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Jewban Diaspora Narratives on Identity, Belonging, Resilience, Privilege and Community

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Immigration, migration, and diasporas are growing areas of study for scholars of peace and conflict. Such studies address reasons for migration and displacement, the experience of emigrating, treatment of immigrants, relevant policies and more (See, for example, Toivanen & Baser, 2020; Vertovec, 2005). Cuban American Jews, or Jewbans, as they are called (and call themselves), are a unique diaspora. They reside in many places in the US, although South Florida is home to the largest group. On the large, the Jewbans are a highly successful demographic in Miami and other locations. Many factors contribute to this success and are part of Jewbans' narratives that have been passed down intergenerationally. Other factors, however, do not seem to be part of Jewbans' narratives yet may be equally relevant to their success. As much research has shown, immigrant narratives shape how subsequent generations identify, socially, economically, and politically. This in turn is connected to how and in what ways they build community.

This paper begins with a brief discussion of the Jewban diaspora, emphasizing key milestones and timelines. It focuses largely on the wave of Jewbans known as exiles and their families who were raised in South Florida. The paper then highlights themes related by one family of Jewbans, most of whom

currently live in South Florida and all of whom lived there for many years. I am a participant researcher, as the family that I interviewed are all members of my husband's immediate or extended family. Although much has been written about the Jewbans, most was authored by persons who are themselves Jewban. I am not Jewish nor Cuban. Further, this paper adds to the literature about the Jewban experience by identifying themes that emerged across three different generations related to identity, belonging, resilience, privilege, and community.

Ten members of the family were interviewed for 30-60 minutes each, some of them multiple times. This includes members who were born in Cuba and left as Castro came to power, their children who were born in the US, and their grandchildren, also born in the US. Interview transcriptions were analyzed using grounded theory to identify themes that were particularly redundant, emphatic and those that might be expected but were limited or absent. As a participant researcher, I recognize that these stories were relayed to me not just in an academic context but in a family one as well. I did not seek to fact check the narratives expressed to me, as it was the stories that were of interest. With their permission, I identify the individuals by their first names. The review of literature and literature related to each themes gives an additional layer of nuance. Several primary themes emerged and are illustrated below. Themes that were redundant and emphatic include Jewish identity, community, family/belonging, work ethic, and resilience. Themes that would be expected to be part of the family's narratives given social, political, and cultural history but that were minimal if not absent in my interviews include privilege, victimization, and idealization of pre-revolutionary Cuba. The paper concludes with recommendations for future research and implications for immigrant community building and belonging.

The Jewban Diaspora: A Brief History

According to the Merriam-Webster dictionary, a diaspora is "the movement, migration or scattering of a people away from an established or ancestral home." The term has long been associated with Jews, who have been displaced many times historically. The Jewbans are unique in that they are "a diaspora within a diaspora" (Siegel, 2012). Others call the second wave of Cuban Jewish migration outmigration, or "to leave one region or community in order to settle in another especially as part of a large-scale and continuing movement of population." According to Steinberg (2007), there are three waves of the Jewban diaspora to South Florida. The first wave began in the 1920s and lasted until about the mid-1950s. It was largely comprised of Jews from the Northeast United States due to a continued economic boom that helped develop Miami, especially the South

Beach area. The second wave began in 1959 and lasted through the mid-1960s, when approximately 5,000 Cuban Jews sought refuge in South Florida after Fidel Castro came to power. The third wave, which is still occurring today, has been taking place since the late 1970s, when many Latin American immigrants came to Miami as a result of war or economic hardship in their own countries. The focus in this paper is on the second wave and their families that were born in the US.

The second wave are referred to, and often refer to themselves, as exiles. Most are Ashkenazi Jews who trace their family heritage to Eastern Europe, largely Poland, Romania, Russia, and Belarus. A smaller group are Sephardic, whose families are traced to Spain, Morocco, and other more Central European countries. This wave is considered exiles because their genesis for leaving Cuba was the revolution that brought Fidel Castro to power and instituted a communist government. Most self-identify this way and have passed that terminology along to subsequent generations (Bettinger-Lopez, 2000). Exiles migrated to other cities but the vast majority came to South Florida due to its proximity to Cuba and its similar climate. The US government admitted 248,100 Cuban immigrants between 1959 and 1962, with some 14,000 minors admitted between December 1960 and October 1962 in what is known as Operation Pedro Pan. Things might have gotten difficult when, on January 3, 1961, the US broke diplomatic relations with Cuba, but it extended benefits to Cuban migrants in the form of visa waivers. Upon arriving to the US, Cubans could be paroled or gain refugee status, claiming they were fleeing communist oppression. The history of the US, and Miami in particular, is intertwined with Cuban history in numerous ways (Eckstein, 2022; Ferrer, 2021).

