up question was how many Cubans they thought lived in Syracuse and most answered within the range of 200-300. This answer choice could easily be explained by the number of Cubans living in the same apartment complex with them, and by those who work or go to church with them. Whether or not it is true (it likely is not) that the participants

know the majority of the other Cubans in Syracuse, what is important is that each Cuban knew enough other Cubans to validate the idea that Cubans have frequent access to other Cubans via social networks. While the number of Cubans in Syracuse according to the last published Census is well over 1,000 at this point, I would argue that there is only a degree or two of separation between each of them even though there is not an established ethnic enclave.

Cubans are initially drawn to other Cubans because of their language and other ethnic commonalities, and they may or may not find other common interests or goals or find a practical use for their connection in terms of employment, living arrangements, religious practices, or hobbies. Regardless, knowing other Cubans, or knowing about them or what they do, even superficially, serves as social capital. Cubans are careful to maintain these ties, even if they are weak ties, because living in Cuba has taught them that one never knows when you will need something from a neighbor. The ties need not be strong to be useful; they can help maintain economic stability, or social stability such as in the case of life event celebrations. If a Cuban can help another Cuban in need, they are likely to do so because they have learned that they may someday be the one in need, or they may be paying forward benevolence that was shown to them by another Cuban.

Cubans are educated within a socialist system and are accustomed to "buscando su vida" which means looking for ways to survive by whatever means necessary, especially when the government is not able to provide certain necessities or luxuries. Americans are educated, both at home and at school, within a capitalistic system and are taught to value those who "pull themselves up by the bootstraps," and that those who can't achieve the American Dream are probably just not working hard enough. Cuban pride does not seem harmed by knowing that

someone else helped you get where you are, as many of my participants talked about who else in the community helped them when they first arrived in Syracuse. American pride is a more capitalistic pride, where acknowledging that one did not make it on his/her own could be seen as a weakness. Cubans are ambitious and competitive, just as Americans are, but these characteristics manifest themselves differently due to an upbringing in a socialist culture. Successes are relative and evaluation criteria will be different than native Syracusans'. Cubans understandably compare their life achievements with their past experiences and those individuals who make up their social networks. If Cubans, and other immigrant groups for that matter, are not integrated with and socially networking with native Syracusans, upward mobility or outward migration to suburbs may not be a social, financial, or educational goal for them simply due to lack of knowledge.

Identity Component # 3: Loyalty (Trust, Respect and Reciprocity)

Many Cuban interview participants said, "No se puede confiar en todo el mundo," or in other words, you cannot trust everyone. Cubans are not unique in this belief, and in fact many Americans who grew up anywhere in the U.S. might say the same. The difference I found in interviews with Syracuse Cubans was in the degree of mistrust and suspicion, and the idea that one must actively earn and keep another's trust as opposed to automatically beginning to build trust in as relationship and then trusting that person until they give you a reason not to. This slight variation of idea may be even more important for immigrants who tend to look at ethnicity as the "place" to meet friends or significant others, rather than seeking out a physical location as native Syracusans might do. For Cubans, trust is earned and kept through reciprocity and confidentiality, which results in counting another Cuban as a loyal friend.

Cubans in Syracuse have characterized and described trust and being a good friend as being able to count on another person for physical help and/or companionship (ie. spending time, support at life events, etc.) *and* being able to count on that person for emotional help or support without letting others know that you needed that help to begin with. This definition of trust is slightly different from the English dictionary definition of trust, which is "assured reliance on the character, ability, strength, or truth of someone or something."[72] The Cuban definition of trust involves not only having a trustworthy character but the willingness to help in a time of need or engage in need-based reciprocity.

