

Surviving “la lucha” in Ciudad Juárez. An Anthropological reflection on the Cuban community in Ciudad Juárez, México

Sobreviviendo “la lucha” en Ciudad Juárez. Reflexión antropológica sobre la comunidad de cubanos en Ciudad Juárez, México

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Abstract

The following article presents a brief anthropological and historical reflection based on the Cuban community in Ciudad Juárez, Chihuahua, México. Additionally, we discuss important historical aspects that have contributed to the development of the Cuban community in El Paso, TX-Ciudad Juárez, CH border, such as the migrant caravans that occurred between 2017-2019 and the migratory policies that have been put into effect. Furthermore, we present an ethnographic analysis on the migration experience of certain participants, placing an emphasis on created networks, and expanding on the concept of community through spatial solidarity and survival in Ciudad Juárez.

Palabras clave: estudios fronterizos, Ciudad Juárez, migrantes cubanos.

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Resumen

El siguiente artículo presenta una breve reflexión antropológica e histórica sobre la comunidad cubana residente en Ciudad Juárez, Chihuahua, México. Además, se discutirán los aspectos históricos más importantes ocurridos en la región de la frontera que aportaron al desarrollo de esta comunidad, como lo fueron las caravanas de inmigrantes entre los años 2017-2019 y las reformas políticas migratorias de parte de Estados Unidos y México. Por otro lado, se discute un análisis etnográfico sobre la experiencia migratoria de algunos miembros haciendo énfasis en la construcción de redes y el desarrollo del concepto comunidad como un espacio de solidaridad y sobrevivencia en la sociedad juareense.

Keywords: border studies, Ciudad Juarez, cuban migrants.

Introduction

The following article presents a brief anthropological and historical reflection based on the Cuban community in Ciudad Juárez, Chihuahua, México. Additionally, we discuss important historical aspects that have contributed to the development of this community such as the migrant caravans that occurred between 2017-2019 and the migratory policy reforms that have been put into effect by the US government and how it affects border policies. Furthermore, we present a brief ethnographic analysis on the migration experience of participants of this community and how they arrived in Ciudad Juárez as part of the migrant caravans. In fact, we discuss how the members of the Cuban community created networks and build the concept of community through spatial solidarity to survive in Ciudad Juárez. Lastly, our aim for this anthropological reflection is to make visible the living conditions and major vicissitudes that the members of the Cuban community have faced in this new countryside. For the purpose of this article we use the term in Spanish, “*la lucha*”, which means the struggle, in reference to the ethnographic research conducted by Kaifa Roland (2010) who conducted her ethnographic work in Cuban society and originally used this term as a metaphor to describe the struggle to live in Cuba.

The background and connection to cuban migrants in Ciudad Juárez

Why the Cuban community? This is a vital question that needs to be asked to better understand the focus of this article. Beginning in 2017, the population of downtown Juárez changed dramatically due to the impact of the migrant caravans that arrived at the border. As a result of the migrant caravan and the economic opportunities offered in the city, Avenida Juárez began to revitalize and reminded us of the prosperous years of downtown Juárez. For instance, new Cuban restaurants and bars, souvenir shops, and an increase in pedestrian traffic traveling back and forth between Ciudad Juárez and El Paso could be observed. Downtown Juárez became full of “life”. Within this context, the Cuban migrants began to draw attention from the locals and the local media due to their entrepreneurialism and their working presence in the area. Other actions that characterize the Cuban presence on the border has been the public protests in 2020 and 2021 held at the down-

town international bridge (La Polaka, 2020). The protests are held to pressure local and federal authorities to allow the Cuban migrants to cross into the United States. All these circumstances drew our attention as academics from the University of Texas at El Paso.