Exiles were largely White-skinned and middle or upper class. The first to leave after the revolution were military officers, government officials, landowners, and businesspersons, many of whom were associated with the Batista regime (Steinberg, N.D). This is in contrast to the third wave, which involves a different demographic, one that is browner-skinned and lower in socioeconomic status on the whole. The third wave includes very few Jews, as 90 percent, perhaps up to 96 percent, of Jews left the island during the second wave. Bettinger-Lopez (2000) found that the Cuban-Jewish community tends to view more recent Cuban emigres as different and does not engage much with the newer arrivals.

In cities like Miami, exiles set up grocery stores, shops, restaurants, and other small businesses and "created a milieu where island-born mingled, shopped, ate, drank, and 'talked Cuba.' Calle Ocho, Southwest Eighth Street, and Bergenline Avenue because the hubs of Little Havana and Union City (New Jersey), respectively. The areas maintained their Cuban flair and ethnic import, Exile-

defined, even after they were no longer majority Cuban and after the Cuba-born became enmeshed in broader city life" (Eckstein, 2009, p. 54). Miami was given the nickname of "The Southern Borscht Belt" and many joked that it had turned into a suburb of New York City. This Jewish-sounding nickname and association with New York underlined the sense of connectedness that the newcomers felt with their old homes, which contradicted the drastic change in their relocation (Moore, 1992, pp.108-9).

Description of Participants

Exile Generation

Lilia is almost 80 and left Cuba immediately after marrying Jack, who passed away in 2021. She was 16 when she left the island and he was 23.

Ester is Lilia's cousin on her mother, Consuelo's, side. She is a professor emeritus who is the only family member to have extensively studied the Jewban experience and has been to Cuba several times. She was 6 when she left the island.

Rachel S. is Ester's sister, also Lilia's cousin on her mother's side. She is a social worker and, being not yet 4 when the family left the island, has more impression of it than distinct memories.

Enrique/Henry is Jack's brother. He is ten years younger so is in his mid-1970s. He and his family left Cuba after the Bay of Pigs invasion. He was a teenager and has quite distinct memories of living in Havana and the passage to the US.

Second Generation

David, my husband. is Lilia's middle child and is 57. He was born in New York and moved with his family to Miami when he was 10. Davis is the most interested in the family history of anyone in his immediate family, likely due to the fact that he grew up hearing stories from his maternal and paternal grandmothers about their lives in Eastern Europe and then Cuba.

Lisette is Lilia's youngest child. She barely remembers their time in New York, as she was just 5 when the family moved to Miami. She admits she is not very "political" nor has she had that much interest in the family history but is proud to be Jewban.

Jeff is David and Lisette's cousin, son of Lilia's brother Leon. Born in Miami, he is one of the few who left the geographic vicinity of his family, never to return.

Gregg is Jeff's brother, another cousin of David and Lisette. He, too, was born in Miami but left as an adult and has not returned to live near the family. He maintains a significant interest in the Jewban story.

Third Generation

Rachel B. is David's only daughter. She was born in Broward County, Florida. Her parents divorced when she was just one year old, so the way she was raised differed somewhat from the others in her generation.

Dylan is Lisette's oldest son. Of this generation, he is the most knowledgeable about family history and the most interested in the Jewban experience.

Interview Themes

Jewish Identity (More Than Jewban)

Unlike other research about the South Florida Jewbans (Bettinger-Lopez, 2000; Eckstein, 2009), this family retains very little of its Cuban-ness. This is interesting, given that all the interviewees said they are proud to call themselves Jewbans, not just Jews. This theme is consistent, however, with Portes and Rumbaut (2006), who asserted that religion is the most important factor in the "development of ethnic communities and the reassertion of national cultures" (p. 304), as it can help mitigate the trauma of migration. All of the interviewees in the first two generations emphasized that most of their friends were Jewbans, as they lived near, went to school, and often worked with other Jewbans, not Cubans nor necessarily American Jews.

