"Derecho de Piso": Access to Home in the Path Towards the Uruguayan Citizenship for

Cuban Migrants

An Intersectional and Ethnographic Study on the Shifting Limits of Time, Space, and Norms

in the Creation of the Home

A SENIOR CAPSTONE PROJECT

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By

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Abstract

Through this research project, I explore the complex relationship between the governmental and societal norms of a perceived homogenous and liberal Uruguayan society and the new realities of the incoming Cuban migration. Through eleven months of field work and analysis of historical and government documentation, I examine how the norms that play a role in the construction of the home (governmental, gender, and cultural norms regarding space and time) tend to exclude the new realities of the Cuban population. Uruguay is a country whose nation-state formed from European ideals of cosmopolitan cities; we make little acknowledgment of slavery or past non-white communities in the country, and in general, we continuously attempt to exclude ourselves from Latin America as a whole or any community asociated with non-whiteness. During the last six years, incoming migration from Latin American countries such as Cuba has challenged the perceived –but false– "homogeneity" of the society and revealed deeper historical hierarchies of class, race, and ethnicity entrenched in the bureaucratic sector and city planning. Through this paper, I argue that these norms were created for the idealized "homogeneous" Uruguayan population, and now ignore or exclude also the realities of the incoming immigrant population, resulting in unregulated and poor housing opportunities that reinforce the marginalization of this community.

On my honor, I have neither given, nor received, any unauthorized aid on this project. Honor Code Upheld.

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Dedications and Acknowledgments

Thank you to my family and friends who witnessed and walked with me this path through my first ethnographic work.

Thank you to Leonardo Fossati, who inspired and taught me to advocate and work for housing rights in Uruguay.

Thank you to Sarah Hautzinger, for being an amazing tutor and supervisor.

Thank you to Mariela, and the many other women who shared their stories with me.

Introduction

"They are taking over our basketball court now," said a close friend to me while we were passing one of the public basketball courts in our neighborhood. He was referring to a group of teenagers from the Dominican Republic and Cuba that were playing basketball three blocks from our homes, and he continued explaining how "they" are permanently occupying public spaces, such as parks, or in this case, the courts. At that moment, I had been living outside of Uruguay for almost five years, but I had heard and read about the increasing new wave of migration from other Latin American countries. Interested in the topic, I returned to do fieldwork on youth migrants and public spaces. I soon became aware that this use of public spaces was just one of the consequences of a bigger problem: scarce access to decent housing. I have lived in Aguada, a neighborhood in Central Montevideo, my entire life; today it is the third neighborhood with the highest number of migrants and the highest number of complaints from nationals towards migrants. As a migrant myself, it became of interest to study the struggle for housing on the path towards citizenship in a country prized globally for its liberalism. Through this research project, I explore the complex relationship between the liberal perspective of policies and the social norms of a perceived homogenous Uruguayan society, and the new realities of the incoming Cuban migration. I argue that the discrepancy between both results in unregulated and poor housing opportunities for Cuban migrants that reinforce the marginalization of this community through their living spaces and integration.

Uruguay is a country globally known for its open border policies and its recent legalization of abortion, marihuana, and gay marriage. It is an utopia country for some, with good football, European architecture, and a very stable democracy that led to fifteen years of a left-wing government. Its civil society prizes the culture of protest and of political participation while pretending to live in a post-racial society due to the supposed hegemonic population. Why are these new waves of racialized migration testing the civilians and the

state for their tradition of social liberalism? The scene for this work is an unusual one; in March 2020, we had a change of government that brought Luis Lacalle Pou to power and ended 15 years of left-wing presidency, and a month prior to my arrival we had the first cases of COVID in the country. During these eleven months of fieldwork and continuous research, this work was able to capture a singular and fascinating time of fast global and local changes that affected all levels of society and is displayed in governmental policies as well as fieldwork material. By studying the conflict between liberal policies, a very confused local population, and the increasing struggles of a vulnerable migrant community, it all seemed to converge with a great deal of tension into one reality: housing. Through this work, I aim to study the origin of the struggles of housing accessibility for the recent migrant community mostly of Cuban origin. After introducing the historical and contextual background of my fieldwork and case studies, I view my research through three frameworks: the norms of the state, gender and intersectionality, and spatiality and temporality in the creation of a home for the migrant. I argue that these three areas of analysis are united by the social, cultural, and state norms that were created for the normative Uruguayan citizen and now ignore and exclude the new realities of the incoming migrant population.
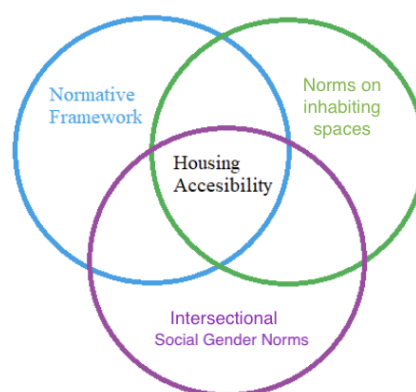
The population of Uruguay has been shaped and formed by the movement of people through history. Similarly to how the author Roxanne Dunbar-Ortiz expressed in her article "This is no 'Nation of Immigrants'" in relation to the United States, Uruguay is not a country

of immigrants but one defined by colonization and settlers, whose native population, the Charrúas, has been largely exterminated (2020). The few native survivors mixed with the white settler population, coming mostly from Spain and Italy by the end of the 19th and the beginning of the 20th century. More than 600.000 Europeans arrived during this period of time, while migration from Brazil to Uruguay was composed mostly of the black Brazilian population ranning away from the still ongoing slavery system at the time.

After 1950 Uruguay had a population of 2.2 million, which grew to 3.4 million in 2015. After 1950, emigration started to exceed inmigration, and it continued to be responsible for population growth due to the country's struggle with population loss (Calvo and Mieres 2007; MIDES 2017). By 2010, the situation started to reverse, mostly due to nationals coming back from European countries (figure 2; Koohan and Nathan 2011). Around this time, incipient immigration from other Latin American countries besides Argentina and Brazil increased, reaching almost 15% of immigrants born abroad by 2014 (MIDES 2017).

Within the last six years, we had one of the biggest waves of immigration and refugee after the 20th century, which promoted new social relations formations (Figures 2 and 3). Until 2015, the incoming migrant people from Latin American countries besides Argentina and Brazil were largely Peruvian or from the Dominican Republic, but recently populations from Cuba and Venezuela were the most represented (Urwicz 2019). Cubans migrated to new destinations in the South due to the change of border policies in the United States under Trump's presidency, and other migrants saw opportunities for permanent or bridge destinations in the southern cone (O'toole 2019). Uruguay became a prominent option for migrants of the region due to a relatively strong and stable economy and political system and its friendly policies towards migrants.
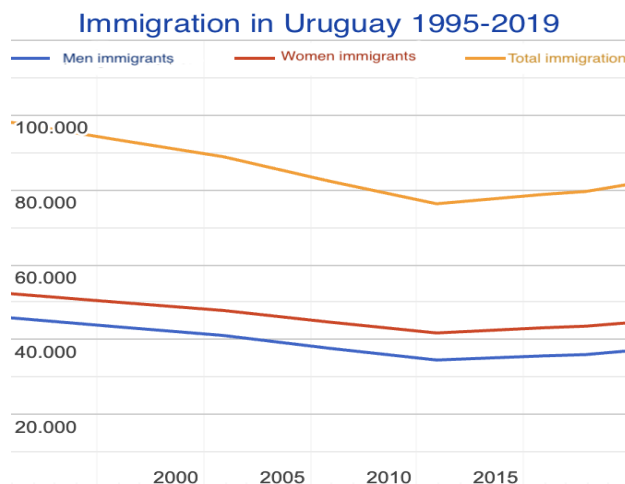
Figure 2. Total Inmigration by genders 1995-2019 (Datosmacro. 2019, February)
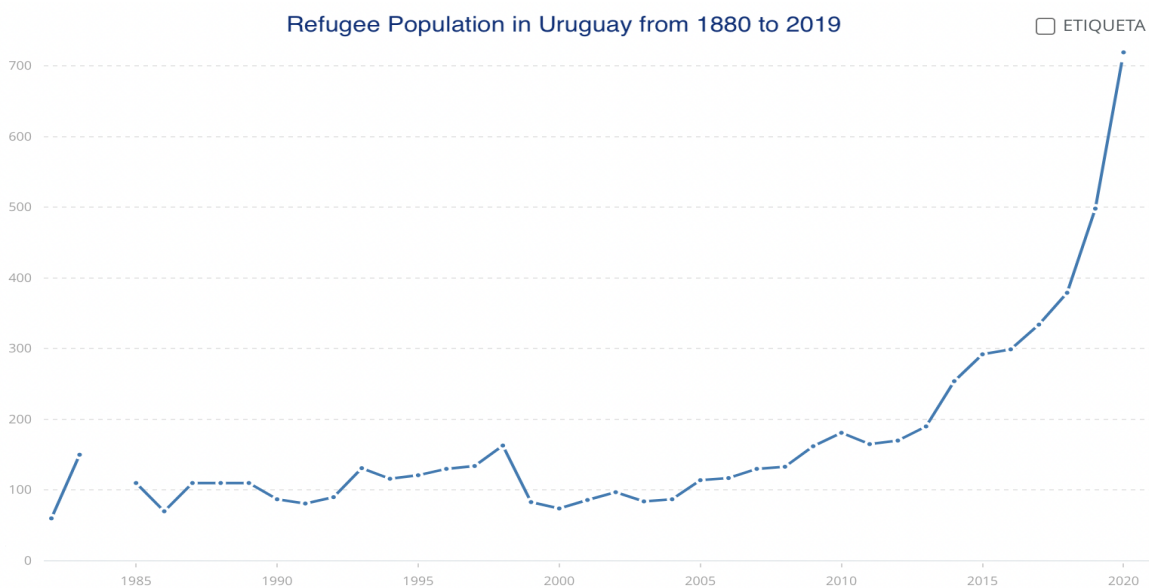
Figure 3. Refugee population in Uruguay from 1880 to 2019. (Datosmacro 2019)

These new migration waves and paths created from other Latin American countries to Uruguay are part of a global phenomenon which breaks some of the myths about global migration. As explained by Awad and Natarajan in their essay "Migration Myths and the Global South," it is often assumed that the majority of migration waves happen from South to North. Nevertheless, as stated by the United Nations International Migration Report, from

2000 to 2017 the number of international migrants residing in the South increased from 40% to 43%, while this percentage decreased equally in the North (2019). Adding to this, in 2017 38% of international migration was from South to South countries, 35% from South to North, 20% from North to North and 6% from North to South. In Latin America alone, 60% of the migrant population headed to other countries in the region (Awad and Natarajan 2018). Uruguay was one of the many Latin American countries that experienced this increase in regional mobility.