One place that I was able to observe the engagement of need-based reciprocity was in the local church that Mariana's husband pastored. She talked about how the members of the church (who were mostly Cuban) had a donation room for new Cubans that arrived and were in need until they got permission to work or until they found a job. She offered that the American church that partnered with theirs would make donations and then she explained, "We ourselves are giving back to our community…Since many of us have begun to work, we donate the first clothing that we received… we give them to the donation room and then the new people that have arrived get use of our things." She went on to say, "We don't have extended family here, so we have united as a big family to be able to, in some way, help each other and provide 'warmth' in the midst of this journey." According to Mariana, even families that moved out of the city to find better schools for their children still come back to attend their church and maintain the social network connections they have made.

[72] https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/trust

Since trust and respect are two qualities that dominate the relationships between most Cubans, especially romantic relationships, the "Cuban" definition of trust that involves willingness to engage in need-based reciprocity is important. A slight variation I have found regarding trust is the initial acquisition of trust when two Cubans are blood-related, such as cousins. Chucho and his cousin came to Syracuse together on a raft, and he told the story of how once his cousin found out about his plan to leave Cuba, his cousin wanted to be included in the plan. Inclusion was assumed, and this happened despite his cousin not having anything tangible to contribute to the exit plan. In this case, trust is assumed and expected from the beginning because of blood relation but is still an active version of trust and expected to be reciprocated whenever needed and to be kept intact within the relationship. I saw this reciprocity continue while in Syracuse, although Chucho's cousin eventually moved to another city for a love interest.

In general, all Cubans appear to approach others in a very friendly way whether meeting each other for the first time or seeing each other on the street. They greet each other with a handshake if you are male, or a kiss on the cheek if you are a female. Greetings such as "amor," "cariño," "acere," or "machín" flow freely, but this friendliness comes with unspoken rules which would be hard for someone outside the culture to know and properly engage with, even if that person is a Spanish speaker or Latino of a different culture. In Syracuse, the Cubans that I have met or observed are at a minimum superficially friendly with each other, even if they have not met yet or even if they have a past where they were involved in an argument or some other issue. It is not uncommon in Syracuse for Cuban men to have had a dispute with or have been "fajado" (angry) with another Cuban man to find themselves back in a common social circle

with that Cuban, either through work, common friends, church, soccer, or other social scene. This happened between Miguel and Chucho. Chucho had been in a relationship with a woman and after they broke up, Miguel began reaching out to her on social media offering to take her on dates. Since Miguel and Chucho had been friends and had overlapping social networks, they somehow worked out their differences enough that they were able to be in the same social spaces again. Chucho had told Cristiano about this breach of trust, which also caused Cristiano to distrust Miguel. At a birthday party after this incident, I was able to witness the three of them interacting with each other as if they were very good friends. To an outsider, these interactions would seem friendly, but in this case, the Cuban men likely remained suspicious of Miguel because of broken trust, sharing only filtered information.

Discussion: Identities, Friendships, Boundaries and the Strength of Tie in Networks

It is somewhat expected that the information shared within Cuban circles will become a source of *chisme*, or gossip, in conversations with other Cubans you may know or who know you. Thus, intimate information or asking of advice is saved for friends with whom you have a large degree of shared trust. A part of gaining trust includes whether information is kept confidential or heard by another Cuban within a different conversation. Like the breach of trust by Miguel described above, the *chismeador/a* (gossiper) that shares information is also quickly demoted in degrees of trust and likely avoided for at least the near future. That tie in the social network is weakened and moved down the continuum, but not usually dissolved. The Cuban involved who crossed the boundary, who may have been previously considered a friend, may be either be confronted directly through a phone call, or hear through another Cuban why the

offended friend is upset or why the other is being avoided by the one whose confidence was broken.