The only things I was told about the Cuban heritage that they integrate today is Spanish-speaking (for all, at least minimally) and in their food traditions. Even noting the passing down of Spanish, all the interviewees emphasized that what they learned includes hybrids of Spanish and Yiddish. I recall laughing when we were discussing some politician Lilia did not like and someone asked why. She responded "Porque un putz." A Spanish-Yiddish compilation meaning He's an idiot, roughly. Many noted that on Jewish holidays the family has traditional Jewish food but usually with a Cuban flair, like brisket with beans and rice. They occasionally go to Cuban restaurants or order Cuban food. But none visit the many Cuban historical sites in South Florida. No one celebrates important dates in Cuban history, for example, Jose Marti's birth date.

Only one of the individuals I interviewed really embraced being Jewban. Ester is an exile who moved with her family when she was a child. Today she is a

retired college professor who has been to Cuba several times and has written extensively about the Jewban experience. She also noted that because of her background, she is most comfortable in mixed race and mixed religious groups. Others did not express that and seem to largely be connected to fellow Jewbans or, for the later generation, American Jews.

Community

Even in Cuba, the Jewbans mostly kept to themselves, as these interviewees described. This is consistent with Levine (2010), who reported that Cuban Jews coming to maturity between 1945 and 1959 (this included my mother-in-law and now deceased father-in-law), "maintained strong ties to their Jewish roots; they socialized within Jewish groups and selected marriage partners from within their religious community. Their immigrant parents and grandparents had found things much more arduous" (Levine, 2010, p. 7). In South Florida, Jeff and Gregg noted that their mother, an exile, still maintains friendships with other exiles. Lilia and Enrique are still connected to classmates with whom they went to school in Cuba, some in South Florida and others in different locations. Likewise, David described growing up with family friends who were virtually all Jewbans in the neighborhood and in their Hebrew school. It seems, then, that the exiles and their progeny maintained strong community ties with other Jewbans. Lisette, Jeff, and Gregg said the same of their youth, although Jeff and Gregg, having moved away from South Florida, are less connected to the Jewban community today.

The third generation appears not to have developed the same Jewban community. Having studied in Wisconsin and Colorado, Dylan noted that it was hard for people to understand what Jewbans are, so he mostly expressed himself as Jewish. He said even in South Florida he does not interact much with Cubans who were not Jewish. Similarly, Rachel B has a large circle of friends, most of whom are Jewish but none are Jewban or Cuban. This is consistent with Bettinger-Lopez's (2000) findings in that Jewbans discussed the difficulty in keeping the vibrant community across the generations, given the social, political, and economic changes in South Florida at the same time period.

Family

Every one of the people interviewed emphasized that they were taught, and that they taught their own kids, the importance of family. While this is not unique to Jewbans, the degree to which the Jewbans have stayed in geographic proximity is remarkable. Those who grew up in Cuba recall that their families all lived in close proximity there and family members also worked together. It was family that helped one another migrate, first to Cuba and then to the US. Enrique recalls that

his father, David Bekerman, emigrated from Warsaw, Poland in the 1920s as a young man. He worked at various hobs and married his mother Eva before moving Enrique's grandmother and aunts to Cuba as well, before the outbreak of World War II. Family members started business together on the island and again in the US. Their children recall being told about this, and growing up in the US, only a few of the members of the family live outside of a 30-minute radius of their immediate family. Even blended families worked together, with many starting businesses together. Enrique, who came to the US just after the Bay of Pigs invasion, described the closeness of his family, even though his brother Jack was ten years older than him and his sister, Sarita, was 17 years older. Enrique described tagging along with his brother and his friends in Havana, sharing a room with him, and having similar interests in boxing and baseball. Further, he notes that Jack would take his father to and from the family factory and do the same with his paternal grandmother, as they all worked together. She was frail and could not do much but watch the people go by. He also recalled Jack carrying her, Superman-style, up and down steep stairs at her apartment. Another story was about Jack's defense of his family. Enrique explained, "One time when we still lived in Old Havana when there was a tumult in the store. I later found out that my brother had punched a guy on the street for calling our father a "baldy bean." Everyone was very proud of Ishe (note: one of many nicknames given to Jack), at the time, except my mom." Jack had taken some courses in civil engineering and architecture at the University of Havana when it was not closed due to student activism. His mother begged him to go to the states so he could continue his studies but he did not want to leave his mother alone. Enrique also described his mother Eva's large extended family and the effort she went to in order to stay in contact with some who ended up in Brazil, Venezuela and elsewhere. He recalls her writing letters, sending pictures, and inviting them to stay if they were in Cuba.

In the US, those who "left" the area faced the wrath of many of their family members. Ester and Rachel S., who were children when they arrived in South Florida, said that when they decided to leave Miami to go to college in Boston, their father would not speak to them for years.

