THE CULTURE OF MIGRATION IN URUGUAY

By

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A THESIS PRESENTED TO THE GRADUATE SCHOOL
OF THE UNIVERSITY OF FLORIDA IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT
OF THE REQUIREMENTS FOR THE DEGREE OF
MASTER OF ARTS

UNIVERSITY OF FLORIDA

2011
To Mark Brause and Katherine Kahl
ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

I want to acknowledge the Center for Latin American Studies for providing the funds for this research. I would like to thank my committee members, Dr. Phil Williams, Dr. Marianne Schmink, and Dr. Adrián Félix, for their insight and guidance throughout the research and writing processes. I also thank Dr. Charles Wood for his valuable contribution to the beginning stages of this research, and Dr. Richmond Brown for his support and encouragement as my advisor. I would also like to thank Andrea and Fernando, the Prudenza Ugartemendia family, and Leticia and Javier in Uruguay. Besides their wonderful hospitality, they were incredibly helpful in establishing contact with informants, and very patient with my constant questions. Lastly, I would like to thank all of the Uruguayans who took the time to sit down and share their experiences, opinions, and ideas with me about migration, their country, the world, and life in general.
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THE CULTURE OF MIGRATION IN URUGUAY

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May 2011

Chair: Phil Williams
Major: Latin American Studies

This study provides evidence of a culture of migration in Uruguay through the use of ethnographic data collected in July and August of 2010 in the cities of Salto and Montevideo, Uruguay. Although there are strong cultural pressures that encourage emigration from Uruguay, there are contrasting pressures to remain in the country. The tension between these pressures to leave and to stay is part and parcel of Uruguay’s unique culture of migration. The findings illustrate how individuals understand and experience these migratory pressures, and provide a nuanced view of the cultural factors that influence the decision to stay or to leave. This study locates the ethnographic findings within the field of migration studies, as well as within the broader historical, political, and economic forces that effect migratory trends.
CHAPTER 1
INTRODUCTION

Overview

Despite the fact that Uruguay has some of the best social and welfare indicators in Latin America, and comparatively low rates of inequality and poverty, Uruguay has one of the highest rates of emigration in the region (Pellegrino and Vigorito, 2005). Pablo Mandeville, the Resident Representative of the United Nations Program for the Development of Uruguay, recently stated that nearly eighteen percent of Uruguayans born in Uruguay currently live outside of the country (Pellegrino, 2009:5). For Uruguay, a small country with a population approaching just 3.5 million people, the high rate of emigration has serious demographic implications. There have been particular political and economic crises which have led to periods of increased emigration in the history of the Uruguay; however, emigration has continued steadily even in the absence of such crises. Uruguay has one of the highest levels of human development in Latin America, indicating that the strength of the traditional economic push/pull factors used to analyze migration is weak in the Uruguayan case. The atypical nature of the Uruguayan case has led several authors to suggest a “culture of migration” present in Uruguayan society (Bengochea, 2007; Pellegrino, 2002; Souza, 2007). The basic idea of a culture of migration is that international migration causes profound changes to the very culture of the sending society, including shared values and perceptions, and that these changes in homeland culture encourage further emigration.

Statement of Problem and Research Questions

The idea of a culture of migration is an appealing option in the Uruguayan case; however, there has been very little ethnographic evidence to support the claim. In this
paper I will seek to answer the questions: Is there a culture of migration present in Uruguayan society? and if so, how do Uruguayans as individuals and as a society perceive, represent, and interact with those broader cultural forces which have led to high rate of emigration? I will analyze Uruguay's migratory phenomenon from the homeland perspective, meaning that the research will focus on those who live in Uruguay and experience the realities of high rates of emigration and migratory pressures as part of their daily lives, instead of focusing on migrants who have already left the homeland. Anthropology's traditional focus on the local, and the descriptive strength of ethnographic research, makes an anthropological approach appropriate to the research question. An anthropological account of migration must also take into account that modern migration is inextricably linked to broader economic, political and historical processes. Though this research is ethnographic in nature, I will seek to situate my findings within the relevant economic, political, and historical contexts.

Review of Literature

The Field of Anthropology in the Study of Migration

Globalized realities have created a challenge for the field of anthropology, which traditionally has focused on the rich, descriptive analysis of a specific locale. Ethnographies presented cultures as static and self-contained, ignoring the dynamic nature of culture itself. The field of anthropology has had to adjust to globalized localities and has become particularly adept in describing how global forces affect people in their communities. The use of anthropology in the study of migration is no exception. Arjun Appadurai (1991:191) writes:

As groups migrate, regroup in new locations, reconstruct their histories, and reconfigure their ethnic ‘projects,’ the ethno in ethnography takes a slippery, nonlocalized quality, to which the descriptive practices of anthropology will
have to respond. The landscapes of group identity - the ethnoscapes - around the world are no longer familiar anthropological objects, insofar as groups are no longer tightly territorialized, spatially bounded, historically unselfconscious, or culturally homogenous.

Appadurai (1991:196) addresses this dilemma by suggesting a new kind of ethnography which can, “capture the impact of deterritorialization on the imaginative resources of lived, local experiences. Put another way, the task of ethnography now becomes the unraveling of a conundrum: what is the nature of locality, as a lived experience, in a globalized, deterritorialized world?” The anthropological focus on the local must include how the individuals in the research site interact with broader economic and cultural forces, and their globalized realities. The use of narratives is particularly useful for this type of research.

Narratives about migration, achieved through formal interviews, casual conversations, and anthropological observations, help the researcher to understand how individuals make meaning of their lives, and experience structural pressures. Narratives are a very effective tool for learning about the role of the individual in migration. Brettle (2002:24) states, “the effects of extralocal and long-term processes are only manifested locally and specifically, produced in the actions of individuals living their particular lives, inscribed in their bodies and their words.” Therefore, the field of anthropology, with its tradition of focus on the specific, the individual, and the local, provides an essential voice in the field of migration studies. Brettle writes:

The methods of anthropology are well suited to the task of eliciting data from individuals, including the collection of individual stories of life experiences. In research on migration, anthropologists have a unique contribution to make by elucidating how the process looks from the inside out and from the ground up. What they learn often confirms economic and sociological theories about why people migrate – to improve their standard of living by going places where wages are higher or jobs more plentiful. But
ethnographic data often suggest other dimensions that ultimately lend important support to a more comprehensive approach that combines levels and units of analysis.

As Brettle mentions above, anthropology helps illuminate other dimensions of migration behavior. Two of the concepts which ethnography is particularly suited to eliciting are identity and imagination, and how they influence migratory decisions.

Although the concept of identity has been a part of Western philosophy since the eighteenth century, its use has become widespread in U.S. academia in the past 30 years (Rouse, 1995). Identity is a difficult concept to define. Manuel Castells (2004:6) writes, “By identity, as it refers to social actors, I understand the process of construction of meaning on the basis of a cultural attribute, or a related set of cultural attributes, that is given priority over other sources of meaning.” Berezin (2003:11) asserts that identity is a “cognitive form” that is “… inextricable from the understanding of self and is central to participation in meaningful patterns of social and political action.” Identities are constructed in a process of individualization, and definition of the self in relation to the other. Castells (2004:7) writes:

The construction of identities uses building materials from history, from geography, from biology, from productive and reproductive institutions, from collective memory and from personal fantasies, from power apparatuses and religious revelations. But individuals, social groups, and societies process all these materials, and rearrange their meaning, according to the social determinations and cultural projects that are rooted in their social structure, and in their space/time framework.

It is important to note that social actors do not have a single identity, but rather multiple identities, some of which may be circumstantial, and all of which are subject to changes in importance to the actor through changes in their situation, or over their life-course. The dynamic and multiple nature of identities is very important to the study of migration. Rouse (1995) explains that in the 1970s and part of the 1980s, scholars
tended to understand migrant identity as “bipolar,” meaning that there were only two options for migrant identity; the migrant either retained his or her previous identity and returned to the homeland, or abandoned his or her old identity in favor of creating a new identity by remaining in the country of destination. However, it is now understood that migrants may have “multi-local and transnational affiliations” and have “acquired multiple identities, combining old and new in a broadened repertoire of possible associations” (Rouse, 1995:354). Identity is an important concept in the field of migration studies, not only in regards to the self-identification challenges of those who do migrate, but also in terms of understanding motivations for leaving and staying in the homeland.

The concept of imagination in migration is also important to understand. Arjun Appadurai (1996), in his book *Modernity at Large*, makes the connection between migration, media, and imagination. Appadurai (1996:4) states that, “Because of the sheer multiplicity of the forms in which they appear (cinema, television, computers, and telephones) and because of the rapid way in which they move through daily life routines, electronic media provide resources for self-imagining as an everyday social project.” While previous to the globalizing forces of technology and media, life possibilities were finite and limited by tradition, the consumption of images, stories, and cultural productions which cross national boundaries allows for people to imagine alternative lives for themselves and for their children (Appadurai, 1991). In addition to resources for the imagination provided by electronic media, contact with, or news and rumors of, people in the same social sphere who have already moved abroad provide another rich source of resources which influence how individuals imagine their own
possibilities. With this information, people can imagine other worlds, and what it might be like if they migrated. Because of this imagining of other possibilities, Appadurai (1991:198) states that those “whose lot is harsh no longer see their lives as mere outcomes of the givenness of things, but often as the ironic compromise between what they could imagine and what social life will permit.”

The gap between what is imagined as possible and the reality of an individual’s lived experience does not just lead to discontentment, but can lead to action. Appadurai (1996:7) states:

Imagination, especially when collective, can become the fuel for action. It is the imagination, in its collective forms, that creates ideas of neighborhood and nationhood, of moral economies and unjust rule, of higher wages and foreign labor prospects. The imagination is today a staging ground for action, and not only for escape.

While the manifestation of these actions can take many different forms, including political or social mobilization, it can also take the form of emigration. Therefore, an understanding of individual and collective imaginings about life outside of the country of origin and the possibilities of emigration is essential for an emic understanding of migration.

**Theories of Migration**

In the field of migration studies, there are a variety of theories that help to explain and predict migration trends. Structural theories are some of the most pervasive in the field of migration studies. They provide broad, overarching patterns at the highest levels of aggregation (global and international). In reaction to these generalizing theories, there has been an emergence of theories which attempt to arrive at a more nuanced understanding of migration, and to account for migrant agency. Instead of viewing individuals as passive automatons, new theories have tried to understand the individual
decision-making process and how they are affected by their social and cultural realities. These studies tend to focus their research on lower levels of aggregation, such as the individual and community. Additionally, there is a growing body of academic literature on the state (both sending and receiving) as an important actor in the migration phenomenon. This study will use the culture of migration theory to explore the case of Uruguay, but will also include several other migration theories which are pertinent to the case.

**Culture of Migration**

The culture of migration theory fits with a broader idea of cumulative causation. Cumulative causation means that, even aside from migrant networks and the presence of migrant support institutions, the act of migration causes changes in the sending society which further encourage migration. (Messina and Lahav 2006:46) In explanations based on a culture of migration theory, international migration is seen to cause profound changes to the very culture of the sending society, including shared values perceptions. This change in homeland culture leads to further migration.

Cohen (2004), in his book *The Culture of Migration in Southern Mexico*, argues that a culture of migration approach to his study of Oaxacan migrants is the most appropriate. He explains that “culture of migration” means that migration is socially accepted and pervasive in the society, both historically and currently, and that decisions about migration are “rooted in everyday experiences” (2004:5). Cohen (2004:5) further explains the cultural model of migration by stating:

To call migration in Oaxaca ‘cultural’ is not to say it is a kind of hardwired response – or automatic reaction to a set of specific outcomes. Instead, migration is one response among many to patterns and processes that link households and rural communities to global labor markets, flows of goods, and personal demands.
As part of Cohen’s argument for a cultural model of migration, he asserts the migrants’ agency in response to cultural pressures. Cohen also highlights the importance of culturally informed familial and community responsibilities in the decisions to migrate, remit, and return.

Similarly, in her work, *Making a Life: Meanings of Migration in Cape Verde*, Lisa Åkesson (2004) also uses a culture of migration approach. Åkesson emphasizes the importance of history in forming cultures of migration, while exploring the “ideas and practices that generate migration culture in everyday life” (2004:20). Åkesson insists on the importance of studying migration from a homeland perspective, investigating the discourse of those living in Cape Verde and the way that they give meaning to the theme of migration. She identifies what she calls “migrant ideology,” in which mobility as a part of everyday life is both “natural and necessary” (2004:20). The culture of migration in this case is characterized by a lack of hope about the possibilities to be found in Cape Verde, and the belief that emigration is the only way to achieve a better life.

Hahn and Klute (2007), in their book, *Culture of Migration: African Perspectives*, agree on the importance of studies that focus on the societies of origin. They write that, although structural models are useful, migration is not simply a response to push/pull factors. Instead, migration should be understood as a “complex social phenomenon, which is a structured process and at the same time embedded in interpretations and valuations” (Hahn and Klute 2007:16). Hahn and Klute (2007:13) describe culture of migration as "a perspective that perceives migration movements as complexes of
cultural representations.” Also called into question by Hahn and Klute is the very notion that sedentary lifestyles are “normal” in the case of Africa. They state:

Whereas, from a European standpoint, migratory phenomena seem to disturb order, so that many efforts are employed in order to send migrants back, at worst, or to integrate them, at best, mobility and movements of people are since long part and parcel of the African reality.” (2007:11)

This idea highlights the importance of researching migration from an emic perspective and exploring the cultural norms surrounding mobility, rather than assuming their continuity with western ideas.

A culture of migration in Uruguay has been suggested by several authors to explain the continued emigration from the country in the absence of political or economic crises. However, it tends to be mentioned only in passing. A collection of essays called Migración Uruguaya: Un Enfoque Antropológico, compiled by Diconca and Campodóico, does provide insight into migration and culture in Uruguay. In the book, Mariana Viera Cherro hints at the presence of a culture of migration in Uruguay, stating that, “The individual assumes long distance relationships and the mobility of the people as everyday life” (2007:150). Viera Cherro’s (2007) main arguments are for the presence of “shared risk communities,” and continuity in “route myths,” which she calls the ideas about what is to be found in Uruguay and outside of the country, according to the social imaginary of the country. In the same book, Julieta Bengochea (2007:126) discusses the normalization of emigration as “an option located in the collective imagination of the Uruguayan population, especially the youth.” For Bengochea, emigration is just another valid option in the life of a young Uruguayan looking to set out on their own, feeling discouraged by real and imagined lack of opportunities in the home country. Because of this, Bengochea (2007:134) states that “One can speak, then, of an
‘emigration culture’ or ‘culture of emigration’ present in the majority of the population and sustained in the lack of hope that appears in many young Uruguayans.” Also in *Migración Uruguaya: Un Enfoque Antropológico*, Lydia de Souza (2007:155) sets out to investigate the “existence of a culture of migration rooted in the social imaginary of our country.” Souza (2007:159), after an exploration of survey data, states, “The young imagination, in this case, weaves two worlds, one secure but immobilizing, and the other risky, but with better possibilities for the future.”

Using the culture of migration theory in this study will allow for the use of ethnographic methods to explore the emic perspective on migration. I will show how the case of Uruguay fits with and diverges from other studies using the idea of a culture of migration in Chapter 3. Several other theories are relevant to the Uruguayans case, and will also inform the analysis.

**Neoclassical Economics**

The theory of neoclassical economics explains international migration as a consequence of difference in the supply and demand for labor, in combination with differing wage rates, between countries. Messina and Lahav (2006:36) explain neoclassical economics at the macro level by stating:

Countries with a large endowment of labor relative to capital have a low equilibrium market wage, while countries with a limited endowment of labor relative to capital are characterized by a high market wage, as depicted graphically by the familiar interaction of labor supply and demand curves. The resulting differential in wages causes workers from the low-wage country to move to the high-wage country.

In this economic model, migrants from low-wage but labor rich countries will continue to move into areas with labor shortages and higher wages until an eventual equilibrium is achieved. In the micro level of neoclassical economics, the individual migrant is seen as
a rational actor who strives to maximize their income by weighing the costs and benefits of moving.

This model has remained pervasive in economic based studies of migration, despite some major criticisms. One criticism is that it states purely economic rationale as the only factor in the decision to migrate or not, leaving out social and cultural factors. Äkesson (2004:17) critiques this model by stating that it “ignores the fact that migration and economic considerations, like all human practices, are always socially embedded and culturally informed.” Neoclassical economics as a model cannot explain differences between the decisions made by individuals, within families and communities, and by country of origin. Additionally, this model would indicate that the poorest of the population, who would have the most to gain economically by migrating, would be the section of the population most likely to move. However, studies indicate that this is not the case. In the case of Uruguay, Adela Pellegrino and Andrea Vigorito (2005) found that Uruguayan emigrants were more likely to come from the top 40 percent of the wealth index, clearly indicating that simple supply and demand economics are not the only factor present in the decision to migrate. This theory does remain useful, however, as Uruguayan migrants do tend to move from a poorer nation to richer nations where their earning potential is greater.