From 2019-2020 we traveled to downtown Juárez to begin a fieldwork experience as part of a Sociology Master's Thesis to understand the impact in this urban context. In particular, the difference between the multiple migrant groups who came from El Salvador, Guatemala, Honduras, México, and Cuba who participate in these caravans. The first phase of the fieldwork, consisted of visiting *Centro de Atención a Migrantes* (CAIM), located behind the Santa Fe International Bridge. Throughout our multiple visits, we had the opportunity to meet several members of the Cuban community who recounted their experiences as migrants living in Ciudad Juárez. The analysis will focus on the interviews that were conducted with members of this group who work in construction, restaurants, bars, cashiers, and other activities who tell us the struggles they have encountered while arriving at the border. Although the increase of the migrant population in downtown Juárez brought life in 2019, this movement decreased in 2020 due to the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic. Before beginning our analysis, we will discuss a brief literature review on the migrant crisis in Ciudad Juárez from 2016 to the present.

A brief literature review on the migrant crisis at the border

The following literature review discusses a brief historical analysis regarding migration policy reforms that have affected the US border in the last decade, especially the impact in Ciudad Juárez. In order to understand the complexity of life on the border, we must first understand the context of the situation and how US policies impact border towns, border town residents, and general migrants. This literature review will begin by focusing on policies set forth by former President Obama (2008-2016) placing an emphasis on articles by Kelly Bogart (2018) in "Keeping the Dream Alive: Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals and the Necessary Next Step"; Benjamin Roth (2018) in "The double bind of DACA: exploring the legal violence of liminal status for undocumented youth"; Kristina Campbell (2018) in "Dreamers Deferred: The Broken Promise of Immigration Reform in the Obama Years", and other scholars who discuss migratory topics such as DACA and how immigration was enforced under the Obama presidency. Secondly, we will examine former President Trump's (2016-2020) zero-tolerance approach to immigration and discuss the Remain in México policy that was enacted by his administration by exploring research conducted by the following researchers Fabregat, Vinyals-Mirabent, and Meyers (2020) in "They Are Our Brothers": The Migrant Caravan in the Diasporic Press"; Mukpo (2020) in "Asylum Seekers Stranded in México Face a New Danger: COVID-19"; Jeremy Slack (2019) in "Deported to Death", and others. Lastly, we will discuss how the migratory policies that have been sanctioned by the US government negatively affect migrants and put them in increased danger citing periodicals by Chappell (2019) and Martínez Prado (2019).

Immigration was one of the most pressing issues of the last decade, which led to several policies and executive orders that have helped shape the immigration system that we have today. One of these executive orders was the Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals (DACA) that was created by former President Obama. DACA allowed those who had been

brought to the US before age 16 to work and attend school as long as they met specific standards, such as being in school, graduating high school, being a military member, among others. It is estimated that around 800,000 undocumented migrants were able to obtain work permits and deportation relief through DACA (Bogart, 2018).

Although DACA offers recipients a way to legally work and attend school in the US, they live under what Roth (2018) refers to as liminal legality, in which recipients are allowed to live in the US legally but do not have the same rights as US citizens. Living in this legal grey area makes recipients vulnerable to legal violence, especially in states where there is harsh anti-immigrant rhetoric. Even with the protections that DACA offers recipients, many continue to live in fear. Registering as a DACA recipient entails “coming out” as undocumented to the US government, which means that living inconspicuously is no longer an option, thus putting themselves and their families at risk for possible deportation in the future (Becerra, 2018). This fear has become more pervasive in recent years due to former President Trump’s attempts to repeal DACA.

It has been argued that Dreamers, or DACA recipients, offer a romanticized image of immigrants, one that depicts them as being innocent victims worthy of the American Dream (Campbell, 2018). The popular depiction of Dreamers as the ideal immigrant reinforces the belief that those who are deported are unworthy because they do not meet the exceptional standards outlined in our national discourse (Slack, 2019). Slack (2019) argues that this leads to social death in which deported immigrants are seen as unworthy and guilty in the eyes of society by residents in México and the US.