Ester and Rachel also expressed that their father was always "difficult" and that gossip and talking about others was the norm in Cuba and once they arrived in the US. There was great pressure to be at family affairs despite the tensions. Jeff and Gregg, born to a very successful exile, Leon (Lilia's brother), had a strained relationship with him, as he was also described as "difficult." Money was a significant source of family tension, according to Ester, who was very vehement about that. She expressed that her mother was the favorite of their grandmother, more-so than her grandmother's own daughter, Consuelo, because she was shy and

meek and she married into the family, bringing with her significant dowry money. At the time of her wedding in 1951, her dowry was $10,000, which would be equivalent to $125,000 today.

Although it is not always expressed in this way, the emphasis on family also included family financial and labor support to make their businesses successful. The story detailed above highlights this point, as that dowry money was used by the Ester and Rachel's father and her mother's brothers to start a hardware business that became very successful in Cuba. Although I have been told since I became part of the family how many started businesses together and/or worked together, the part that was not often expressed was that the capital to start these businesses was also typically provided by a family member. In New York, Lilia's parents Consuelo and Isaac established a jewelry business, invited Jack and Lilia to work in it, and even brought Jack's mother Eva, who had immigrated to Miami, to work in the business. The business then moved to South Florida, and at one point Lilia, Jack, both grandmothers, and David and his brother Perry and his wife worked in the business, with Enrique occasionally helping and other grandchildren assisting in later years. Although the business is now mail-order only, at the time they had several storefronts and even built a playroom in one of them in which the grandmothers could watch their grandkids while the other adults worked. Both Rachel and Dylan recall playing there. This I see as connected to several of the other themes and will be discussed in greater detail later.

Work Ethic

As is recalled in historical records, these respondents discussed that one of the main reasons for their success is their work ethic. Lilia, Enrique, Rachel S., and Ester noted that their family in Eastern Europe did not have many employment options due to discrimination against Jews, so they were forced to become entrepreneurial. Similarly, when the Eastern European Jews arrived in Cuba there were few options available to them. Most began as peddlers (see Bettinger-Lopez, 2000; Levine, 2010), as did the members of this family. This meant working hard, all the time. Yet they did just that, and as Levine (2010) explained, the work ethic of all the immigrants to Cuba at the time (not just the Jews) made them stand apart from native Cubans, who had a more relaxed attitude. Indeed, all four exiles recalled that their families started as peddlers in Cuba, and all the second and third generation interviewees were familiar with this narrative. When my Jack passed away in August of 2021, the family met with the Rabbi who would be performing the service. He asked what one thing really stood out to everyone about Jack, and his three children all simultaneously stated, "He was always working." His own father, David, was not well-liked by the extended family because he struggled with

various health ailments and did not do well in the Cuban heat, according to Enrique. Lilia tells it a bit differently, saying that he did not work hard, instead relying on his wife, Eva, to largely run their business, Modas Ethel, which eventually became quite successful. All four exiles reported that their mothers also worked, usually within family businesses. When they settled in Miami in 1962, Enrique recalls that his mother finally found work in a shoe factory in Hialeah. She had to get up at 4 am in order to make it to work by 7 am. She did that for two years, while he, as a high school senior, worked 30 hours per week at a shoe store.

Further, all of the exiles and their children largely expressed that, while education was important, work was more-so. Jeff and Gregg, children of exile parents, did go to college but said they believed their parents would not have cared if they did not and that they only did because they were in school with students of a certain social class in which higher education was expected. Yet all of the interviewees of the second and third generation did go to college and all have or are going free of any debt. This is due to their hard work but also to the family's economic success that has allowed them to pay for all or part of their kids' higher education without the need for loans.

More important than education in general was the passing along of their Jewish heritage via Hebrew School and other means. All of the generation who grew up here attended Hebrew School as did their kids. Almost all studied at some point in Israel through Birthright or another program. This is consistent with what Levine (2010) wrote: "In the United States, immigrants learned to discard their foreign mannerisms and to seek Americanization while at the same time preserving and even strengthening their identity as Jews within a pluralistic society. Cuban Ashkenazim not only clung to their Yiddish culture when they arrived but worked communally to strengthen it, teaching Yiddish to children, supporting Yiddish theater and newspapers, and maintaining contact with Yiddish-speaking movements in the United States and Europe" (Levine, 2010, p. 290).