**New Economics of Migration**

New economics of migration is a theory which emerged as a corrective to neoclassical economics. This model again underscores the importance of economics as the main factor which determines whether or not an individual migrates, but unlike neoclassical economics, the migrant is discussed as being embedded in larger social and familial network, rather than an autonomous actor (Messina and Lahav, 2006).
an effort to maximize expected income, a family or household unit will choose to send
some member abroad to work in a different market. Having a migrant household
member is also a strategy to diversify the risks of dependency on local market forces by
placing a member in another market.

New Economics of Migration has proven to be very useful in describing the
importance of the household in the context of labor migration, as Jeffery H. Cohen
decision to migrate from the communities he studied in Oaxaca, took into account the
current household resources, as well as the abilities of the members and potential
resources they would be able to provide for the family unit in the form of remittances.
Stark and Bloom (1985: 174) also underscore the importance of remittances as an
“implicit contractual agreement” between the migrant and the nonmigrants with whom
the costs and returns of the migration project are shared. If remittances can be seen as
an integral part of the analysis using a new economics of migration model, then
Uruguay’s lack of remittances, which constitute less than 0.5% of the country’s GDP
(Pellegrino and Vigorito, 2009), imply that this model is not an effective tool for
analyzing the Uruguayan case.

**Migrant Network Theory**

Network Theory explains social relationships between migrants and nonmigrants
as a cause of further migration, independent of push and pull factors from the sending
and receiving countries. Peggy Levitt (2001: 8) describes migrant networks as such:

> Once begun, migration spreads through social networks. Social networks
> are the sets of cross-border interpersonal ties connecting migrants, return
> migrants, and nonmigrants through kinship, friendship, and attachment to a
> shared place of origin. Once a network is in place, it becomes more likely
> that additional migration will occur.
Migrant networks provide for information sharing about employment and housing opportunities, and with other practical matters, which works to reduce both the risk and expense of migrating. Access to migrant networks becomes a form of social capital for the prospective migrant, aiding them in the process of finding foreign employment. Messina and Lahav (2006:44) state that, “acts of migration at one point in time systematically alter the context within which future migration decisions are made, greatly increasing the likelihood that later decision makers will choose to migrate.” Kapur and McHale (2005: 125), describe the same phenomena as “chain migration,” which is self-sustaining, even after the original impetus for emigration breaks down.

**Structuralist/ Marxist**

The Structuralist/Marxist approach uses World Systems theory, the idea that the developed nations of the world represent the core of a single world system, while the underdeveloped or developing nations are left at the periphery of this system. The Structuralist approach views migration as a natural and inevitable response to the growth of capitalism in and its penetration of peripheral markets (Messina and Lahav, 2006). Previously, the penetration of these markets was achieved through colonialism; however, now it is achieved through neocolonial relationships and the globalization of the economy. The opening of the peripheral markets to capitalism causes dislocation of people in developing nations, as their labor becomes a commodity in the global market.

This theory is generalizing and lacks attention to the nuances of the migration experience, but it useful in the case of Uruguay. Uruguay, having such a small internal market, is becoming more and more incorporated into the global capitalist economy. The skills and education that many Uruguayans have attained are desirable on the global market, leading to highly skilled migration to the core from the periphery.
Transnationalism

In the last two decades, the concept of transnationalism has become the focus of much intellectual attention. Transnationalism opposes the previous paradigm in which migrants were thought to sever ties with their homeland and assimilate into the host society. It also breaks with "methodological nationalism" in an attempt to study migration without the central focus on the nation-state (Hahn and Klute, 2007:12). In their book, *Nations Unbound*, Basch, Glick Schiller, and Szanton Blanc (1994:22) state that, "Transnationalism is a process by which migrants, through their daily life activities and social, economic, and political relations, create social fields that cross national boundaries." In her book entitled *The Transnational Villagers*, Peggy Levitt (2001:6) defines transnationalism as, "processes by which immigrants forge and sustain multistranded social relations that link together their societies of origin and settlement."

For the transnational migrant, geographical distancing from the homeland does not mean they are cut off from the social and organizational life of their homeland. Through the intense exchange of migrants, remittances, social remittances, frequent communication, as well as participation in homeland organizations and politics, transnational migrants remain active participants in their homeland.

The concept of transnationalism is applicable for the study of the Uruguayan case. Many Uruguayans who emigrate maintain strong and frequent connections with the homeland. However, this does not create the intense "transnational social fields" that are described by Glick Schiller et al. (1992), nor the "transnational communities" described by Levitt (2001:2) when she states that "Over the years, migrants from the Dominican Republic and the friends and family they have left behind have sustained such strong, frequent contacts with one another it is as if village life takes place in two
settings.” Perhaps because of the geographical dispersion of the Uruguayan diaspora, or the tendency for Uruguayan migrants to achieve a high degree of integration into their host societies, Uruguayan emigrants do not seem to manifest such strong ties between the home community and abroad community as represented in Levitt’s study. More useful in the Uruguayan case is the notion of the “transnational actor” who maintains frequent contact with the home land. Importantly, it is not only those who engage in migration who can be considered transnational actors. Those who remain in the home country, but who live their lives in transnational contexts can also be considered to be transnational actors (Levitt, 2001:9). Åkesson (2004:16) calls these transnational actors who do not migrate “homeland transnationalists” who “live their lives in a social universe that stretches far beyond the borders of their country.”

**The State as an Actor**

Globalization and transnational processes have led some scholars to question whether the modern nation-state is “an outdated from of social and political organization” (Vertovec, 2009:84). Others maintain that while the nation-state may be changing, it is not disappearing. State led transnationalism is one way that nation-states try to capture and benefit from transnational processes. For example, remittances sent by emigrants are estimated to surpass all development assistance for developing counties, and are a key source of foreign capital for many counties (Østergaard-Nielsen, 2003). In order to capture some of these funds and funnel them towards public works and development projects, some states have developed programs to match or double funds for certain projects sent by migrant workers. One example of these programs is Mexico’s “Dos por Uno” (Two for One) program, created in 1992, which formally solicits and recognizes migrants’ contributions (Smith, 2003).
States have also recognized the power that migrants have in homeland politics. Vertovec (2009:94) lists some of the forms of homeland politics as:

Exile groups organizing themselves for return, groups lobbying on behalf of a homeland, external offices of political parties, migrant hometown associations, and opposition groups campaigning or planning actions to effect political change in the homeland.

Levitt (2001) describes transnational politics between the Dominican Republic, specifically the city of Miraflores, and the Dominican migrant population in the United States, as having a great impact on Dominican local politics. Local political parties campaign in the U.S., attempting to gain migrant loyalty by catering to their needs and interests, and migrants return to the DR to run for political office (Levitt, 2001). Many states have also sought to extend substantive citizen rights to migrants by allowing them to vote by absentee ballot. Governments have also created special government offices for migrant nationals, and many have begun to allow dual citizenship for their nationals who have migrated (Vertovec, 2009).

Nation-states reaching out form linkages (substantive or symbolic) with their migrant populations abroad, an example of what Basch, Glick-Schiller, and Szanton Blanc (1994) call “deterritorialized nation-state building.” Because of transnational processes, the citizens of a deterritorialized state are no longer contained within the geographical boundaries of the state (Basch, Glick-Schiller, and Szanton Blanc, 1994). Deterritorialized nation states become, practically and symbolically, “representatives, protectors and spokespeople for their dispersed populations” because they “conduct economic, political, social, and cultural transactions that are essential for the maintenance of the home state’s survival” (Basch, Glick-Schiller, and Szanton Blanc, 1994: 270).
The stakes are high for many migrant exporting countries. They have much to gain from migration (remittances, social remittances, political representation, knowledge and skills brought back by return migrants), but also much to lose in terms of human capital, demographic distribution, and the destruction of social fabric and social organization that accompanies migration. While labor migration is often argued as a positive for the state as an anti-poverty measure, and even as a key to the development strategy of some countries, out migration of the highly skilled population is largely thought to be detrimental to the sending country.

**Highly Skilled Migration**

Highly skilled migration refers to the migration of those in a country who are highly educated, particularly talented, or have great experience in their field; in other words, they have high levels of human capital. Highly skilled migration is of great concern for developing countries as it can drain the country of the human capital necessary for development. Nancy Birdsall, President of the Center for Global Development, states, “There is a growing awareness in the development community that the movement of people is potentially as important to development outcomes as the movements of goods and capital” (Kapur and McHale 2005: preface). The emigration of the highly skilled is also known as the “brain drain” effect, and is of particular concern to Uruguay. Concerns about “brain drain” are often noted in Uruguayan media, politics, and academia.

**Brain Drain**

The term “brain drain” frames the emigration of highly educated or highly skilled migrants as a detrimental loss of human capital for the sending country. Pellegrino states throughout her works that in Uruguay, both historically and currently, those who emigrate tend to be comparatively highly skilled when compared to the overall
population (Pellegrino and Vigorito, 2005). According to Pellegrino (2002:16) the mass emigration of the highly educated started under the military dictatorship when the government began to interfere with the University of the Republic. She states, “Repression targeting university professors was particularly harsh and the subsequent emigration of academics was significant. The quality of the teaching at the university level fell dramatically and entire research groups disintegrated” (Pellegrino 2002:16).

In reference to current trends in highly skilled migration, Pellegrino (2002:16) states, “The option of emigration has taken on a massive nature, mostly including middle class sectors, professionals in various fields, teachers, professors and, in general, people with high levels of education.” She also explains that, although Uruguay is among the countries with the greatest proportion of tertiary educated young people on the continent, there is no “over-education,” meaning that there is not an imbalance between the supply and demand of graduates for the local labor market (2002:18).

The loss of human capital due to the emigration of highly skilled Uruguayans is compounded by the fact that education is highly subsidized in Uruguay, which provides free public education from primary through tertiary education levels. This means that the benefits of the investment in human capital of those who emigrate are never felt in Uruguay. In this case, the loss of human capital can be associated with a loss of economic capital as well, due to the lack of return on investment by the state (Kapur and McHale, 2005). Human capital is an “indispensable element for development in every country” and the loss of human capital also affects the ability to produce human capital, ending in a net loss for the sending countries (Pellegrino 2009:197).
Brain Gain

In response to the brain drain debate, some academics have rejected the negative implications of brain drain, framing the issue of highly skilled migration instead as “brain gain.” The brain gain theory, explained at length by Kapur and McHale (2005), implies that the remittances sent home by migrants, as well as knowledge and skills gained by migrants that could be disseminated in the home country, equal a net gain to sending countries, rather than a net loss. The argument that remittances aid in development seems to be especially popular, but is also controversial. Kapur and McHale (2005:145) state, “It is important to dispel one myth surrounding remittances, namely, that they compensate for the brain drain, substituting one scarce factor (financial resources) for another (human capital) that is critical for development.”

Even if remittances provided an adequate substitution for highly skilled migration, remittances have traditionally been thought to have little impact in the Uruguayan case, and are believed to constitute less than 0.5% of the countries’ GDP (Pellegrino and Vigorito, 2009). The comparatively low levels of remittances sent home by Uruguayans abroad is explained by Pellegrino and Vigorito, who emphasize that emigrants from South America who, by virtue of their educational and occupational status, have a better chance of full insertion into the receiving society, are less likely to send remittances back home (2009:207).

Although the extent of dissemination of ideas and skills gained abroad to those remaining in Uruguay needs further investigation, it is logical to assume that the transfer of knowledge does not fully compensate for the loss of human capital accrued by the society upon emigration. Kapur and McHale (2005: 207) weigh in on the issue by asserting:
The idea that migration of a significant fraction of a country’s best and brightest is not particularly harmful and may even be beneficial to the country is simply unwarranted… although the effects are undoubtedly complex, the fundamental reality is that countries need talent to ensure innovation, build institutions, and implement programs – the key pillars of long term development.

The trend of migration of the highly skilled is exacerbated by the increasingly restrictive migration policies of receiving countries. The Uruguayan highly skilled have always been pulled towards the regional metropolis, Buenos Aires, Argentina, as well as towards major cities in southern Brazil, but contemporary migrants are tending more and more to emigrate to developed nations, especially the United States and Spain (Pellegrino, 2002). According to Pellegrino and Vigorito (2009), the United States, Canada and Australia have kept “half-open door policies,” although they are becoming more restrictive, while European countries have “closed door policies,” but all developed countries are strongly favoring the entrance of highly skilled migrants.

The Approach to this Study

It is evident that many of the theories of migration, from the broad structural theories, to theories which attempt to account for migrant agency, are relevant to the Uruguayan case. Uruguay fits into broad economic models, being a net migrant sending country to wealthier, more developed countries. However, these models are far from adequate in explaining why Uruguayans leave, or choose to remain in their homeland. The theories of culture of migration, migrant networks, and transnationalism, are very useful tools in an anthropological approach to this case. The use of ethnography and narratives bring a more complete understanding of Uruguayan migrants as actors, individual agents, and the influence on social and cultural realities on migration decisions. It is also evident that the role of the state should not be ignored. The state
policies in the sending and receiving country must be taken into account when analyzing the context of migration from one nation-state to another.

Except in the cases of forced displacement or exile, migration is a choice arrived at by an individual or perhaps a family unit. The choice, however, is not made in a cultural void, but within norms and expectations according to the culture, taking into account state legal structures and projects, and heavily influenced by international global economic and power differences. This study will present the case of Uruguayan migration from a culture of migration perspective, with the understanding that culture is dynamic, not static, and is subject to changes in economic and political processes. Focusing on the homeland perspective and exploring the idea of a culture of migration, I will try to locate the anthropological subjects within these broader processes to arrive at a more complete analysis of emigration from Uruguay.

Methods for Data Collection

I spent most of the year 2007 in Uruguay as a Fulbright English Teaching Assistant, dividing the grant time between the provincial city of Salto, and the capital city of Montevideo. As part of the grant, I was also able to conduct my own research. I chose to compile a collection of oral histories from Uruguayans to increase my understanding of Uruguayan history and culture through firsthand accounts of lived experiences. It was during this time in Uruguay that I began to understand the importance of high rates of emigration in the history and daily reality of Uruguay. The descriptions people gave about friends and relatives who had gone abroad were deeply ambiguous, mixing the pain of separation, happiness for and envy of the lifestyle attained by those abroad, and pity for those abroad who suffer because they miss their homeland. I remained interested in emigration as I started the Master of Arts in Latin
American Studies at the University of Florida. I chose to return to Uruguay to study the culture of migration during the months of July and August of 2010.

During July and August of 2010, I spent six weeks in Uruguay collecting data, dividing my time between Montevideo, the capital, and Salto, a department in the interior. Conducting research in these two sites permitted me to understand the differences in migratory pressures between the capital and the interior, as well as account for the effect of urban primacy. I also had existing contacts in both of these cities due to my prior experience in the country. When I arrived, I began by interviewing the contacts that I already had in the country, and from there used the snowball sampling technique to extend my sample. My contacts were very helpful in suggesting potential interviewees and helping me establish contact with people who had a variety of backgrounds and relationships to migration. I conducted 26 semi-structured interviews to collect the bulk of the ethnographic data. I interviewed fourteen women and twelve men, and fifteen of the interviewees were from the eighteen through thirty-two age bracket, shown to be the most susceptible to migratory pressures in Uruguay (Pellegrino and Vigorito, 2005). Amongst those whom I was able to interview, there was a young professional who was planning to emigrate to France, an elderly widow whose entire family had emigrated to the United States, and a public official who had been exiled during the dictatorship and had returned to Uruguay. Each interviewee had a unique and valuable experience to share in relation to migration and the migratory pressures of the country.

I engaged each interviewee in a conversation about the Uruguay in general, recent changes in the country, if they had ever thought about migrating, whom they
know who had migrated, their thoughts on migration trends and politics, and their impressions about life in Uruguay compared to the exterior. Because the interviews were semi-structured, other topics which were brought up during the interview were freely pursued, making each interview unique and ethnographically rich. I recorded each interview using a digital voice recorder. While in Montevideo, I attended a meeting of the Association of Parents with Children in the Exterior (APHIE), and was able to involve several members in a group discussion on migration after the conclusion of the meeting. APHIE is a civil society organization that provides support for parents of emigrants. I was also able to visit the Museum of Culture and Migration, and interview the director of Projoven, a governmental program that aims to assist youth in acquiring the skills they need for labor market insertion. I also gathered data from informal conversations and observations, as well as from various cultural productions, such as radio and television shows, newspaper articles, and song lyrics. In the field I worked inductively, using grounded theory to analyze the data and inform my research.

Grounded Theory

Grounded theory is a research method developed by sociologists that has a long history of use in ethnographic case studies (Bernard, 2000:443). Using this method, the researcher works inductively, drawing concepts, categories, and theories from the data collected. Instead of collecting all of the data and later analyzing it, grounded theory calls for analysis starting with the first piece of data collected, while still in the field. Each interview, or other text, is coded by the researcher. From these codes, certain patterns and analytical categories emerge. Provisional theories can be interpreted from the patterns, which are then tested against each new text acquired through the research. Field notes about the process and the emerging theories are kept through a process
called “memoing” (Bernand, 2000). Corbin and Stauss (1990: 6) describe the method by stating, “The research process itself guides the researcher towards examining all the possibly rewarding avenues to understanding. This is why the research method is one of discovery and one which grounds a theory in reality.”