Dreamers may be deported if they commit a crime or fail to renew their DACA status. Because DACA recipients were brought to the US before age 16, most of them speak English and Anglicized Spanish, not remembering much about their home countries. Their “Americanness” makes them vulnerable targets when they are deported to border cities such as Tijuana or Ciudad Juárez. Drug cartels prey on newly deported Dreamers who are presumed to have resources and capital due to their connections in the US. Drug cartels see new deportees as potential recruits or sources of money which can be collected through ransom by kidnapping deportees and calling family in the US for money (Slack, 2019).

The Obama administration utilized aggressive tactics to enforce immigration, and it can be argued that these tactics are what helped shape the way for former President Trump’s zero-tolerance approach to immigration. More people were deported under the Obama administration than in the previous 100 years before his presidency (Campbell, 2018). According to Street, Zepeda-Millan, and Jones-Correa (2015), the Obama administration issued removals for over two-million undocumented immigrants in his first five years in office, a level that was 1.6 times higher than the average under the republican predecessor, George W. Bush. It is important to note that the Obama administration focused on deporting those with criminal convictions and recently arrived undocumented immigrants (Kim & Semet, 2020).

An unprecedented number of asylum seekers were held in detention centers along the US – México border under the Obama administration (Campbell, 2018), a practice that continued and became even crueler under former President Trump, through the enforcement of family separation at the detention centers. Family separation, kids being held in cages, and the unsanitary conditions found in the detention centers have yielded a large

number of protests in many areas across the US. Globally, the migrant figure has become a scapegoat and has been held to extreme scrutiny, which has resulted in fear and increased hatred in many nations (Slack, 2019).

Currently, President Joe Biden has announced his promise to defend the DACA recipient community in the United States and to avoid any kind of deportation. This announcement represents hope for DACA recipients, the migrant community living in the United States, and the hopeful migrants awaiting their court dates in Mexican border towns, who have all faced increased harassment and uncertainty under the Trump presidency due to the migrant narrative that was pushed and associated with stereotypical discourses of hate and criminality. Therefore, the proposed Biden presidential policy regarding migrants will have a new approach focused on human rights, which will be valued before anything else. In conclusion, the migrant population at the border deserves better treatment and a more just and humane policy that allows them to improve their living conditions, whilst acknowledging that migrants are humans and not criminals.

Cuban migratory reforms

The dynamic between the US – Cuba relationship radically changed in 2014 under former President Obama. Negotiations on diplomatic relations with former President Raul Castro began and there were modifications to the previous US embargo against Cuba and on the restrictions to travel from the US to Cuba. As part of normalizing relations between both nations, the “wet foot, dry foot” policy was eliminated in 2017 (Rodríguez, Targ, 2018). The eradication of the “wet foot, dry foot” policy ended the privileges that the Cuban political asylees held and as a result are no longer given special considerations when requesting asylum. Former President Trump, however, reversed some of the policies regarding Cuba that were enacted in the Obama administration. Cuba is being considered a security threat and an adversary to the US once again (Rodríguez, Targ, 2018). Despite the reversal of several policies, the removal of the wet foot, dry foot policy has not been put back in place. The removal of the aforementioned policy along with former President Trump’s implementation of the Remain in México policy have largely contributed to the influx of Cuban asylum seekers that find themselves in Ciudad Juárez.

The aforementioned reforms have considerably affected the everyday life in border cities across México, including Ciudad Juárez. Most of the border cities have transformed into host and shelter cities, in which thousands of migrants are waiting and expecting to cross the border into the US. In this context, we observe the Cuban migrants in Ciudad Juárez that are living in indefinite transit, waiting to cross the border into the US in the near future.

The migrant caravan’s impact between 2018-2020 in downtown Ciudad Juárez (El Centro)

To understand how life on the border is currently experienced, we must explore recent migratory patterns, such as the migrant caravans that have resulted in harsh policies like

the Migrant Protection Protocol. According to Varela Huerta and McLean (2019), migrant caravans began making their way from Central America through México to the US in 2011, however, the caravans increased in 2018, with the last one comprising between 4,000 and 7,000 migrants (Fabregat, Vinyals-Mirabent, Meyers, 2020). The caravans were highly politicized and became a hot button issue during the 2018 mid-term elections, in which former President Trump framed the situation as an invasion and used the caravans to push his anti-immigrant rhetoric and sociological discourse of criminalization even further (Fabregat, Vinyals-Mirabent, Meyers, 2020).