Resilience

A large part of the family narrative, and that of many Jewbans according to previous research (see Bettinger-Lopez, 2000; Behar, 2007; Levine, 2010), emphasizes the importance of resilience. Part of the family's success was definitely due to being entrepreneurial and taking risks, often during rough times. Ester expressed that "capitalism comes easily to Jews, especially those like her family with tight family connections." Even those with strained family relationships acknowledged that their parents or other relatives thrived in large part due to the willingness to try different businesses and bounce back if they failed. None of the

interviewees attributed this quality to their Cuban roots, however. Rather, all defined it as part of being Jewish, noting how the Jews have always been a "wandering" people and who, despite tremendous antisemitism and persecution, have tenacity that allows them to persevere. Similarly, one Miami Jewban who was interviewed by Bettinger-Lopez (2000) expressed that "I would say there is a difference between the Jewish people and the rest of the world. We are more able to detach ourselves from where we are and move on…I mean, we are Cubans, but we were able to detach ourselves, and now we're here. And if we have to move from the States someplace else, we will do it [unlike Gentile Cubans]" (p. 16).

The exiles with whom I spoke talked about the stories they learned from their parents, grandparents and other relatives about how difficult things were in Eastern Europe. They provided rich stories about the challenges these emigres faced in Cuba, adapting to a new climate, a new language, and a new culture, and starting out with nearly nothing. Many had to change their names. Lilia's mother became Consuelo in Cuba. Enrique's mother was born Eta Lederman Kusherman but became known as Eva. This trend continued in the US, where Isaac became Jack and Enrique is often referred to as Henry. While there were Jews in Cuba prior, more were Sephardic so the Ashkenazi emigres had to virtually forge their own synagogues and community organizations. As noted, most of the men became peddlers, as there was little else for them to do given the language barrier and their lack of education prior to arrival on the island. Yet, within a fairly short time, most became middle class or even more affluent, owning or managing a variety of businesses ranging from garments to shoes, rope to sugar.

Then came the revolution. So, the wandering Jews wandered once more, again leaving with little and headed to a country where they had to learn a new language and culture and in some cases, navigate a very different climate. My husband's aunt on his father's side, Sarita, had previously left Cuba and was living with her husband in Kansas City. Lilia was 16 when Castro took over and the family, hearing rumors about the government sending children and teens to labor camps, were very concerned for her and her brother's safety. At the time she had started dating Jack, who was 7 years older, and the two were pretty serious. When Lilia's parents said they wanted to send her to the US, Jack insisted that they get married and he go with her. So. they did, never to set foot in Cuba again. They moved to Kansas City and Jack worked with his sister Sarita's husband selling insurance, but it was not for him. At that time his brother-in-law, Barney, was very "Americanized" and convinced Jack to go by that, rather than his birth name. Kansas City was a far cry from the tropical paradise of Cuba. After that they moved to Los Angeles where another relative owned a liquor store at which Jack worked, but Lilia's parents, Consuelo, and Isaac, were unhappy about their living situation

and, having themselves emigrated to New York, had the couple and their new baby, David's brother Perry, move to New York. With Lilia's dad Isaac, they established a successful jewelry store, then several others, enduring another change of location and lifestyle.

Privilege

The Jewbans I have met and those I interviewed for this research are some of the warmest, most welcoming people. Using the word privilege, then, may sound demeaning. I do not mean it that way, but instead am referring to the work of several scholars, most notably Eckstein (2009, 2022). Her book *Cuban Privilege* generated great controversy, especially in the setting of Miami's exile community, but she used historical data to show that the Cuban exiles received the most generous federal welfare programs in US history. While not an exhaustive recounting of these privileges, this segment includes some that were likely beneficial to these families and were not noted. The stories emphasized family and working hard to make it, but not really the many help services that were available through nongovernmental organizations in addition to federal programs. Starting with President Eisenhower and through eleven different presidencies, policies have been put in place that make it easier for Cubans and their families to come to the US, to obtain legal permanent residency status, to become naturalized citizens, and to bring over family members. For some time, Cubans were even privileged at the expense of other immigrants, as they received essentially first dips among quotas set for Western Hemisphere immigrants. Congress even gave Cubans their own quota, independent from other immigrants in the region, via an amendment to the Immigration and Nationality Act in 1976. Further, until recent times, even Cuban immigrants who were unauthorized were accepted and given many of the same privileges. This is in stark contrast to other immigrant groups, for example, Haitians, who were largely detained and deported if they attempted to enter the US unauthorized. Additionally, Cuban immigrants were able to receive significant public benefits, including food assistance, job training, language instruction, help finding housing and more. As Eckstein (2022) noted, many Cuban immigrants in the first post-revolution wave were transported to the US at taxpayer expense, through Freedom Flights. Nearly a third of a million Cubans, "most of whose lives were not at risk," were transported to the US in this way during the Kennedy, Johnson, and Nixon administrations (Eckstein, 2022). Not only did this type of assistance not come up in the interviews, saving Ester, no one even knew about the many immigration and federal aid advantages the exiles, and by extension their families, had in developing successful lives in the US.