Consistent with the grounded theory methodology, I began to analyze the data that I was collecting while in field. I transcribed the interviews and then coded the themes found in the transcription. I then applied the same codes to the next transcription, adding codes for new themes which emerged in the data. By analyzing the patterns in the coded data, I developed analytical categories. From these categories, I formed preliminary theories and further questions, which were included (tested) in the next interview. My notes during this analytical process allowed me to find the most fruitful avenues of research, and the research process revealed patterns in the data which would have otherwise gone unnoticed. Using grounded theory to analyze the ethnographic data that I collected helped me to move beyond thick description, and allowed me to create and test theories that emerged from the data, without limiting my research to a preconceived hypothesis.

Outline of Chapters

This work is divided into four parts, including this introductory chapter. Chapter 2 contains a historical overview of migration in Uruguay including accounts of the major immigration and emigration waves. It will also describe how the Uruguayan state has reacted to migration trends, and what it is currently doing about the high rates of emigration. Chapter 3 is an analysis of the ethnographic data that I collected in the field in which I will provide evidence for the existence of a culture of migration in Uruguay, and describe how it is similar and divergent from other culture of migration accounts.
The thesis will conclude with Chapter 4, in which I will highlight the findings of the study and suggest further avenues of research on the topic.
CHAPTER 2
THE HISTORICAL AND POLITICAL CONTEXT OF MIGRATION

Immigration, Emigration, and National Identity

Uruguay has long struggled to combat the almost transitory nature of its population and to cultivate a real attachment to its territory. Unlike many other nations in Latin America which formed their national identity in the process of fighting for independence from Spain, Uruguay became a country after independence. The Oriental Republic of Uruguay was created in 1828 as a buffer state through negotiations between Brazil and Argentina, mediated by a British envoy (Brun, 2005). At the time of independence, Uruguay had a population of just 74,000 inhabitants (Aguiar, 1982). The Uruguayan government actively encouraged European immigration, as population size was seen as essential for economic growth, military power, and fixing the border areas (Pellegrino, 2009). Immigration was fundamental to the demographic growth of the country.

Uruguay’s history, culture, and national identity are profoundly influenced by migratory waves. When asked about their own culture, Uruguayans often repeat, “We are a country of immigrants.” Durand and Massey (2010) state that, “During the latter half of the nineteenth century and first half of the twentieth century, European emigrants went primarily to five countries in Latin America: Argentina (around 4 million), Brazil (2 million), Cuba (600,000), Uruguay (600,000), and Chile (200,000).” In Uruguay, European immigration caused the population of the country to grow sevenfold in the second half of the nineteenth century, giving it a ratio of foreign born immigrants to resident population (known as Criollos) similar or higher to that of the United States (Goebel, 2009:1). According to Goebel (2009:2), 70% of the immigrants to Uruguay from 1850 to 1930 were of Spanish or Italian origin.
Although Montevideo was an important point of entry for cross-Atlantic migrants, Aguilar (1982) points out that for many migrants, it was only a stop off point in their journey. Goebel (2010:13) states that “Uruguay was primarily a country of transit within a broader migratory circuit,” citing the fact that between 1874 and 1901 “no more than 1,596 foreigners became Uruguayan citizens.” Goebel (2010) suggests that many of the Spanish and Italian immigrants were actually sojourners, who intended to work, save money, and return to their countries of origin. The most famous of these temporary migrants were the “golondrinas” who would spend half of the year working the harvest season in Europe, and the other half working the harvest season in South America (Goebel, 2010:13). Goebel (2010:13) states that Montevideo’s port statistics on the ratio of Spanish and Italian arrivals and departures suggests a 70% return rate, but warns that many of these moves between Uruguay and Europe were not definite, and that the bulk of the movement actually took place between Montevideo and Buenos Aires. Regional migration was intense and many immigrants landing in Montevideo crossed into Argentina and Brazil, while many Argentines and Brazilians ended up establishing themselves in Uruguay (Pellegrino, 2009).

Uruguay consistently struggled to keep immigrants in their national territory. With such a low naturalization rate it is understandable that Uruguay, in 1919, became the first country in Latin America to recognize dual nationality (Cain and Doherty, 2007:101). The census data regarding the number of foreign born people in the country showed a decline of 20,208 between the years of 1900 and 1908 (Aguila, 1982:33). Despite the loss of immigrants, an important number of immigrants did remain in the
country. Brun (2005:558) states that at the turn of the century, 47% of the population of the capital city, Montevideo, was composed of foreign born immigrants.

The early established pattern of emigration led Uruguayan public functionary and scholar, Julio Martinez Lamas, to describe Uruguay as a “country of emigration” as early as 1938 (Aguiar, 982:27). Martinez Lamas, in his book entitled A Donde Vamos?, stated:

This emigration of compatriots who leave taking with them their families… is the worst social and economic phenomenon that is occurring with us, not only because every one of the emigrants is an Uruguayan and in the act of leaving stops being Uruguayan, and the rest of his country loses their intelligence and labor, but also because he gives himself to his new country, to the foreign, his children, and the children of his children, forever… Every emigrant takes with him a piece of the national capital… How can one conceive of progress, of national greatness, of social wellbeing, of individual joy, in a country that, although sparsely populated, is a land of emigration? (Aguiar, 1982:27)

Batllismo and the “Golden Era” of Uruguay

Having such a high proportion immigrants as a total of the population, a high rate of regional migration, and a somewhat artificial origin as an autonomous nation state, made the formation of an Uruguayan nation and collective identity a challenge. However, at the beginning of the 20th century, Uruguay began to consolidate its national identity as a peaceful, and prosperous liberal democracy. José Batlle y Ordóñez, president from 1903 to 1907, then again from 1911 to 1915, was especially influential in the progressive social policies and interventionist state economic policies, so much so, that the 1903 through 1930 era in Uruguay is known as the Batllista era. Labor laws, including limits on child labor, and an eight hour work day limit for all sectors were considered quite progressive. The Uruguayan state vastly expanded access to free, compulsory education, and increased its official policy of separation of the church and
state by ending religious instruction in public schools, and granting the right to divorce. The Uruguayan National Public Assistance Law of 1910 made Uruguay the first welfare state in Latin America.

The Batllista era was fundamental in the formation of a collective identity of the nation, though not necessarily a strong sense of nationalism. Spektorowski (1998:110) states, “The idea of parliamentary democracy, political pragmatism and the absence of concern over national identity were the factors that shaped Batllist ideology, which aimed primarily at creating a society in which individual happiness would prevail over the quest for a so-called national identity.” Spektrowski (1998:110) further describes Balltist ideology by stating, “Battlismo, representing social mobility, immigration, cosmopolitanism, and a secular, compulsory education system, believed in linear progress and in utilitarian, materialistic rationalism – detaching itself, as a political movement, from a Hispanoamerican cultural background.” The national image of Uruguay as dissimilar to the rest of Latin America and more like the “civilized West” has been an important point in the collective identity of Uruguay (Spektrowski, 1998). Uruguay’s nickname at this time was the “Switzerland of South America,” and the capital city Montevideo was known as the “Athens of the River Plate” (Sosnowski, 1993:3).

In the 1940s, Uruguay began a move away from its agro-exporting economy toward an Import Substitution Industrialization (ISI) model. This era was accompanied by an increase in the country’s Gross Domestic Product (GDP), an increase in real wages, and increase in jobs in the manufacturing industries and public sectors. The years 1945 through 1955 were a time of particularly accelerated economic growth and
industrial development, earning it the nickname “Era of the Fat Cows” (Frega et al., 2007). World War II and the Korean War extended Uruguay’s important international export linkages (Pellegrino, 2009).

The first half of the 20th century is remembered as Uruguay’s “Golden Era” and is part of Uruguay’s idealized past (Frega et al., 2007). Uruguay’s prosperity, education level, high literacy rates, and democratic tradition were a source of pride for the country. Even the national soccer team was highly successful then, hosting and winning the first World Cup in 1930, and later beating Brazil in the World Cup of 1950 in what is known as the Maracanazo. Uruguay’s collective identity began to consolidate around the image of the country as outstanding from its neighbors in its cultural levels, prosperity and peaceful democracy. However, these pillars of Uruguayan identity would all be challenged in the coming decades.

The Economic Decline and Dictatorship (1955-1985)

The Uruguayan economy began to stagnate and decline in the 1950s and 1960s. International demand for Uruguay’s exports fell, while the ISI growth began to reach its limits due to the small internal market (Pellegrino, 2009). The total exports dropped from US$254.3 million in 1950 to US$129.4 million in 1960, the growth rate declined drastically, the Uruguayan peso was devalued, and real wages began to fall (Brun, 2005:560). Economic decline was accompanied by civil and political unrest, most notably, the leftist urban guerilla group, the Tupamaros. There was also a marked increase in the power of the armed forces, and the military’s adoption of a doctrine of national security to combat leftist movements in a Cold War context (San Martin, 2007). Two of the military’s stated objectives were the “destruction of the subversive military
apparatus that operates in the country” and to “provide security for national
development” (San Martin, 2007).

The increased militarization and civil unrest set the stage for the 1973 golpe del
estado and the start of a military dictatorship which would remain in power for the next
12 years. The dictatorship meant the suspension of civil liberties, massive incarceration
of suspected dissidents, and years of state terror. Besides the political and social
changes, the dictatorship also meant a change in economic policy and a move towards
trade openness and financial liberalization. Although the national GDP increased at the
start of the dictatorship, real wages fell 43% between the years 1970 and 1979 (Espino
and Azar, 2009). Economic hardships were further exacerbated by the debt crisis of
1982. In this year alone Uruguay’s currency was devalued by 169 percent, and by the
mid-eighties, one in three homes was below the poverty line, a level of poverty
previously unthinkable in Uruguay (Espino and Azar, 2009).

Despite consistent levels of emigration in the first half of the 20th century, Uruguay
had remained a net immigrant receiving country until the 1960s (Pellegrino and Vigorito,
2005). The combination of the economic decline and the military dictatorship reversed
this trend. The military dictatorship routinely used torture and terror tactics to eliminate
subversives from the country. During this time, political exiles left Uruguay en masse,
either by mandate, to avoid persecution and terror by the state, or by way of expressing
“opposition that manifested itself as exodus” (Taks, 2006:143). From 1963 to 1975, an
estimated 201, 376 people emigrated from Uruguay (Cabella and Pellegrino, 2005:5).
The four years between 1972 and 1976, the beginning of the dictatorship period, saw
the highest rates of emigration to date (Pellegrino, 2002:16). The high rates of
emigration continued throughout the military dictatorship, with another notable increase during the 1981-1982 debt crisis (Pellegrino, 2002). The return of democracy to the country in 1985 brought back only small numbers of return migrants, leaving Uruguay with a large exile community, and a continuing emigration trend (Pellegrino and Vigorito, 2005).

After the end of the dictatorship, Eduardo Galeano, one of Uruguay’s most famous authors wrote:

Lots of ashes have rained on the purple land. For the twelve years of the military dictatorship, the word libertad referred to nothing but a plaza and a prison. At that prison – the chief cage for political detainees – it was against the rules to draw pictures of pregnant women, couples, birds, butterflies, or stars; and without permission no prisoner could whistle, smile, sing, walk at a fast pace, or wave to another. But every Uruguayan was a prisoner except for jailers and exiles – three million of us, though only a few thousand seemed to be. One in every eighty Uruguayans had a hood tied on his head while the rest, doomed to isolation and solitary confinement even when spared the pain of torture, wore invisible hoods as well. Fear and silence were mandatory. Hostile to any and all living things, the dictatorship poured cement over the grass in the plazas and felled or whitewashed every tree within its reach. (Galeano, 1993)

Galeano’s passage illustrates the reality for those who continued living in Uruguay through the dictatorship under conditions of fear and self-censorship. The alienation felt by those inside the country has been coined as insile, as analogous to exile (Sosnowski, 1993).

Not all Uruguayans who lived through the dictatorship experienced the repression to the same degree of intensity, depending on many factors including location, age, and political beliefs. However, in the process of redemocratization, everyone had to confront the reality of what had happened in the country. Speaking of the experiences of redemocratization in the Southern Cone, Roniger (1998:169) stated, “With redemocratization, as the full magnitude of horrors of the repression were made public,
the legacy of human rights violations forced individuals to confront their understanding of the institutional foundations and the identity of their societies.” This had a profound destabilizing effect on the national identity of Uruguay. The myth of peaceful democracy and civility had been destroyed by 12 years of military repression and violence, and the idea of Uruguay as prosperous in comparison to its Latin American neighbors was challenged by the intense pauperization which had taken place during the dictatorship.

**Post-Dictatorship Recovery**

While the military government relinquished formal governmental control in the elections of 1984, the military did prohibit two popular candidates from running, including a candidate from the leftist *Frente Amplio*. The military also managed to force through parliament a measure which granted amnesty to all military personnel accused of human rights violations, known as the *ley de caducidad*, a measure that was upheld by voters in referendums in 1989 and 2009 by narrow margins (Brun, 2005). Uruguay’s slow but steady post-dictatorship economic recovery eventually resulted in urban poverty being reduced from 18% in 1990, to 9% in 1999 according to ECLAC data (Huber and Stephens, 2010:198). However, this recovery was soon erased as Uruguay experienced its worst economic crisis in its modern history in 2002.

**Economic Crisis of 2002**

In the wake of the Argentine economic crisis, Uruguay’s economic system also collapsed. In 2002 Uruguay’s GDP fell 11.4% and the exchange rate fell by approximately 90%, sending the unemployment rate to its highest level in 20 years (Pellegrino and Vigorito, 2005:58). There was also a one week bank holiday to prevent massive withdrawals, and some banks closed entirely. The Uruguayan peso was
devalued by 90%, and average household income fell by almost 20% in real terms (Pellegrino and Vigorito, 2005:63).

The economic crisis of 2002 led to another wave of mass emigration (Pellegrino, 2002:16). The drastic drop in real wages, increased unemployment, and general economic instability experienced during this crisis sent thousands of emigrants out of the country. Between the years of 1996 and 2004, approximately 100,000 people emigrated from Uruguay (Cabella and Pellegrino, 2005:5). The emigration began to intensity just before the crisis, in the year 1999, and peaked in 2002 with 29,000 people leaving that year alone (Pellegrino and Vigorito, 2005:66). Since the crisis, the Uruguayan economy has been steadily recovering, yet emigrants continue leaving in large numbers.

**Migrant Demographic Profile**

There are strong demographic trends amongst those who emigrated recently (1996-2003) including the tendencies to include slightly more men than women, be predominantly young adults, to come from the top 40% of the wealth index, and to be highly educated in comparison with the overall population (Pellegrino and Vigorito, 2005). According to Pellegrino (2002:16) the mass emigration of the highly educated started under the military dictatorship when the government began to interfere with the University of the Republic. She states, “Repression targeting university professors was particularly harsh and the subsequent emigration of academics was significant. The quality of the teaching at the university level fell dramatically and entire research groups disintegrated” (Pellegrino 2002:16). In reference to current trends in highly skilled migration, Pellegrino (2002:16) states, “The option of emigration has taken on a
massive nature, mostly including middle class sectors, professionals in various fields, teachers, professors and, in general, people with high levels of education.”

**Why Emigration is a Problem for the Uruguayan State**

**Loss of Human Capital and its Impact on Development**

The loss of human capital due to the emigration of highly skilled Uruguayans is compounded by the fact that education is highly subsidized in Uruguay, which provides free public education from primary through tertiary education levels. This means that the benefits of the investment in human capital of those who emigrate are never felt in Uruguay. In this case, the loss of human capital can be associated with a loss of economic capital as well, due to the lack of return on investment by the state (Kapur and McHale, 2005). Human capital is an “indispensable element for development in every country” and the loss of human capital also affects the ability to produce human capital, ending in a net loss for the sending countries (Pellegrino 2009:197).

The idea that the loss of migrants, especially the highly skilled, is an impediment to development is pervasive in Uruguayan society, media, and politics. Javier Taks (2006:148) stated that in the Uruguayan case, “Unlike other experiences, such as those of Mexico or the Philippines, motivating emigration is not seen as a tool for national development.” In six countries in Latin America, the income from remittances represents over 10% of the country’s GDP (Østergaard-Nielsen, 2003:15). In contrast, remittances to Uruguay are believed to constitute less than 0.5% of the country’s GDP, despite the fact that a massive 18 percent of the population lives outside of the country (Pellegrino and Vigorito, 2009). The comparatively very low levels of remittances sent home by Uruguayans abroad is explained by Pellegrino and Vigorito (2009:207), who emphasize that emigrants from South America who, by virtue of their educational and occupational...
status, have a better chance of full insertion into the receiving society, are less likely to send remittances back home.

Demographic Concerns

Demographics and the problems associated with a small population have always been a concern for the Uruguayan state. The country has a low fecundity rate and an increasingly aging population. Uruguay’s aging society has less to do with increased life expectancies than with the emigration of the young. For the Uruguayan state, this poses a serious threat to the country’s health, social security, retirement and pension systems (Calvo and Mieres, 2007). Taks (2006:140) goes so far as to question “the viability of Uruguay as a nation-state in a globalized world,” if the state cannot resolve its demographic problems through long term planning.

