

Gender, Work and social Integration among Yucatec Maya Immigrants in San Francisco, California

Género, trabajo e integración social de inmigrantes mayas yucatecos en San Francisco, California

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Abstract: This article examines Yucatec Maya migration to the United States since the late 1980s. It pays special attention to gender differences for men and women to analyze distinctive patterns of migration, work, and social integration in the United States. Our main findings indicate that Yucatec Maya men came to California for economic reasons while most Yucatec Maya women arrived after marriage or via family reunification. Also, Yucatec Maya immigrants have social and economically integrated into the United States while at the same time have negotiated gender change in marriage and retained family values and unity.

Keywords: Yucatán, migration, gender, work, social integration

Resumen: Este artículo examina la migración de mayas yucatecos a los Estados Unidos desde finales de la década de 1980, poniendo especial atención a las diferencias de género, ello con el fin de analizar patrones distintos de migración, trabajo e integración social en el país destino. Nuestros hallazgos muestran que los hombres mayas yucatecos llegaron a California por razones económicas, mientras que la mayoría de las mujeres lo hicieron después del matrimonio o por reunificación familiar. También [se observa que] los inmigrantes mayas yucatecos se han integrado social y económicamente en los Estados Unidos a la vez que han negociado cambios con base en el género dentro del matrimonio y han conservado ciertos valores y unidad familiar.

Palabras clave: Yucatán, migración, género, trabajo, integración social

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Introduction

Since the late 1960s, indigenous Mexican women and men such as the Yucatec Maya have migrated to California to work in the service and domestic sectors as a result of poverty and a lack of employment, healthcare services, and schooling in their communities of origin. In the late 1990s, this migration flow increased their rates of immigration to San Francisco for old and new reasons: better employment opportunities for men and women, marriage, family reunification, curiosity and adventure. At present, as economic migrants, Yucatec Mayas have integrated in the U.S. labor market and American society, and have acquired new economic roles and positions in both the global economy and their families in California. In this study, I examine social and economic integration of Yucatec Maya women and men, who have lived and worked in San Francisco since the late 1980s. I pay special attention to gender differences across generations to analyze distinctive patterns of migration and work in the United States. This work is divided into three parts. In the first, I discuss my approach to social and economic processes of integration and gender change in marriage and family relations in the migratory context. In the second part, I describe when, how and why Yucatec Mayas came to Northern California. In the third part, I examine gender and work to understand social and economic processes of integration for Yucatec Maya men and women.

This study was based on twelve months of research in San Francisco between September 2010 and September 2012. Over the course of my research, I used ethnographic

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methods, open-ended interviews, informal conversations and participant observation. I conducted thirty semi-structured interviews with nineteen immigrant women and eleven immigrant men, and two community leaders.

I. Integration and gender

Historically, in the United States, the debate on immigrants' incorporation has been framed in the language of assimilation. More recently, it is referred as a process of "integration." The emergence of new ways of naming the multiple processes involved in immigrants' incorporation is rooted in the idea of moving away from the negative concept of assimilation to host society. That is, the classical assimilation theory suggested that assimilation was a one-directional process in which immigrants and their descendants acquired the culture of the dominant group. Current studies on migration point out that the process of integration among immigrants in the United States is more complex than that of the classical assimilation (Glazer and Moynihan, 1970; Gans, 1994; Alba and Victor, 1999; Portes and Rumbaut, 2001). Immigrants and their descendants incorporate in American society at various levels: social, cultural, economic, and political (Mahler, 1995; Pessar, 1995; Grimes, 1998; Glick Schiller and Fouron, 2001; Levitt, 2001; Brettell, 2003); and gender, age, ethnicity, class, country of origin, and skills play a central role in the integration process. In contrast to classical assimilation, contemporary assimilation theory highlights that immigrants and their descendants integrate in the host society without rejecting their

own ethnicity. This new paradigm considers that race, gender and ethnicity are the organizing principles of the social structure of American society as well as the axes for various forms of integration of immigrants and their descendants (Jiménez and Fitzgerald, 2007; Mollenkopf and Champeny, 2009). Integration, as a theoretical concept, aims to describe multiple relationships between immigrants and the receiving society. It also intends to explain how local contexts of reception and migration policies at the local and national levels shape the trajectories of integration of immigrants and their children. (Brettell, 2003a; Glick Schiller, 2006; Aparicio, 2007; Brettell, 2007; Thomson and Crul, 2007; Glick Schiller, 2008; Reed-Danahay and Brettell, 2008)

Scholars looking specifically at gender and migration have pointed out that the processes of social and economic integration are gendered. Piper (2008) indicates that international migration flows have become more diverse in terms of gender, ethnicity, class and country of origin. Immigrant men and women arrive at the country of migration in different numbers, for different reasons, and enter the U.S. labor market with different levels of skills, education, age, and legal status. Although men and women occupy different sectors in the labor market, they tend to enter at the bottom of the U.S. labor market and experience gender differences in pay. Research on women and migration specifically indicates that female migration has increased worldwide. This phenomenon has been explained as the result of the restructuring of the global economy and the rise of poverty and social inequality in poor countries in Latin America, Africa, and Asia. In the context of

contemporary global capitalism, the growing involvement of international migrant women in paid work has been described in two ways. First, this is the result of an increase in the demands for labor unskilled and poorly paid jobs in the service and domestic sector in migrant-receiving countries. Secondly, this is the outcome of a new international division of labor, which in fact is also gendered. Impoverished migrant women arrive at rich countries to do important work for the social reproduction of thousands of native families in the receiving countries. They mainly take paid jobs that are traditionally related to personal care and domestic work; while at the same time, other women take care of immigrants' children in the country of origin or in the country of reception—be they sisters, aunts, godmothers or grandmothers. Ehrenreich and Russell Hoschild (2004) have referred to this phenomenon as 'global chains of care.' In discussing the South/North female migrations, Sassen (2003a) indicates that some immigrant women integrate in the informal economy, something that she refers to as 'counter-geographies of globalization.' Many immigrant women work at home and remain invisible for the host society. They generate important economic resources that very often circulate transnationally. One characteristic of female informal workers is that they are less visible than formal workers. Particularly, they lack a series of civil and labor rights, social protection, and formal employment as migrant workers. In particular, female informal workers sell or produce goods from their homes. Some of them are garment makers, embroiderers, paper bag makers, cooks, and bakers. Others are

home-based workers, who “work on their own account, while others work on a piece-rate basis for a contractor or firm.” (ILO, 2002: 8)

It is often assumed that economic incorporation of immigrant women into international migration processes is part of a set of “survival strategies” for households. As many feminist scholars have demonstrated, migration is a gendered process. In the United States, many immigrant women integrate into the labor market because their work is crucial for the sustenance and care of their families. Economic integration goes hand-in-hand with social integration. As Malkin (2007) indicates, immigrant women have had to learn a variety of practices to incorporate them and their children in the host society. For example, immigrant women learn how to deal with “the bureaucratic mazes of schools, hospitals, and Medicaid applications” (Malkin, 2001: 417). They also gain knowledge of how to manage the new family economy, pay bills, go shopping in urban or suburban malls or supermarkets, and navigate the public transportation system.