In previous research, exiles who came to Miami largely reported an unsympathetic and unhelpful community, although there is some discrepancy in the data. Many Cuban Jews reported to Bettinger-Lopez (2000) that the Jewish community in Miami was not very welcoming to them when they arrived by the thousands in 1959 and the early 1960s. Reportedly they provided no financial aid or moral support. Rabbi Mayer Abramowitz explained that American Jews thought the Cuban Jewish emigres were wealthy and not in need of help. Even the Greater Miami Jewish Federation did not immediately help, some reported, so Cuban Jews established their own synagogues and groups. Also, American Jews were aware of federal support being offered so did not feel it necessary to add to that. Abramowitz also said that the American Ashkenazi Jews at the time held anti-Latin sentiments and in particular anti-Castro and anti-Cuban ideologies. As Siegel (2012) wrote, "the general anti-Cuban sentiment in Miami at the time paralleled (and perhaps affected) the Jewish community. Ironically, the discrimination suffered by Cubans in the 1960s is similar to the antisemitism suffered by the Jews in the 1920s, including signs posted in buildings saying, "No Pets, No Kids, No Cubans" (Siegel, 2012). Cuban Jews who emigrated to other parts of the country, especially New York, reported better experiences.

Yet others paint a rosier picture of the reception of Jewbans in Miami. Levine (2010) reported that the Greater Miami Jewish Federation (GMJF) set up a reception center at the airport and were joined by other welfare agencies. Help was also provided by the Hebrew Immigrant Aid Society (HIAS) as well as the National Council of Jewish Women (NCJW). Garcia (1996) explained that many of Miami's poor, working class people resented the Cuban migrants for the various supports they received. Local media outlets expressed the position that the Cuban influx was a burden and a drain on resources. In contrast, national media as well as government and religious leaders treated the Cuban migrants as heroic refugees (Bettinger-Lopez, 2000). In Miami, the only established congregation that sought to welcome the Ashkenazi from Cuba was the Conservative Temple Menorah on Miami Beach. Only two of the interviewees arrived directly in Miami after leaving Cuba and both were children, so they do not recall the reception they received or that their parents received. Both admitted in retrospective that they are pretty certain their father received both family and other kinds of assistance in starting a business when he arrived.

Victimization

The family narrative tends to stress hardship. Fairly so. No one in this family used the word "victim," but many talked about being refugees from first

antisemitism and then from communism, and thus the stories emphasize being from a victimized status. Rok (Ester), a little girl when her family left Cuba after the revolution explained, "In our family psyche, leaving and losing Cuba was unremarkable in the many lifetimes of diaspora, moving like Gypsies wherever we might not be punished for being ourselves. On the rare occasions in my childhood when I mentioned to my family my profound sense of loss, of intense curiosity and deep longing for Cuba, they would inevitably reply: you don't have any idea how easy you had it as an immigrant, compared to what we endured in leaving Russia and Poland" (Rok, 1995, pp. 90-91). Yet, historical documents and some of the family members who were more students of history note that it was not really victimization that prompted the leaving of Cuba. It was economic. That is not in any way a bad reason, but it is interesting that it does not fully capture the actual situation. Even in Eastern Europe, where antisemitism was a bigger issue, the Ashkenazi largely left for economic opportunity.

This is perhaps in significant part due to the way that US officials talked about, and as noted above, privileged, Cuban exiles. They were accepted as refugees despite legislation that explicitly said they did not qualify. The second generation and third generation who grew up in the US all used the word refugee to describe their grandparents and never questioned that it was not necessarily the most accurate term. Stories of difficulties leaving the island were abundant, again, despite evidence that in 1959 and the early 1960s, it was generally easy for Cubans to immigrate to the US. The privileges afforded to Cubans had a positive payoff, as Cubans thrived in places like Miami and have helped turn it into a dynamic city. Cubans in Miami, especially the earlier waves, hold many high-income jobs and influential positions (Eckstein, 2022).