Action Taken by the Uruguayan State

Post-Dictatorship Governmental Action on Migration

The end of the military dictatorship and the return to democracy brought a unique set of challenges for the Uruguayan state. One of these challenges was how to address the fact that hundreds of thousands of Uruguayans were now living in exile all over the world. As Silvia Dutrénit Bielous, in her book *El Uruguay del Exilio: Gente, Circunstancias, Escenario*, describes it:

If it was intended or not, if it was conscious or not, exile socially and culturally transforms those who suffer it and expands the homeland over the years, breaking with the notion of determined and palpable borders. Like all historical processes, it is irreversible even when the reasons for exile disappear and the protagonists return to their country of origin in significant numbers (2006:6).

The Uruguayan state’s first goal was repatriation, bringing its citizens back into the physical territory of the nation state. In 1985, the Uruguayan government created the
National Commission of Repatriation, with assistance from the United Nations and the International Organization for Migration (Pellegrino and Vigorito, 2009). The creation of this program can also be seen as being a symbolic opening of the doors to political exiles in an attempt to resolve what Silvia Dutrénit Bielous (2006) referred to as the inherent guilt, suspicion, and resentment between those who left and those who remained behind during the political and social turmoil of the dictatorship.

With the cooperation of the National Commission of Repatriation, in 1986, PEDECIBA (Development Program for the Basic Sciences) was formed. Under the military dictatorship Uruguay’s infrastructure for teaching and producing science and technology disintegrated as the country’s most important scientists went into political exile. PEDECIBA sought to consolidate the reconstruction of science and technology, stating, “The advancement of the sciences and specifically of the basic sciences is absolutely necessary for the progress, modernization and independent development of a country” (Barreira and Velho, 1997:277). The program’s first priority was the repatriation of scientists. The program also aimed to create and develop research groups, improve the teaching of science at all levels, create regional research centers, and establish cooperative networks with scientists abroad (Barriero and Velho, 1997).

While the National Commission of Repatriation and PEDECIBA did assist in the return of many exiles, especially the highly skilled, they were not able to produce a mass return of exiles to Uruguay. Many exiles had firmly established themselves abroad and were unwilling or unable to uproot themselves and their families a second time.

The 1990’s was characterized by a lack of attention to the issue of emigration, perhaps due to what Marcos Supervielle noted as a “certain fatalism on the part of the
legislators of the political parties” in regards to emigration (Taks, 2006:147). However, the beginning of the 21st century brought renewed attention to the subject, with a focus on the creation of linkages with the exile community rather than repatriation. In 2001 the government created the Program of Linkages with Highly Qualified Uruguayans Residing in the Exterior, followed by the creation of the National Commission for Linkages with Uruguayans Residing in the Exterior (Taks, 2006). These programs had the goal of strengthening ties between the Uruguayan diaspora and the home country by bettering consular services, promoting Uruguayan culture and national identity abroad, offering support for Uruguayans abroad, as well as promoting exchange and cooperation in business, science, and technology (Taks, 2006).

**Frente Amplio and the New Politics of Migration**

The 2004 presidential elections in Uruguay brought a historic end to 175 years of a two party system ruled by the *Partido Colorado* and the *Partido Nacional (Blanco)*, the populace instead electing Tabaré Vásquez of the *Frente Amplio* party (Luna 2007:1). *Frente Amplio* is a center-left coalition comprised of 16 factions, including Communists, Socialists, Christian Democrats, ex-*Tupamaros*, and more (Luna 2007:5). As a political coalition party, *Frente Amplio* began just before the military dictatorship, in 1971. Because of their leftist politics, and their connection to the urban guerrilla group, the *Tupamaros*, *Frenteamplistas* were amongst the main targets of the dictatorship, forcing many into exile. In exile, many of the forced emigrants campaigned in their host countries for global attention to the human rights abuses occurring in their home country, and acted in solidarity with the leftist movement (Hollander, 1997). It is evident then, that the *Frente Amplio* party has a historic connection to the exile population,
which could help to understand its attention to the Uruguayan diaspora, and its wish to extend substantive citizenship rights to Uruguayans living in the exterior.

*Frente Amplio* (FA) has maintained several of the earlier created organized linkages with the diaspora, but has also scaled up their formal connections with those residing abroad. In keeping with the idea of mitigating the effects of highly skilled migration, FA maintained the Program of Linkages with Highly Skilled Uruguayans Residing in the Exterior, and added the program known as the CUAC, which is the program entitled, Circulation of Highly Qualified Uruguayans. Importantly, this program does not just focus on academics, but also includes “business people, artist, and cultural agents” (Taks, 2006:150).

FA’s main program to create institutionalized linkages with the diaspora, however, took shape under a program called Direction of Consular Services and Linkages with Uruguayans in the Exterior, otherwise known as Department 20 (Taks, 2006). The country of Uruguay is divided into 19 “departments,” similar to our states, so the name Department 20 is a symbolic reference to the Uruguayan Diaspora, identifying it as just as much a part of Uruguay as any of the other 19 departments. Department 20 was created in 2005 with the intention of formalizing and institutionalizing the means of communications and networks between the Uruguayan government and the Diaspora, and one that was not limited to just the highly skilled population. The Department 20 has three main pillars: the formation of Consejos Consultivos (a civil society grouping of Uruguayan emigrant representatives) for each country with a major concentration of emigrants, a voluntary consular registry, and the increased efficiency of the services for those residing in the Exterior (Taks, 2006).
The Consejos Consultivos are an especially important part of the project of institutionalizing the relationship between the Uruguayan state and the diaspora, “whose function is to foment extraterritorial citizenship participation and to be a nexus between the Uruguayan colonies that they represent and the state institutions” (Sosa González 2009:43). Consejos Consultivos have a “thin link with the Uruguayan diplomatic representation in their country of residence” (Taks, 2006:149). There are currently 46 of these Consejos Consultivos, and around 150 non-institutionalized Associations of Uruguayans abroad (Sosa González 2009:43).

The creation of Department 20 has been a politically popular move, both in Uruguay and in the communities abroad. However, the FA’s push for substantiating the diaspora’s citizenship rights through the right to vote from abroad has been much more contested. The first director of the Department 20, Álvaro Portillo defended the right to vote from abroad by stating:

Our strategy as a government, as the Uruguayan state, is a strategy of linkages, with the understanding that today we are a country with many territories. According to the imaginary of the people, fundamentally those who are outside of the Uruguayan territory, the factor of the vote is one of the central elements in making these linkages real. (Sosa Gonzalez, 2009:48)

As Eva Østergaard-Nielsen (2003:5) explained, “promises of overseas citizens’ right to vote…often prove difficult to push through national parliaments, because some domestic actors see more disadvantage than advantage in allowing this or it simply proves too difficult or costly to implement in practice.” This ended up being the case for Uruguay where, despite a long campaign to promote voting rights for those abroad, the measure was defeated in the 2009 elections.
Although FA’s policies in regards to migration are based on making linkages between the home country and the diaspora, and do not necessarily focus on repatriation, the argument can be made that they indirectly do just that. Pellegrino and Vigorito (2009:200) discuss those immigrants with strong ties to their home country as such:

This type of migrant who maintains relationships with the residents of their countries of origin, even when they have established strong ties to the receiving country, are the people who feel a part of more than one collectivity and look to share in the citizen’s rights and obligations in the transnational “life space” in which their migrant experience occurs. It has also been observed that this type of migrant often has a much greater willingness to return.

Thus, strengthening ties between the sending country and the emigrant communities abroad may actually encourage return migration.

In an effort by the FA to promote the return of the diaspora, there has been the recent creation of the Office of Return and Welcome, created in response to the global financial crisis which has led to an increase in Uruguayan emigrants wishing to return to Uruguay. The government has further encouraged return with the passing of Law 18.250, Article 76, which allows Uruguayans to return to the country with all of their material possessions without being taxed on them. This includes work equipment, and is limited to one motor vehicle.

Additionally, although the FA has not promoted any formal policies to encourage remittances, donations, or investments from abroad, the Consejos Consultivos do encourage “strong solidarity and compromise with the home country” (Sosa Gonzales, 2009:42). There have been, in fact, many donations of physical goods such as hospital beds and desks for schools, as well as thousands of dollars sent to support child
nutrition programs, rural schools, and reconstruction after natural disasters (Sosa Gonzalez, 2009).

**Uruguayan Migrant Receiving Counties**

Emigrants from one country become immigrants in another, and the economic and political situations, as well as cultural and linguistic characteristics have a strong bearing on migration decisions. Uruguayan emigrants have chosen different destinations throughout their history. As noted at the start of the chapter, through the second half of the nineteenth century and the first half of the twentieth century, there was a high degree of return migration to Europe, as well as regional migration between Argentina, Brazil, and Uruguay. Movement from Montevideo to Buenos Aires was so intense at the end of the nineteenth century that one Italian diplomat stated that Uruguay was never likely to become, “anything more than a bridge between the ocean and Argentina” (Goebel, 2009:13). Indeed, with a population around four times greater than the entire population of Uruguay, the cosmopolitan center of Buenos Aires has always had a strong pull on the population of Uruguay. During the 1970’s, Argentina absorbed a full half of the Uruguayan emigrants seeking to escape Uruguay’s political and economic crisis (Pellegrino and Vigorito, 2005:69). However, Pellegrino and Vigorito (2005:69) show that in the year 2002, at the height of the economic crisis, only 8.5% of Uruguayan emigrants went to Argentina, likely because they were experiencing a similar economic crisis. The trend instead was to go to developed counties, with a third going to the United States in 2002, and another third going to Spain (Pellegrino and Vigorito, 2005:69).

The United States has had a pull on Uruguayan migrants because of the availability of good paying jobs, both for skilled and unskilled labor. Until 2003,
Uruguayans entering the United States did not need a visa, under the Visa Waiver Program (Siskin, 2004). However, because of the concern over terrorists gaining entrance into the United States through these programs after September 11, 2001, and because of the high numbers of Uruguayans entering the United States and overstaying their visas to escape the 2002 economic crisis, Uruguay’s participation in the program was terminated in 2003 (Siskin, 2004). Although there are no data available to demonstrate the effect of new visa requirements, it is likely that it has slowed emigration to the United States from Uruguay.

The oil crisis and economic stagnation in Europe in the 1970s led to “closed door” immigration policies; however, many European countries remained open to political exiles from the Southern Cone (Pellegrino, 2004:12). More recently, Europe’s economic growth, labor shortages, and ageing populations have led to increased immigration (Pellegrino, 2004). Of all European counties, Spain has attracted the most immigrants from Latin America, both because of its economic growth and its cultural and linguistic similarities. Given the history of Spanish and Italian immigration to Uruguay and the rest of Latin America, migration to these two countries is seen as a distinct case, Pellegrino (2004) calling it “return migration.” Durand and Massey (2010) disagree with that designation, asserting that “return migration” can only occur in the first generation. They instead call it “transgenerational migration,” insisting that South American immigrants have been favored over African immigrants in a process of “ethnic substitution” (Durand and Massey, 2010). They state:

Various demographic and legal factors interact to produce transgenerational migration: ageing population, low fertility rates, and slow labor force growth, combined with new framings of citizenship and nationality; the implementation of legalization and amnesty; the allocation of
visas on the basis of ancestry; and selective systems of recruitment that pay attention to ties of ethnicity language, culture and religion. Transgenerational migration occurs through the manipulation of identities, nationalities, genealogies, and surnames by migrants and authorities in receiving nations alike. Migrants draw on ties of common descent to achieve legal entry, exchanging what might be called ‘ethnic capital’ for access to high-wage labor markets. Nationals seek to avoid ethnic conflict by selecting immigrants who are viewed as ethnically ‘similar’ to the native population (Durand and Massey, 2010:43).

Spain’s economy grew immensely from 1994 and 2007, and created one in three jobs in the European Union during this time (López, 2011:9). López (2011:4) states that in the last 10 years, Spain has experienced a seven fold rise in its immigrant population. Spain is also a very attractive migrant destination because of its linguistic compatibility. Many South Americans who obtain an Italian passport due to their ancestral heritage, use the passport to work and live in Spain, taking advantage of the freedom of movement for citizens of the European Union.

The attractiveness of Spain as a migrant destination has declined somewhat in the last few years. Spain has been severely affected by the global financial crisis since 2008. Unemployment rates have risen dramatically for native Spaniards, and have been even worse for the immigrant population. At the end of 2009, the unemployment rate for Spaniards was 16.8%, while the rate for foreign-born in Spain was 29.7% (López, 2011:12). Spain has become more hostile to immigrants, enhancing security measures, drastically cutting hiring of non-European Union workers, and creating a “pay-to-go” measure called Plan de Retorno Voluntario to encourage migrants to return to their home countries (López, 2011).

**Chapter Summary**

While the situations in receiving countries have become less attractive (in the case of Argentina) or less accepting (in the cases of Spain and the United States), conditions
in Uruguay have been steadily improving. From 2004 to 2008, Uruguay registered a GDP growth rate averaging 8% annually, and while it decelerated in 2009 to 2.9%, it again exceeded 7% growth in 2010 (Central Intelligence Agency, 2011). Since up to date statistics on emigration are unavailable, it is not possible at this time to determine how much of an effect these changes have had on Uruguay's emigration rate. To date nothing has been published in academic sources claiming a reversal of the emigration trend.

Migration is a part of Uruguay's history and present, originally as an immigrant receiving country until the 1960s, and then as an emigrant sending country from then to the current day. The military dictatorship was the first major event to cause massive emigration from the country, and then in 2002 the economic crisis caused another wave of emigration. Even apart from those two events, in time of prosperity and peace, people continue to leave Uruguay at a steady, though much slower rate. The Uruguayan state can do little to prevent emigration, even though it has a negative effect on the nation. Just as when the nation was forming, Uruguay continues to struggle to retain its population in the national territory.
CHAPTER 3
THE CULTURE OF MIGRATION IN ETHNOGRAPHIC DATA

On July 20th, 2010, I joined a couple thousand Uruguayans in the Plaza de Independencia in the heart of Montevideo to watch Uruguay face Germany for third and fourth place in the 2010 World Cup on the big screen. For a country which “lives for soccer,” the surprise success of the Celeste (the Uruguayan national team) created a euphoric atmosphere. As the broadcast started over the drone of the vuvuzelas and chants of “Soy Celeste,” the announcers began by thanking those who had turned up to watch the game in the Plaza, Uruguayans tuning in on their televisions at home, and gave a “special welcome to the Uruguayans all over the world who were tuning in to support their team.” The announcers’ recognition of the “Uruguayans all over the world” reinforced the commonly stated sentiment that “Uruguayans don’t stop being Uruguayan just because they leave the country,” and invited the diaspora to share in the celebration of the success of the nation. Even in one of the country’s most exciting moments in recent memory, Uruguay’s numerically small, but proportionally large, diaspora was present in the rhetoric of the day, demonstrating its force in the social imagination of the country.

It is estimated that around 600,000 people who were born in Uruguay now reside outside of the country, giving Uruguay an emigration rate of 18% (Pellegrino, 2009:11). The high rate of emigration not only has an effect on the economy and politics of Uruguay, but also on the society. My own interest in researching emigration from Uruguay did not come from a curiosity about economic impacts of highly skilled migration, or in the political project of incorporating the diaspora into the national community. Instead, my interest came from listening to firsthand accounts of the pain of
family disintegration, and separation from friends and loved ones, while I carried out a series of ethnographic interviews in Salto and Montevideo, Uruguay in 2007.

During July and August of 2010, I returned to Uruguay specifically to study the culture of migration in the country. Through my research, I discovered that there is indeed a culture of migration to be found in Uruguay; however, it is at times a latent cultural force which is activated under specific circumstances. The strong pressure to remain in Uruguay contrasts directly with the pressure to leave, creating a tension that is part and parcel of Uruguay’s unique culture of migration. Uruguayans see migration as part of their historical legacy, and movement as a possibility for making their futures. This does not mean, however, that all Uruguayans want to migrate, or that it is necessarily seen as the best option. Migration is understood to be both positive and negative, and the decision to emigrate is strongly informed by the cultural values of the country.

The ethnographic evidence in this chapter is divided into two main sections. The first section will provide evidence for a culture of migration in Uruguay. The second section, in contrast, will discuss the evidence of a strong cultural pressure to stay in Uruguay, and will provide more nuanced discussion of the culturally appropriate reasons for leaving. The findings presented in each section emerged from my use of grounded theory as an analytical tool. Each of the subheadings represents an analytical category into which I grouped the patterns I found while coding the themes in the transcribed interviews. Each of the headings represents a provisional theory (that emerged from the analytical categories) which I came to accept after further comparing the theory to the new data. Quotes from the interviews have been included to
substantiate the findings and to add a sense of realism to the data. All of the interviews were conducted in Spanish, and the translations are my own. Since the subject of migration can be sensitive according to legal status, pseudonyms have been given to identify the interviewees.