This was the case between Cristiano and Yubran. Cristiano and Yubran looked like good friends upon observation, and they would go out together almost every weekend to clubs in downtown Syracuse. Cristiano had shared with me that at some point, Yubran had shared private information with another Cuban friend about him, and Cristiano was told about this breach of confidence by the other friend. Cristiano said that he stopped responding to Yubran's messages until he called him to acknowledge and apologize for what he had done. I am not sure how Yubran found out about why Cristiano was ignoring his calls and messages, but Yubran had apologized, and trust and respect were partially regained. The relationship was somewhat restored, but both parties were cautious in degree of trust going forward, and the social network tie was not as strong. Notwithstanding, Yubran was still invited to the upcoming birthday celebration for Cristiano's son. Since trust, respect and reciprocity are so important to Cubans, it is likely that the news of the offense crossed over to various circles fairly quickly and into different social networks. Thus is the network of *chisme* (gossip) in the Cuban culture, especially in smaller cities such as Syracuse. Maintaining trust and participating in reciprocity is especially important amongst recent Cuban immigrants because their identity is important within the Cuban community; ties along their social network can be affected and they may not be able to access certain social capital when necessary.

In interviews and participant observations I heard both "amistad" and "amigo" (both translated directly as "friend") used to identify and characterize relationships amongst Cubans, and I was interested to know if there was a difference between the two, and if "conocido"

would then be the equivalent of the English “acquaintance.” After exploring this concept, it became clear that these distinctions helped to define the strength of the tie within a social network, and that trust, respect, and reciprocity were the characteristics that defined the relationships and strength of tie. I asked directly about the semantic difference between amistad, amigo, and conocido during an informal conversation with Cristiano about a co-worker, also Cuban and with whom he occasionally hung out with casually. I had asked something about this co-worker and referred to him as “tu amigo” to Cristiano, who very quickly corrected me to say that this person was not his “amigo.” I asked if something had happened between the two of them and he said that it had not, it was just that he considered him an “amistad,” but not an “amigo.” Cristiano’s description showed a sort of spectrum of relationship growth with particularly clear boundaries. “You have to be careful,” Cristiano explained, “not to share too much too soon because you never know someone’s intentions.”

Especially after the fall of the Soviet Union and the origination of the Special Period in Cuba, Cuban culture became a culture based on scarcity. While Cubans can be generous in giving time and material objects, most are also very aware of how much they are willing to “give” to others and are adept at putting up boundaries. These boundaries help to maintain cultural identities (ie. exceptional, reciprocal), but also protect a Cuban from being “used” by another person. Boundaries also serve to balance out social and economic ambitions and show where others fall in their social networks. Depending on where others fall on their spectrum from *conocido* to *amigo* we can gauge the strength or weakness of that social tie, and what favors are appropriately asked of whom. While all social networks have boundaries, they seem to be especially important to Cubans since they grew up in a culture of scarcity.

Cristiano, in his interview, gave an example of the delicate boundary work done within a culture of scarcity while discussing the difference between asking a favor of someone versus "using" someone: "I would rather borrow something once if I don't have it, and then go and buy my own. I would not keep asking to borrow it. For example, a snow brush might be something you need in the moment, but it's not like in Cuba where you don't have the money to go and buy your own the next chance you get." The idea of reciprocal respect of boundaries within one's social network is evident in his reasoning in this example. By not "overusing" someone's generosity, he strengthens the tie, whereas it might be weakened if the giver felt "used."

As you spend more time with someone, especially if it is regularly and you both seem to value the same things in a friendship, that person transitions into an "amistad." There does not seem to be a concrete transition, but rather slight upgrade in the quality of 'knowing' and 'closeness.' The difference between "conocido" and "amistad" would be similar to the difference between "acquaintance" and "co-worker" or "compatriot" in English. The first is more of an informal knowing in which you might state where you know each other from. The second indicates a slighter stronger tie in the sense that you see each other more often. You occasionally share feelings or stories with each other and/or spend time together with the intention of getting to know one another better. Transitioning to "amigo" requires time and loyalty. An "amigo," or strong network tie, is someone with which you share a common interest, that you talk to regularly, ask for advice or opinions from, and who values the same things as you. Pablo and Chucho, for example, are examples of "amigos" because they share meals at each other's houses, each contributing either money, food, or drinks to the gathering,

and Chucho committed to being the godfather of Pablo's most recent daughter. In his interview, Pablo also talked about another Cuban that he considers a friend. He talks about his "amigo" saying, "He told me he was going to help me with a job, and after about 15-20 days I got permission to work, Social Security, everything, and he said, 'Let's go,' and he took me and my brother-in-law to work at the Turning Stone Casino." This act strengthened the network tie between Pablo and his friend, further cementing that tie.