Idealized Cuba of Old

The island seems to stand as a static one amongst these exiles and their families. The Jewban exiles I interviewed all discussed the beauty of pre-revolutionary Cuba and noted the lack of discrimination (although this is not entirely accurate, if one reviews scholarly writing). Eckstein (2009) found a similar theme.

> In their new land, Exiles continued to filter their homeland memories through shared, pre-revolution lenses. This was especially true of adult emigres, who were old enough when they left to have interpreted life for themselves. The wealthiest and most politicized Exiles tended to set the tone and norms for them all. They remained fiercely anti-Castro even though

> their conception of the country under Castro became mainly a construct of their imagination, given how little of the revolution they had personally experienced. They imagined their homeland through rose-colored, pre-revolution lenses that blinded them to injustices which had prevailed in their midst. The little they experienced in Cuba under Castro they interpreted critically, with political spin, Many claimed to have suffered for their political convictions partly because they considered victimization under Castro a badge of honor (p. 22).

Castro was the big evil, and not only did he take away their livelihoods he took away their beautiful existence. At least, that is the story they have passed down to their families. For instance, when asked what interest, if any, his family seemed to have in Cuba post-revolution, Gregg responded "none. Castro=bad. Cuba=bad. Communist=bad. That's what we were taught." This is similar to previous research. The myths about Cuba are even stronger among the younger generations, Bettinger-Lopez (2000) found, because they lack direct knowledge or experience "so they know only the most important—'legendary'—aspects of Jewish life in Cuba, which translate into much of their understanding of what life in Cuba was like for their parents, as well as what Judaism was in Cuba" (p. 158).

Only Enrique had anything much to say about the actual experience of leaving Cuba for the US. Lilia always says she was "just a little girl" (16) and that they landed at Ellis Island and that's about it. Enrique recalls that his father had a heart attack the day they were supposed to leave Cuba. His family left Cuba on April 30, 1961. They had previously stood in line to obtain tourist visas based on his father's disability, claiming to need to see specialists in the US. They received permits to leave Cuba temporarily and were originally scheduled to leave on April 17, the day of the botched Bay of Pigs invasion, which closed down the airports. In the climate on the island at the time, returning home was scary because you could be seen as counter-revolutionary agitators. The family then had to wait several more weeks to get new airline reservations and his mother's travel visa was close to expiration. With the help of friends, they got new airline tickets for April 27. They were waiting at the gate when they heard an announcement about new regulations prohibiting foreign currency from leaving the country. This was a challenge, as the Cuban peso was not well accepted internationally. Passengers were called at the gate to declare their possessions. He, his mother, and his father each had $3 in US dimes, and when Enrique and his father were called, they declared their possessions and placed the dimes on the table. When Eva's turn came, she tried to plead with the agents, explaining their need for the money. He thought she meant what Enrique and David had declared, so said "lady, just sit down." She interpreted that to mean

she did not need to declare her own $3. They then began loading the airplane. David and Enrique got on, but when Eva was set to load, she was asked to open her purse and they found the money. She was not allowed on the plane, and David and Enrique had to disembark. Their passports were suspended, they were strip-searched by Cuba's secret police, the G-2, and their baggage was confiscated. A trial date was to be set. David had what Enrique described as a "mild heart attack" upon hearing the news, and the family stayed at the airport hotel so a doctor could check him out. They were only able to get through it with the help of Lilia's parents, Isaac, and Consuelo, who had a contact who intervened on their behalf. Their trial for having "contraband" was suspended and their passports returned. Had they not made it out on April 30, Eva's visa would have expired.

One thing I repeatedly hear from Lilia is that there was no racism in Cuba. Again, reality paints a slightly different picture. The rosy account of Cuba's lack of racism was likely due to the fact that the constitution prohibits it, but also the fact that the Jews were largely a tightknit community who mostly interacted with other Jews. Ester, who has traveled and studied Cuba explained that there was racism in Cuba in terms of the types of work people had and their financial situation, but not the firm residential segregation that was and still remains in the US. People tended to live in mixed race communities but had their own schools, places of worship, and businesses based on race. At the time the exiles came to the US deep racism was (and remains) structurally a part of the US. Separate water fountains and other facilities were not a part of Cuban life but were so in the States. This part of the story has been passed down, as the exiles recall being surprised and appalled at seeing the stark racial separation in the US and told their children and grandchildren how "opposite" this was from Cuba. Lilia was particularly surprised about the racial segregation she and Jack saw when they first moved to Kansas City.