Section 1 - Evidence of a Culture of Migration

Immigrant Past

"We are a country of immigrants" and "We are all sons and daughters of immigrants" are two of the most common phrases repeated in discussions of Uruguay as a culture and as a people during my research. Having virtually no indigenous population, Uruguayans do not have strong ancestral and cultural ties to the land, nor a strong mestizo identity which can be found in many other countries in Latin America. The vast majority of these immigrants came to Uruguay from Europe, particularly Spain and Italy. Uruguay was a net receiver of immigrants until the 1950’s, meaning that immigration is a part of Uruguay’s recent past. Many of the people I interviewed were second or third generation Uruguayans. Because of the recency of this migrant history, strong cultural and personal attachments to the sending country remain.

When asked about their family’s heritage, most Uruguayans can identify who immigrated and from where. In my sample of 26 people, most people claimed Spanish and Italian ancestry, but there were also claims of Basque, French, English, Argentine, Brazilian and Charrúa heritage. Those who had ancestors who immigrated to Uruguay before the mid-1800s generally referred to those ancestors as criollos. Many of my interviewees, especially those who were second or third generation Uruguayans, knew the story of the ancestors’ arrivals, their specific regions of origin, and the context of their emigration. For example, Gustavo, a middle aged man of Basque heritage told me
of his father’s escape from Spain after having been drafted into the Spanish Army during the Civil War. He stated, “My father was exiled by the government. He was banned by the Spanish Government for twenty years. After that, for all of those people who, from the 1920s to 1930s came to America, they restored their rights. And for their children too, they gave us all citizenship.” As a part of their rights as citizens, he and his children are allowed to vote in the Basque Country national elections by absentee ballot. Gustavo recognizes that it was his parents’ dream to return to the Basque Country, and although he thus far remains in Uruguay, he strongly identifies with his Basque heritage and has always felt some desire to “return.”

Identity and dual citizenship

Gustavo’s identification with the home country of his parents, and his ability to attain citizenship in that country, were no exception. In fact, of the twenty-six people that I interviewed, twelve had dual citizenship with another country, three more had tried to attain it but were unsuccessful, and one was just starting the process. Also, Gustavo was not the only Uruguayan whom I met that votes in the elections of other countries. Several more voted in Italian elections, and one voted in Brazilian elections.

Of course, the ability to be granted citizenship in another country has as much, if not more, to do with politics in both the sending and receiving countries, as with personal identity based on ancestral heritage. Having very low birthrates and ageing populations, many European countries in the last decade have looked to reconnect with their diasporas to increase immigration. Felipe Arocena (2009:166) quoted a director of an Italian Patronatos institution as saying:

There is now a new Italian offensive – to give it a name – in relationship to their Diaspora. Now that Italy has solved its own economic problems, the authorities want to regain contact with their communities overseas. In
Uruguay there are 7,000 Italians who were born in Italy but 100,000 Italians who were born in Uruguay.

Clearly the Italian State is promoting the idea that Uruguayans of Italian heritage are also Italian and should identify themselves as such. This move by the Italian state does seem to have an effect on people’s perception of their own identity, a fourth generation Uruguayan of Italian ancestry stating, “I love my country, and I love the country where I came from, Italy, where my ancestors came from” (Rodrigo, age 24).

Besides personal identity, Spanish and Italian heritage is evident in everything from architecture to food culture. Most obviously, use of the Spanish language creates an automatic cultural link between Uruguay and Spain. Names for children are often given to reflect the nationality of the parents’ ancestral origin, for example, naming a child Alessandra or Giuliana rather than Alejandra or Juliana if the child has Italian surnames.

**Sons and daughters of immigrants**

Identification with one’s country of ancestral heritage is coupled with the understanding that movement to seek better conditions is part of their history and a part of the range possibilities for their lives as well. The phrase “hacerse la America,” which loosely translates as “to make it big in the Americas,” is a very common phrase used by Uruguayans to describe why their ancestors came to Uruguay. Now the phrase is used to describe the same situation in regards to those emigrating for better opportunities, for example, “Juan left thinking he would ‘hacerse la America’ in Spain.” There is a historic continuity in the action of migrating which is a part of Uruguayan culture. The situation was summed up very well by a young doctor from Montevideo.

Marcelo (age 32): This is a country of immigrants, there aren’t any natives. Very few natives remained. They were Italians, Spanish, blacks, the rest were very small
proportions. The majority are Italian and Spanish. So, this is a country made from migratory currents. Emigration as a phenomenon isn’t that surprising because if we look back in the country’s short history, people came looking for a better quality of life, and they found it. Those people aged, or they are no longer with us; they were previous generations. Those who remain now, their decedents, are going to look for the same; they are going to look for wellbeing. If they don’t find it here, they are going to leave.

Gimena (age 31) had a very similar response when asked whether or not emigration is a problem for Uruguay.

Gimena: I don’t know if I would define it as a problem when we ourselves are a country of immigrants. Because, if you look down the street, you don’t see a single native, if you take a bus you see children of Italians, children of Germans, but a Charrúa? No. Uruguay’s borders were created somewhat by force, and they are kind of flexible. From the inside and the outside they are really permeable and I don’t think that is a problem.

Being “sons and daughters of immigrants” and having migrant heritage is an important aspect of Uruguayan national identity. People see current migration trends as a continuity of macro-historical trends, and that while it may be sad, leaving one’s homeland is not entirely unexpected or unnatural.

**Homeland Transnationalists**

As discussed in Chapter 1, transnationalism is an important concept in the Uruguayan case. Many Uruguayans who emigrate maintain strong and frequent connections with the homeland, while those who stay behind live their lives in transnational contexts. Åkesson (2004:16) calls these transnational actors who do not migrate “homeland transnationalists” who “live their lives in a social universe that stretches far beyond the borders of their country.” Personal relationships, employment, and personal identity all cross national borders, encouraging the idea that their lives are transnational.
**Transnational employment**

One example of homeland transnationalism is the quantity of people who remain in Uruguay, but who are employed by foreign companies, or often travel abroad for work. Software engineering and sales are growing industries in Uruguay, and two of my interviewees worked in this field. Uruguayan computer and software engineers are well regarded in the global market, and work for lower wages than someone with similar training in the United States and Europe. Alonso, a young male interviewee, worked for a company which sold software almost exclusively to foreign countries, the United States, Europe, and Central America. Martin worked in the growing “teletrabajo” or “telework” field. Nearly all of his contact with co-workers and his American boss is over Instant Messaging, E-mail or Skype™. Alonso also spoke of working with people abroad.

Alonso: The University here in Uruguay has you work with other universities in other countries with which they have agreements. My thesis was with people from France, but Russians and Chinese participated as well. So it is like you have continual contact with people from other countries and working with people from other countries. Besides, it is not a career where you need to have people side by side to be able to work together. If you need some software, you chat on Skype™ and they send it to you by e-mail. It is the same is if we were side by side. It facilitates a lot in the sense that you meet people from other countries and make contacts and later, if they say, ‘I remember that guy who worked with me on that one project and he could be really helpful in this job,’ they call you.

Both Alonso and Martin worked daily in a transnational context, though remaining in Uruguay. Both also had several offers of work abroad, but chose to stay, sacrificing much higher pay to remain in their country.

Adriana (age 29) is another example of a transnational employee. As a biochemist, Adriana works for a multinational consortium, and has traveled all over the Americas and Europe to participate in projects and attend conferences and courses.
She is a part of a broader scientific community that has a global reach, granting her mobility and making her daily reality transnational.

Foreign language competency is an especially important skill for those who work in transnational contexts like Alonso, Martín, and Adriana. All three of them, along with eight other interviewees, were fluent in at least one other language, while several more had taken classes in foreign languages. Adriana started studying English at the age of four, and started to study both French and German at the age of twelve. When I asked her about the language that is used in these international conferences she stated, “English is the universal language, especially for the sciences. Everything is done in English.” It is very common for middle class families to pay for private language instruction for their children, and for parents to see language classes as part of the cultural capital that they are responsible for giving their children.

Personal networks

Besides professional networks, Uruguayans have extensive personal networks with those living abroad. Because of the high rates of emigration in the last fifty years, I did not speak with a single person who could not name a family member, a friend, or at least an acquaintance who lives abroad.

Martín: It’s a reality that we are accustomed to, having a relative or a friend who left. Everyone knows about Skype™, even those without many resources know what Skype™ is, because we have had to use it at some point to talk to a relative in the exterior. We have all accepted the cheapest way to communicate, to send money over there to help out, or from over there to here for the family. It is incorporated into our lives that we will, at some point, have to say goodbye to a friend, or that we will get everyone together when a friend returns to visit.

Other interviewees mentioned phone calls, e-mails, Facebook™ and instant messaging as ways in which they keep contact with their friends and family in the exterior. Many also had friends or relatives who returned to Uruguay to visit once a year, or once every
six months, though this was dependent on legal status in the receiving country and economic capability of the individual or family.

Several interviewees identified their connections abroad as one of their most important sources of information about global situations. Gustavo noted that he watched news programs on TV, read the paper, and found information on the internet, but that, “What my friends who live abroad tell me about the reality there carries more weight than any piece of data.” The information that people receive from their networks abroad is an important part of how potential migrants weigh their options.

It is clear that migrant network theory is important to consider in the Uruguayan case. With such a large diaspora, the information sharing between those abroad and those in Uruguay is intense. According to migrant network theory, the risks and expense of migration are greatly diminished through this information sharing, which encourages further emigration. I found evidence supporting this theory in my research. Examples were given of friends abroad offering jobs to their compatriots in Uruguay, of information sharing between Uruguayans about seasonal work opportunities for short term migration projects, and Uruguayans wishing to join their already established friends and family abroad. In my research, however, migrant networks tended to facilitate migration once the decision to leave was made, but not cause migration in and of itself. Behind decisions to migrate there was a much more complex interplay of cultural, personal, economic and political variables which informed decisions to migrate, well beyond the opportunities provided by networks.

Additionally, migrant networks do not always serve to encourage migration, but can also discourage migration. Just as positive experiences and news of opportunities
abroad travel though migrant networks, so do negative experiences and news of diminishing opportunities abroad. Because Spain and the United States are primary destinations for Uruguayan emigrants, the news of how the current economic downturn is affecting these two countries is important information for potential migrants. Besides news that they can get through other sources about the effects of economic downturn, Uruguayans also get personal news about the experiences of their compatriots. Patricia, a 31 year old teacher from Montevideo, told me, “In Spain it is horrible. They are even deporting people who were just there as tourists. A friend of my sister had the Spanish passport, her parents are Spanish, and she went to work, legally, in a restaurant. Her coworkers, even though she had papers, treated her like trash because she was Uruguayan; they knew she had papers!” These personal accounts of how other Uruguayan migrants are received help Uruguayans form opinions about migrant receiving countries.

**Imagining the exterior**

Even to those who are not considering migration, Uruguayans often describe themselves as having *la mirada por afuera,* meaning that they are focused on things from outside their own borders. They see themselves as very attentive to what is happening outside of their national borders. Part of this has to do with being “a small country between two powers,” another often heard phrase. Uruguayans are acutely aware of the fact that what happens in the much larger and more powerful neighboring countries of Argentina and Brazil often has a profound effect on Uruguay. There is even a common saying that, “When Argentina sneezes, Uruguay catches a cold,” exemplified in 2002 when Uruguay fell into a financial crisis, immediately after Argentina’s economic crisis started. Economically, Uruguay is somewhat dependant on other countries.
Lacking a large internal market, Uruguay must rely on its international trade for economic growth. Emphasizing this point, one member of the Association of Parents with Children Abroad (APHIE) lamented that, “We are a very small country, and very far from where the decisions that directly affect us are made.”

Uruguay’s interest and knowledge of the exterior are also informed by the media. Television, radio, newspapers, and the internet flood Uruguay with news from the outside.

Gustavo: I think our media communication is good because we are always concerned about what is happening in the world. We get news from everywhere on TV; for better or worse, it is there. We have freedom of press. We are attentive. Being such a small country and not having much news of our own attracts news from all over. Our immigrant past has much to do with it because it’s always ‘What’s happening in Italy? What’s happening in Spain?’ We used to be a colony and we are always dependent on what happened in another part of the world.

Indeed Uruguayan news programs and newspapers are full of stories from around the world. I was surprised in my research about how many media stories there were about happenings in the United States.

Television is a very important source of knowledge about the exterior. According to the 2009 survey data from Imaginaries and Cultural Consumption, 90.2% of the population over the age of 16 watches between one and five hours of television daily (Dominzain, Rapetti, Radakovich 2009). Besides news of the happenings in other countries, there are also a wide variety of channels, programs, and films from abroad which transfer knowledge about the culture and way of life of the other countries. Uruguay does have a small film industry with its own unique style, but the majority of films shown on television and in theaters are dubbed or subtitled versions of movies from the United States and Europe. Many of the most popular soap operas and reality
shows come from Argentina, and many of the sitcoms are popular U.S. productions. While in Uruguay I would joke with my Uruguayan friends that they had seen more U.S. produced movies and television shows than I had, though I am fairly convinced that it is true.

Arjun Appadurai (1996:4) makes the link between migration, media, and imagination, explaining that, “electronic media provide resources for self-imagining as an everyday social project.” The consumption of images, stories, and cultural productions which cross national boundaries allows for people to imagine alternative lives for themselves and for their children. With this information, people can imagine other worlds, and what it might be like if they migrated. Lorena (age 32) illustrates the point.

Lorena: Now, maybe because of globalization, I see it [emigration] as in the realm of possibilities, even beyond whether or not countries in the exterior are better or worse economically. Well, I’m not sure if it is just emigration, or more travelling and experiencing, but it seems more accessible now… It is like one feels that the world is closer now because of the means of communication that are within our reach: the telephone, internet, transportation. This has changed a lot, and in very little time. It makes you see things differently; from seeing things when I was younger as an unattainable utopia, to nowadays seeing it as something very possible.

Lorena was conscious of the fact that globalization and the media had altered her view of life in the exterior, and how she imagined herself in it.

In my research, even Uruguayans who had never been abroad themselves spoke of how they imagined life in other countries. The phrases, “It’s a distinct life,” and “They have a different level of life,” are commonly heard in reference to those living in exterior. It is widely agreed that material goods and comforts are much more easily accessible living elsewhere. My interviewees highlighted the houses, vehicles, computers, and the often repeated “full refrigerators” of their compatriots abroad. Gabriel (age 32) stated of
those abroad, “They tell you, or at least the people that I know, that they have a different level of comfort that we don't have. There everyone has their vehicle, for example. They rent their apartment and have a full refrigerator. For us here, that’s not so easy, with a mid-level job.”

The material comforts that can be attained by working in another country are not the only advantage of living abroad. Many people also speak of what they imagine to be the cultural superiority of other places. Adriana spoke of her desire to live outside of Uruguay since the time she was twelve years old because of her fascination with her image of England, specifically the “punctuality” and “perfection” that she associated with the country. Antonella (age 20) described what she imagined as the “order,” “cleanliness of cities,” “beautiful yards,” and “more respectful people,” that could be found in the “exterior,” although it was not assigned to any particular nation. Enrique (age 58) spoke of growing up thinking of the United States as “the image of a strong country,” and his parents’ habit of saving pesos, using them to buy U. S. dollars, and hiding them in their pillow.

The realities assumed to be quite different in the exterior have a strong presence in the collective imagination of Uruguay. Individuals who grow up in this context demonstrate a strong curiosity and attraction to foreign realities. Fascination with the exterior is represented by the fact that travel was by far the most commonly elected response to the survey question “What could you like to do in your free time?” (Dominzain, Rapetti, Radakovich 2009). All of my interviewees expressed the desire to travel or to study or work abroad for a short time, and all but eight had managed to travel outside of the country beyond neighboring Argentina and Brazil.
Unmet Expectations

A strong part of the culture of a society is what the people aspire to in order to feel fulfilled in their lives. Carlos Filgueira noted:

The reasons for significant international emigration are to be found, then, in long-term cumulative processes, which created deeply rooted attitudes and expectations that were frustrated in broad sectors of the population. The relationship between the population’s expectations and aspirations and real possibilities of satisfying them are more serious in Uruguay than in most Latin American countries. (Pellegrino and Vigorito, 2005:64)

As discussed in Chapter 2, Uruguay’s collective identity as a nation consolidated around being the peaceful, prosperous, “Switzerland of South America,” where education and intellectual pursuits were highly valued by the society and rewarded in terms of wage, social prestige, and social mobility.

Middle class lifestyle

There is also the strong expectation of being able to live a middle class lifestyle with formal employment. Middle class Uruguayans expect to be able to purchase their own home, have a vehicle, educate their children, pay for healthcare expenses, feed and clothe the family, and take short vacations. Prior to the 1960’s economic decline, this was all possible on a single wage, a “family wage,” earned by the male head of household. Every one of my interviewees who was older than 40 year at the time of the interview grew up with their father working as the wage earner while their mother did the domestic and reproductive labor, and all stated that they were able to have a middle class lifestyle with this arrangement. Now it is expected that both parents need to be employed to attain a similar lifestyle. However, even with two income earners it is very difficult for some sectors of the population to achieve this lifestyle, especially without an education.
Liliana (age 21) told of the sister of the woman who cleaned her family’s house growing up, who didn’t have a high educational level and moved to Spain to work illegally, with her family. She said, “She showed us photos of the little girl with the computer and said, ‘This would never have been possible here in Uruguay, having a computer, a car, a house; never.’” She continued on to describe another family she knew who had emigrated, saying, “They left with their children also, to the United States. They are there illegally but they also have a beautiful house, a car, everything.” For those working in jobs such as housekeeping, construction, as waiters, or other jobs where high levels of education are not needed, the same kind of work, even if done illegally abroad, can allow for the typical middle class lifestyle, where in Uruguay it would not.