Before delving further, it is critical to understand the concept of the migrant and how I use it in this work. There is no general or international definition of *migrant*, and there is still a constant debate about who is defined as such. The International Organization for Migration defines migrant as "*An umbrella term,…, reflecting the common lay understanding of a person who moves away from his or her place of usual residence, whether within a country or across an international border, temporarily or permanently, and for a variety of reasons.*" My intentional use of migrants in this work follows previous anthropological work done in this area which shows how a big part of the immigrant population chooses Uruguay as a bridge destination to the United States of America or other regional countries, and their lives include a more constant crossing of borders and mix between what is defined as immigrant and emigrant(Uriarte 2015). The use of "migrating person" is intentional to try to not define the person as a condition of the self. One is a person, and then is all the other conditions that define our identity: race, gender, place of growth, etc.

Another key way of understanding the study of migration is through the conceptual framework of Abdemalek Sayad, who defined migration as the experience of the migrating person as a whole. In this way, the sociologist and assistant of Bourdieu understood that when we talk about a migrant as an object of study, we need to use a methodology that includes all conditions of the life of the migrant. These conditions were mostly based on the experiences

as an immigrant as well as the conditions that produced them as emigrants (Sayad 1996). Adapting this framework, I attempt to define the person as a *migrating person,* to use my language as I attempt to use my work: to capture the holistic experience of the migrant. Adding to this line of work, I aim to analyze the circumstances, conditions, and parts of the different realities of migration in the stories presented here.

Methodology

The methodology used for the realization of this research capstone project consists of four main parts:

In the first place, I have done extensive fieldwork through the only nonprofit organization working with migrants in Uruguay, called Idas y Vueltas, and within my neighborhood's community. At Idas y Vueltas I worked for nine months during 2020 and came back for two months in 2021. Is important to acknowledge that this research has happened during 11 months of COVID pandemic, and Idas y Vueltas had reduced its in-person activity and cut open-office hours. Visits to *pensiones* (boarding houses) were limited to urgent cases of eviction, and limited people could sign-up for in-person visits. The spectrum of cases worked with within "normal" times would have been wider. Nevertheless, this research heightens the understanding of the reality of the migrant population during these specific times and into the work of the civil society to confront uncertainty.

I came to this organization through a professor responsible for research in the area at the public university in Montevideo, and also at Idas y Vueltas. I started as a volunteer in the soup kitchen that opened due to COVID-19, and after a couple of weeks I was invited by Leonardo Fossatti, an anthropologist and recurrent figure in this work, to join the housing sector as the first point of reference of this. This allowed me to create new connections to the Cuban community in more vulnerable circumstances and to a big group of anthropologists, lawyers, and political activists working in migration. By the time of my arrival at Idas y

Vueltas, the majority of the migrants were coming from Cuba due to the increase in this specific wave. Within my neighborhood community, I was able to deepen my relationship with Cubans besides Idas y Vueltas. Both of these circumstances allowed me to focus on the Cuban population in particular for this project. Through this work, I was able to document the most challenged segments of the Cuban migrant population for accessing housing, and the ways in which they try to address it. This is reflected in the main case study presented -Mariela and the shorter stories of Yeseyki and Laura. Adding to this, I was able to document the work done by members of the organization -some of whom are migrants- at the civil and state level to address some of the issues presented while trying to get answers from government offices.

Secondly, the research consists of different interview methods, such as direct interviews and in-depth interviews. I did these interviews four times with those I was the closest to and with whom I share the longest work. This information was used for analysis mostly of detailed cases and I informed everyone that their names will not be revealed.

Third, I distributed and kept surveys to obtain a broader image of the situation beyond the specific cases I present here in detail. At Idas y Vueltas we used surveys to keep track of the general conditions of the community, and I used them when new people came to the organization (App.1). These surveys were based mostly on general questions of the place of origin, where they were in the process of obtaining documents, and where they were staying in Uruguay. I also created my own survey to expand on the housing situation of individuals when they were requesting assistance from the housing sector. This survey focused on the conditions of their current housing and the reasons for their request for assistance. The organizations used the surveys to keep track of the needs of the population and have quantitative data on how much help is needed, and I informed them if they would be used for other purposes such as research.

Fourth and last, I drew upon secondary source material in the form of state policies, newspaper articles, the constitution, prior data research, and the current solutions given by the government for better housing accessibility to the migrant community in Montevideo. Through the use of these different documents and their analysis, I aim to engage the reader with the perspective of the government through a more linguistic and material analysis that follows a materialist methodology used in previous work on bureaucratic anthropology. This is done to understand the intentions versus the real consequences of the words and actions of the government when welcoming migrants, and also to better draft recommendations based on existing social and cultural realities, policies, and government narratives.

Positionality

As an international student, the last 6 years of my life have been shaped by movement. I moved to Germany when I had just turned 17, but I still mark my story as a migrant long before that. My grandparents fled into exile to Cuba during the Uruguayan dictatorship, while my mother went with her grandmother to Sweden and then to Cuba. However, migration is present even earlier, with my ancestors coming from Italy, Spain, Turkey, passing through Argentina, and from the only indigenous community in Uruguay, the Charrúas, which lived as a society in the XVI century (Rossi 2006). Migration is in my identity, as much as it is in the roots of Uruguay and every Uruguayan.

However, as a migrant, I find myself in a very privileged position. I have always moved either on a scholarship or with a job opportunity abroad. I am white-passing. I have Italian citizenship, and I communicate fluently in English and Spanish. My difficulties do not go much further than culture clashes, or someone's comment because of speaking Spanish or with an accent. The concept of the "Global Hierarchy of Mobility" by Bauman, situates migrants along a spectrum whose poles are those forced and those free to leave (Ong 2003). Academic students with scholarships, like me, are situated with the global elite. We can

mobilize more easily and freely than those who migrate under the circumstances shown in this paper and are subject to numeral dependencies and state regulations (Bauman 1998). I can, to a limit, relate and connect to people through my own experience as a migrant, but it is critical to acknowledge that I have a different position than the people in this work.

I lived my whole life in Aguada, one of the three neighborhoods in Montevideo where most migrant people reside due to its affordability and closeness to the center and the diverse housing market. The struggles of the migrant community and the locals coming together started to become more and more apparent the longer I was at home, and I was part of that reality. One day, I woke up to the news that one pension a couple of blocks away from my house was evicting more than fifteen families, mostly from the Dominican Republic and Cuba, including children, elderly, and people with disabilities. Access to housing is an everyday issue for migrants that greatly affects all other aspects of their lives, such as job accessibility and health. Nonetheless, it remains an issue in the shadows for the local public.

My presence in the field was a struggle but also an advantage. As a white, female student, and middle-class Uruguayan, approaching people I already knew from a new role and perspective gave me substantial key informants, but at times little credibility for my work. Some of my key sources are Cuban friends living in my neighborhood, or closer partners from the organization, with whom I was able to connect further due to the connections of my family with Cuba and because of the social capital I have gained from living in Uruguay my whole life. On the other hand, I believe I was barely able to interact with male Cubans, and sometimes as an undergraduate student, people would not always take my work seriously. Overall, due to this position in society, and the work I was doing at Idas y Vueltas, I was able to see and get closer to both worlds; the mainstream world of the "national," and the world mostly of Cuban womans living, or not, in a *pensión*.

"Derecho de Piso"

The title of this work makes reference to a common saying that comes from the Southern region of Latin America. Often, when a new person comes to a work space, school, etc. it is said that they need to pay "derecho de piso" (right of the floor). This means that they need to struggle before settling in, and if you are lucky, jokes and pranks are done from older members to the new ones. With less luck, people faced bullying and harassment when entering new places. This is a tradition that while being lost with time, still remains in people's minds and fears. For example, a friend of mine, who recently entered into a new job position, was very nervous of fellow co-workers wanting her to "pagar el derecho de piso." At the end, nothing happened, but it still exposes how the custom is very much in our minds.