For female and male immigrants, social and economic integration also entails processes of gender change at the individual, marriage and family levels. Some scholars suggest that as a result of migration, immigrant women and men change their understandings of their gender identity, roles, and expectations in their family, marriage, and work (Menjívar, 2003; Hirsch, 2007; Stephen, 2007). In this respect, some researchers have found that as women begin to work, they become social and economically independent from men. Some start entrepreneurial enterprises, send money back home,

and raise their children with the help of their husbands or by themselves if they divorce, their marriage falls apart, or their husbands die (Cruz-Manjarrez, 2012). For other immigrant women, however, it is expected that as soon they reunite with their migrant husbands in the United States, they stay at home while men work. In this sense, Menjivar (2003) warns us that what immigrant women may consider a gain or a loss from their migration experience and socioeconomic integration to host society is a highly subjective process: “situations that an observer might deem oppressive may actually represent forms of liberation for women involved and vice versa” (Menjivar, 2003: 103). It is a fact that many women think that they are doing better economic and socially speaking, if compared with their lives in their country of origin. For immigrant women, “immigration brings about changes in gender relations that have complex and uneven effects; it presents women with opportunities and, at the same time, imposes constraints” (Morokvasic, 1984; Tienda & Booth, 1991, cited in Menjivar, 2003: 103). In this study, I intend to show that some Yucatec Maya immigrant women carry out important work at home and engage in marital relations—that may seem oppressive and framed within a system of unequal gender relationships—but are indispensable for the social reproduction of their own families in the United States. In what follows, I describe from a historical and ethnographic perspective when, how and why Yucatec Maya women and men integrated into the international migration and began to settle in California.¹

¹ Throughout this work, I use pseudonyms to protect the identities of Yucatec Maya participants.

II. Yucatec Maya migration to California

Previous studies have shown that Yucatec Maya migration into the United States began during the Bracero Program (1942-1964), but this migration movement was no that significant in terms of the number of farm workers participating in this temporary work program (Whiteside, 2006; Lewin Fischer, 2007; Solís Lizama and Fortuny Loret de Mola, 2010; Cornejo Portugal and Fortuny Loret de Mola, 2011), as it has been documented by other studies of indigenous Mexican migration to the United States (Fox and Rivera-Salgado, 2004; Velasco, 2005; Stephen, 2007; Leco Tomás, 2009; Cruz-Manjarrez, 2013). However, as Fortuny Loret de Mola (2009) and Quintanal Avilés et al. (2012) point out that Yucatec Maya men from the village community of Oxkutzcab were registered as “aspiring braceros,” years before and a year after the Bracero Program ended (Quintanal Avilés, 2012: 212).² Three Maya families I came to know in San Francisco mentioned that male relatives such as grandfathers, fathers and uncles went to work to Northern and Southern California between the 1950 and 1960. Mario, who is from Oxkutzcab and today an American citizen, migrated to San Francisco in 1979. When he was eighteen years old, his late uncle Simón helped him to migrate to the United States. As he recalled:

² Fortuny Loret de Mola found in the Archivo General del Estado of Yucatán copies of lists of men “who aspired to become braceros” (2009: 240). The document “no. 247” contains the seal of the municipal government of Oxkutzcab and the signature of the municipal president in turn. This document indicates that seventeen men from Oxkutzcab were enlisted. Quintanal Avilés et al. document the application processes of the Yucatec “aspiring braceros” between 1955 and 1965. They describe how the Mexican federal government, the state government of Yucatan and the municipalities became involved in this process. They provide specific information about the departure points within Mexico before the Yucatecos went to work to the United States. The braceros, who were already working in the northern area of Mexico, left from Sonora to California or from Chihuahua and Monterrey to Texas. (2012: 386)

I had an uncle who came to California to work as a Bracero. First, he arrived to Salinas and then moved to San Francisco. Twenty years ago, he passed away. In fact, he died here (in California). He helped me to come to San Francisco. In 1979, I was working as a construction worker in my town. At that time, I used to work here and there. I had a job in a tailoring, in a hat shop and the field. Money was not enough. My family was very poor and I need to help my parents. When I decided to come, I was eighteen years old. I was single. I remember that one day my late uncle went back to the village from California. He said to me: “if you stay here, you are not going to make it. You can invest lots of money selling lemon and oranges, but you won’t see profits. There is a lot of competition. Do not waste your time.” Si estás seguro, si estás animado, si eso es tú decisión, yo te ayudo” he said to me, “come to California, I will help you.” Then, I decided to emigrate. My late uncle sent me money. I told my mom that I had decided to migrate to California. I did not tell my dad. I knew he was going to be mad at me. One day, he just realized that I was gone.

At the end of Bracero Program, a very few Yucatec Maya migrants from Oxkutzcab began to settle in Northern California. Fortuny Loret de Mola points out that “Don Tomás Bermejo, perhaps the Pioneer migrant from Oxkutzcab... traveled to San Francisco in the mid-1960s, attended the Presbiteryan church in the Mission District, and in 1965 opened a

restaurant (named Tomy's, on Geary Ave) that served Yucatecan dishes" (2009: 299).³ Also, Maya women began to incorporate to this international migratory flow through family networks. In 1968, Luisa arrived to San Mateo, California to visit her youngest aunt from her mother side. Since then, she has lived there. As she recalls:

The first migrant in the family was one of my uncles. In the 1950s, he went to California to work as Bracero. After, my cousins and my aunt joined him. Towards the end of 1960s, my uncle worked with an American family in San Mateo. At that time, he was living here (San Francisco), and after that he brought his youngest sister with my cousins. In 1968, I met my aunt and my cousins in the village of Aanceh. The latter, who went back and forth to work between Mexico and the United States, returned this year to Yucatán to wed. My sister and I were invited to participate as bridesmaid. In the wedding, my aunt told me that my cousins were taking their wives with them to the United States. Then, I asked my aunt if I could go with them to California. I was curious and wanted to know California. My aunt said to me: "of course, let's go." Then, I went to San Mateo. In those days, it was easy to have a visa. I got mine.