Another important value that an "amigo" must have, according to Cristiano, is that they must "respetar," or "show respect," but is quick to say that this is only him and it may not be the case for other Cubans. In fact, though, Cristiano is not alone in this idea of "respeto;" in everyday Cuban speech it is also commonly heard in its negative version in the phrase, "falta de respeto," or lack of respect. There is a wide range of things that can be "una falta de respeto," but in terms of social network ties, the most common way to show disrespect to someone and weaken a tie is to disregard boundaries. Examples of this disrespect or disregard for boundaries would be giving too much/too little attention to a person or their significant other and giving too much, or inappropriate, information about another person, or "chismeando" (gossiping). Also, for men, information shared at a workplace should not typically be shared during personal/mixed gatherings or celebrations outside work, to maintain a boundary of confidence in each circle.

In addition to the (dis)respect of boundaries, the strength of a tie within a Cuban network is also based on whether that person supports their primary social identity, or rather the identity that is most important or necessary to the Cuban migrant at that time. This means that although another Cuban may be one of the first people a Syracuse Cuban connects with,

that tie may diminish in strength or necessity as time goes on and one decides that the other does not support or advance the social identity that they are actively promoting at the time. According to an article in *Psychology Today* titled, "Friendship: The Laws of Attraction" (Karbo, Nov 2006), there are four essential behaviors that are necessary to form and maintain a friendship bond (or in the case of this study, a strong tie): communication involving reciprocal self-disclosure, verbal and/or tangible supportiveness, and then to maintain the bond, interactive exchanges (not necessarily involving physical proximity), and positivity in the form of the energy that one brings to the friendship (does the friendship make us feel good about it and willing to expend energy to maintain it?). The article offers a key clue to our understanding of how new Cuban migrants choose and maintain their network ties upon arrival to a new community and why they may choose to extend their social network outside of Cubans.

Some of my Cuban participants said that they enjoyed hanging out with other Cubans, but that their "closer friends" are Puerto Rican or Dominican. Rather than a purposeful rejection of other Cuban migrants, strengthening social network ties or friendships with community members of other ethnicities has more to do with promoting a particular social identity at that stage. It could also have to do with the culture of scarcity that Cubans come from, which promotes ingenuity in terms of survival, but also mistrust due to uncertainty of their future. Social identity characteristics and friendship relationships thus become social capital and help to promote either inclusion or exclusion in social networks.

Conclusion

This chapter has helped us to understand Cuban identity components as social capital within the context of ethnic social networks in Syracuse, NY and gives us a deeper

understanding as to how integration can be achieved or impeded in receiving communities and societies of non-gateway cities. We saw that local Cuban social networks in Syracuse are initially useful and network ties are delicately maintained even when other ties are formed, and connections are expanded outside the ethnic networks. However, Cubans in Syracuse must battle against discrimination in their receiving community, along with historical racial prejudices developed in Cuba, to advance socially and economically. Cubans access and activate multiple identities to utilize through social networks.

This research also elaborated on the notion of Cuban exceptionalism that grew out of earlier waves of Cuban migration. The organizational capacity learned in Cuba (Uriarte 2008) still carries over to new destinations locations, but social network formation looks different outside of enclave locations like Miami. Los Comunicados in new destinations, like Syracuse, can use group and individual identities as social capital to tap into new social networks to create new life opportunities. New ways of adaptation and cultural maintenance have taken shape with the advancement of technology, and cubanidad, a Cuban cultural (transnational) identity component, is manifested differently. Los Comunicados have varied commitment to identities that they may have cleaved to while in Cuba or in Miami. In Syracuse, these Cubans have learned to prioritize certain identities over others to gain access to groups and social networks based upon their ever-changing life goals.