The Migrant Protection Protocol (MPP) or Remain in México policy as it is commonly known, was announced in January 2019 by the Trump administration as a political response to the caravans that were arriving at the US border. Through MPP, the Trump administration has attempted to critically curtail asylum in the US even when it was already difficult to obtain. To illustrate, the average denial rates for asylum seekers from Guatemala are 77%, 80% for Hondurans, and 90% for Mexicans (Slack, 2019). Asylum is extremely hard to receive if the asylum seeker does not have legal representation, which is the case for most.

Photo 1: Summer 2019. Migrant caravan refugee camp found near the Santa Fe bridge in downtown “El Centro” de Juárez



Source: the authors.

MPP requires asylum seekers to wait in México while their asylum claims are processed in the US (“A Timeline”, 2019). It is estimated that over 60,000 asylum seekers have been affected by this policy (Mukpo, 2020). Most of these asylum seekers currently reside in Mexican border cities such as Ciudad Juárez, where they stay in overcrowded shelters, cheap hotels, homes, and even tents near the ports of entry. Asylum seekers have changed the culture in downtown Ciudad Juárez, an area in the city that struggled to bounce back after the 2008 recession. The downtown area is now thriving with new restaurants and stores that have been opened by entrepreneurial migrants who now reside in the border

city, such as the Cubans in Ciudad Juárez. Although migrants living in border cities are able to make money, they continue to struggle and face a great number of challenges when attempting to cross the border into the US.

MPP puts asylum seekers in danger, especially in cities such as Ciudad Juárez, Chihuahua, where crime and violence are rampant. Just as with new deportees, cartel members prey on asylum seekers who may not be familiar with the cultural norms of a new country and may not have a social network to rely on. In September 2019, a shelter in Ciudad Juárez that housed asylum seekers was robbed by three masked men. They held the migrants at gunpoint and threatened to kill them while they took migratory documents, cell phones, clothes, and even cleaning supplies (Martínez Prado, 2019). In a separate instance, according to *Periodico Cubano* (2020), a poster board was posted outside a popular downtown Cuban restaurant in Ciudad Juárez stating that Cubans needed to stop causing problems at the ports of entry if they wanted to avoid being murdered. These are just two examples of the everyday violence and struggles asylum seekers face while living in México.

Frustration, fear, and lack of resources sometimes lead asylum seekers affected by MPP to attempt to cross the US border illegally. In fact, the political instability of migrant policies has led despaired migrants to risk their lives and attempt more dangerous crossings to reach the US. For instance, the well-documented case of the drowned migrants (*inmigrante ahogado con su hija*), better known as Oscar Alberto Martínez Ramírez. Martínez Ramírez, his wife, and daughter of 23 months arrived at Brownsville, TX from El Salvador to request asylum, but were required to wait in México for their asylum cases to be processed. After two months of waiting at a migrant camp, Martínez Ramírez decided to cross into the US by crossing the Rio Grande. The strong tide led him and his daughter to drown before his wife's eyes (Chappell, 2019). "While undocumented immigrants from México can blend in during (most) of their travels through México, Central Americans cannot. For Mexicans, deportation exposes them as foreign in their land, as engaging with the dangerous activity of migration" (Slack, 2019). At the same time, Central Americans and other groups of migrants find themselves in greater amounts of danger due to unfamiliar cultural and physical terrains (see: Photo of Drowned Migrants Captures Pathos of Those Who Risk It All-The New York Times ([nytimes.com](https://www.nytimes.com))).