Rural-to-rural migration and rural-to-urban migration in the peninsula of Yucatán is a common feature of Yucatec maya internal migration. Since the 1950s, these movements

³ This information coincides with that reported by my informant Luisa and other immigrants from Oxxutzcab.

have followed two paths: economic migration to the cities, where employment opportunities were available, and migration for education. The growth of tourism and hotel industry, the creation of free-trade zones, and the expansion of the highway system in the state of Quintana Roo have offered hundreds of jobs in the construction industry and service sector (Castellanos, 2010: xxxiii). In the first half of the 20th Century, to provide junior and high school education in the Yucatec peninsula, the federal and state governments opened dozens of elementary and junior high school education for Maya children. These schools were open for children who lived in isolated rural areas. During the 20th Century, across Mexico, the ideology behind this national policy was to “integrate” and assimilate the Yucatec Mayas into the Nation-state.⁴

In the mid-1960s, Yucatec Mayas from Oxkutzcab were moving within the Yucatán Peninsula. The cities of Chetumal and Merida offered job and schooling opportunities for entire families before some of them engaged later in international migration to the United States. Luisa describes that at the age of nine years old, when she finished elementary school, her mother, who was left with four children, decided to take her children to Chetumal, Quintana Roo. Because Oxkutzcab did not have middle school and her mother had to figure out how to get her children ahead, Luisa left her pueblo with her family. While Luisa and her youngest sister studied middle school in Chetumal, her oldest brother enlisted

⁴ For a broader discussion on education policies in the first half of the 20th Century in Mexico see Castellanos (2010).

in the Mexican army. Approximately, in 1965s, Luisa migrated again to the city of Merida to study high school, the only place in the state of Yucatan where high school was available at that time.

Internal migration often times leads to international migration. Like Luisa, in the early 1970s, Roberto went to Merida and Chetumal to work as a construction worker. In 1974, he migrated for the first time to the United States to work in the agricultural fields of Nevada, and thereafter to the Valley of San Joaquin and Oregon. The reasons that made Roberto leave Oxkutzcab was that his oldest daughter was very sick and he did not have enough money to pay for her medicines. He also recalled that the money he earned in Chetumal was so little that he could not provide his family with the basic: food, house, health care and education. Between 1974 and 1979, he worked as a tractor driver in the alfalfa, oats, rice, beans, melon, watermelon, and tomato fields in Nevada and California. In the 1980s, he went to Oregon to work in the potato packing industry and as a bus driver in the agricultural fields. In 1989, he migrated to San Francisco because his contracts were temporary and the salary was very low. A migrant friend of his village invited him to go to San Francisco.

According to Roberto, twice a year, between 1974 and 1989, he used to “visit” his wife and two daughters in Oxkutzcab. During his stay in the United States, he used to maintain communication with his spouse Juana through letters and telegrams. Roberto points out that during five years, he could not travel to Oxkutzcab nor send money to his

family because he broke his two legs at work. Since Roberto and Juana got married, they went to live with Santo's family in Oxkutzcab. When he left to the United States, Juana and her two daughters stayed with her mother-in-law. Oxkutzcab is known for its production of citrus and vegetables. When Roberto could not provide the basic to his family because of the job accident, Juana and her two little daughters began to work as a fruit and vegetable merchants in her village. According to Juana, she and her two daughters used to help her mother-in-law to harvest oranges, lemon, papaya, avocado and *mamey*, and then sell part of them.

Together with the economic crisis of the Mexican countryside of the 1980s, the downward price trend in the *chicle* (gum) and lumber industries and the henequen production set the path for internal migration within the Yucatecan Peninsula (Labrecque, 2005, cited in Oehmichen Bazán, 2013: 48). Throughout this decade, Yucatec Mayas migrated in significant numbers to Merida and Mexico City. With the development of the touristic sector and the opening of free trade zones, Yucatec Mayas continued to work to touristic destinies such as Cancun and Chetumal in Quintana Roo (Lewin Fischer, 2007; Castellanos, 2010; Iglesias Lesaga, 2011; Oehmichen Bazán, 2013; Be Ramírez, 2015). Throughout the eighties, international Yucatec Maya migration to the United States is very low. This is because "job opportunities" are mainly available in Quintana Roo. It is important to mention here that the experience of migration that Yucatec maya gained within the Yucatec peninsula served as the basis for migrating internationally. As Lewin Fischer

indicates: “Yucatecans’ internal migration to Cancún’s tourism sector prepared these workers for international migration, which increased notably in the 1990’s.” (2007: 17)

Based on the trajectories of migration of the Yucatec Maya men and women I interviewed, I found that those migrants who went in the nineties to the United States migrated first to work to Chetumal and Cancun in search of a better economic situation. For instance, in the early 1980s, Francisco, who comes from a poor peasant family in Oxkutzcab, went to work to Chetumal as a single man. When he got married in his village and had his first daughter, he and his wife Angelica went to work to Cancun, then to Isla Mujeres, and thereafter to Cozumel and back to Chetumal. As Francisco and Angelica had two more children, they returned to Oxkutzcab. But, because Francisco income was not enough to sustain his family, he migrated to San Francisco in 1983 at the invitation of one of his migrant friends. It is important to point out Fortuny Loret de Mola (2009) described that the history of migration of Angelica’s families. According to this scholar, Francisco and Angelica’s families are part of old international migrant families in Oxkuzcab (Fortuny Loret de Mola, 2009: 227). For instance, Angelica’s siblings began to migrate to the United States in the 1970s and Francisco’s family in the Bracero era (1942-1964). Based on my interview with Angelica, in 1989, she and her four children arrived to San Francisco to her parents-in-law. Norma, the oldest child in the family remembered that when she arrived to her grandparents’ she was eleven years old. As she recounts:

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I was eleven years old when we came here (San Francisco). When we arrived here, my sibling and I were so happy to see our relatives. We had not seen them for a while. We met our grandparents, cousins, uncles and aunts. Lots of people from Oxkutzcab came to visit and welcome us. Among them were our grandparents' friends. Our relatives took us to visit San Francisco. We went to the Golden Gate and the Golden Park. We were so happy to be here and see our family.

