As a New Socialism in Cuba moves toward liberalization and away from a longstanding centrally planned economic model, we are at a critical moment to grapple with how pandilleros (gang members), whose interests represent some of the island’s most disenfranchised communities, are structuring their identities, desires, and sense of belonging within major urban cities.

Aggregating two years of ethnographic fieldwork, my dissertation explores a set of interrelated, overarching themes that address pandillerismo (gang life) and Cubanidad (Cuban identity) alongside the transformation of the Cuban state. The first of these themes is the negotiation of socioeconomic status, race, and cultural capital amongst a once purportedly classless society. The second is the relationship between masculinity, the streets, and The PCC (Communist Party of Cuba), particularly in connection to the pervasiveness of the Cuban black market.

At its core, my dissertation is an analysis of what pandillerismo and street life entail across various Cuban barrios marginales (marginalized neighborhoods.) To this end, I have collected and interpreted ethnographic accounts that highlight some of the key virtues and values undergirding Cuban sociality, exploring how poorer urban Cubans subsist under the specter of a revolutionary state that is at once highly regimented yet selectively pliable.