Education of children

When asked what it is that Uruguayans aspire to attain, Rodrigo had a clear idea of what a comfortable life would include.

Rodrigo: What the people want is to have a possibility to educate their children, for example. To have the possibility to be live comfortably in their city, meaning, if I go to the thermal springs or the riverfront one afternoon, I don’t have to be thinking, ‘Man, if I do this today, how am I going to be able to eat tomorrow?’ Maybe what everyone wants is to have a nice house, a vehicle, to have a business which allows you to support a family, to have your children well educated, that your wife doesn’t lack anything, that you don’t lack anything. That is what everyone wants. To be in a position that, if someone gets sick and you have to take them to the doctor, you aren’t thinking to yourself, ‘No, they should just stay home because I can’t pay the doctor.’ Not to live with opulence, but not to live poorly either.

The expectation is that, with some education or training, one should be able to attain the comfortable life that Rodrigo described. It should also be added that having children “well educated” may mean enrolling them in a private school, but not necessarily. Most Uruguayans still speak highly of the public education system in their country, especially
at the primary level. “Well educated” children instead refers to being able to pay for private lessons or activities after school, since Uruguayan public schools are only half a day, unless they are in a specific Tiempo Completo system. Some of the most common activities or classes are language instruction, music, art, acting or dance classes, membership in athletic clubs, and membership in cultural clubs. One young man in particular stated that his parents were “working class” and worked very hard to send him to a private school, and to provide him with private English language classes, and piano lessons. He said that they taught him early on that they would not be able to leave him anything except cultural capital. Having “well educated” children in Uruguay means providing children with cultural capital.

**Meaningful employment**

Uruguayans also tend to distinguish between jobs, and “quality jobs,” one of the main factors being the ability to progress in the employment through an increase in wages and status within the company. Lorena spoke of those of her generation who had left the country around time of the economic crisis of 2002.

Lorena: It seems to me that everyone of my generation left because of economic reasons, to look for work. There was a period in which the country was quite poor, and they couldn’t find work, or rather, they couldn’t find work that would give them the opportunity to progress in life. I think that everyone that left had work, but it was work that didn’t allow them to progress, nor to support their family, nor to buy a home.

Lorena’s perspective that most people who emigrated were employed when they left, rather than people who were unemployed and could only find work abroad, is backed up by data collected by Adela Pellegrino. In her study of those who left between the years of 2000 and 2006, Pellegrino (2009:14) noted that more than 8% of the total was employed when they left, while only 5% of those who considered themselves economically active were unemployed and looking for work at the time of their
departure. These data clearly indicate that being employed is not enough to fulfill
people’s expectations and prevent them from emigrating. Tomás (age 66) reiterated the
same point.

Tomás: The majority left because of economic problems, because of the low
wages. And many people left because of the lack of prospects. For us, working in the
bank, there is a certain banking career. It is not a place where you just enter and stay in
the same place forever like in a factory. There you work on a machine and the most you
can aspire to is maybe a minor supervisory role. Working at the bank I progressed to
having the role of director, after many years. If you behave well, there is a career ladder.

This is a point often overlooked when government programs attempt to lessen migration
by proving minimum wage labor employment opportunities. Especially in Uruguayan
culture, wage labor without the possibilities for social mobility or prospects for
improvement does not actually provide much incentive to stay in the country.

**Social mobility and social prestige**

In people’s aspirations and expectations, there is a direct link between education,
wage level, social mobility, and social prestige, and people feel disillusioned when any
of those do not meet their expectations. Gloria, a 32 year old doctor, lamented that the
state invests so much in forming professionals by providing free education through the
tertiary level, only to have the professionals leave to work in other countries, but also
understood why professionals chose to leave.

Gloria: On the other hand, I think this country used to value professionals more,
and there were fewer professionals. Now there are many professionals, many doctors,
but they earn wages that they laugh at in Spain. My friends in Spain, when I tell them
how much I earn, they laugh at me. Granted, life there is more expensive, everything
there is more expensive, but still, they are earning around ten times more… It’s
disheartening, to have studied so much, and to earn so little, or to have to take on
multiple jobs.
Gloria equated the wage that she earned as a doctor to her social prestige and whether or not the society valued her. Rodrigo also made the connection between wages, and social value.

Rodrigo: People leave because of lack of prospects here. And many people who study, who are very well prepared, leave because wages are better in other countries, because they value what you have struggled to earn for five, six, eight years. There are geneticists working in the United States, botanists working in New Zealand, doctors working in Argentina, Brazil, Paraguay, Europe, nurses working in Italy. The salary levels are higher and they really value what you know. Because of this it is kind of difficult to stay here and make a minimal salary.

Culturally, the medical profession is highly regarded, and has traditionally been very well paid and prestigious, but, as Gloria hinted at, there are many people choosing to study medicine, and they are not paid a wage that is considered adequate to the individual’s educational investment. I heard similar arguments for some other traditionally prestigious fields of study, such as law, architecture, and engineering. People would joke about lawyers outnumbering people in Uruguay, or question the need for so many architects for such a small, slow growing population. Alonso described the emigration of professionals from the medical field as due to the overabundance of medical professionals.

Alonso: It is natural, because if you graduate as a doctor here in Uruguay, working here... is impossible. You apply for a job, maybe they call you, maybe they don’t. And if they do call you, they pay you two pesos because, as there are so many doctors for such a small country, they have the luxury of paying you very little. If you decide not to take the job, they say ‘good riddance’ and call another.

**Perception of cultural decline**

Besides the decline in real wages and the difficulty in achieving a middle class lifestyle, people also describe a societal and cultural decline that has occurred in the last few decades.
Marcelo (age 32): We had also declined from a cultural point of view. People have become more superficial, more banal, more consumption driven. Before, it was a much more intellectual country, and the middle class has lost a lot of that... There used to be a middle class much more dedicated to cultural activities, that had more intellectual development... I see this and sometimes it makes me want to emigrate. I think that if we leave Uruguay, it won’t be to improve our wages, but to improve in this aspect.

Being a highly educated country is ingrained in the national identity of Uruguay, and many people expressed concern with the quantity of people who are now not finishing high school because they have to work to help the family, or because they get involved in youth delinquency and drug use. There is also a growing concern about crime and the lack of security in the cities, and the idea that it is no longer safe to let children run around their neighborhoods.

In Uruguay there is a cultural expectation of the connection between education, wage, social prestige, and an expectation of the accessibility of a middle class lifestyle. Disillusionment in regards to those expectations is exacerbated by the information that people receive about the exterior through personal networks and media. People can imagine how life for them would be different in the exterior. Gabriel stated, “I don’t think there is a single person in Uruguay for whom the idea of leaving hasn’t crossed their mind at some point.” Emigration is seen as a very possible life outcome, and is spoken of as having a historic continuity with their immigrant past. However, that is not to say that leaving Uruguay is seen as one’s only or even best option in life.

Section 2 – Cultural Reasons to Stay and Acceptable Migration

Staying is the Best Option

As homeland transnationalists, Uruguayans live in contexts that stretch beyond their national borders, have access to migrant networks, and many even have a passport which would allow them to emigrate and work legally in Europe. Taking this
into account, it seems surprising that more people do not choose to leave. Several authors (Bengochea 2007, Souza 2007, Pellegrino 2009) have suggested that emigration has become a normalized part of Uruguayan culture, or that emigration is equated with success. However, I argue that emigration is not as culturally “normal” as it might appear, looking at the high percentage of Uruguayans living abroad. I did not find a sense of hopelessness about the possibility of finding meaningful employment, or building a “good life” in the home country, that has been described in other locations (Åkesson, 2004). Perhaps this is because most previous studies on migration from Uruguay have focused on the migrants themselves and their reasons for leaving. Those who have made the decision to migrate are likely to justify their decision by representing it as their only option. Since I worked from a homeland perspective, I found that most people do not always consider migration to be their best, and much less only, option. The preferable model is to remain in Uruguay, realize one’s educational and professional potential, and start one’s own family close to where the rest of their relatives are.

**Rooted in culture**

Although from a macro-historic viewpoint, the high rates of immigration and emigration would lead one to notice a certain transience on the part of the population, when in Uruguay one can see that people do feel a real attachment to the nation, territory, national myths, and cultural symbols of the country. Uruguayans who remain at home represent themselves as a culture deeply rooted in their traditions and proud of their nation. People point to the “tranquility” of the country, the slower pace of life, and time to spend with the family and with friends as advantages to staying in Uruguay. They speak of their fondness for the ubiquitous *mate*, the *parrilladas* (barbeques), the
*dulce de leche*, and the tradition of eating ñoquis pasta on the 29th of each month, as idiosyncratic parts of their culture which they are fond of. They discuss the advantages of living in a country without war or climactic disasters, and of their pride in the historical success of the Uruguayan national soccer team, having won two World Cups. And generally, people value the comfort of living in their own culture, using their own language, hearing the specifically *rioplatense* accent, and being near to family and friends. Carolina stated, "I am really proud to be Uruguayan, I love Uruguay. It’s for no other reason than that I love my country that I stay here… I have opportunities to leave, but they don’t interest me."

When people talk about their decisions to stay in the country, they generally involve the words *apego* (attachment) and *raíces* (roots). Martín, the software engineer, described the fact that it is very easy for graduates from his educational program to find well paid work abroad.

Martín: Some new opportunities for professionals have emerged so that they can continue their career here, but it is not really to their advantage. Many times professionals stay here because of their *apego* cultural (fondness for the culture), for their attachment to the place where they grew up, but it is clear that the better economic and educational opportunities are to be found in other countries.

Uruguayans from most career sectors, from waiters to surgeons, choose to forfeit better wages and working conditions to remain in their home country. Besides the feelings of attachment to the country and the culture, Uruguayans also decide to stay because of their families.

**The importance of family**

Uruguayans represent themselves as having a very family oriented culture, and indeed, family ties were the most common reason given in my research for remaining in the home country.
Lorena: My spouse and I talk about how nice it would be to go live in some other part of the world, but on the other hand, I think it is a part of our culture, that the desire to be near our families holds us back, the desire to have everyone together, like we are here. When my sister moved to Montevideo [from Salto] it seemed so far away; it’s terrible to be so far. It’s to say, yes, we would love to go, but to leave our relatives, our parents, grandparents, children, aunts, uncles, and cousins when we are so accustomed to being all together, within ten minutes of each other… It is very powerful, very strong for us. It seems like that is the most difficult part to being outside the country.

These family ties went beyond what we would consider the nuclear family, and a strong cultural significance of the role of aunt and uncle appeared time and again in my research. Alonso was actually set to take a job abroad, but ended up backing out with only a week before he was supposed to leave. He spoke of the role of family in his decision to stay.

Alonso: My sister lives here and when my niece was born, and I started to realize that I was missing the growth of my niece, her childhood. Then my grandfather died and I thought about the little time I had spent with him. That’s how I began to consider things I hadn’t thought of before. I started to think that the lifestyle here is more tranquil; it’s nicer for raising children, they can play out in the yard. These things you could never have in a big city.

The individual’s identity as part of a family, and the social expectations that they fulfill their familial roles, are very strong. Separation from family and culture is widely agreed to be the worst consequence of emigration.

Attending a meeting of the Association of Parents with Children in the Exterior (APHIE) helped me to understand the emotions that are suffered when families are separated through emigration. During the meeting parents were given space to talk about their children and their grandchildren abroad. Some became quite emotional as they spoke of both successes and problems that their family abroad experienced. Other members of the group offered moral support, affirmation of the good work they had done raising their children, and advice in regards to the laws about migration in both
Uruguay and the receiving societies. Although it seemed that the parents of emigrants suffered greatly regardless of which country their children had migrated to, those who had children who were undocumented were especially concerned.

Like several of the APHIE members, one of my interviewees suffered greatly from the absence of her children due to emigration. She was a widow in her seventies and her children were working illegally in the United States. She lived alone and would make a trip once a year to visit her children and grandchildren, but was quite emotional, stating that she felt so alone most of the time. She was also angry that her children could not return, knowing that if they left the United States to return to visit her, that they would not be allowed back into the United States because they had violated their visas by staying and working. She stated, “I told them, by the time you come back, the house will be here, but I won’t. I’m not going to live forever.”

The cultural importance of the family and living in proximity to family is reflected in Uruguayan migration behavior. Unlike the migration behavior described in new economics of migration theory, where the family unit sends one or more members abroad as part of the family’s economic strategy, Uruguayan nuclear family units tend to relocate the entire family abroad. My interviews revealed many instances of entire nuclear families moving abroad, and while this was disruptive and painful to the members of the extended family who remained in the country, it was a much more acceptable option than dividing the nuclear family by sending one member abroad. In fact, after spending several weeks researching emigration, I heard only one account of someone leaving their nuclear family behind, working, and sending remittances home to support the family.
Life is Not Always Better Abroad

Personal and social cost of migration

My interviewees also reminded me that life is not necessarily much better for those who leave the country. Even for those who manage to experience upward social mobility and gain access to material things that they would not have been able to acquire in Uruguay, there is a great cost of migration. Marcelo stated, “If you don’t have good life conditions here you know that if you go to Spain and do the same work you will be able to live much better. The thing is, however, when you begin to compare, there are things… risks, ‘uprootedness,’ pain, sadness because of the separation of families. These are the things that retain people here.” Liliana, a university student in her early twenties, spoke of people she knows living as undocumented migrants in the United States, unable to return home to visit because they would not be allowed reentry. She stated, “It’s like being divided, you know? I think it is sad. Wanting to return, missing your country, your people, your culture, your family. But at the same time, it’s like you are stuck there.” Migrants who long for their home country are common in the discourse about migration. Their situation is both lamented and expected when one leaves Uruguay.

Even when one emigrates legally and is free to return whenever one likes, emigration has a social and personal cost. A big deterrent to migration is the notion that you will always be an outsider in the place of reception, and that, if you stay long in another country, you will become an outsider in Uruguay as well. Sara (age 57) stated, “I see it in the minds of my brothers, and so many other friends, that they are not fine over there, but they are not fine here either. It is a permanent nostalgia.” Of her brother who was exiled to Rio de Janeiro during the dictatorship, she stated, “When he is here,
he is nostalgic for Rio, and when he is there, he is nostalgic for Uruguay.” Gimena echoed that sentiment, and describe the situation of her exiled uncle.

Gimena: He was left totally without roots. He comes here and is an outsider; he returns and is an outsider there too. The experiences that I see up close are not attractive at all. The idea of emigration I don't like at all. It seems to me that you never find your home, your real place in the world. No matter how much I believe that it opens your mind to travel and meet people from other places, you are always going to belong to the place where you were born. Just like the Spanish woman who lives upstairs. Even at age 70 she speaks really Galician Spanish, she will always be La Gallega. From my point of view, from what I have lived, I think that short term migrations are enriching, and long term migrations are painful.

After half a century of continual emigration, people in Uruguay have a clear understanding through their friends and relatives that migration is very difficult on the individual and for the family. Although they are tempted to go abroad for reasons discussed above, there is also the understanding that emigration is not the perfect solution, and that emotionally, it may be better to stay in their home country.

**Migrant experience of downward social mobility**

Besides the shared notion that emigration has a high emotional cost, there is also another line of rhetoric about downward social mobility of those who have left. Many people would assure me that work opportunities aren’t always that much better abroad, and that many people end up doing work that “they wouldn't do here,” implying that the work that they end up doing would be considered beneath them due to their social standing and education levels. The image of going abroad and “working as a gardener” appeared time and again in interviews and conversations as the classic case of this type of downward mobility. Liliana stated, “I have an aunt who was a principal for a school here… when she went there she worked in a hotel, directing the housekeepers. She never would have accepted that kind of work here.” Other examples of this kind of
work that were mentioned were cleaning pools, selling candy in the streets, picking crops, waiting tables, and cleaning cars.

**Insecurity of undocumented migrants**

Emigrating to do this type of work is often associated with working as undocumented laborers.

Gimena: I have seen many people following their dreams of leaving and end up working much more than they would work here. They take jobs that they would never accept here. They work Monday to Monday with zero benefits, zero insurance, to strengthen something that they will never belong to, that they will never benefit from like their neighbors who were born there. That seems horrible to me.

Besides the abuses that can accompany undocumented labor, people also spoke of the insecurity and fear of apprehension of their compatriots who were living abroad illegally, as a deterrent to migration without legal status. In fact, even the few who stated that they had at one point considered going abroad to work illegally, said that now they would not go unless they could find a way to go legally, and to have a contract in hand before they arrived.

The change in whether or not they would consider leaving and working illegally reflects both the improving economy in Uruguay and the changing context of reception abroad. People are well aware of the economic downturn in the United States and Europe, and changes in migration policy.