For the purpose of this work, I use this saying to show how the struggles that migrant populations face accessing housing expose how they are paying for "derecho de piso." There seems to be a general acceptance that when coming to a new country one needs to struggle and housing becomes a main element of struggle. Before leaving their country of origin, Cuban migrants use their savings and sell or take loans against their homes to move away through unsafe journeys. They arrive at a new place and try to find a home again without the social and cultural capital that they possessed in the country of origin (Uriarte, Fossati, Novaro 2018). There are various elements which add to that first struggle of finding a decent home . Firstly, migrants arrive in a relative position of "suspicion" and "danger," due to the permanently provisional state of the migrant by the state (Delgado 2003; Uriarte and Fossati 2018). Secondly, the migrant population often lacks trust for public offices and officers. Lastly, the state of the *pensiones* are often enforced by the owners of the *pensiones*, who tend to limit visits from state officers. The state of migrants and lack of trust for others, reflect in a similar way to that of newcomers in a workplace and their need to earn their place in.

Before delving further in the historical and social context of housing for migrants, through this essay I explore how housing accessibility for the migrating population in Montevideo is limited by three main factors worth of analysis: The state regulations, the intersectional social circumstances of the individual, and the space and time of stay. These three aspects are conditioned by social and governmental norms that encompass culture, social and gender expectations, politics, and economics that constitute an order in Uruguayan society. The national in Uruguay knows of this order and in general responds and acts according to them, for example what norms are legally expected of the home, the spaces that are considered to be private/public, and which types of housing is considered permanent/temporary. Nevertheless, the "unusual" immigrant -that is the immigrant from new origins and not the already known Spanish, Argentinian, or South Brazilian- alters this order and becomes a challenge to the status quo of society, and we hear complaints from neighbors of the "overuse" of public spaces and the use of refugee homes as a more permanent housing option when before it was an emergency solution.

The alteration of the status quo creates new issues in the society that reveal deeper social issues that were present even before their arrival (Sayad 1996). The social and governmental norms, the expected use of spaces for the home, and the time of stay, have been established and altered through time by different communities and waves of migrations. This has revealed a deeper hierarchical issue based on race and ethnicity, upon which our society has been built and which it continues to reproduce with sectors of its populations such as low income or black Uruguayans. Nevertheless, it becomes inevitable to ignore when accepting a new and numerous population residing in the central areas of the capital city that are outside of the expected Uruguayan and migrant homogeneity.

Housing and migration: *A hierarchical and constant struggle of access*

My migration-shaped family story is probably fairly typical for the average Uruguayan[1]. Our identities have been formed by the movement and, of course, in that movement, colonial powers were always present. Due to this, to understand the intersectionality of the social relations of current housing accessibility, first, it is important to understand hierarchical relations of race rooted in history. It is necessary to go back to the origins of the formation of this nation-state and the amount of human movement needed to create it. After decolonization, in 1825, Uruguay followed a long and struggling independence process from Spain and Brazil and the British commercial interest (Sztainbok 2009). The country had a low population of natives due to their extermination and an increasing European population in the area leading the independence process. As a result, Uruguay is a country whose nation-state formed from European ideals of cosmopolitan cities, little acknowledgment of slavery or past communities in the country, and in general, a continuous attempt to exclude ourselves from Latin America or any non-white community.

Current conversations around our history and ancestry being limited to European migration are usually quite problematic in the lack of acknowledgment of the colonial power and racism inherited in our country. Clear examples were the near extermination of the Charrúas in *Salsipuedes* and one of the cruelest slavery systems in Latin America. The massacre of *Salsipuedes* occurred in 1831 after the ministry of Uruguay, Rivera, ordered a meeting with the remaining Charrúa community and betrayed them, killing most of them and selling the survivors either as slaves or a museum exhibition in France (Meler 2016). This massacre was silenced by the parliament for 177 years. Similarly, the slavery system in

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[1] 8.1% of the total population is of African descent, in 2014 5% of the population acknowledged having some indigenous ancestry but it is estimated that more than 10% have Charrúa descent (Soto, "Un País sin Indios" Prod.). The rest of the population is made up of European descent, mainly Spanish (60%) and Italian (40%) (Arocena n/y, 13).

Uruguay is easily forgotten by the population and usually linked to other countries such as Brazil or United States. It is estimated that more than 60,000 enslaved Africans arrived in the country and had one of the longest and hardest processes of abolition in the continent that lasted from 1838 to 1862 (Bracco et al, 2010; Montaño 2001). The narrative of nationhood in Uruguay is white and European, leading to the current strong hierarchies of both race and ethnicity that today are still existent in all aspects of society and created a confused civil society when faced with new racialized migration waves.

A Historical issue

To understand the issues migrant people currently face in accessing housing, it is important to remark that housing accessibility has historically been an issue for everyone with few resources in Uruguay, a sector which most migrants fall into. Different programs, modes of housing, and laws have been set in place to try to address a struggle existent since the 19th century. The nationalization of the Banco Hipotecario de Uruguay in 1912, was the first state motion to facilitate access to housing through mortgage loans and subsidies for owners of land for the construction of private houses (BHU n/y). Adding to this, in 1937, the Institute de Vivienda Económica aimed to establish the first accessible housing program for the low income population (Fossati 2018; Magri 2014). Cooperativism came later as a civil response to decent housing accessibility, and is still very present. There were several other attempts to facilitate better housing accessibility, such as with the law Ley Nacional de Vivienda 13.728, in 1968, which stipulates housing accessibility as a right of every family (Fossatti, Uriarte 2018). This was shortly interrupted by the law of Alquileres 14.219, in 1974, which set new obstacles for the low income population when renting places (Fossatti, Uriarte 2018). Solutions to housing accessibility have played differently historically for the non-white population and currently for the Latin American migrant. It is important to re-visit these solutions and their intersectional consequences in this population, specifically.

Conventillos are an example of the historical link between the migrant population and African-Uruguayan citizens. These residences were the first type of planned housing in Montevideo built during the 20th century due to the big waves of migration from Europe (Sztainbok 2009). They are defined as a type of tenement building common in the region, of rectangular shape with several rooms surrounding a courtyard. Usually one family shared a room, while the kitchen and toilet were common areas. Initially, immigrants from European countries and rural migrants resided in these residences but quickly moved up the social strata (Sztainbok 2009). It was then occupied by formerly enslaved Afro-Uruguayans, who stayed in these buildings due to their affordability and location, breaking its status of temporary housing into a more permanent one. This population remained in these residences until the dictatorship of 1973, where many *Conventillos* were demolished to get "black people out from central areas" (Ortuño 2009). Apart from the change of temporality, *Conventillos* also broke the standard understanding of spatiality in housing. Many families lived together and did not share the same boundaries of private/public: they held meetings, meals, and spent most of their time in the shared outside space (Sztainbok 2009).

Apart from *Conventillos*, housing accessibility required several solutions for an increasing immigrant population, and diverse ways to address it across time at the state and civil level. A clear example is the Hotel del Inmigrante, which was built in Buenos Aires, Argentina for the increasing immigration of the 1880s from Italy and Spain. However, the start of the construction took more than two decades (Rousseaux 2019). This hotel hosted for a short period of time around a million immigrants over the years and was free for the first five nights and cost cinco pesos for the family every night after. Uruguay went through a similar process and projected a hotel which the founders struggled to get financed on time until its culmination in 1911, and thereafter was used mostly for quarantine purposes.

Housing Accessibility Today

During the last fifteen to twenty years, mostly during the governance of the left wing party, Frente Amplio, diverse plans were established to try to improve housing accessibility. A successful example is Plan Juntos, a government program that works with families in vulnerable circumstances for the creation of their own home (MVOTM 2020). As stated by Fossatti, other laws and programs were not as successful, and at times, problematic. An example is the law Ley de Vivienda de Interés Social 18.795, which favored private investment for the construction of houses with tax exemptions that were reflected in the final price, but bureaucratic issues never allow this project to run effectively without corruption (2017). Housing inaccessibility is a permanent issue in need of urgent solutions that address the individual circumstances of each sector of the population affected. For migrants, even what is considered "accessible" for the local population can present obstacles to them.

The migrant population in Uruguay is diverse, and so are the opportunities they have accessing housing depending on their socioeconomic status or country of origin. Through this work, when referring to the migrant population in urgent need of affordable and decent housing, I am mostly referring to Cuban migrants. Historically, migration and housing access has been an issue addressed differently by the government depending on the race and class of the population coming in. In times when Uruguay did not have the resources that it has today, the state saw immigrants from Europe as an opportunity and established open borders policies and programs. In a similar manner, in the last two years, the new government has been open to receiving migrants mostly from Argentina and Brazil with a certain amount of resources to invest, while the situation with incoming Latin Americans from low income backgrounds is the opposite (Carmo 2020).