Finally, in Syracuse, Cubans are hesitant to strengthen connections with other Cubans who may cause them to be negatively perceived either by the Cuban community or larger society by association in any way, regardless of any desire to achieve cultural maintenance. In this respect, social media has opened new ways to network socially and is able to virtually fulfill

part of that need. Local ethnic network connections become options rather than necessities, and Syracuse Cubans can be more selective of which local ethnic network ties they choose to strengthen. For Los Comunicados, social media has made it easier than ever to expand social networks outside the local community. What this means for the fields of international migration and social networks is that in future studies it will become more important to analyze the ties that hold social networks together through both physical and virtual connections and examine if they are utilized to help the migrant incorporate into their new community, or perhaps pull them to another.

Conclusion

Rationale, Aims, Discussion

This project started out looking at how social networks function during emigration, throughout the migration journey, and settlement for Cubans who ultimately arrive in Syracuse, NY. The data showed that these networks could not exist without relationships and the fostering of a sense of belonging, whether in person or through use of technology. Within the interviews, there was not one participant who did not talk at length about relationships he/she had with people in Cuba, relationships they developed along the journey, relationships that supported their goals, relationships that caused them pain, relationships that shifted their worldview, and relationships that sustained them once they arrived in their new settlement city. These relationships became social capital for each of the Cubans I interviewed and served either as an aid in their goal of emigration or a learning experience that affected their future in some way. Furthermore, these relationships formed nodes in social networks for Cubans and/or transformed into social capital and facilitated access to other social networks in each stage of their migration journey. This was true in the emigration planning stage, the actual journey stage, the settlement stage, and during stages when they were planning their futures.

Immigration Policy Changes

I did not expect for such dramatic changes in Cuban politics and U.S. Cuban immigration policy to happen during the length of my research, but because they did, I was able to help tell the story of and document a new wave of Cuban immigration. Pedraza was the last researcher to coin a wave of Cuban migrants, Los Balseros, and that wave began in the 1990s. Prior to 2000

and for some years after, very few Cuban citizens had even landline phones in their homes (about 10 per 100 inhabitants), let alone access to cell phones. Even when cell phone usage began to spread on the island (1991 was the first year it had limited availability), cell service was only accessible through internet cards, which were sold by companies run by the Cuban government, such as ETECSA, and they were very expensive for a typical Cuban citizen.[73] There was also internet access in 2014 at government-run hotels, but this access was reserved for tourists and workers of foreign companies. 2016 was the first year that (limited) home internet service became available with an account and fees. Not even the Cuban government could have predicted the massive changes that cell phone and internet accessibility has inspired on the island in terms of political demonstrations, emigration, and this fifth wave of Cuban migrants, Los Comunicados.

Most of the interviews I conducted were done just after Barack Obama left office and changed the immigration policy toward Cuban immigration, which means that many of the participants left Cuba just prior to this. During Obama's two terms he progressively opened communication and attempted to warm relations between the U.S. and Cuba's new President at the time, Raúl Castro. At the end of Obama's second term, as a show of good faith toward Cuba, he changed provisions in the Cuban Adjustment Act that had previously allowed Cubans to simply reach the shores of the U.S. and automatically gain permanent residency after one year and one day. Thus, beginning in January of 2017 and continuing through the time of this writing, Cubans arriving at U.S. borders were required to prove a founded fear of returning to

[73] For more information on the opening of internet service in Cuba see https:/www.nbcnews.com/news/amp/wbna23850623

Cuba because of persecution or retaliation, just as other refugees and asylees have been historically required to do. Cubans also continue to apply to come to the U.S. legally under family reunification or with religious visas, but as shown in the interviews this is a lengthy process, not guaranteed, and is costly to a Cuban without access to U.S. dollars. I believe that I interviewed some of the last members of the fourth wave of Cubans arriving in the United States by boat, due to the revocation of the "Wet Foot, Dry Foot" provision of the Cuban Adjustment Act and increased cell phone and social media access. Most participants I interviewed, including members of the new 5th wave of migrants, crossed the southern U.S. border having flown to a country that was libre visado (approved with visa) and then traveled through Central America and Mexico.