Martín: Now the borders are not as open as they were before, especially with Spain. There have been a lot of changes. Spain has had important anti-migration policies lately. They have been deporting, including in poor condition, people from here. Now the idea of leaving to live in another country isn’t so agreeable. Now people first worry about getting European citizenship, principally Spanish.

Both in interviews and casual conversations, people mentioned the unemployment levels in Spain, especially, and that it was particularly hard for immigrants to find work with the growing nativist attitudes. They explained that even those Uruguayans who
were there working legally and were Spanish citizens were facing discrimination in Spain. Although most Uruguayans’ physical appearance does not make them stand out as foreign in Spain, they say that people notice their accent and refer to them as “sudacas,” a pejorative term for South American.

Despite the warnings that people receive through networks, word of mouth, and the media, I was told that people who have made up their minds to go, will go anyways. Gabriel told me of his brother who, even lacking the correct documents, went to Spain at the peak of the crisis.

Gabriel: My brother went to Spain a few months ago. He had work here but quit to go to Spain… It was a very difficult moment in Europe. Everyone told him, ‘You aren’t going to be able to find anything; it’s too difficult to get a job there now, especially for immigrants.’ But he went anyways. He did everything; I mean, he sold Coca Colas on the beach, was a waiter in a nightclub, and it didn’t work out and four months later he came back. He is still without work here.

Though warnings are not always observed, and people continue to emigrate from Uruguay, there is strong evidence that emigration is not culturally “normal” in the sense that it is expected or encouraged for all people. Emigration is understood to have very negative consequences, including family disintegration and the personal pain of being “uprooted.” Many Uruguayans express a lot of pride in and attachment to their nation and culture, and understand emigration to be a risk, especially when the context of reception is negative.

**Opportunity and Justifiable Emigration**

Remaining in the home country is still the most acceptable decision, but there are also culturally defined instances when emigration is acceptable and even expected. There are two ends of the spectrum in this regard; leaving is justifiable when outstanding individuals cannot really live up to their full potential in Uruguay, and in
times of acute crisis when “they had no other option,” such as the military dictatorship era, and the economic crisis of 2002.

**Personal and intellectual development**

The importance of education and intellectual development is deeply rooted in Uruguay’s national identity. Uruguayans often express the need to “desarrollarse” (to develop one’s self) and to “abrirse la cabeza” (to open one’s mind). Because of their educational attainment, Uruguayan professionals tend to identify themselves strongly with the global intellectual community. Sebastian, a well educated adult from the interior, discussed feeling like he should be a part of this global intellectual community, but because he is from a small, developing nation, felt marginalized and somewhat apart from the community. He stated, “I feel intellectually capable of involving myself in that world, but it is like I am watching it from outside, like watching TV.”

Although Uruguayans tend to hold their own national educational institutions in high regard, they also recognize the limitations of their education in the country. The idea of going abroad to study, earn a Master, a PhD, or to participate in other training is looked upon very positively in Uruguayan culture. Going abroad is especially important for receiving additional trainings or specializing in subjects which are not well developed in Uruguay. For example, Gloria, a child psychologist, and her husband Marcelo, a cardiologist, have been considering going to Spain to specialize.

Gloria: We have been thinking about it because Marcelo is a cardiologist, but also a geneticist. Here the field of genetics is not well developed; there are clinics, but very few. I would like to earn a scholarship to go to Spain to specialize in autism, a developmental disorder, because here that field is really underdeveloped. So, we have already validated our degrees with Spain and the option is there. I mean, we want to go, we have European citizenship, and we have an open door. We have talked a lot about it, but there is a lot in the balance… My son doesn’t want to go, and you have to think about your family, about his schooling, his friends. We are thinking about it just to get a scholarship to go specialize, and then return.
Neither Gloria nor Marcelo could realize their goals of professional development in their fields of interest in Uruguay. For both of them, progressing in their professional field is important to their personal fulfillment. Gloria and Marcelo were far from the only people who I interviewed who wished to study abroad. In fact, all of the students and young professionals I interviewed expressed the desire to desarrollarse by studying temporarily in another country, or had already done so.

**Return – expectation versus reality**

In the case of migration for personal development, the expected outcome is that the individual returns to the homeland, having “opened their mind,” and having gained valuable human capital. The reality, however, is that many of those who study in other countries are recruited to work in those countries for much higher wages than they could earn in Uruguay. Although it is Gloria and Marcelo’s plan to return, Marcelo admitted, “Until you are there, you can’t be sure about what is going to happen, you never know. If they offer you an income of four times more than you could make here for the rest of your life, you are going to think about staying, at least for a few years.”

Higher wages are not the only thing preventing the return of those seeking education abroad. Several people had friends or relatives who had gone to study for a few years, and had ended up forming a family with a native of that country and staying. Adriana, a 29 year old biochemist, is planning on leaving to do a post-doc in France once she finishes her degree. When I asked if she would stay in France she explained that it was a very hard decision for her. She said, “Working abroad for three or four years limits your long term projects like getting married, starting a family, buying a home. If I go, I will go without a return date. But Uruguay has many programs for
repatriating scientist, so I haven’t dismissed the idea of returning.” She added, “It is difficult to think of how I will miss my friends, my family, but I have to make a decision. I can’t live with one foot on either side of the Atlantic.” Adriana did not want to live the next few years of her life in France without putting down roots. She was open to the idea of starting her long term goals of marriage, family and homeownership in France, though it pained her to think about permanent separation from her family and friends in Uruguay.

**Migration of the highly skilled**

Highly skilled emigrants are also expected to stay abroad if their training or talent could be considered wasted upon their return. Sebastian discussed a relative of his who earned a PhD in the United States, only to return and not be able to work directly in that field.

Sebastian: Luis finished his doctorate there. Various months passed and he didn’t know what to do. He didn’t find the job he hoped to attain, so he returned to Uruguay… Luis started to work with his father in the family orange cultivating business. But what a waste! He had this training in horticultural genetics, and was working on the family farm. There was no research institution here that was at his level, so for him, it was a waste to be back in Uruguay, and he really struggled with this. But then an opportunity to work with a big company in the U.S. emerged and he went back.

By exploring the cultural norms around educational attainment and the employment of the highly educated, it is easy to see why “brain drain” is such a problem for Uruguay. Uruguay’s public education is free through the tertiary level, representing a huge investment in the human capital of the country that is lost when the individual migrates. Beyond that, many educational opportunities are simply not available in Uruguay, and the Uruguayan state provides many scholarships to its citizens as an investment for improving the field upon their return, with the knowledge and experience
gained by that individual abroad. This is another investment by the state that is lost when individuals do not return.

**Migration of the particularly talented**

Besides the highly educated, particularly talented actors, artists, musicians, and soccer players are amongst those who are expected to leave to fulfill their own potential. Gabriel, a musician, described the situation for musicians in Uruguay, saying that, because of the small population, a band’s popularity reaches its limit. He said, “After two or three years, you reach your ceiling. That is why they all go to live in Argentina.” Other interviewees knew of people who had gone to Brazil to learn to be a cinematographer, or to be a dancer, saying that those career possibilities didn’t really exist in Uruguay, since there is such a small market for them.

**Nunca Se Sabe – You Never Know**

**National crises**

Although people emigrate from Uruguay even in times of relative prosperity and tranquility, as discussed earlier in the paper, the massive waves of emigration were a result of political and economic crises. The military dictatorship era and the economic crisis of 2002 are still very present in the social imagination of the country, and affect how individuals see themselves and their possibilities in Uruguay. For a country which was known in the early part of the twentieth century as the “Switzerland of South America” for the strength of its peaceful democracy and prosperity, the military coup in 1973 was a traumatizing shock to the country. Over ten years of military dictatorship followed, complete with the imprisonment and torture of suspected dissidents, suspension of civil liberties, and the huge quantity of political exiles who fled the country. The economic crisis of 2002 was also similarly traumatic. People lost
everything overnight, real wages plummeted, unemployment soared, and those who were economically stable were suddenly cast into poverty. Many people committed suicide as a result, and tens of thousands left the country.

**Legacy of insecurity**

These two events created the vast majority of the Uruguayan diaspora and therefore, migrant networks. However, they also had a lasting effect on the home country, leaving a legacy of instability and insecurity in the collective imagination. This insecurity shows itself in conversations about migration. Even those who are the most emphatic about their desire to remain in Uruguay add the clause, “pero nunca se sabe” (but you never know). Daniel, a young man from the interior, who is very attached to his home city and wants to remain there, left the door open to emigration. When I asked if he had ever thought about living in the exterior, he replied, “No, never. Maybe because I’ve never had the need. But if I did have the need, if I didn’t have work… maybe then I would consider the possibility of leaving.” Jaime also viewed emigration as a possibility, though he does not currently have plans to leave.

Jaime: I don’t have any plans of emigrating, but I don’t throw out the possibility because one can’t always foresee it… I think is within the possibilities that Uruguayans maneuver if things become complicated here. I tell you, today I am not thinking of emigrating, but I haven’t thrown out the idea.

Jaime, even at age 42, with himself and his wife employed in very stable positions and two children in school, left a door open to emigration if things became “complicated.” Emigration is not seen as a choice that is totally under one’s control. Because of the legacy of crises in the country, it is understood that circumstances may change and the emigration option may become necessary.
Acquisition of foreign citizenship

The acquisition of foreign citizenship and passports is directly linked to this feeling of insecurity. It represents a hedge against the risk of staying in a country that is vulnerable to crises. Pablo’s family began the paperwork for their Spanish citizenship just after the economic crisis of 2002 to give themselves “a chance” if “things got complicated here.” No one from his family ended up emigrating to Spain, but they have that “open door” as a kind of backup plan.

During our interview, Valeria (age 59) was very excited to tell me about her Italian passport that she had recently acquired.

Valeria: If you can get it, why wouldn’t you? My grandfather’s birth certificate [from Italy] didn’t cost us anything. My father’s passport cost 300 pesos [about US$15.00], it is not like that is a lot! And mine cost 380 pesos [US$19.00]. That’s nothing! You just have to ask for the birth certificate and all of that, but it is nothing that can’t be done. I think it is good, because one never knows… If it doesn’t take up space, and doesn’t cost much money, there is no reason not to have it.

For Valeria, as a grandmother, attaining dual-citizenship is a kind of insurance for her children or grandchildren. She stated that she applied for citizenship “thinking about my children.”

Valeria: They will never leave, but you never know. If you leave all of the paperwork done, everything arranged, with time maybe my grandchildren will want to travel, will want to leave… It is like leaving a door open. I will never emigrate, but my children, grandchildren, great-grandchildren… one never knows what’s going to happen; it is all so unstable.

Acquiring citizenship in another country acts as another kind of capital that a parent or grandparent can leave for future generations. Although they may not intend to leave Uruguay, acquisition of dual-citizenship allows people to build a life in Uruguay, with the security of knowing that they can legally migrate to a more prosperous area if things go wrong.
Personal Crisis

Lydia de Souza (2007:161) emphasizes the importance of migrant networks by saying, “The result of these established networks and the ‘nearness’ of the decision to migrate is so strong in Uruguay that faced with any symptom of crisis, the emigration reaction is immediate.” This is an important point, but I would offer two points of contention. First, it is not just migrant networks, but instead, the underlying or perhaps latent culture of migration which adds to the “nearness” of the decision to migrate. And second, de Souza was speaking of symptoms of national economic and political crisis, while personal crises can have the same effect.

End of romantic relationship

When asked about the circumstances surrounding the decision to migrate made by my interviewees or the people they know who had migrated, there were several accounts of personal crisis just before the decision was made. The most common was the end of a romantic relationship or divorce, which was associated with migration at a rate that was very surprising to me. Sebastian, who had decided to leave to work in the U.S., but was denied a work visa, spoke about the circumstances leading up to his decision, “That year was really complicated because I had just divorced. I was going through a period of general disorder in my life, because of the divorce. I didn’t have a clear idea of what to do with my life, of which road to take. I was this close to leaving for the United States…” Beatriz (age 54) shared the story of one of her best childhood friends who married young and whose marriage failed. She said her friend “resolved to rebuild her life independently” and left for France. Gustavo confirmed the tendency I noticed in my interviews, saying, “Sometimes all it takes is a romantic rupture and you
decide, I’m leaving.” Emigration gives one a chance to totally start over after a personal crisis.

**Business or professional failure**

Another example of a personal crisis preceding emigration decisions was the failure of a business. Valeria described the situation leading up to the departure of her brother and his family. After losing his job, her brother decided to start a business. He was not a good businessman, however, and he soon lost his business as well. Valeria described how he became totally depressed and his wife decided that the only way to save the family and provide for their four children was to move the family to Spain to start over. She took the two youngest children and moved to Spain, found work for herself and for her husband, and he followed with the older two children. Valeria told of their struggles when they first moved to Spain, but of how they are doing very well now, and are well established in Spain with no plans of returning.

**Lack of direction**

Finally, emigration seems to be an attractive option for those who are lacking direction in their lives or struggling to settle into a career. Rodrigo described a time in his life when he felt lost, and wanted to leave.

Rodrigo: I thought about leaving in 2007, when I was failing in the University. I wanted to just leave and work abroad. Since I was doing poorly in my studies and I knew that the wages for an employee here aren’t sufficient to support a family, I wanted to go to work three or four years, and save up enough capital to start a business here.

Rodrigo ended up leaving the University for a time, and working as a farmhand on an estancia. His employer later encouraged him to resume his studies while working, and he is now finishing his degree in agriculture while working. Martin had a similar story of
a friend who was struggling in school and lacked direction, but his friend did end up emigrating.

Martín: I have a friend in Spain who left several years ago. He didn’t have a clear idea of what he wanted to do, so high school was difficult for him. He didn’t have any guidance. He dropped out of high school, reenrolled, and then dropped out again. He worked for brief periods of time. He felt frustrated and couldn’t see possibilities for his future. He convinced himself that his only opportunity was to go work in Spain.

For those experiencing personal crises, emigration is a way to distance themselves from their problems, make a clean break, and start over.

Migration as a Backup Plan

Although emigration is not culturally understood as the best option for the individual, for many Uruguays the idea of emigration represents an attractive back-up plan. Whether faced with national or personal crises, or a combination of the two, the idea that one can start over in new place is deeply ingrained in the collective and personal imagination. It also seems that many Uruguays have a latent desire to “probar suerte” (try their luck) abroad, or are at least a bit curious about what their lives would be like if they did. A crisis situation may be the push that one needs to actually act on that desire.

Changing Tendencies

Fewer people emigrate

During the six weeks that I spent studying migration in Uruguay in the summer of 2010, my interviews revealed a growing sense that emigration trends were changing in that country. Although most people still agreed heartily that emigration remains a problem for Uruguay, people tended to have a more positive outlook on the situation, telling me that they thought fewer people were leaving, and that they had the impression that people were coming back from abroad. This was a marked change from when I
was in Uruguay in 2007, when discussions of emigration were characterized by a sense of sadness and hopelessness about the problem. My first interviewee during my recent visit stated:

Patricia (age 31): Now emigration doesn’t have such a negative charge as it had before. Now there isn’t the situation of people obligated to leave, crying and sad. People are leaving knowing that they can come back. It’s not so sad. They will go and come back, make money, go to study, progress, and they will return.

All but one of my interviewees thought that the numbers of people leaving Uruguay had declined in the last few years. Tomás stated of the current emigration rate, “They say that it is stopping and even that the trend is reversing, that more people are returning than leaving. Of the people that I know, none of them are leaving. The situation here has improved.” Lorena had the same impression, stating, “I think that now, like this year and last year, there are less people leaving. I have that impression, though I haven’t done any research on it or anything. I have heard that on television programs. I think it has to do with the world economic crisis, that there are people returning.” Many people shared Lorena’s opinion that people were returning because of the economic crisis in the receiving countries.

Carolina stated simply, “Going to the United States doesn’t give you the guarantee that it did ten years ago. The same with Europe and Spain, they aren’t very economically solid now.” Martín shared a similar opinion.

Martín: Emigration was always seen as an opportunity to better one’s self, but lately, that has been transforming. From being an opportunity for betterment to being, in many circumstances, more like roulette, more like a gamble. The people aren’t going with the same certainty that they will be fine there.

The uncertainty about opportunities abroad was not just for unskilled migration, but also for those who are highly skilled. Adriana, though she had been offered several
opportunities in Europe to complete her post-doc work, had begun to worry about her possibilities for employment after that, feeling that many corporations would have less money to hire people, and would prefer to hire native born scientists.

As the preferred migrant receiving countries are struggling economically, Uruguay’s economy has been growing steadily since their crisis in 2002.

Pablo: We hear about the economic crisis in the United States and Europe but it hasn’t affected us. It has just gone over top of us, and this is good. It makes people feel secure to know that there in Europe is a mess and here we are, tranquil, continuing on just the same. It gives you something to think about. Look at Greece and all of the problems they are having. It is like this has changed our mentality.

In conversations and interviews, people would compare the risks of going abroad to what was available in Uruguay. Many people spoke of the improving economy and new job opportunities available, but there were other advantages as well. People highlighted the Plan Ceibal, a program which has given every public elementary school student in Uruguay a laptop computer, as a wonderful occurrence for their country. Others highlighted the recent healthcare reform and spoke of the security of knowing that if you were sick or injured, even if you were very poor you would go see the same specialists to whom the wealthy people have access, with very little or no cost to yourself.