In sum, this section illustrates how two different presidents and political parties approached immigration and have contributed to the instability found along the border. Migrants and asylum seekers are pawns for the political parties in the United States, which set forth policies that continue the cycle of poverty for asylum seekers and make them vulnerable to different forms of exploitation by cartels. This, in turn, results in double victimization by two different entities –American political parties who fixate on migratory issues as a way to remain in political power and drug cartels who look to exploit and recruit new members to increase their power in México. Thus, comprehensive immigration reform is needed, one that is more humane and does not criminalize migrants who seek opportunities and safety.

The cubans in downtown “El Centro” de Ciudad Juárez 2019-2020, fieldwork experiences the journey, from Cuba to Ciudad Juárez

Most of the Cuban migrants who were interviewed followed the same path toward the border. Some of them left Cuba on an airplane and flew directly to México City, from there, most of them took a “Guagua”,³ or bus, to Ciudad Juárez. Other adventurous voyagers traveled by sea from Cuba through Belize, where they crossed the dangerous jungle and exposed their life. Others took buses through Guatemala and México; others are victims of coyotes who smuggle them into México. In addition, some Cubans have been smuggled by law enforcement and cartels after paying “cuotas” or being victims of sexual violation. According to our informants, they emphasized how difficult it was to cross Belize and Guatemala and how dangerous their voyage across México was. For example, weather conditions such as monsoon season, transportation conditions, violence throughout Central America, lack food and water, and even having motion sickness and no access to medicine. Another interesting observation is that Cuban migrant’s ethnic phenotype differs from that of Guatemalans and southern indigenous Mexicans. It was evident that our Cuban informants’ phenotype was that of the Caribbean, which tends to be of African, European, or mixed/Mulatto descent. These characteristics draw attention from the locals in Central America who instantly recognize that the migrants are Cubans, which makes them susceptible to violence in their journey. In conclusion, the path to Ciudad Juárez represents a journey full of risk and danger. Our informants would “thank God and feel blessed when they arrived in Ciudad Juárez despite the historical violence encountered in the city, which they preferred over the violence found throughout their journey” (quote from an interview fragment).

Los cubanos en Juárez. Surviving “la Lucha”, the economic hardship 2019-present

What do Cubans do in Juárez? “Chica, nosotros en Juárez hacemos lo que sea para sobrevivir y quedarnos en Juárez para no regresar a Cuba”.⁴ Many Cubans are working in Juárez legally and illegally. They work in many areas such as construction, restaurants, supermarkets, bars, and other commercial industries. Others have turned to sex work at some bars in “El Centro” for an income; for example, as part of our observation we witnessed some elegant women from Cuba working as bartenders wearing provocative clothing and others as prostitutes, better known in México as “paraditas”.⁵

³ * Cuban Spanish slang word referring to a public bus.

⁴ *Translation from Spanish interview: Girl, here in Juárez we do whatever we have to stay here and survive and to avoid going back to Cuba.

⁵ *“Paraditas” is Mexican slang word for a prostitute who works on the streets. This fragment is part of an interview with an informant.

Unfortunately, due to the COVID-19 pandemic, employment opportunities have vastly decreased in El Centro de Juárez. However, our informants explained that some Cubans began working at maquiladoras, convenience stores like Del Río, and as housekeepers who serve the Mexican upper-class, while others moved to other cities in México looking for better opportunities. In comparison to other migrant groups, Cubans appear eager in regard to the political migratory future now that President Joe Biden is in office. Using the term of “la lucha” the Cubans in Ciudad Juárez are struggling in the following adversities:

- The dangerous journey to Ciudad Juárez
- The cancellation of “wet foot, dry foot” policy, and former President Trump’s migratory reforms and the resulting anti-immigrant discourse in the United States.
- The employment opportunities that have been reduced due to the COVID-19 pandemic.
- The impact of COVID-19 that has caused deaths and serious illness among the Cuban community members living in Ciudad Juárez.
- The cartel violence and threats against the migrants experienced in Ciudad Juárez.