For the migrant Cubans and the low-income population, the main opportunity to access housing is a *pensión*. A *pensión* is a privately owned shared house or building, with a

common kitchen, toilet, and single or shared rooms of four to ten people. Officially, to be a *pensión* there needs to be a minimum of ten rooms in the house, if not, the building is considered a tenant house, but normally houses with less than ten rooms are commonly referred as *pensiones*. Usually the rent is for the bed, and the average bed in a shared room costs US $100 and $150 per month for a private one. Most of them are located in the central area, in district B, where Idas y Vueltas and part of Aguada, my neighborhood, are located (Figure 4). This location offers proximity to most job and educational opportunities, which helps to avoid transportation expenses. Nevertheless, in the central area is also where most old and often deteriorated buildings are, which are often transformed into *pensiones*. Nationals from the countryside, university students, and unemployed individuals have resided in these *pensiones* since before the start of the last immigration waves. Similarly to the *Conventillos*, easier social and economic mobility of nationals have allowed them to use *pensiones* as a temporary option, while non-national migrant people started to live in these residences more permanently.
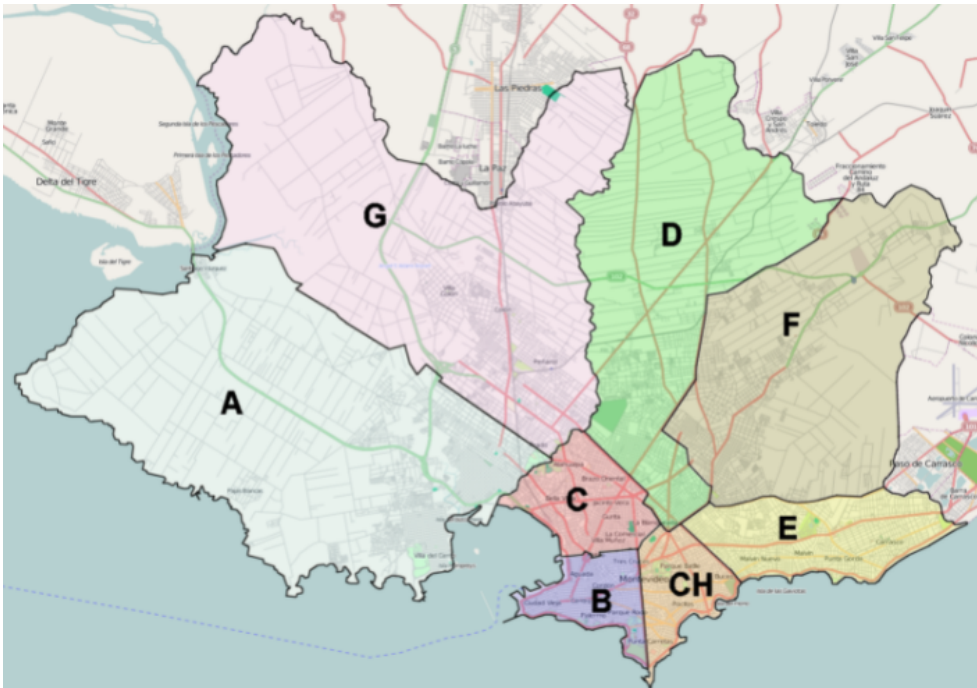

Figure 4: Map of Montevideo showing the administrative division in 8 "municipios", most of the migrant population is found in municipio B where the center and Idas y Vueltas is located (Hoverfish, 2011)

As expressed earlier, *pensiones* have been a primary civil response for issues related with housing accessibility in Montevideo. With low prices and a good location, they became highly demanded by the population. Nevertheless, the standardization and regulation of them has led to an increase of prices and of an "underground system of *pensiones*." As stated by Santiago Soravilla Calvano in a communication and journalism piece done in 2019, it is hard to fully know the number of pensions currently working or the exact number of people living in them (2019). The Ministry of Housing, Territorial Planning and Environment of Uruguay (MVOTM) works at the state level as the government agency responsible for housing policies and their implementation, while the Municipal Administration of Montevideo (IMM) holds responsibility for inspections of places that offer housing, such as *pensiones* (Soravilla 2019). Even though these two agencies are supposed to work together, this does not happen effectively, and in 2019 there were 178 registered *pensiones* through the IMM and 152 through MVOTM (2019). This means that at least 26 of these *pensiones* were existing without state regulation, and in some cases they had the permission of MVOTM but not from the IMM, still making it an irregular *pension* (2019). At Idas y Vueltas and mostly during the pandemic, we estimate that this number has increased, since in the period of 6 months we visited 3 pensions not shown in the study we used.

Figure 5: Map of Montevideo as shown in Google Maps marking the pensions registered or not in the IMM and Mvotma (Calvano, Santiago 2019).

In the field: *Idas y Vueltas*

"la movilidad humana como derecho humano"

It was a very sunny and warm day in the middle of a gray May autumn, and I was getting late for my meeting with Pilar, the research supervisor of Idas y Vueltas. We met at the door of the soup kitchen hosted in a gym that has just opened to provide meals for families struggling due to COVID in La Ciudad Vieja (the old city). I entered through the main door, walking by a long line of at least fifty to sixty people waiting for food, hearing diverse accents and seeing a racial diversity that I do not often see around Montevideo. I asked the volunteers for Pilar and they directed me to the side of the building, where she was sitting waiting for me. The volunteers standing at the other side of the door did look like what I often see in Montevideo, middle-aged white women and men. I sat with Pilar as we talked

through my goals with their organization and my research, and this became the first day of eleven months of my involvement at Idas y Vueltas.

Idas y Vueltas is a not-for-profit organization that provides assistance to migrants in Uruguay, mostly in Montevideo, the capital city, and El Chuy, bordering Brazil. Their house is in La Ciudad Vieja, the neighborhood that hosts most migrants in the city, and which is often known for high rates of robberies, violence, and unstable old buildings which are barely reformed. The organization provides employment and paperwork guidance, help in the search for housing, and psychological support for migrants while also trying to build a just and equitable society according to new realities. What I found most fascinating in this organization are the strong values driving it. They assist in bureaucratic processes and try to address the urgent needs of the migrant people, but more importantly, Idas y Vueltas politically defends and promotes the rights of migrants in Uruguay and of those who had to emigrate from Uruguay and constitute their diaspora. As Leo, a friend, activist, anthropologist, and worker at Idas y Vueltas told me once "we often find ourselves just working in the urgency, but I believe that there is more work we can do on the roots of the problems we work with." Similarly, in the main webpage of Idas y Vueltas, they describe their organization was:

A civil society association made up of a group of people who believe in human mobility as a human right; as an opportunity for personal and collective growth; and as an alternative (sometimes the only one) to overcome economic difficulties or situations of violence. We work so that people can migrate without losing their rights and are respected in their dignity regardless of the country in which they were born or in which they reside. (Idas y Vueltas, n/y)

Idas y Vueltas presents itself as a grassroot and civil organization. It has a strong political stance within the scene of migration in the country, such as to fight for the reunification of families, for the end of border-control documentation, such as visas, for refugees, and for the tolerance and respect for the rights of migrants around the world. From the political position of this organization, it has been critical to form alliances and networks

to better support migrants in the country. For example, Idas y Vueltas is part of the Advisory Council on Migration (CCAM) which advises the Junta Nacional de Migraciones (Fossatti 2018), and is in constant work with local and international organization such as the OIM (International Migration Organization, n/y).

After joining as a volunteer in the soup kitchen for two weeks, I was interested in joining the women or labor sectors. However, I was invited to join the housing sector that was in need of staff, which due to my prior experience working with housing accessibility in Colorado Springs, seemed like a good fit. I worked voluntarily as the main reference of this sector from late May 2020 through July 2021, with a break during the first three months of 2021 due to duties with my studies. My main responsibilities as a reference were: to guide people in knowing their rights regarding housing and mostly when facing eviction, to provide general knowledge on the conditions of housing, and help find accessible and stable housing options. I continued going to the soup kitchen and started attending the "Espacio de Bienvenida" (Welcoming space) that happened every Wednesday and Saturday until its suspension in December due to COVID. Until then, people met at the NGO to receive different assistance, ask questions, or chat. I was receiving complaints, giving information, and directing people to other resources and offices daily through Whatsapp.

"Housing and work are two things that the migrant does not transfer," said Leo while citing Sayad during a conversation at his house. He introduced me to Sayad's work to make me understand the complexity of the life of a migrant and the importance of the multidimensional approach to their study. We were working in the housing sector, and we were constantly talking, analyzing, and formulating documents on this sector, which is a single part of the life of migrants. As Fossatti cited about Sayad's work:

All the discourse on immigrants is always structured in pairs: talks about immigrants and work, immigrants and housing, immigrants and health, etc. (...) a vision is produced that, using technical language, it partializes the existence of the emigrant and ends up saying nothing about the emigrant

himself. It is as if he exists only insofar as he is accompanied of something else: health, work, housing, etc. (Sayad 1996, 165).

At the organization we tried to work together with different sectors to provide guidance that went beyond housing. I offer several examples on how we worked together with social workers, psychologists, and the job opportunities sector to assure people were able to find a job before the eviction. When COVID cases rose in the *pensiones*, we worked with the health sector to find a way to address the pandemic in these residences. This study focuses on housing, but through each story I hope to remind the reader that this research is focusing on the intersectional and holistic experience of the Cuban migrant.

Case study: Mariela

The first time I met Mariela was during my first month as a housing reference, and her case of eviction was the first one under my responsibility. One of the founders of the organization, an elder migrant from Sweden, explained to me her situation before our meeting. "She is so depressed, she probably lost more than twenty kilos in the last couple of months. She has a son who is into drugs and is stealing everything from her, and now she is getting evicted." Mariela, a black thin woman in her late forties, slowly entered the room where I was sitting, looking down. She immediately told me what was happening: they were being evicted in one week. Mariela´s situation was extremely difficult, she left her job in Cuba as a school teacher, sold her house, and brought her two sons to Uruguay with her. The oldest one of twenty one years old fell into severe drug consumption, and the youngest, of seventeen years old, struggled to find a job. She told me she was not sleeping at night because her two sons were in a constant fight in the small room they shared. "And now I do not know where to go; the little I had my son took" she said.

The place where they were living was an informal and unregulated pension whose owners, two Peruvian immigrants, left two months before without saying anything but

leaving a complaint for usurpation, or squatting. There were four families living there, all over eighteen years old (besides her youngest son) and from Cuba. The conditions of the residence were very precarious. During my first visit, I saw the sign at the front and realized that the place was supposed to be a bar. The walls that separated the rooms were made of strong cardboard and not longer than a meter and a half, there was one light for the whole place, and a roller shutter for the doors and the holes where windows were supposed to be.