In the early 1990s, a new generation of Yucatec men and women began to migrate to San Francisco. They continue to be impoverished men and women from age of two to their late thirties. Most of these migrants are young married men and women with foreign-born children, couples with children left in Yucatan, and a few single men and women. One reason for this new international migration movement was the deterioration of economic and social conditions in Mexico, the creation of NAFTA, and changes in labor market opportunities in the United States. Another and perhaps most important reason was family reunification⁵. Nine of the eighteen women I interviewed in San Francisco reunited with their families in the nineties. Five of them migrated with their children and reached their husbands in San Francisco. Among these women, there is a young girl, who arrived with her mother in 1999 at the age of two years old. One of these women reunited with her sons and

⁵ In this study I refer to the concept of "family reunification" as a social process in which documented and undocumented family members reunite in the United States. The term "family reunification" is also part of the "family reunification program of the U.S. government". In this study I did not find families that reunited through this program.

grandchildren in San Francisco after her spouse passed away in Yucatan. Another arrived to San Francisco with the help of his oldest son, and other one with the support of her eldest brother.

Like the family stage migration model of Hondagneou-Sotelo (1994), where husbands migrate before their wives and children, for most Yucatec Mayas I interviewed, the move of married men from Mexico to the United States depended on social networks that included friendship as well as kinship relationships (cf. Massey et al., 1987; Glick Schiller and Fouron, 2001; Hirsch, 2003; Cohen, 2004; Dreby, 2010). In 1995, Rafael was disappointed with his economic situation in Oxkutzcab. He was tired of working very hard all over in the Yucatec Peninsula as a construction worker, agricultural laborer, and *cargador de bolsas* at the supermarkets. When he got married and had his first child, he decided to migrate alone to San Francisco. In 1998, he returned to Oxkutzcab and convinced his wife Margarita to migrate with him. As he describes:

When I got married, my migrant friends invited me to go to San Francisco. I was surprised that some of them were building their houses in my town. They said to me: "come with us, we are going to help you." Then, I told my wife Margarita's that I want to go to California. She said that we could also ask for help to one of her uncles who were already working in San Francisco. My friend helped me to pay for the *coyote*... I left to San Francisco in 1995. I did not see Margarita and my little daughter Romina for a year and a half. Then, I went back to Oxkutzcab and convinced

Margarita to come with me to San Francisco. All my childhood, I was a very poor child. I did not want that for my child. Since I was fourteen, I had to look for a job outside my pueblo to help my family. I went to work to Cancun, Chetumal and lots of places in the Peninsula. When I began to work in San Francisco, I got very satisfied with my salary. I was convinced that in Oxkutzcab there was no future for my family. Still today, in my pueblo, you eat what you earn. When I realized that my friends and relatives in San Francisco were doing better, I took the risk to bring my family to the United States. I do not regret this and I do not have plans to go back to my pueblo.

During this decade, the pattern of wives following their husbands underwent two significant transformations. First, complete extended families began to reunite in San Francisco. Secondly, young single and divorced women came to San Francisco with the support of their children or older brothers. For instance, in the early 1990s, in Oxkutzcab, Felipe and Patricia married in Oxkutzcab and both went to live with Felipe's family. In 1997, Felipe migrated to San Francisco with the help of his father-in-law, Roberto, and Patricia decided to go back to her parents' home. In 1998, Juana (Patricia's mother) and her youngest daughter Eloisa joined Roberto and Felipe in San Francisco. Patricia decided to go back to her mother-in-law's because she did not want to be alone with her little son. In 1999, Felipe returned to Oxkutzcab and told Patricia that he was planning to go back to California. One of the emerging migratory patterns of this decade is that young married

women with children asked their husbands to take them to the United States. As Patricia pointed out:

When Felipe left, I returned to my mother's. I stayed there until my mom and my sister left to San Francisco. But, because I felt so lonely in my parents', I returned to my mother-in-law's. When Felipe came back to Oxnacab, I told him that I did not want to be by myself and raise my kid without a father. I did not want to repeat this story. My father was always absent. I remember that he was all the time working in California. I said to Felipe: "If you want to go to California again, you have to take us." I talked to him about my loneliness and my preoccupation of having a child growing up without a father. We talked to my father about our plans. He was very happy that we could be all reunited in the United States. He lent us some money to pay for the *coyote* to cross the border.

Parents, wives and children, and grandchildren reuniting with family members—who were U.S. citizens, permanent residents, or in some cases undocumented migrants—began to settle permanently in San Francisco. In 1997, Roberto became a U.S. citizen and applied for the regularization of her wife Juana and her youngest daughter Eloisa, who was a minor at this moment. At present, Juana and Eloisa are U.S. residents, Felipe (the son in-law) passed away, and Patricia and their son are undocumented.

In the last fifteen years, the pattern of mothers following or reuniting with their children in San Francisco and leaving some of their children in Yucatan has become a characteristic of this Yucatec migration flow. In 1994, Ines migrated alone from Oxkutzcab to San Francisco after her husband died. Her oldest son, who is a U.S. citizen, asked her to join him and his other three undocumented brothers in California. In 2005, she became a U.S. resident. At present, Ines sends a hundred dollars each month to help her daughter and granddaughter who still live in Oxkutzcab. According to Ines, having her family in her pueblo is the most important reason that makes her return at least once a year. When I asked her if she feels happy to be with her children and grandchildren in San Francisco, she replied:

I would like to have my whole family together. Half of my heart is in Oxkutzcab and the other half is in San Francisco. Before I left Oxkutzcab, I used to take care of my granddaughter while my daughter was working. After my husband passed away, I felt very sad. One of my sons insisted on having me in the United States. He used to tell me: "what are you doing there? My father is gone and we are here." Once I got the U.S. visa, I flew to San Francisco. It was very difficult for me to leave my little girl and my daughter, but at the same time, I was very happy to be reunited with my four sons. Nowadays, I cook for all of them and keep an eye on my grandchildren while my son and daughters-in-law work. I like to take care of my grandchildren.