Further, other things were a little less perfect in pre-revolutionary Cuba than the somewhat affluent Jewbans acknowledge, perhaps of which they were unaware. Working class people struggled to pay rent, have food, and educate their children. The revolution promised something entirely different to them, although obviously to this day it did not provide. Only Ester mentioned that socialism tends to improve the lives of some people, especially women. Pre-Castro the island was awash with mobsters and prostitution, which Castro pledged to (and by most accounts, did) reduce. It was the glitz and glamour that is so fondly remembered by many exiles and all that were interviewed. Not that these family members were mob-involved or endorsed prostitution, but they did enjoy the luxuries of the casinos and the "Vegas" culture without questioning its toll on working class people. As Levine (2010) noted, the Cuban Jews largely accepted the graft on the island, as it was

generally good for business. As Risech (1995) wrote, "The fossilized rhetoric of *Anorada Cuba*, the lament for a pre-Castro Cuba that never really existed, a mythical Cuba where everyone had wealth, health, and high culture, where there was no racism, was the constant refrain at the dinner table. Always in counterpoint was the theme of the communist evil which had despoiled our island paradise." (p. 62).

Additionally, many in the second and third generations believe that the Jews were oppressed in Cuba and that this was part of the reason why they left. For instance, Rachel B. and Dylan both said they thought their grandparents left Cuba mostly because of religious intolerance. Many historical accounts state otherwise, in particular under Castro. There were documented times of antisemitism (see Levine, 2010) that surely Lilia's grandparents would have experienced when they emigrated from Poland in the 1930s, yet that story was not shared by anyone I interviewed. Again, the exiles I interviewed had passed along the narrative that things were perfect pre-Castro and horrible thereafter. According to Levine (2010), Castro never discriminated purposely against Jews, and the Jews who remained in Cuba were largely treated with solicitude. Jewish holidays and events received coverage in Havana newspapers and on TV and radio, and Castro even declared a three-day mourning period in late-April 1963 after the death of Israeli president Yitzhak Ben-Zvi.

Interestingly, only Ester expressed any real interest in the actual status of Cubans today, who have a stronger case for victimization than the exiles and their progeny. Consistent with what Bettinger-Lopez (2000) found, most of these interviewees admitted they pay very little attention to what is happening on the island outside of what makes the headlines. When asked about the controversy around the fate of Elian Gonzalez in 1999, the young Cuban boy rescued after his mother died trying to escape to the US, again all but Ester expressed that the oppression was so bad in Cuba that the boy should have been required to stay with extended family instead of with his dad in Cuba, again reaffirming this notion of Cuba as a place of victimization. That perspective seemingly stands in stark contrast to their emphasis on the importance of family.

Conclusion

The Jewbans remain a fascinating group for many reasons, but in particular for experiencing double-diaspora and yet surviving and even thriving, for the most part. This research has uncovered some of the reasons for their success, and in doing so, can help better understanding of issues faced by other diasporic people as well as factors contributing to their resiliency and success. This research has also

identified narratives that have been passed down about identity, community and belonging as well as some that perhaps later generations should become more aware, for instance, immigration privilege given to Cubans and the reality of Cuban pre-revolution and now. For Jewbans and for scholars of Cuban Studies and similar fields, perhaps this research indicates a need to broaden the understanding of historical, social, and political trends and their impact. How people identify shapes how they build and maintain community and belonging within any given family and space, and this research has shown that narratives provide a basis for identity among these Jewbans.

Subsequent research, currently in progress, should continue to uncover what narratives get passed along multiple generations of Jewbans. Further, comparing the narratives discussed herein from exile Jewbans to those of the smaller group of Jewbans who left Cuba in later waves would be a useful and interesting examination of identity, community and belonging. Further, comparing the experience of exiles with those who were part of the Pedro Pan exodus of children sent to the US can highlight different dimensions of the diaspora. This research is also under way. As was noted, researchers who are differently positioned (such as I am, as non-Jewish and American-born) can give perspective on immigrant communities. All of these topics are of great interest to peace and conflict studies scholars and educators who seek to understand diasporas and their social, political, and cultural importance.

Research that identifies the positive contributions of immigrants is especially important today, given the anti-immigrant rhetoric that has been incendiary during and after the Trump presidency. Immigrants have been depicted as criminals who threaten Americans' safety, as freeloaders who soak American resources, and as overall threats to the health of the US economy. Of course, all of these myths have been repeatedly debunked, but providing positive counternarratives about the successes of immigrants, and what Elo, Taube and Volovelsky (2013) call "diaspora entrepreneurs," can contribute to painting a more accurate picture of those who migrate to the US (see for example Finley & Esposito, 2020).

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