Mariela explained to me that they had already received a notice about the eviction around a month ago but they thought it was a lie from the owners of the pensión. The place was rented through ANDA, a private service entity that provides loans and guarantees, and made the process different from those which go through state and public offices. When we communicated with ANDA, it was explained to us that the owners of the *pension* or *casa de inquilinato* were renting this place without stating that it was a *pensión*. They left after eight months because it was not giving the profits they expected, and notified subletters within two weeks. Most of the families living there had recently arrived and were unemployed; therefore they stayed as long as possible due to a lack of other options. The bills for water and electricity were still going under the owner, who for this reason was pushing for the complaint of eviction under usurpation, which makes their occupation a crime.

To give time for the families to find other places to go, we went to court to request an extension of the date of eviction. We asked for the extension on Wednesday, a day after we got the notice from Mariela, and the eviction was on a Friday. Since there was a national holiday on Thursday we only had one day to work through the bureaucratic process, and after submitting the paperwork we never saw a response in the system. On Friday, when the day of the eviction came, I went to the *pension* thinking that it was not approved. After waiting for two hours, I called ANDA and was notified that the extension was approved that morning. A month passed until we got a second notice that the last eviction would be in two weeks,

without room for negotiation. Since the eviction was done through a private entity, and the bills were still being paid by the primary renters, ANDA did not rush the eviction or the case of usurpation, as when evictions are done through the state or the police department.

This case of eviction was played within the existing norms of the state and the normative framework; there was no violent or forced eviction by landlords, and they managed it through the private loan entity, ANDA. Due to Mariela coming to Idas y Vueltas we were able to get an extension of what would have been an immediate eviction. Nevertheless, the circumstances that got them to be evicted and the consequences after the eviction show the flaws the state and its regulatory framework have on following the conditions of *pensiones* and providing opportunities for families in vulnerable conditions.

Mariela came to Idas y Vueltas with more problems than just housing; she was going to therapy sessions and trying to find a job. As she told me during our first meeting "I cannot stop thinking about my children, I cannot leave them alone, and I do not have energy for anything else." She was very aware of the psychological stress and exhaustion from her migration journey, and was getting support from almost all sectors of the organization. In the housing sector we kept close contact during the eviction time, as we worked with the social workers to find job and housing opportunities. She became a close friend with whom I met several times after, and after finding a program to give her housing for a few months, she eventually found a full-time job. We continue texting and meeting when I go to Uruguay, and across this research, her life experience will come up a number of times. As a student, the relationship between Mariela and I developed differently from the usual relationship between researcher-subject of study. Mariela in many ways was a mother, invited me for coffee, gave me advice about life, and motivated me to keep studying and working. It has been a struggle to find ways to better represent and make justice of what she has shared with me, what we lived together, and the many ways she has helped me along this time.

Making the Home: The normative vs. the new realities

The approach to the issue of lack of accessible housing, which is the line of work and study of the formation of the living space, is in critical need of the comprehension of its multidimensional landscape. As stated by Romero, the living space exists in an environment, in a cultural context, and in the diverse existing forms of inhabiting a space (Romero cited in Fossati 2017). Subsequent to this work, in the following sections I introduce and analyze the three areas that I identify as creators of norms in the living space that reproduce the normative Uruguayan expectation for this spaces, excluding then, the realities of the cuban migrants: the state, the social gender expectations, and the use of spaces and time.

The State and the Normative Framework

The conflicted role of the state in providing accessible housing opportunities and protecting migrants' rights deserves a special analysis in times where migration and refugees have increased in the midst of governmental changes. Through this section, I will explore how the historical foundations of the Uruguayan state and society introduced earlier, shape how it has handled the recent waves of migration: on the one hand, welcoming all migrants, while on the other hand, requiring extensive bureaucratic documentation to a specific class of migrants, which creates exclusionary effects. One of the questions this research raises is: *does the state speak in one voice*? Based on recent scholarship calling for a "disaggregation of the state," I argue that the state is constituted by a variety of different entities, individuals, social networks, and relations that are both within and reach beyond what is understood as the "state." The theoretical framework of Akhil Gupta, "disaggregating the state," allows us to study how it is necessary to break down the state in its inner structures, such as its bureaucratic processes, to find how it is having outcomes that go against their best intentions. To understand how the state works, it has to be taken apart.

Matthew S. Hull's work "Government of Paper" introduces the methodology of "material practice." Hull analyzes through the medium of documents an ongoing battle between villagers in Pakistan and a development agency trying to expropriate their land. He does a close read of documents and materials that were claimed as critical for bureaucrats to have control of the population in the land they are trying to expropriate. By using this approach, we are able to read in close detail the constitution and presidential documents that provide a linguistic perspective on how the bureaucratic sector and officials act in regards to migration and the differentiation of the processes depending on who is addressed. Adding to this, we are able to ask important questions such as, what materials or documents mediate the relationship between the state and migrants? Why does the state demand certain forms of verification, and from populations for whom it would be difficult to provide? As Hull explains, through this method, we are able to show "how government discourse is shaped by the material forms it takes" and the differentiation between the language of documents and the language of speeches, mostly when coming from the new presidency (2012).

In 2008, advanced regulations on the rights of migrants were passed into the constitution, with migration and refugee being legislated at the national level through the law Nº18,076 and the law Nº18,250 respectively (OIT 2018). The government published the law on the right to Refuge Nº18,076 stating that; "Everyone has the right to request and receive refuge in the national territory, in order to safeguard their life, physical, moral and intellectual integrity, freedom and security" (Uruguayan Constitution). Not even a year after, they passed the first article of the law 18,250 of the constitution which states that:

The Uruguayan State recognizes as an inalienable right of migrants and their families without prejudice to their migratory situation, the right to migration, the right to family reunification, due process and access to justice, as well as equal rights with nationals, without distinction.

Adding to this noting of the right to migrate on the basis of being humans, the law Nº18,250 established the responsibility of the state to integrate migrants, to respect their

rights to health, housing, work, and education, and to give opportunities of regularization in the country (Impo, Article 6, 8, and 13). One of the most important advanced provisions of the law is also to establish the National Council of Migration composed of governmental and civil organizations involved in migration, including a representative of Idas y Vueltas (ROU 2016). This council aims to monitor and follow up on all migration policies, write recommendations, and centralize decision-making on the matter (OIT 2018).

In 2016, The Presidencial Council drafted a document framing the current migration policies from the state and with the support of all municipalities and the approval of the National Council of Migration. This document was written as a response to the new migration patterns in the country and the reforms of migration policies being done in response. The two following examples show how the state portrays its position facing the new migration patterns and the changes expected to improve the wellbeing of migrants:

As a response to the new challenges face by new dynamics of migration, the Uruguayan State has built a generally open immigration policy in the framework of regional processes of integration, together with an emigration policy that aims to focus on return and the relationship of nationals residing abroad (ROU 2016. 23).
and
The [immigration] policy has been focused in the development of a migration management that is more efficient, in the strength of the institutional and normative framework, and in the creation of new instruments tending to facilitate the access to rights of the immigrant population and the realization of their life in the Uruguayan society (ROU 2016. 23).

During a Commission meeting in 2018, the Committee also noted that the Government reports on the obstacles encountered in implementing the Migration and Refugee Laws presented here, in particular the challenges related to "strengthening a comprehensive and cross-cutting approach to migration issues and the need to continue improving the coordination of the migration policy with national public policies in various areas, including work, education, health, and social security (OIT 2018)." As shown through these documents, the state, and specifically after the construction of a National Council of Migration has demonstrated the best intentions regarding migration.

After the start of the new immigration patterns in 2015, the state has changed its immigration policies to reflect these new realities. According to the normative framework drafted by the Presidential Council, the open-border and progressive control continued beside the new inmigration. The changes made by the state to make immigration more flexibilize included a free application for residence within an established 30 days period, the approval of the health identification with the work identification to access regulated jobs faster, the possibility to start bureaucratic processes for residence and ID in their country of origin, and the waiver of the requirement to prove wealth when transmitting the residence (ROU 2016. 22-24). When referring to these "achievements" in the document, the agent of action is on the "Uruguayan state" sometimes with the addition of "its public organs" and the input of "The National Council of Migration and the Civil Society." The state enforces the perspective of working as an overarching agent besides acknowledging the diverse agents partaking in this work. As stated by Fossatti in one of our conversations, besides the good intentions of the government to follow up with the functioning and outcomes of these laws by presenting new objectives and achievements, migrants are still faced with systematic abuse of their rights due to the ignorance of migrants about national regulations, as well as the functioning of the state.

Akhil Gupta´s political anthropological framework of analysis, "Disaggregating the State," helps us understand how even when the state as a whole has an interest in helping those in need, in reality, it fails to do so. By showing the state's role in decreasing poverty in India, Gupta argues that the state is not one single overarching agent. There is a need of disaggregating governmental structures to find the responsible sectors for specific issues and solutions.When looking at the Uruguayan state's role in migration through this framework, Gupta helps us analyze the flaws in governmental structures that lead to civil irregular solutions to present needs. Similar to Gupta's case in India, these flaws are mainly focused on the bureaucratic sector. The requirements for the processes of documentation or guarantees,

and the time needed for Cuban migrants to get the documents to rent and access decent housing, present the biggest obstacles to accessing housing. By using this framework, we are not arguing about poor implementation of programs or blaming individuals in the bureaucratic sector. As Gupta explains, "in a bureaucratic system no matter who occupies an office, the rules governing decision making deliver consistent outcomes" (Gupta 2012). Therefore, there are the rules and processes set in place in the bureaucratic sector that will deliver outcomes that go beyond the expectations or intentions of the state as a whole.