There was also a lot of excitement about the (center) leftist government, the Frente Amplio, that took power in 2005, and was elected again in 2009. Though not all of my interviewees supported the Frente Amplio party, even those most opposed recognized some of the positive changes that had occurred since its election. Those who strongly believed in the Frente Amplio were very excited about the changes it had brought. Of their election in 2005, Adriana stated, “It started a collective sentiment that we could improve things. There was a lot of joy, it was something historical.” And of the
recent 2009 election of President Mujica of the Frente Amplio, Pablo stated, “It was really important that Pepe Mujico won the presidency; the Frente has been very important. When they won the election, the streets were full; the whole country was celebrating.”

Pablo also credited the Frente Amplio with encouraging a growing sense of nationalism in the country, and trying to encourage people to stay and find work here.

Pablo: They encourage you not to leave, saying ‘you can do it here,’ that Uruguay is a productive country, that we have possibilities for young people here. They are trying to build some nationalism. They encourage you to find work here. And say ‘if you leave, you can come back.’ It’s more or less a message of ‘here in Uruguay, you can reach your goals.’

Martín also notice a growing nationalistic sentiment.

Martín: There have been outbursts of nationalism lately, where everyone has united over a cause. The fight against Argentina about the pulp mills for example, everyone was standing up for their country. And with our national team in the World Cup, it united everyone in a common cause, and that is something that hadn’t happened for a long time.

Many other people were in agreement with Martin about the importance of the Uruguayan national team’s fourth place finish in the 2010 World Cup.

Pablo: Seriously, though it seems like a joke, with all this about our national team, it changes things a lot! You feel more tranquil, prouder. I don't know, it's like the people are more content here. We finished fourth in the World Cup, and we live for soccer! We believe in ourselves more… Uruguayans tend to be really negative, the glass is always half empty, we have very little confidence, but with this, it’s like, Watch Out! We are here! We are 3 million, but we can do it!

Uruguayans with whom I spoke felt this difference in the society. They said that people were prouder, that they had begun to really value what they have in Uruguay, and that they felt more positive about what the future might bring for the country.
Lack of migration data

It is difficult to find recent migration data in Uruguay. As of today nothing has been published in academic sources that could be used to back up the impressions of Uruguayans that few people were leaving. However, newspapers in Uruguay have been indicating just that. In September of 2009 *La República* announced that if the estimated statistics held until the end of the year, 2009 could be the first year in four decades in which Uruguay had a positive migration rate (*La República*, 2009). And recently, the online newspaper sociedaduruguaya.org reported that, using the incomings and outgoings from Carrasco International Airport, between July of 2008 and June of 2009 Uruguay had a positive migration balance of 11,000 people. The article also reported that in the twelve months following, there was a positive migration of 2,500 people (*Sociedad Uruguaya*, 2011). The Sociedad Uruguaya (2011) article also suggested that the conditions for another wave of immigration are present in Uruguay, if the economy continues to grow, while a recent British Broadcasting Corporation (BBC) News article spoke of a labor shortage for a new pulp mill construction project, and suggested that the developer would need to import labor (*Psetizki*, 2011).

**Summary of Findings**

Uruguay does have a culture of migration. Though it is at times latent, the culture of migration is activated by specific, culturally defined, circumstances. The strong pressure to remain in Uruguay contrasts directly with the pressure to leave, creating a tension that is part and parcel of Uruguay’s unique culture of migration. Uruguayans understand their historical connection to migration, identify themselves with their ancestral heritage, and generally live their lives in transnational contexts. Many even have the possibility, due to their dual-citizenship or professional opportunities, to legally
migrate abroad and earn much higher wages. However, emigration is not culturally accepted as the best option for all Uruguayans. Emigration is a rupture of the individual from their social context. Even when people are encouraged to leave, it is very sad and disruptive to families, friends and communities. As Sara stated, “I cry when people leave. It hurts me terribly that so many young people go. And that pain stays inside me.” The culturally preferred outcome is that people can develop themselves personally and professionally, find employment that allows for promotions or professional growth, and start their own family near their extended family.

However, when social expectations are not met in the home country, or in cases of national or personal crises, emigration is an attractive alternative. Individual achievement and intellectual development is contrasted with expectations of fulfillment of family roles, and both play important parts in the decision making process. Uruguay’s history of crises also plays an important role in the social imagination of the country, and the acquisition of foreign passports is one way that individuals reduce the perceived risk of future crisis. It is apparent that decisions about migration are both “socially embedded and culturally informed” (Åkesson, 2004:17). Individual migration decisions are based on interactions with broad structural processes, such as wage differentials and employment opportunities, but they are also a result of personal and cultural values and subjectivities. And lastly, the culture of migration, like all culture, is not static. The culture of migration is responsive to changes in the home and sending country contexts, as illustrated by the changes regarding migration in the last few years in Uruguay.
Study Objectives

The goal of this study has been to determine if there is a culture of migration present in Uruguayan society, and to understand how Uruguayans perceive, represent, and interact with broader cultural, economic, historical, and political forces which have led to a high rate of emigration. To achieve this end, Chapter 1 presented a review of the literature and situated the Uruguayan case within that literature. Chapter 1 emphasized the importance of researching migration from an anthropological perspective, and proposed the culture of migration theory as the most useful for my research, while acknowledging the relevance of several other migration theories. In Chapter 2, I presented the historical and political context of migration in Uruguay. I demonstrated that migration has played an important role in the formation of Uruguay as a nation, while the emigration trend has been shown to be consistent since the 1960s, and greatly intensified during the Military Dictatorship era and the economic crisis of 2002. In Chapter 3 I used the ethnographic data which I collected in Uruguay in July and August of 2010 to explain how individuals interact with migratory pressures, and to explain the nature of Uruguay’s culture of migration.

Findings

Uruguay does have a culture of migration, meaning that, emigration from the country has made changes to the very culture of Uruguay in a way that encourages further migration. However, I did not find the sense of hopelessness about building a life in Uruguay that has been described in other accounts of culture of migration by Bengochea (2007), nor the idea that emigration is both “necessary and natural”
described by Åkesson (2004). Although emigration is an option located in the social imagination of the country, the preferred life arrangement is to be able to develop one’s self as a person and as an intellectual, find meaningful employment, and live a middle class lifestyle near extended family. Though emigration is not the culturally preferred life course, it is an attractive option when one cannot meet the culturally informed expectations in the home country, and is socially understandable in that context.

Uruguayans understand migration to be a part of their cultural heritage and many have been able to acquire the citizenship of their ancestor’s country of origin. The acquisition of foreign passports is partially a reflection of personal identification with the sending country of one’s ancestors, but is also a hedge against the risk of remaining in a country which is susceptible to political and economic crises. The sizable Uruguayan diaspora around the world has made it so that every Uruguayan whom I interviewed had friends or family living abroad, clearly indicating direct access to migrant networks. Uruguayans who remain in their homeland live their lives in transnational contexts, informed by the experiences of friends and family abroad, their own travel experiences, employment with foreign companies, and through electronic media. This transnationality provides resources for imagining their lives in other locations. Uruguayans tend to be very informed about the differences between Uruguay and other countries in regards to wages, potential for material acquisition, educational opportunities, and cultural characteristics.

In contrast to the appeal of the option to emigrate, Uruguayans also receive information about the negative aspects of migrant experiences. Stories are relayed from those abroad about discrimination and poor treatment in receiving countries and about
the difficulties of adapting to life abroad, away from one’s family and culture.

Uruguayans also hear, both through migrant networks and through the media, about the economic and political situations in the potential receiving countries. In fact, it seems likely that emigration from Uruguay has slowed considerably in the last few years due to Uruguay’s growing economy and the fact that both Europe and the United States have been experiencing economic recessions.

Despite the fact that a macro-historical look at migration patterns in Uruguay points to a certain degree of mobility in the population, most Uruguayans do feel a strong attachment to their country and their culture. Uruguayans also describe themselves as very family oriented and cited the desire to remain near their families as the primary reason that they did not want to emigrate. Emigration is understood to have very negative aspects for the individual, family, community, and country. From the data that I collected, it is apparent that emigration is an option for Uruguayans, but it is not considered the only or even best option for most people.

How Culture of Migration Fits with other Migration Theories

As stated in Chapter 1, the culture of migration theory is an important approach to studying emigration from Uruguay; however, several other migration theories are applicable to this case. In order to demonstrate how some of these theories apply and where they fall short, I will use the case of one of my interviewees, Adriana. I introduced Adriana in Chapter 3 as a 29 year old biochemist who was finishing her degree and planning to move to France to do a post-doc, and who stated that she would very likely continue living in France upon completion of the post-doc.

Adriana’s case fits the neoclassical economic theory of migration in that she is migrating from a poorer country to a richer country, and will definitely increase her
earning potential by working in France. Uruguay, however, is not a “labor-abundant”
country which sends migrants to “labor-scarce” countries as described in neoclassical
economic theory (Messina and Lahav, 2006). In fact, Uruguay is itself a “labor-scarce”
country, and Adriana is highly employable in her home country, though she would earn
a lower wage by staying. Additionally, Adriana chose to sacrifice even higher wages that
were offered to her in the United States, choosing instead to go to France, which she
described as more “culturally similar.” Although the neoclassical economic theory of
migration is applicable, it ignores more complex reasons behind her decision to migrate
and to where. Structural/Marxist theory is equally applicable, yet over simplifying. While
it is true that as Uruguay continues to further integrate into the global capitalist market
and Adriana’s labor has become a commodity in the global market, structural/Marxist
theory does not allow for any agency in the decision, which Adriana clearly exercised.

Adriana, in fact, had eliminated the option of migration from her life goals for
several years, and had chosen instead to remain in Uruguay and conform to the level of
academic achievement available in the country, and had started to form long term plans
with her partner. It was only after she and her long term partner ended their relationship
that Adriana decided to emigrate. This behavior is consistent with the observation that I
made in Chapter 3, that the culturally preferable option is to remain in the home country,
but that personal crisis is a socially acceptable reason for leaving. Broad structural
theories of migration are useful in the Uruguayan case, but cannot account for migrant
agency and variation in migrant behaviors.

Adriana’s case is also relevant to the study of migrant network theory and
transnationalism. Adriana stated that she had many friends and relatives working in
Europe, showing that she, like all of my other interviewees, has access to migrant networks. In the interview, she stated that it was comforting knowing that she would have relatives somewhat nearby, but did not discuss them as being important to her decision to emigrate. While her relatives live in Spain and Belgium, she is choosing to live in France. To her, the social capital gained through migrant networks, was not as important to her as a highly skilled migrant. Instead, she placed the emphasis on comparing the offers she had received from various institutions in Europe and the United States with the benefits of how she imagined her life would be in each of those places. She was also not reliant on migrant networks to inform her opinions of how life would be in each place. Although she likely took their accounts into consideration, she had previously had the opportunity to participate in conferences, work temporarily, and get further training in many places abroad. In this sense, she is already living as a “homeland transnationalist.” When she emigrates she will become a transnational actor, keeping in close contact with her friends and family in Uruguay, while living and working abroad.

Adriana is also a classic example of “brain drain” for the Uruguayan state. Apart from a few years of private high school, Adriana’s education has been funded by the Uruguayan state. Adriana is well aware of this, and feels indebted to Uruguay for her education. Even though she plans to emigrate, she stated that she would take into account that her education was free and would “…look for opportunities to collaborate and contract projects in Uruguay” so that Uruguay could continue developing. Her attitude of responsibility towards the home country reflects the idea discussed in
Chapter 2 about Uruguay’s emphasis on creating and benefiting from linkages with the diaspora, especially the highly skilled.

Economic and structural models of migration, migrant network and transnationalism literature, as well as consideration of the state’s role in migration are all useful lenses in examining the case of emigration from Uruguay, but much can be added by using a culture of migration approach. A culture of migration lens revealed that in Adriana’s case, there was much more than wages in considering whether or not to leave. It revealed the cultural emphasis on realizing one’s own intellectual and professional potential, and the importance of second language acquisition as a form of cultural capital. It also revealed the fact that emigration was a secondary option for Adriana that was chosen only when the project of family formation in Uruguay did not work; and that, although her emigration was socially acceptable in light of her personal crisis, she still feels guilty about leaving her family and friends, as well as leaving the nation which invested in her education. In the case of Adriana and all of the other interviewees, their decisions to leave or stay are very complex and culturally informed.

**Significance**

This study contributes to the growing body of migration literature that attempts to go beyond structural economic theories and understand the role of the individual and culture in migration decisions. Although Uruguayans are moving from a developing nation to more developed, wealthier nations, this study has shown that the decision to migrate or stay is complex and culturally informed. The field of anthropology, with its tradition of focus on the specific, the individual, and the local, provides an essential lens in the field of migration studies. An anthropological approach helps the researcher to understand how individuals make meaning of their lives, and experience structural
pressures. The ethnographic interview is a very effective tool for learning about the role of the individual in migration, and understanding migratory pressures from an emic perspective.

This study also adds to the body of literature which studies migration from a homeland perspective, rather than based on the experiences of those who have already migrated. Most theories of migration are used to explain migrant behavior, that is, why individuals decide to leave their country, but they say little about why individuals choose to remain where they are. This is an especially important point in the Uruguayan case, where so many individuals have access to migrant networks, have professional connection and opportunities abroad, and have access to legal migration and full citizenship rights abroad because of their ancestral heritage, and yet choose to remain in their home country. The reasons that people remain in their country can only be understood from studies which include a homeland perspective. Studying only the migrants in order to understand migration from a certain place can skew the results since migrants are likely to seek to justify their decisions by presenting their decision to leave as their only option. It is rather like testing the dependent variable rather than the independent variable.

This study has also identified a kind of latent culture of migration present in Uruguay, in which many Uruguayans see emigration as a backup plan if faced with national or personal crises. Many Uruguayans have even taken the necessary steps to acquire citizenship in another country so that, if the need arises, they will be able to leave Uruguay and work legally elsewhere. That means that, although Uruguay’s emigration rate seems to be slowing at the moment, at the next symptom of political or
economic crisis, there is likely to be another massive wave of emigration from the country.

Limitations and Suggestions for Further Research

A major limitation (and strength) of this study is the fact that this research is exploratory in nature. While this research has identified many of the variables involved in the decision to stay or to migrate, it does not compare the variables to determine the importance of one over another. That being said, further quantitative or qualitative work could develop hypotheses based on the variables identified by this research, to be tested in the field.

Another caveat of this research is the non-random sampling technique that I used in the field, as well as the small sample size of 26 interviews, which leads to a question of the generalizability of the findings. Though clear patterns emerged in the research that I conducted, it is not possible to gauge with certainty whether or not these patterns will hold true for the Uruguayan population as a whole. Again, further testing of the variables that my study revealed, by expanding the sample size, using a cultural consensus methodology, or developing a quantitative survey would be useful avenues of future research.

This study also has a strong middle class emphasis. Every person whom I interviewed would likely self identify as being from the lower to upper middle class. I did not interview anyone from the Uruguayan elite, nor did I interview anyone from the rural or urban poor population. Further research would be required to see if my findings would hold true for other socioeconomic classes in Uruguay.

Another avenue of research that would be interesting to pursue would be to compare the findings from the homeland perspective, which I used, with the
experiences of those Uruguayans living abroad. Currently in the field of anthropology, there is growing trend of using multi-sited ethnography as an analytical tool to better capture the realities of a globalized world. Certainly, in this case, ethnographic interviews with the Uruguayan diaspora would enrich and add to the understanding of the culture of migration from Uruguay.

And finally, this case is potentially very interesting for a longitudinal study of the culture of migration. As stated earlier, culture is not static, but responds to internal and external forces. As the economy of the home country and the receiving countries continue to change, and migration policies shift, it would be fascinating to see how the culture of migration changes or remains constant. It would also be interesting to interview the same people every few years to see how their opinions and their use of discourse about migration shift to reflect the changes in their lives and the broader economic and political changes. A longitudinal study such as this would create a strong case study which would be useful to the field of migration studies, the field of anthropology, and the field of development, in that highly skilled migration is a concern for development practice.
LIST OF REFERENCES


BIOGRAPHICAL SKETCH

Holly Brause was born in 1984 in Astoria, Oregon and graduated from Astoria High School in 2002. Holly completed her undergraduate studies at Linfield College in McMinnville, OR, earning a BA in anthropology with minors in both Spanish and Latin American studies. As part of the requirements for the Spanish minor, Holly spent the spring term of 2004 studying in Oaxaca, Mexico. She graduated from Linfield College in the spring of 2006. Upon graduation, Holly earned a Fulbright grant and spent the majority of 2007 in Salto and Montevideo, Uruguay. In Uruguay, she was an English Teaching Assistant (ETA), and carried out an ethnographic interview project, compiling an archive of oral histories.

In 2011, Holly graduated from the University of Florida with Master of Arts in Latin American studies, and a specialization in anthropology. She was a Graduate Assistant to the Center for Latin American Studies Outreach Program.