Single and separated women, who migrated in the 1990s and the early 2000, set out to migrate into San Francisco by persuading their older immigrant siblings and older sons. According to three women I talked to, it was difficult to get support from their male relatives. Fathers, brothers and sons in both Oxnard and San Francisco opposed to their female relatives' desire to migrate. Male relatives discouraged women to migrate because crossing the U.S.-Mexican border was very dangerous for women. Immigrant men told their female relatives that finding jobs in San Francisco was very hard. In their attempt to deter women, men also said that women had to pay rent and live in crowded apartments with lots of men. Despite all these oppositions, single and separated women have migrated. Certainly, the main reasons for women for migrating internationally were economic. But perhaps most importantly, their desire to get ahead and build a future for them and their families was at the core of their decision to migrate.

For instance, in 1999, Rocío was twenty-one years old, and went to San Francisco with the help of his older migrant brother. Her father opposed to Rocío's desire because of the dangers she could face at the frontier. Despite this, Rocío went to *El Norte* arguing that she was old enough to take care of herself. She was convinced that she could earn good money in San Francisco and come back to Oxnard to open a convenience store. The fact is that she had a terrible experience while crossing the U.S. Mexican border (as her parents told her). Nowadays, she is working in San Francisco and her life has taken new paths. She

does not plan to return to Oxkutzcab because she does not see a better future for her new family. I discuss later in the chapter how she has become a very successful entrepreneur.

Like single women, separated women have experienced less support from their male migrant relatives in the United States. In 1996, at the age of thirty-eight, Verónica came to San Francisco under the aegis of his older son and one of his brothers. At the beginning, both opposed to Verónica's desire to migrate, but at the end they financed Verónica's trip, paid the coyote, and found her a job at her brother worksite. Her sister Ines, who arrived two years earlier, provided her with housing and food. When I asked Verónica how and why she came to San Francisco, she replied:

My husband left me with four children. When that happened, I left my parents-in-law's and went back to my parents' house. I began to work very hard to sustain my four children. During weekdays, I used to work in Merida in the domestic service. When I had some savings, I bought a truck. I began selling fruit between Merida and Oxkutzcab. In 1995, I got sick and had to go through a surgery. I had to pay private hospitalization. That was very expensive. The fruit business was good. But after I recovered, I did not have money and could not continue to work. My job was very physical. The doctor said to me that I was expected not to do heavy work. In the business fruit, I had to drive the truck and carry boxes of fruit. That is why I decided to come to California. What else I could do in Yucatan. My only son, my sister and my brother were here (San Francisco). I thought that I was going to be much better if

I worked in the United States. You know, even if you work hard in Mexico, you do not get what you deserve.

One day, I made my mind. I told my daughters that I was going to California. I did not tell my migrant son and my brother because they were against this. When I got to Tijuana, I just called them. They were very surprised to hear me. I asked them to lend me some money to pay for the coyote. I did not have enough savings to cross. At that time, it was very expensive to cross the borders. It cost 1,300 USD. Anyhow, when I arrived to San Francisco, my son and my brother were very mad at me. They said to me that crossing the border was too dangerous. They were very concerned about my safety because they did know the *coyote*. But thanks God, they help me to get here. When I arrived, I went to live with my sister Ines because my brother and son lived in a crowded apartment with lots of *paisanos*.

Throughout the 1990s, Yucatec maya migration to the United States increases significantly. With the development of migrant networks, they arrived to various regions. Those from the village of Oxkutzcab migrate to San Francisco and Portland (Fortuny Loret de Mola, 2009); those from Peto go mainly to San Rafael (Barenboim, 2013); those from Kaal to Dallas, Texas and San Bernardino Valley of California (Adler, 2004); and those from Kiní, Ucí, Hoctún, Chumayel, Dzoncauich and Tecantó to Los Angeles (Solís Lizama and Fortuny Loret de Mola, 2010; Chávez Arellano, 2014; Solís Lizama, 2014). During the 2000s,

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Yucatec Maya migration continues to increase. Yucatec Maya men and women migrate from different regions within the Peninsula of Yucatán to new destinations in the United States. Currently, Yucatec Mayas work and live in San Francisco, San Bernardino, Thousand Oaks, Santa Rosa, Los Angeles and San Rafael in California; Las Vegas, Nevada; Baltimore, Maryland; Dallas, Texas; Portland, Oregon; Denver, Colorado and Washington State.

An important pattern to mention when describing the Yucatec Maya female migration between 2000 and 2012 is that young women came to San Francisco when they married a Yucatec maya migrant man. Among the women I interviewed, I found that four of six were determined to migrate with their husbands to the United States. As children, they saw and experienced how men and fathers left their children and wives. For instance, Guadalupe points out that her father migrated to the United States in the 1980s when she was six years old. At the beginning, he used to return once in a while. Every time, he came back her mother was pregnant. At the end, her mother was left with seven children and she had to figure out how to get by. When her father left to the United States to work, he sent money to her mother. However, as the time passed by, he stopped sending remittances and Guadalupe's mother found out that her husband had remarried in California. As mentioned by the other three women I talked to, "it has been common" that in their families and community at large married women with children are left behind. Lewin Fischer et al. (2012) have documented that lots of Yucatec Maya women are left behind with their children. But also, he has described that many women, who went to work

sometime within the Yucatec Peninsula or have migrant husbands working in the Peninsula or in the United States, prefer to stay at home instead of accompanying their migrant husbands. The reason behind this is that women do not want to be away from their children, as newly married migrant women said to me. Without a doubt, just as it is hard to have a husband away, it is difficult to leave your children behind. Based on their own experience, Guadalupe, Alicia and Sandra were determined to migrate with their migrant husbands because they wanted to be with them and raise their children together.