Red Tape: The Path Towards Citizenship

From the first moment that a migrant wants to come to Uruguay, they face different treatment depending on their country of origin. For the migrant population coming from the Mercosur trade agreement and associates[2], the visa is waived and there is a more accessible process to gain residence in the country, the "legal Mercosur residence" (MERCOSUR 2018; Novick 2012). The migrant population from Cuba and the Dominican Republic, which constitutes more than half of migrants in these new migration patterns, have been asked for specific documentation such as visas and background checks which amounts to structural violence in the form of material practice (MIDES 2017). The structural violence exists when due to the need for extra documentation to this specific population it creates barriers for accessing the ID, "seguro público," and guarantees for housing that deprive them of equal access to health resources and decent living conditions. Venezuelans for example, are able to access this documentation faster due to: the flexibility to start the documentation from home, the visa waiver, and the bigger Venezuelan community helping other Venezuelans such as through organizations such as Manos Veneguayas.

The process to gain residence in the country for those who do not form part of the Mercosur, needs to start once in Uruguay at the National Direction of Migration. When

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[2] That is Argentina, Brasil, Paraguay, Venezuela, Chile, Bolivia, Perú, Colombia, Ecuador, Guyana and Suriname (MERCOSUR.int, 2018).

Mariela told me about her journey to Uruguay, it helped me understand how some of the flexibilities in bureaucratic processes that the state adopted were never going to help her. She left teaching and sold her house in Cuba to leave in search of better economic opportunities for her sons. Even though their first desire was to go North, due to the closure of borders in the United States of America, they decided to go South. The first destination was Guyana because it was the closest destination to South America that did not require visas at the time. She moved to the North of Brazil, where, in her own words, she realized quickly the hardship of achieving good living conditions. They decided to move South, and on the way heard that they could have better state support in Uruguay. They arrived in Uruguay crossing the border by foot, and entered asking for the refugee status due to the lack of visa but asked for the residence once their petition was rejected. Some of the new flexibilities of the state for migrants, do not take into consideration these irregularities. By citing the political scientist James Scott, Hull describes how states' schemes are carried out mostly according to a "plan and run into problems mainly because of informal processes they ignore" (2008). When the state "flexibilized" documentation processes, they did it by allowing migrants to start processing documentation from home and to speed the process to get an ID. Nevertheless, these two changes were never helpful for Mariela due to "the informal processes –and realities- they ignored" as Scott claimed (Hull 2008). Mariela, as with many other Cubans, did not know Uruguay was going to be a destination and could not start the process beforehand and did not know how to apply for the ID.

Before even trying to access housing, Cubans already come to Uruguay with a specific treatment and circumstance that influences their access to living conditions. Even with the state's best intentions complications arise not only from the infiltration of the formal by the informal but also, as Garfinkel emphasizes, "from the formal procedures themselves, especially from the translations of official categories into the operational realm of

documentary artifacts" (Hull 2008). Individuals are "translated" into categories of nation-state and origin that shape their treatment and privilege in the country and oppose the notion established in the constitution of "the right to migrate on the basis of being human."

Red Tape: Affording a home

When a migrant aims to access housing besides *pensiones*, the next "affordable" option is to rent a house or apartment to share with family or multiple families. Nevertheless, to rent any sort of living space a rental guarantee is needed. The rental guarantee came into force in 1975, with the Ley de Alquileres, which presented several obstacles for housing accessibility for lower sectors of society (Fossatti 2018). This guarantee is a permit document given by the government or private entities, that states the limit of the monthly rent you can cover that is backed up by more than three months of work and salary. This is needed to rent any living space and requires; a national ID, proof of the least three months salaries, and a salary that allows for at least the minimum renting price (GUB 2021). The rent of an apartment in the center of Montevideo costs around $350-400 dollar a month minimum, so an average salary of around $400-500 would be required. Due to the documents needed to take the ID and the bureaucratic process involved, sometimes it takes years for a migrant to get the ID. And even with the ID in hand, requirements for the guarantee turn out to be impossible. Most of them start in irregular jobs with no proof of salary or working time, and the salaries of most of the people I worked with, such as Mariela, were below the $400 and are often used to maintain more than one family member.

The most accessible guarantee is the state one, which requires a three months' salary and a certified history of labor. This guarantee allows you to rent at least around a third of salaries over $350 but when accessed for that amount, not much accommodation is found for the price. For just-arrived migrants to know how to achieve these requirements and to be able to get this paperwork is almost impossible, and *pension*es become the only option available

without these requisites. Even when migrants work closer to Idas y Vueltas, the bureaucracy involved in the documentation process, and the time needed to find a job with at least three months of work, pushes migrants to live in pension for a minimum of 4 to 6 months.

While working in the housing sector we perceived several ways in which the rights of migrants are overstepped within the *pensiones*, creating new barriers for stable housing. During the first six months working in this space, we received seven cases of evictions in pensions, five of these under usurpation[3]. Through this method of eviction, a "criminalization" of the renter is created, making the judicial process go from civil to criminal. The person can be detained without judicial activity in between since it is clarified as a crime of flagrancy (basically that it is "red-handed") and eliminates the option of an extension or dialogue (Lopez 2020). This abuse of power can play within the law and present obstacles generated by fear and vulnerability. In many cases, it takes advantage of the renter´s lack of information and makes it difficult for the migrant to integrate into the country due to its presentation as a crime in their documentation, which discourages them from protecting their rights regarding housing.

In the data collected during my work with Idas y Vueltas, there were 320 people affected by the 9 cases of eviction registered in the 9 *pensiones*. These include minors, elderly, people with medical conditions or chronic diseases, women heads of household, family units, etc. who need specific support in the field of housing given that the precarious conditions of *pensiones* are not suitable for their needs. The conditions of these residences have notoriously worsened while I was working in the field, and with the pandemic, we have perceived that control has been lost in this area. For example, access to electricity and water as a right is not fulfilled, and we visited at least one *pension* where they have to go find water elsewhere. This issue is further accentuated when we find ourselves in the midst of a

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[3] The nature of the cases of usurpation was informed to me with similar words by Fossatti at my time of arrival. Some of the cases named here were already being addressed previously to my arrival.

pandemic, where hygiene cannot be maintained in the same way without basic access to water, and many outbreaks have increased in the *pensiones*. The context of the pandemic continues to be used to raise prices under the threat of eviction leading migrants to face a choice of "this or nothing."

Abuses of the rights of migrants within the progressive state's norms exist from the moment a migrant decides to come to the country until when accessing a *pensión* due to the lack of other accessible housing. There is a detachment between state intentions in the form of norms and regulations and the real-life outcomes that happen due to the irregular life experiences of the recent migrants mostly of Cuban origin. Gupta's framework of analysis allows us to identify the central issue in the bureaucracy of getting a residence, ID, or guarantees, processes which leave migrants with no alternative choice than to access a *pensión*. The historical hierarchies of race and ethnicity are presented through the documents requested to migrants that do not belong to the Southern part of Latin America, and are often non-white and from lower economic brackgrounds. This extra documentation creates obstacles particularly different for the migrant population from Cuba, and pushes them with no alternative to unregulated and poor housing conditions. The bureaucratic process needs to break away from the blind spots given by the standardization of migrants, to be truthful to its norms, it needs to look at the specific contexts and needs of each migrant population.

Gender into play

Migration is a gendered phenomenon. To study the particularity of gender and migration in Uruguay is relevant to have a global scope that relates the regional to the global. Many of the obstacles that migrant women face in Uruguay are part of a global problem or brought from the country of origin. In 2019, women made up 47.9% of all international migrants worldwide (UN Report 2019), while in Uruguay, women made up to 54% of the migrant population (MacroData 2019). The feminization of migration is a multi-sided

phenomenon that resulted from three main characteristics of modern migration and social relations: The increasing number of women migrants worldwide since before the 2000s, the growing demand for women's labor in destination countries (mostly in care, domestic, and the manufacturing sector), and lastly, the increasing independence of women and their role as primary economic providers (Maynon 2017).

The feminization of migration as a result of the internationalization of care exposes the need to zoom out from the individual to see the overall violent structures that women face when migrating. Menjivar's framework of analysis "violence in the women's life" described in her book, *Enduring Violence*, allows us to study how violence is multi-sided and cannot be looked at either as a form of interpersonal violence or only at the state structural level.

Rather than view violence ..., the perspective I am advancing seeks to unearth those entrenched processes of ordering the social world and making (or realizing) culture that themselves are forms of violence: violence that is multiple, mundane, and perhaps all the more fundamental because it is the hidden or secret violence out of which images of people are shaped, experiences of groups are coerced, and agency itself is engendered (Menjivar,2011).

Migrant women in poverty and homelessness face direct violence, structural violence, and systematic violence, which reveals a need for their situation to be seen from cultures and systems that encompass from the self to the interstate, and global relations. As stated by Paulina Luicio, in the Global South higher poverty levels, social and global inequalities, unemployment, and informal economies have been the result of a history of global neoliberalism (2017). Women in the Global South often choose to migrate because economic pressures compel them to, while women in more developed countries are increasingly having full-time jobs and careers, leading to the need to pay for care work, adding to the existing incentives for women to migrate and fulfill these jobs (Luicio 2017).