In addition to the change in the Cuban Adjustment Act before President Obama left office in January 2017, President Trump further tightened restrictions on immigration to the United States. This resulted in another shift of how Cubans could legally enter the United States, an increase in detention of Cubans at southern borders of the U.S., and a decrease in the use of refugee resettlement agencies to place Cubans in new destinations. The status of refugee became less "automatic" and more difficult to achieve for Cuban migrants. Policies implemented by Trump, such as the Migration Protection Protocols[74] in Mexico, forced migrants who were attempting to enter the United States to instead remain in Mexico and apply for entry or asylum from that side of the border. This policy, implemented in January 2020, slowed migration flow into the U.S. from the southern border and was compounded with the Coronavirus pandemic in March 2020. As FY 2020 closed on September 30, 2020, between

[74] https://www.dhs.gov/news/2019/01/24/migrant-protection-protocols

Trump's executive order to cap the number of refugees admitted to 18,000 and the Coronavirus pandemic, the U.S. had admitted the lowest number of refugees in U.S. history since the passage of the Refugee Act of 1980, at just under 11,000 total refugees[75]. Admittance of refugees to the U.S. had all but halted completely until September 2020, when the U.S. began to slowly allow the flow of immigrants to begin again.

In Syracuse, the refugee resettlement agency Catholic Charities had reported a drop to almost 0 new Cubans arriving in Syracuse through their agency even before the Coronavirus pandemic. This means that in the future, social networks of friends and family would become the main draw of Cubans to Syracuse rather than resettlement agencies, and we would likely see a rise in the number of undocumented Cubans living in the U.S. This is a major characteristic shift of the Cuban diaspora in Syracuse that will prove fruitful for future research. At the end of this research, in 2024, only three of the interviews for this project had been conducted with Cubans who arrived in Syracuse without legal immigration status, but future research may want to focus on the contrast of opportunities, job and otherwise, available for this fifth wave of Cuban emigrants that arrive in Syracuse. The interviews with two employees of refugee resettlement agencies in Syracuse; one employed by Catholic Charities and the other by Interfaith Works, along with the three with undocumented status, represent just the beginning of a shift of how Cubans will come to Syracuse in the future, likely by a heavy reliance on social networks throughout not only the journey stage, but also the settlement and incorporation stages.[76]

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[75] https://immigrationforum.org/article/fact-sheet-u-s-refugee-resettlement/

[76] According to a December 20, 2023 publication by WOLA.org, the most recent changes in Cuban immigration policy reflect the crisis that accompanied the most recent exodus of nearly half a million Cubans; the U.S. Consulate

Contribution of Study

This study examined the role of social networks during the emigration, settlement and incorporation stages of Cuban migrants living in Syracuse, NY, outside of Miami's Cuban enclave community. The findings of this research have contributed to the literature on the Cuban diaspora by documenting a new, fifth wave of Cuban migration which began to emerge around the threatened repealing of the 'Wet Foot, Dry Foot' policy in 2016, and despite the two-year interruption of the COVID pandemic, continued to grow until we saw its biggest surge in 2022. This research has also contributed to the literature on immigrant incorporation by showcasing the use of social networks, especially social media network connections, in the Cuban emigration, journey, and settlement processes. Finally, it has provided insight as to how settlement in a non-gateway city differs from Miami for Cubans in the way in which they utilize their social networks and identities to survive and progress in their new destination location.