This new pattern of migration is embedded in the transformations of gender relations between young men and women. For various generations, Yucatec Maya men have migrated nationally and internationally to provide financial support for their families. Contrarily, some women have stayed at home to comply with family roles: taking care of their children and the domestic sphere. As it was mentioned by the migrant women of this study and referred by scholars such as Lewin et al. (2012), married men used to decide the destiny of their families, especially that of wives. The latter were supposed to stay at home, that is, in their village. Sometimes, women lived with their fathers-in-law while their husbands went to work to the United States. As young women pointed out: still today, some men do not allow their wives to migrate. Nonetheless, for some younger women, these experiences have been essential to break this pattern. As Guadalupe explains:

When I decided to get married I had a very clear idea of what I wanted: to wed Jose and have children. However, I did not want to experience what so many women

have lived in my family and my village. Their husbands went to El Norte and left them behind. Women had to educate their children alone. Fathers were all the time absent. I did not have that mentality. In those days, I told my fiancé: “if you want to marry me, you have to take me with you.” I also said to him: “I am not going to stay here by myself, no way.” For me, it was very hard not only to see how my mother struggled to feed us and sent us to school, but also to be raised without a father. I can tell you that my brother-in-law came to San Francisco to work and left her wife and children in Oxkuzcab. That’s not fair.

Lewin Fischer et al. (2012) have made important contributions to our understanding of the negative impacts of international migration in marital and family relations in the Yucatec peninsula. Women and children, who have been abandoned by their husbands or fathers respectively, experience depression, anxiety, sadness and loneliness. Married women being left alone have had to deal with their children’s financial, schooling and health needs as well as their frustration and demands for the absent father. These findings resonate with what Yucatec maya migrant women told me on their decision to migrate. According to migrant women, wives and husbands should be together. As parents, they also must do everything they possibly can to raise their children together.

Women, who have decided to migrate with their husbands or reunite with their relatives in California, have had to learn at least two things. First, they have had to

negotiate gender roles in marriage as it relates to family relationships. Secondly, as mothers and fathers, they have had to learn how to integrate economic and socially to American society to sustain their families. In what follows, I compare the demographic characteristics of Maya immigrant men and women to discuss gender differences in the social and economic processes of integration and the ways in which these processes have shaped family and marriage relationships.

III. Gender, work and socioeconomic integration

Since the late 1980s, thousands of women around the world have integrated into international migration flows. Castles and Miller (1998) have described this global phenomenon as the feminization of international migrations. At present, we can distinguish two global migratory patterns worldwide. First, women from Third World countries have been immigrating to First World countries. Second, female migrations worldwide have had an orientation South-North. For the sociologists Hondagneou-Sotelo (2003) and Sassen (2003a), since the late 1980s, the labor market for women has restructured globally and this has had significant consequences in their social lives. Women, who live in rich countries of the First World, employ immigrant women, from poor countries. Generally speaking, the latter have low levels of schooling. In the receiving countries, they are seen as women of color and have a few opportunities for social and economic mobility. The relationship between these native and migrant women is deeply rooted in the functioning of the global

economy, the restructuring of global labor markets, and global patterns of consumption. As Ehrenreich and Russell (2004), the division of labor on a global scale shows that migrant women from the Third World do care, service, and domestic work for rich women of First World countries.

In global cities such as San Francisco, immigrant men and women have precarious jobs. They constitute a set of cheap, exploited and invisible workers. Specifically, upper-middle class men and women employ low-class immigrant men and women to satisfy their labor, familial, consumption and leisure needs. These unskilled migrant workers occupy the lowest part of the U.S. labor system, receive the lowest wages, and cannot ascend to higher positions to improve their working conditions and wages (Levine, 2002). The work carried out by Yucatec women and men in San Francisco somehow coincides with the behavior of the global labor market. As unskilled workers, Yucatec maya men and women do those works “involved in the operation and implementation of the global economic system” (Sassen, 2003: 118). For instance, the majority of the Yucatec Maya men I interviewed work as restaurant employees as dishwashers, pre-person, lead cook, and kitchen manager (cf. Barenboim, 2013; Muse-Orlinof, 2014). A few are employed as janitors, construction workers, carpet cleaning maintenance technicians, bakers, and bus drivers for public transportation or chauffeurs for particular clients. One of the eleven men I talked to mentioned that he complemented his salary working over the weekends as a musician within the Yucatec Maya community. Another one pointed out that he and his wife own a

restaurant that sells Yucatec food. Those who are restaurant employees work in fast food companies as well as hotel, international and ethnic restaurants in the San Francisco Bay Area.

Work activities for men in Yucatan		Work activities for men in San Francisco	
No salary	Paid work	Informal sector	Formal sector/Paid work
Family farming (self-subsistence)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Construction work - Ice cream seller - Tailoring assistant - Hat maker - Pedicab driver - Civil engineer 		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Restaurant employees - Janitor - Construction workers - Carpet Cleaning maintenance technicians - Baker - Bus drivers for public transportation or chauffeur - Musician - Restaurant owner

Table 1. Work activities for men

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An important fact to mention and compare here is the types of work these men did in Yucatan, that is, before they migrated to California. Ten of the eleven men worked in peasant farming for self-subsistence. As teenagers or young married men, they helped their families to produce corn, *mamey*, avocado and citric crops for domestic use as well as for sale in the supermarket in a small scale. One of the eleven men I talked to had a professional career. As he indicated, when he was a child, his family migrated to the city of Merida for economic causes. He grew up there and became a civil engineer. For various years, he worked in the construction of freeways for the Yucatan government until he was fired. In Oxkutzcab, these men had other kinds of jobs while they worked in the countryside. One of them worked as tailoring assistant and another one as a traditional hat maker. One more worked as a pedicab driver and another as an ice cream seller. Those, who were economic migrants within the Yucatan peninsula, worked as construction workers in the hotel industry (see Table 1).

As for the case of Yucatec Maya immigrant women, I documented that four of eighteen interviewees work outside the home and fourteen at home. Those working outside the home have taken jobs in the service and domestic sector, in non-profit organizations serving the Latino and Maya communities in the Bay Area, and one as a restaurant owner. The fourteen women, who work at home, sell goods such as Tupper ware, jewelry, clothing, perfumes, and beauty supplies. One of them offers masseuse. Among these fourteen women, four prepare Yucatec food at home. Everyday, they sell it to Yucatec

men. In San Francisco, it is very common to find an entire restaurant kitchen crew of Yucatec men receiving at their work place “Yucatec food.” During my fieldwork, I saw dozens of men eating in these women’s dining room. I was told that on special occasions, specially, over the weekends, these women sell Yucatec food for family and community events within the Yucatec Maya community. They prepare Yucatec food such as *panuchos*, *cochinita pibil*, *poc chuc*, *pollo pibil*, *salbutes*, and *recaudo negro* among other things.