In the case of Cuban women in Uruguay, we see these international forces through the economic relations and sanctions that neoliberalism has pressed in Cuba, and the

impoverishment and global inequality this has led to (Kuntz 1993). Women have become more willing to move and become primary economic providers for their children. Similarly, in Uruguay migrant women tend to occupy jobs as caregivers and household work. As explained by Lencina in her thesis for social work, 35% of the women migrant population coming from Bolivia are currently working in domestic work, while an increasing majority of Dominican Republicans and Cubans are taking this role (2015). The push and pull factors involved in migration processes have taken on specific characteristics for women, which is what is referred to as feminization of migration. The characteristics of women migration are not limited to these gendered pull and push factors, and at the time of arrival women face obstacles that are linked with the fact of being a woman, such as with housing accessibility.

As stated by the Ministerio de Desarrollo Social (MIDES) investigation in 2017, immigrant women are protagonists of migration processes, but they still face serious conditioning factors. Some of them include; the lack of affordable housing possibilities for families and mothers with children, the increase in hours of care under the pandemic that makes it impossible to access a job, and being twice as likely as their male counterparts to be overqualified for the tasks they perform and resisting the highest unemployment rates (MIDES 2017).

54% of [recent] immigration arrivals between 2009 and 2014 are women. [The unemployment rate] of women who immigrated to Uruguay in this period it is much higher than that of Uruguayan women (8.36% for Uruguayan women and 18% for immigrant women), and six times higher than that of men immigrants (MIDES 2017)

Mariela's case of eviction brings to light how gender norms create a troubling scenario when accessing housing for women and Cuban migrants. In the case of Mariela, she was the only one doing *changuitas* (short-term irregular jobs) to maintain her sons. The moment the eviction happened, she was receiving the "state basket" that counts for $35

dollars per month. Not having a phone, an address of residence, and wellbeing affected her chances of finding a job and made her live in a constant state of survival, living day by day to bring food home. Soon after, the younger son started working as a delivery man and moved out alone due to his older brother's addiction. Mariela was still figuring out how to take care of her son because as she said, she was scared of what being homeless could mean for her son's relation with drugs.

The second day Mariela came to Idas y Vueltas, she was with another Cuban woman who lived with her, Laura. Their stories share a different reality of being a women migrant and a mother in this country. Laura was living with her husband and his brother. The moment we met, she had been living in Uruguay for less than three months and was expecting a baby of two months. She had a daughter and a son in Cuba and came to Uruguay to try to send money home and bring her children. While her husband was doing *changuitas* and soon found a more stable job, she did not want to find one due to her pregnancy. She was hoping to receive the state compensation for pregnant women after her three months of pregnancy, but lost her pregnancy before that and started searching for a job as well.

Motherhood is a complex phenomenon when it comes to migration; some women are able to come with their children, while an increasing number of women have decided to leave them behind to secure their future (Schmalzbauer 2019). In both cases the role of care-givers imposed on women prevails, as a remittance giver, a finder of better futures, or as a continuing worry for care and responsibility when accessing housing and work. Laura was in a struggle to find the way to balance the pressure to send money home while also probably having a child in Uruguay. During the two months that we were waiting to hear when they would be evicted, she revealed that the fact that they were not paying for their current housing was a relief because she was finally able to at least send some money home. Globally, in 2016, women made up to half of the world remittances even though they were

less than men and with an overall lower income (Lucio 2017)[4]. In the case of Mariela, living day by day occupied her day, and limited her from accessing goods, finding a job, or saving money to move somewhere. Due to the closeness to our office, I went several times to their home hoping to help them leave their resumes at different businesses, but there was always a more urgent need to search for food, for a phone, or to do a small and under-paid *changuita*. Housing became a key element in their lives since it defined how much they could help their children, but also if they had a decent space for everyone to live together.

The feminization of migration in Uruguay became visible when working in the soup kitchen. Women were an overall minority (due to the big male uruguayan population present), but there were at least half of the migrant population at the line. I met the supervisor of the gender sector at Idas y Vueltas during this soup kitchen sectors, and when I asked her about the gender presence at the line, she told me that most women coming to the soup kitchen were migrant women, and often try to bring food home. She continued explaining to me how these women often come with children and have the double or triple burden of finding work and housing, and due to the lack of *pensiones* accepting children they go to the outskirts of the city or even the countryside. Unless you are a nationalized single mother with low resources, or you are escaping sexual work, the state does not offer much help to mothers and families with children. This leads to more mothers often traveling alone and taking years to bring the children because they then tend to look for cheaper options to save money until they access better housing (Schmalzbauer 2019).

Uruguay is part of the global issue of feminization of care for migrant women. With more women finding stable jobs in the country, the need for care-workers has increased. Even though Uruguay holds progressive laws protecting women rights[5], low income and non-white

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[4] As stated by the Western Union Press Release, in 2016 women made US$ 300.6 Billion in Remittances; half of $601.3 Billion of the whole global remittances.

[5] Uruguay has a Gender Inequality Index (GII) with a value lower than the HDI (0.367), placing Uruguay 69 among 148 countries. Since the establishment of The National Institute for Women's Affairs (INMUJERES) in 2005 the state has launched several gender equality policies and right's promotion (UN Women).

women face struggles often ignored by the progressive side of the state and the civil society. Women still face multi-sided violence that shape the scope of the state and of the regional level; femicides, their explotation as sex workers, unpaid labor, unregulated labor besides their will, are only a few of these examples that go beyond this work.

Shifting spaces and time-frames

The making of the home for the Cuban community led to the shifting of the understood standards of temporality and spatiality in Montevideo. The theoretical framework of analysis done by Bosani and Romero regarding space and temporality in urban cities and Agamben's writings on "State of Exception," both help us to understand how the shifting of spaces and time has changed in housing due to the new migration waves.

Spaces of exception

During the 2020 South American Symposium on Anthropology, Sonia Romero explained how *pensiones* go beyond the preconceived idea we have of space when we think of home. Because of western influence, in South America we often perceive the space of the home as something tangible, limited by walls or fences, and influenced by the emotions we give to private property. Walls, windows, doors, are used to limit the space and divide what is expected to happen inside and outside. The home has become the space for the private, while the public is outside of that limit. Nevertheless, the conditions of the *pensiones* shift these norms of public/private by shifting the limits of the home where the private is expected.

This shift of spatial limits is referred to as one of the main reasons for clashes between the migrant and national community. As expressed by Fossatti, the "*establecidos and outsiders*" (Fossatti 2017) possess clashing goals on their use of spaces which are enforced and even encouraged by the media and the Uruguayan hegemonic identity (2017, 50-51). The only accessible housing for the new migrant population is in a room with four, seven, or ten

other people. There is a lack of actual physical space in the home, which they then look for in other spaces such as public parks or the sidewalks. For example, a couple of blocks from where our office is located, a couple of young Cuban males took a TV to the sidewalk and were hanging out there. The established social norms of what is expected in the public or private do not include these new realities and result in nationals, such as my friends, complaining about the noise and amount of time spent at these public spaces (Fossatti 2017). The spaces of living shift, and the room, kitchen, or toilet becomes one with the sidewalks, the park, or the basketball court.

We have often defined the world, the law, and the state in terms of opposites; there is the legal or illegal, the secure or insecure, the right or the oppression. Giorgio Agamben in "State of Exception" defines them as poles of a spectrum, in which a variety of forms and spaces of living, acting, and constituting oneself exist (2005). A space of exceptions forms part of this spectrum, where the limits between what is "legal", "secure", or a "right" is not defined anymore. As Agamben claims, certain state and social norms that regulate spaces do not always apply (2005). In one specific case I followed, a low income migrant woman from Argentina, Alejandra, was being asked for a rise in the rent at a *pensión* without justification. She complained with the landlords because she discovered that the *pensión* was not regularized as they claimed. The landlords then threatened her that if she said anything they would keep her belongings. We assisted her with a state-sponsored lawyer who opened a case in court but the landlord locked all her belongings (including her child's medicine) until she withdrew the complaint. The state lawyer was not able to continue the case because it was no longer a civil issue (as established to get the sponsorship) but penal. As in this case, in many others the owners, sometimes with the police, enter rooms and act without permission from the state or the people living there and keep inhabitants' belongings as a threat.

As introduced earlier, within the normative framework of the state, migrants have the same "*access to justice, as well as equal rights with nationals*" while also protecting private property as an "inviolable right" (Uruguayan Constitution, law 18270 and article 32). The law also protects the right of the leasee to up to 120 days prior to an eviction and the prior justified notice for the rising of prices within the 10% allowed increase (Law 18283). The unregularized *pensiones* are a state of exception, where the state regulations and individual rights no longer hold, leading to an abuse of power by the government as a witness and of the inner social structures of power such as the relation between the owner and the lessee.

The state and social norms of what a place should be used for, and what the space should provide, do not longer hold in the *pensiones*. The lack of affordable options in the city leads to migrant people going to crowded *pensiones* which do not provide the spaces expected for the established limits of the public and private. Adding to this, these *pensiones* exist in a "state of exception" that makes the leasee vulnerable. While the abuse of power in these spaces can be found against most inhabitants of the *pensiones*, migrants most often do not know of the juridical systems or their rights as individuals and end up being more vulnerable due to the lack of this information and networks of support.