Photo 2: Fall 2019 – Spring 2020. Cuban stores in “El Centro” de Juárez. A popular burrito restaurant in downtown Ciudad Juárez employs cubans and now sells Cuban food. Cuban restaurant that became an improvised community hub where they build relationships, network, and bond with their community.



Source: the authors.

Photos 3: Fall 2019-march 2020. The Cuban flag outside a gift store found in “El Centro” de Juárez. The Cuban migrant population has increased the diversity in El Centro, Ciudad Juárez. Interestingly, Cubans entrepreneurs are opening gift stores, restaurants.



Source: the authors.

For cubans, “*la lucha*” or the struggle, employs a wide range of possibilities, which has contributed to the newfound diversity in downtown Ciudad Juárez

In Cuba, residents are engaged with the anthropological discourse of “*la lucha*” or the struggle, referring to how economic hardship creates a culture of hustling and learning how to make the most of your limited resources (Roland, 2010). The phrase “*la lucha*” has been documented by American anthropologist Kaifa Roland, in her research “*Cuban Color in Tourism and La Lucha*” (2010).

For this article, we found the phrase of “*la lucha*” pertinent to understanding the vicissitudes experienced by the Cuban migrants who arrive in Ciudad Juárez. In fact, according to Roland (2010) in Cuba, “*la lucha*” revolves around the acquisition of dollars to be able to buy necessities. Life in Cuba is not easy – there has been a rise in delinquency, alcoholism, and prostitution, along with structural issues such as electricity interruptions caused by a lack of petrol (Holbraad, 2014). In Cuba “*la vida es una lucha*”, life is a struggle, both economically and politically (Holbraad, 2014).

However, in industrial border cities, such as Ciudad Juárez, dollars are not hard to obtain, and Cubans often make four times more than they make in Cuba. “*La lucha*” for many Cubans has transformed itself from one against an authoritative communist government and lack of resources to one against cartel violence and navigating a new culture. Cuban migrants have had to adapt their “*lucha*” to a new political landscape where even the po-

lice force is corrupted by the cartels and knowledge of border culture and how to avoid drawing attention to oneself are necessary for survival.

The ability for Cuban migrants to translate “la lucha” into this new context found in Mexican border cities has allowed them to thrive in ways that other migrant groups have not and has resulted in greater amounts of agency⁶. As opposed to other migrant groups, Cubans have been able to prosper in Ciudad Juárez by opening restaurants, shops, and creating a bi-national Cuban-Mexican culture, which can be acknowledged through Cuban/Mexican restaurants and the visibility of Cuban and Mexican flags being flown side by side in downtown Ciudad Juárez. Cubans are known to be passionate, a characteristic of the Caribbean. The passion and determination that are characteristic of the Caribbean have allowed Cuban migrants to surpass challenges faced by a new landscape in which attaining economic and cultural capital is a priority.

According to Roland (2010), “la lucha” entails helping one another. In Cuba, surviving means having to work together to get by. Social relations with family and friends are important as they are resources that may help you when the need arises. For example, the ultimo (last) system surfaced during the special period when lines were hours long. This system allows people to wait in several lines simultaneously to save time and represents one way in which Cubans have had to improvise in order to maximize the resources available to them, such as time and social relations, when goods and resources are scarce” (Roland, 2010). *La botella*, or hitchhiking, is another technique in “la lucha” that has been around since the special period but has recently been perfected due to the scarcity of transportation (Roland, 2010). These are two specific examples that display how Cubans living in Cuba make use of their social relations and rely on the kindness of other compatriots to survive “la lucha”. “La lucha” has been translated to U.S. settings, as well. A study by Barnes and Aguilar (2007) analyzed community social support for Cuban refugees in Texas. The researchers found that other Cubans were the most important sources of emotional support and the second most important source of practical support among newly arriving Cubans. The findings of Cuban refugees living in Texas can be attributed back to “la lucha” and “necesidad” or necessity. Social relations are everything in the community and helping your compatriots thrive is an essential part of “la lucha” and being Cuban.