One may wonder why most of the Yucatec Maya women of this study work at home in contrast to what we know about female immigrant workers in global cities. My findings indicate two things. First, according to Yucatec Maya women, husbands do not want their wives to work. During an interview, a Yucatec maya immigrant woman told me that she wanted to work when she arrived to San Francisco to contribute to the family economy and have some economic independence. However, when she commented this with her husband, he said to her: “Is not enough what I earn? I do not think that you do not need to work. Do you need something?” For this kind of Yucatec men, married women should remain at home and do women’s work: childrearing, preparing meals for the family, and doing housework.

Second, there are young migrant couples with children who have decided and negotiated what women should do. That is to say, women should stay at home to take care of their children. This approach may sound very similar to the former: that women stay at home because men want that. Nonetheless, the rationale behind this idea is that mothers

should be in charge of the social reproduction and care of their family. To be precise, for these young couples, it is very important that mothers take care of their children. For instance, mothers mentioned that they like to take their children to school, to take care of them if they get sick, to cook for them, and to take them for a walk or just play. Perhaps most importantly, for these fathers and mothers, children must not be alone. Six couples with children stated very clearly that mothers should take care of their children. The neighborhoods where Yucatec Maya immigrants live in San Francisco are dangerous and violent. As they said to me, Yucatec men, women, and children have been victims of crime generally experiencing insecurity, robberies, vandalism, racial discrimination, anti-immigrant sentiments, and witnessing drug trafficking in public spaces. This is because some fathers and mothers have decided that mothers should take care of their children personally. For fathers, it does not matter that they have to work double or triple shifts to cover their family living expenses.

As mentioned above, complete extended families have reunited in San Francisco. Six of eighteen female interviewees are grandmothers. Five live with their children and one resides with her cousin. When their children have to work, grandmothers do care work for their grandchildren. This includes taking them to school, preparing meals for them, and watching them over while their parents pick them up after work. I consider that despite the economic struggles and disadvantages these immigrant families have in San Francisco, they have brought forward the value of family and negotiated gender relations between men

and women. All female immigrants, who work at home, do important care work for their families and men value that. Also, women feel satisfied because through informal work they make some money for themselves and for their families as well. As one of them mentioned: “it is good to have your own money. You can buy things you like and somehow help your husband. In addition, it is good not to depend solely on your husband’ salary.” A grandmother said to me: “I like to sell food at home because I can make my own money. I do not have to ask my sons for money. I rather have my money to buy my things. For example, I like to go dancing with my girlfriends and play in the casinos.”

As mentioned above, Yucatec maya men and women, who come from Oxkutzcab, have worked in the restaurant industry. Because of the labor experience Yucatecos have gained in this sector, a few have open Yucatec restaurants in the Bay Area. As described above, in 1965, one pioneer migrant man from Oxkutzcab opened a restaurant named Tomy’s. Up to day, it is run by the descendants of Don Tomás Bermejo. The restaurant continues to serve Yucatec food. In 2007, a couple I interviewed opened a Yucatec restaurant in the Mission District. At present, they employ Yucatec migrant men and women in the kitchen and service areas. According to the owners, opening a restaurant has been a huge challenge. Although both have experience in the restaurant industry, they have had to learn how to administrate their own business and manage their personnel. Nowadays, the restaurant is oriented toward the American market as well as the Yucatec

migrants. This restaurant is part of an emerging “ethnic niche.” On 2012, I ate in five Yucatec restaurants in the Mission District. Yucatec migrants run all of them.

Work activities for women in Yucatan		Work activities for women in SFO	
At home	Outside home	Informal sector At home	Formal sector Outside the home
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Family farming (self-subsistence) - Selling backyard chickens, turkeys and pigs - Costura - Bordado - Making hammocks - Dying cloth - Making traditional hats - Domestic work at 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Tortilleria - Domestic work - Selling traditional clothing - Administrator - Bank teller - Elementary school teacher 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Sale of goods: a) Tupper ware, b) jewelry, c) clothing, d) perfumes, e) beauty supplies, - Sell of ethnic food from home - Spa Masseur 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Administrative assistant - Babysitting - Elderly care - House cleaning - Cleaning services in department stores - Teaching classroom assistant - Book sales - Restaurant employees

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home			- Restaurant owner
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Table 2. Work activities for women

An important factor to highlight here is the types of work Maya immigrant women did in Yucatan. As shown in Table 2 women have made various kinds of remunerated traditional work. At home, they worked as seamstress and embroider. They were specialist in making traditional Maya dresses called *huipil* as well as hammocks and traditional hats made of palm of tree. In addition to domestic work at home, women carried out agricultural work. To increase family income, they also sold backyard chickens, turkeys and pigs.

In the experience of Yucatec Maya women, the discussion on gender, work and socioeconomic integration has taken place in a specific historical context. Between the 1990s and 2000s, Yucatec maya migration into the United States increased significantly. This migration flow has coincided with the feminization of migration movements around the world as well as with the feminization of Mexican migration (Galeana, 2008). As stated above, ten of eighteen women of this study arrived in the 1990s and four in the 2000s. Two of them arrived at the end of the 1980s and one in 1968. At present, seventeen women are mothers. Among them, two are American citizens. Three are U.S. residents and fourteen remain undocumented. Among the latter, one is an undocumented teenaged girl of the 1.5 generation, who arrived with her parents in 1999. See Table 3 to relate migratory status among immigrant men and women by the time of my fieldwork.

Sex	Undocumented	U.S. resident	U.S. Citizen
Female	14	3	2
Male	6	2	3

Table 3. Current migratory status

Yucatec Maya men have migrated to the United States for a number of reasons. Among them are the economic, social and cultural. The eleven men I interviewed migrated in the first place for economics reasons. All of them came to work to the United States because of poverty, the lack of remunerated employment in their community of origin, and well-paid jobs in the Peninsula of Yucatan. Two of them arrived in the seventies, three in the eighties, three in the nineties, and four in the 2000s. The most recent migrants are teenagers, who stated that they also came to California for curiosity and adventure. At present, ten of these men are the main providers for their families in San Francisco. And just one is a secondary provider. In Yucatan, his parents receive monetary remittances from him. Contrarily, fifteen of the eighteen women of this study came to the United States via family reunification and three for work.⁶ At present, the majority of these women takes care of their children and depends on their husbands' salary, although they generate some income from informal work. By the time of my field research in San Francisco, fourteen women were married. Two of these women were widow and two were separated from their

⁶ This research may not be "representative" of all Yucatec Maya experiences of international migration, however, this study shows important trends in Yucatec Maya migration into the United States.

husbands. Women, who are widows or are separated from their spouses, work outside the home. One of the widows is a woman in her early thirties. Before her migrant husband passed away in San Francisco, she used to be a housewife and took care of her only child. At present, she has three jobs in service sector.