Temporality and permanence

Most often ethnographic studies tend to cover the spatiality of migration due to the complexity of temporality on the life of the migrant. Nevertheless, trying to understand the temporal subjectivities of migration when accessing housing will heighten the understanding of the Cuban migrant's choices and opportunities in the long or short term according to their migration goals, or how it is that 'there's nothing as permanent as a temporary migrant' (Griffiths, Rogers, and Anderson 2013). The limits between temporariness and permanence of Cuban migrants are constantly shifting. Many saw in Uruguay permanent opportunities to stay, while others prefered to see a bridge destination before a next stop. What makes housing

temporary or permanent is constantly changing, and these limits took new shape when migrants came to Uruguay (Romero 2008). As explained by Cojocaru, "the ideal migrant" should follow a continuous "sequence of stages, from arrival to integration/return." However, migrants often are in the position to continuously renegotiate their initial decisions and change plans that do not align to this expectation (2016). For nationals, *pensiones* have been perceived as a temporary housing solution while they pursue a career or job. Meanwhile, for migrants *pensiones* are, for most interview subjects, a permanent option in the country. The next frequent and more permanent housing possibility for migrants are shared houses, while shelters become a temporary option for those evicted and in the most vulnerable situations.

I met with Mariela some weeks after her last eviction in her new room, which she was able to rent for two months from a sponsor at the organization. We were drinking coffee when I asked what she thought of the new place, "I just hope to get a job and find a stable pension where to stay, I am tired of moving." Finding a good *pensión* where to settle down was a priority, but when I asked about other types of housing options she said that they were outside of her possibilities. "Young Cubans get together and rent an apartment after a couple of years, but I am alone with my son and we want to save some money." Social capital becomes critical to find housing outside the *pensiones*. After the eviction, Laura was able to stay at a friends' house until they were able to settle down and save enough money to leave North. On the other hand, Mariela did not have connections, and ended up in another irregular pension after getting into the program which financed a regularized *pensión* for two months.

Shared houses become the next available option for migrants who are able to get together in groups, that come to the country knowing people, or are young and in different social circles. My close friend, Yeseyki, started renting a small house three months after arriving in Uruguay with three other Cubans. Her friend was able to receive a guarantee because he and his partner have been living in Uruguay for almost three years and had the

documentation needed. A few Cubans I had conversations with shared Yeseyki's opinion that the shared houses were better than *pensiones* even if sometimes they also needed to share a room because they do not have a landlord checking on them and there are fewer people to share facilities with.

A year into my fieldwork, I left Uruguay for three months, and when I came back I went to visit Mariela at her next new room, she was way more energized and talkative than ever before, and quickly gave me the update into her life and of everyone I knew that lived with her. She told me that at least half of the Cubans I have worked with at Idas y Vueltas left for the United States and her son left for the countryside trying to escape the drug culture of the city and hopefully find a way up North. I remembered that I saw Laura. and her partner 6 months ago, and they did not have plans to leave the country. They were trying to have a baby, and her partner bought a motorbike to work as a delivery boy and move into their own room. Everyone who lived at Mariela's pension left, everyone but her son. "It became really hard after COVID, I thought of leaving too, but I am too old." "I would only leave if my son leaves." By the time I finished my fieldwork, Mariela and her son had been living in several *pensiones* for more than two years, and they did not try something else because it was the only way to save some money for her sons. "Since I am here -in the new pension where se has been staying for the last 2 months- I was able to save almost eight thousand pesos ($170 dollars) which I gave to my older son who wants to leave, but he cannot get anywhere with that money, they are asking for at least a thousand five hundred dollars to take you up North."

I had a similar conversation with Yeseyki, who told me about the neighborhood friends that were also on their way North. "We -Cubans- are crazy about the American Dream" she said while showing me Instagram pictures of the people who left. " They were saving money for months, but they also had good jobs" she told me when I asked how much it cost them to leave. Migrant people often handle poor living conditions as long as they are

able to save money, and sometimes it means living in shared rooms for many years. This was a completely different reality to that of Mariela, who was giving all the savings to her sons and trying to find stability within the *pensiones*.

The social norms on temporality and permanence of the home and the type of home are constantly changing for migrants. Similar to global patterns, for nationals and migrants alike, the rising price of housing meant living in shared spaces for longer with your parents, friends, or strangers (Sawyer et al. 2018). *Pensiones* are a functional living space for the the first months of arrival, but the permanent extension of this housing by most migrants is what shows a specific discrimination and segregation of this population in the city (Bengochea and Madeiro 2020). The lack of social and cultural capital leads them to find unregularized and poor shared spaces in *pensiones* as the only accessible option due to government absence in providing accessible housing opportunities. Adding to this, their own migrant circumstance is a struggle between the permanent and the in-transit, which leads to most of them prioritizing saving money when possible. Even if the American dream is often on Cubans' minds, the circumstances faced in Montevideo, highly related with housing, seem to push migrants further away even if leaving was not in their original plans.

Recommendations

Working with Idas y Vueltas also meant to be constantly involved in policy recommendations and political activism for the ideals that the organization and its members hold. My involvement in this organization and collective action was a short-lived testimony of a longer and deeper work that was there before and after my presence. The recommendations here are part of a collective effort and work that has been maintained and built along the years and existence of the housing sector. During my time at the organization, I was able to meet with the Ministry of Housing, to give a presentation for the National

Institution of Human Rights, and to be part of the beginning of building process of an observatory which aims to monitor and centralize housing-related issues and strength diverse programs for the rights of migrants in the housing sector. Leonardo Fossati, the anthropologist head and starter of the housing sector together with the remaining members, are the key figures; it is because of them that I can now share these recommendations. Throughout this work, we talked and theorized many of the backgrounds for the recommendations here proposed which are summarized in three main components:

- Stronger assistance, faster, and clearer processes of documentation mostly regarding the need for IDs and background checks for renting purposes which could be facilitated by a smoother connection between the Migration Ministry and the Bureaucratic documentation sector.

- The creation of temporary housing for immigrants being displaced or arriving in vulnerable circumstances.

- To coordinate and centralize state and city offices currently working with migrants and with documentation through a new office or a committee that overlooks their work to avoid repetition and lack of services that are supposed to be provided

Conclusion

The study of the way that current social and state norms exclude new realities of migration in the creation of a home for Cuban migrants, allow us to see the contestations between the liberal perspective of Uruguay and reality. The government and the civil society have supported in diverse forms open border policies and an equitable society. Nevertheless, the recent migration wave from Cuba has shown deeper historical and societal issues of xenophobia and racism through the violation of rights and their different treatment in bureaucratic processes. The issues addressed regarding housing accessibility show a city planning that is exclusive to a hegemonic Uruguayan understanding of spaces and time,

housing options that marginalize families and women, and a state that needs to adapt faster to new realities and the specificity of the new conditions.

During the time period when I executed this work, we witnessed a change in a government, the COVID pandemic, and regulation of global migration that led to the closing and later opening of the US's border to Cubans. After the Biden Administration came to office in the United States, many Cubans decided to head North again and leave Uruguay. Within migration, things changed fast, and by the end of this work, Mariela also flew North. After almost two years of pandemic and the new liberal government of Luis Lacalle Pou, many programs and offices named in this work no longer exist. What for me has been the most unexpected change, is that Idas y Vueltas switched its structures and methods of work. The grassroot organization I worked with in 2020, almost lost its whole team by the end of 2021 and adopted a more corporate professionalized model. By the end of my work, I was able to be part of some of the first discussions and calls to assembly due to the absence of multilateral decisions and unequal distribution of power and roles. The volunteers and non-paid staff do not hold "legit" strength in their opinions and most of the volunteers left, and the housing sector almost disappeared. After these complaints, the new board of directors resigned, and the organization is currently trying to find ways of readapting and surviving.

Further work could be done in the study of Idas y Vueltas as an organization, or the aftermath of the transitioning period of navigating governmental processes and a pandemic that goes beyond the possibilities of this work. Nevertheless, the lives shown here, and especially of Mariela, show a reality of struggle that is not often visualized. The civil society, through organizations such as Idas y Vueltas, has taken a stance when there was an absent state, and in this work I argue for a stronger and more cohesive housing plan that in its norms, adapts to the ever changing realities of migrants and is for migrants.

Appendices

1. Forms used as survey data:

N° Exp. INTERNO:

FORMULARIO RECEPCION DE DENUNCIA

Fecha: ___/___/___   **Recibe la denuncia: _____**

Denunciante:_____   **Contacto: _____**

Dirección:_____

Pensión Inscripta: SI ☐   NO ☐   NO SABE ☐

Personas que viven: N°__ / menores de Edad__ / Enferm crónicas__   Otro__

Nacionalidades:

Motivo de la denuncia:

1: Desalojo / lanzamiento / Notificación FGN

Documentación exhibida:

Plazo establecido: SI _____   NO _____

2: Condiciones sanitarias

Describa la situación:

Adjunta fotografía: SI   NO

3. Otros

Motivo de la denuncia:

Descripción de los hechos:

CLAUSULA DE CONSENTIMIENTO INFORMADO. De conformidad con la ley No. 18331, de 11 de agosto de 2008, de Protección de Datos Personales y Acción de Habeas Data (UPDP), los datos suministrados a partir del día de hoy por usted quedaran incorporados en la base de datos de Idas y Vueltas, la cual será procesada exclusivamente para la siguiente finalidad: investigación, estadística y atención de los beneficiarios. Los datos personales serán tratados con el grado de protección adecuado, tomándose las medidas de seguridad necesarias para evitar su alteración, pérdida, tratamiento o acceso no autorizado por parte de terceros. El responsable de la Base de Datos es la Asociación Civil Idas y Vueltas y la dirección donde podrá ejercer   sus derechos de acceso, rectificación, actualización, inclusión o supresión es la de Idas y Vueltas.

ACEPTO   NO ACEPTO

Firma:

Asociación Idas y Vueltas
Juan Carlos Gomez 1540
Mail: vivienda.idasyvueltasong@gmail.com
Por un mundo sin fronteras…

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