Today, “la lucha” discourse has become imperative in the Cuban community living in México due to the removal of the “wet foot, dry foot” policy by the Obama administration and the implementation of migration policies like Migrant Protection Protocols by the Trump administration that have made asylum almost impossible, along with cartel extortion in México. Additionally, the Trump administration promoted a demagogical discourse contributing to the idea and stereotype of immigrants as criminals, which furthered the migratory crisis we see today. It is important to emphasize that Cuban migrants who migrated under the “wet foot, dry foot” policy had a completely different migratory experience in comparison to recent asylum-seeking Cubans who are forced to wait in México while their asylum cases are being processed. Because of this, the political ideology of Cuban-Americans differs vastly from those who are seeking to migrate to the U.S. Many Cuban-Americans align themselves with the Republican party and the conservative ideology regarding

⁶ *Agency refers to the anthropological concept that describes human actions that change the culture (Conrad Phillip Kottak & Kathryn A. Kozaitis, 2011).

immigration, while most of the Cubans living in México denounced President Trump and the Republican party, and embraced and look forward to Democratic leadership.

Conclusions and final reflections

Nevertheless, there is hope that there can be a structural shift in the immigration ideology to a more sensible and humane one that aims to understand and emphasize the human experience in migration. In Cuba, Cubans are victims of a political dictatorship that impedes them from having access to options that allow them to develop socially and economically. Subsequently, our preliminary observations allow us to understand that the Cuban migrants mainly migrate in search of better economic opportunities and individual liberties. However, “la lucha” has allowed a discourse of empowerment and will to survive all obstacles that they face living on the border.

Our paper aims to contribute to new research which emphasizes the beneficence that migrants have on host communities as opposed to the “demonization and stigmatization” that is often found in the press. In the case of Ciudad Juárez, Cuban migrants have brought diversity and a new source of life to a once-struggling downtown Juárez. Cuban migrants have contributed to the economy of downtown Ciudad Juárez, which struggled to fully recuperate after the Great Recession of 2008. The arrival of Cuban migrants in downtown Juárez represents a new sense of hope and urban diversity that is urgently needed in “el centro” de Juárez to revitalize the economy.

Lastly, this research contributes to the emergent development of the migrant Cuban community that arrived in Ciudad Juárez as a result of the migrant caravans after the implementation of the Migrant Protection Protocols. This research provides historical context at a time in which the image of the migrant has been criminalized and stereotyped around the world through the press and politicians, as is referenced by Slack (2019). The Cuban migrants merit admiration and respect by the locals, including the media which should seek to understand the historical circumstances of the Cuban society. This migration movement is the result of the political instability in Cuba since the collapse of the USSR economy in the 90’s. Therefore, The Cubans who arrive in “El Centro” de Ciudad Juárez have a new ambition to overcome barriers to achieve economic prosperity. This new population is important in the future development of “El Centro” de Juárez that has been forgotten by the Juárez governmental administration. Today, the COVID-19 vaccine represents hope for the Cuban migrants who want to continue their journey of prosperity, even if they are denied entry into the United States. Most of them are willing to live their life in Juárez, which provides increased opportunities in comparison to Cuba. As an informant optimistically recounted in Spanish, “*Después de todo lo que pasé para llegar a Juárez, nadie me saca de aquí, yo seguire luchando por mi bienestar y por ayudar a mi familia*”⁷ (quote from an interview fragment).

⁷ *Translation from interview fragment in Spanish: “After all I have been through to get to Juárez, no one is making me leave, I will keep fighting for my well-being and for my family”.

Photos 4: Summer 2019-march 2020. Cubans vendors selling “elotes” and “aguas frescas” in el centro, Ciudad Juárez



Source: the authors.

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Photos taken by Stephanie Morales and Dr. Víctor Vázquez during the fieldwork conducted in Ciudad Juárez from march 2019-december 2020.