Following up work of Papail and Robles Sotelo (2004), I consider that the development of migrant and family networks, the rise of the second-generation Yucatecos, the number of years that immigrants and their foreign-born children have lived in the United States, and changes in migratory status provide a good context to assess the extent to which immigrants and their children have social and economically integrated to the United States. As described above, all Yucatec Maya immigrants arrived to San Francisco through family networks, and particularly, most women migrated via family reunification. Twenty-five immigrants have children, some born in Mexico, others in the United States, and some other in Mexico and the United States. The migratory status of the Yucatec Maya immigrant of this study is important to mention. It varies and is related to the immigrants' time of arrival in the United States and changes in American immigration law. Five of the thirty immigrants are U.S. citizens, five are U.S. resident, and twenty are undocumented. Two of the five U.S citizens became residents under the 1986 amnesty program (IRCA), and then became American citizens. Three women and two men are U.S. residents. Fourteen women and six men are undocumented. According to undocumented Yucatec Maya women and men, they are waiting for the migratory reform to regularize their migratory status. All

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of them told me that they have considered becoming U.S. residents and then American citizens.

Those immigrants, who have U.S. born children or undocumented children, have made use of welfare benefits. As shown above, all Yucatec Maya female and male immigrants have relatives or children in the United States. None of the married couples has children in Yucatan. Most of these immigrants live in nuclear families and a few within extended families. At present, it is not clear for many, if they will return to Mexico in the long term, however, all of them are certain that in the short term, they will stay in the United States to provide security and a better future for their families. For Yucatec Maya immigrants, it is very important to regularize their migratory status to stay legally. All of them are waiting for the migratory reform. I should highlight that the number of years that these female and male migrants have lived in the United States is about twenty years. This is an important fact because twenty-five immigrants have raised their children and grandchildren in San Francisco, be they documented or undocumented. As said before, fathers and mothers (immigrants) want their children to stay in the United States because they do not see a better future in Mexico.

IV. Final remarks

In this work, I have shown that Yucatec Maya migration into the United States is not a recent phenomenon. However, although it is not representative of the Bracero era (1942-

1964), it has increased in significant numbers in the last three decades. It is important to mention that in Mexico the second largest group of indigenous people is the Yucatec Maya. Unfortunately, at present, the Yucatec Mayas may represent the second or third largest group of indigenous Mexican immigrants living and working in the United States. The Asociación Mayab reports that there are between 20,000 and 25,000 Yucatec Maya living in the Bay Area in San Francisco. The INDEMAYA (Instituto para el Desarrollo de la Cultura Maya del Estado de Yucatán) estimates that there are 50,000 Mayas residing in Los Angeles and 25,000 in San Francisco.

As I argued through the text, gender matters in the process of economic and social integration. Based on the discussions of how the restructuring of the global economy has reorganized the division of sexual labor on a global scale, I showed that Yucatec Maya immigrant men and women have entered the U.S. labor market in the care, domestic and service sector.

In this study I find that a patriarchal family system underlies gender order, and gender organizes migration for women and men, marital relationships, and the division of labor in immigrant families. At the beginning of Yucatec Maya migration into the United States, married and single men migrated first and then women. All of the Yucatec men of this study came to California for economic reasons while most women arrived after they married an immigrant man in Yucatan or via family reunification in the late nineties and the 2000s. As discussed above, women, who married an immigrant man, and women, who

migrated via family reunification, had to put an end to man's patriarchal authority and power to migrate. That is to say, in Yucatan, married men or fathers used to decide the destiny of women and family: women and children should stay in the homeland. The women of this study pushed forward gender change in marital and family relationships.

In San Francisco, Yucatec Mayas have integrated into the United States but at the same time have retained family values and unity. In nuclear families, men continue to be the main providers and their participation in family activities is confined to outdoor tasks and leisure activities with children. Housework and care are women's work. Here it is important to point out that married couples have agreed that women should stay at home to take care of their children and do housework, although women expressed to me that they would like to work outside the home. The questions here are: 1) why men do not do care and housework and stay at home? and 2) why some men continue to question the desire of women to work outside the home? Following the work of Melgar (2017), Pérez Ruiz (2015), Rosado and Rosado (2009) and Villagómez Valdés (2010), I suggest that within the framework of patriarchal family and in the context of migration, immigrant women continue to be expected to be wives, mothers and housewives and men be the main providers. It is not strange that these married women are economically integrated in informal work. This allows them to take care of their children and make some money for themselves to have certain economic independence. Without a doubt, migration has brought changes in gender, which includes gender flexibility among couples, while at the

same time gender has maintained some constrains for women, as argued by Menjivar (2003).

In this work, I discussed female headed households. In contrast to married women, my findings indicate that single women with children work outside the home and are the main providers of their families, be they in Yucatán or in San Francisco. Like married male workers, who work two or three shifts to sustain their families; these women, work two shifts and do informal work. Both are exploited and their work benefits a social and economic system based on labor and social inequality. Divorced and separated women make use of family networks. Grandmothers, sisters and aunts help them to take care of their children in Yucatan or San Francisco.

In looking at the ways in which the ideas of family are changing globally, Padilla et al. (2007) suggest that we might be witnessing "... people deliberately using love both as an ideal for which to strive and as the means through which they constitute their families" (p. xv). Over the course of my research, I heard over and over, that family (of any kind) is very important and that married men and women or single women with children should do their best to be together in the same place. Of course, for single women this has other implications. In this work I have not pretended to offer an image of an ideal family. Rather, my goal has been to bring forward the significance of family as a manifestation of love, and as a site of social transformations as it respects to gender relations in the experience of a specific group of Yucatec Maya immigrants in San Francisco.

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