First, using the culture of migration framework introduced by Kandel and Massey (2002; see also Cohen and Kirkeci 2011), alongside Silvia Pedraza's (2007) concept of disaffection, I found that while many Cubans are unsatisfied with areas of their lives in Cuba due to social and economic consequences of socialist politics in Cuba, and live in the reality where emigration is the norm rather than the exception to combat problems, it takes a specific factor in their lives for Cubans to set a plan in motion and actually leave their home country. In each of the migration stories from this study, social networks played a prominent role in the decision, implementation and feasibility steps of their plan. Each case varied in how they ultimately

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has resumed many services in Havana, Biden implemented a new Humanitarian Parole option for Cubans with family members already living in the U.S., and migration talks with Cuba that had been previously shunned are now being pushed to the forefront. https://www.wola.org/analysis/developments-cuban-migration-2023/

decided that life in Cuba was no longer tolerable, the age of their decision versus the age of emigration, and whether their exit from Cuba was considered legal or illegal, and these variations hinged strongly on social network connections as well.

The documentation of a new fifth wave of Cuban migration is a significant contribution to Cuban migration literature. In the case of Los Comunicados, the fifth wave of Cuban migrants, cell phones and social media applications play a prominent role in the social networking that prompts emigration and aids in the journey and settlement processes in a way that previous waves of Cubans could not and did not due to lack of widespread access until around 2018. Social networks, especially those connections made through social media applications, function as important sources of survival/coping strategies and optimism during difficult times for these participants. Cubans in Syracuse experience culture shock, disappointments, worries, loneliness, and isolation in ways that Cubans living in Miami may not due to its large Cuban population and long history of receiving Cuban immigrants.

Another significant finding of this study is regarding the way in which Syracuse Cubans use their individual and group identities. Identities for Syracuse Cubans become social capital to access social networks and combat structural discrimination present in the city. Cubans in Syracuse used multiple social identities to capitalize on friendships and relationships and create new network connections, as well as draw boundaries between themselves and others. Social identities shifted in importance based upon Cuban migrants' short-term and long-term goals and priorities, as did the participants' commitment to those identities over time. This resulted in finding that Cuban migrants' ties along social networks could not be characterized as necessarily being fixed as weak or strong ties (see Granovetter 1973, 1983), but rather as being on a

continuum. Understanding identities as social, human, and cultural capital within the context of social networks during migration journeys and settlement is a major contribution of this study and gives us a deeper understanding as to how change is enacted or impeded in receiving communities and societies.

Limitations of Study

This study looks at outmigration, the migration journey, and incorporation experiences of Cubans settling in Syracuse, NY through the lens of social networks. The stories collected for this study, while representative of the Cuban experience in Syracuse, NY, are not exhaustive. Through the method of in-depth interviewing and asking broad questions, the responses only include what the respondents want to share and what is important through their own perspective. One of this project's intentions was to shed light on the Cuban community in Syracuse and by doing so make visible a community that is invisible to many of its native Syracuse inhabitants, but this will only be possible to the extent that the stories are shared within the community with Cubans and non-Cubans alike at the completion of the project. The study strives to provide a point of reference for future immigration studies in new destination cities, but it does not claim that the experiences will be the same or even representative in cities with different weather climates or population dynamics. Finally, issues of race, class and gender were woven throughout the stories, and although not always explicit, these areas deserve more attention in future work.

Future Research

This research has shown that increased accessibility to social media applications and cell phones has changed the landscape of Cuban migration and Cuban social networks, especially in

terms of access and usage. Physical proximity and/or in-person access to ties within one's social network are no longer necessary for those ties to be able to influence decisions and options. In addition, some issues that previous migrants experienced, such as loneliness or longing for culture, may be able to be assuaged via connections on social media applications like Facebook, WhatsApp, TikTok, and many others. These advances will only bring about more changes in the future, making Los Comunicados a pioneer generation of Cuban migrants especially suitable for subsequent research.

In terms of literature on immigrant incorporation, studying settlement dynamics in other new destination communities could yield interesting comparisons across the Cuban diaspora. Fruitful investigation could reveal whether the nuanced social network connections and options of Los Comunicados will allow immigrants more flexibility in where they are able to settle and ultimately feel at home. Race, class, and gender issues in new destination locations outside of Miami will likely reveal further variations in the Cuban diaspora.

Implications and Policy Recommendations

Housing and Safety

Most of the apartment complexes housing large numbers of Cubans are owned by the same leasing agent, but this would not be evident to the native population. Many of the apartment complexes are part of Section 8, or low-income housing, which is synonymous with low standards of maintenance. Why this is important in this project is because it defines the geographical area in which Cuban migrants can initially interact with other community members. If those other community members are also newly or semi-newly arrived Cuban migrants, which is typically the case, their social networks are limited, as is their social

understanding of their new community and opportunities. According to a phone conversation with a reception and placement coordinator for Interfaith Works, the reception process typically goes like this: 1) The Syracuse organization receives communication from a sister organization asking if they are accepting new refugees; in the case of Cubans this would have likely been from Laredo, TX or Church World Services in Miami, FL. 2) If so, the refugee is transferred to Syracuse, sometimes by bus and sometimes by airplane. 3) This systematic approach, like that of resettlement of Cubans in Phoenix (Skop 2008), allows for small clusters of Cubans to reside in agency-sponsored apartment complexes together for a period of time. The length of time is different for each Cuban and depends on their individual realities, such as age, marital status, race, and command of the English language. As these immigrants spend more time in their surroundings and possibly find a new job or change their marital status, they begin looking to advance their socioeconomic status.

One of the major concerns of many of my Cuban participants, especially those with children, was the safety of their families. Weapons are not legally allowed in Cuba unless one is a member of the police or military, so many Cubans are surprised by and nervous about violence that occurs within the city of Syracuse. Those Cubans with children begin to look for better school systems to enroll their children in. If Cubans can connect with a social network tie that provides a pathway or an example as to how to advance socioeconomically within the city, they are more likely to move out of the original apartment they were initially settled into and into a safer part of the city or a suburb. This typically happens by employing a socially-neutral operating identity because they understand that they must network outside of their ethnic social network in order to get 'outsider' information. Those outside networks ties may be

through work, schools, or friendships with native society members, and the identities employed depend on what will provide them acceptance into that particular group to receive the information or aid necessary for social and/or economic advancement.

A Clash of Two Cultures of Poverty

An unexpected outcome of this research is the opportunity to compare the culture of poverty in Cuba and the culture of poverty in Syracuse. If poverty and lack of life choice options trigger out migration from Cuba, what can Syracuse community leaders and members learn from this? We can begin to answer this question by asking what these two geographically and politically diverse places have in common. This research has shown that there are degrees of difference in poverty and that one's individual understanding of poverty is relative to one's past experiences and current social, geographical, and political lived reality. It has also highlighted the unequivocal truth that if an individual's potential is impeded by structural barriers, that individual must make choices based upon available options. One of those options is to leave the place that impedes growth. It begs the question, then, what are Syracuse City officials doing to remove structural barriers and see all residents, new immigrants included, as human and social capital able to help grow the community culturally, socially, economically and politically? Or, to ask a question specifically in terms of this study, why should Cuban migrants remain in Syracuse? What reciprocity is offered between the existing Syracuse community and new members of the community, immigrant or otherwise?

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2019	**Carter Grosso, Erika**. "Globalization Within and Across Borders: From Cuba to Syracuse, New York." International Critical Thought 9(2), 282-296. https://www.tandfonline.com/eprint/WmyYHMrmNgpE7bnkSrMk/full?target=10.1080/21598282.2019.1613918
2021	Landes, Scott D., Janet M. Wilmoth, Katherine E. McDonald and **Erika Carter Grosso**. "Evidence of Continued Reduction in the Age-at-Death Disparity between Adults with and without Intellectual and/or Developmental Disabilities." Journal of Applied Research in Intellectual Disabilities. 34(3): 916-920.doi:10.1111/jar.12840.

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