

ESTABLISHED AND RECENT YOUNG MAYA IMMIGRANTS: A PARADOX CONCERNING THEIR WELLBEING

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In order to explain the positive or negative orientation towards health among Maya people residing in San Francisco, California, we draw on the oral histories of three juveniles from the state of Yucatan, who differentiate themselves concerning their time spent in the destination and the following social, cultural and economic consequences. For the young immigrant, Dante, who has been longer in San Francisco, and therefore is more assimilated to the American Way of life, it becomes more difficult to attain mental and emotional comfort; whilst Roberto, who just arrived five years ago, is more capable of dealing with cultural tension and consequently it is easier for him to adjust and achieve wellbeing. In this article we apply the concepts of social liminality and cultural negotiation. The case studies also illustrate the diverse ways in which immigrants avail themselves of a series of social resources, such as ties to family, religion, friendship and neighbors that allow them to achieve a relative emotional balance while dealing with the cultural tensions that prevail at their destination.

Keywords: Maya immigrants, social liminality, cultural negotiation, wellbeing, social resources, and acculturation.

Introduction

Social liminality and cultural negotiation (Simich, Maiter and Ochocka 2009) are psychosocial processes that immigrants experience in a receiving society. In this article, these two concepts constitute the principal means of explaining the emotional wellbeing of such

migrants, an exercise that allows us to explain the social resources used by Maya immigrants in the United States as they negotiate among various cultures in the process of adapting to the strange and unfamiliar environment that surrounds them at their destination.

The emotional wellbeing of people in immigrant communities is a topic little studied by anthropology or medicine, despite the fact that the migratory experience can severely alter people's mental maps and constitutes a complex process that creates both opportunities and risks for their physical and mental health. Through the conversations and experiences that Roberto, Santiago and Dante, three young Maya men in San Francisco, shared with us, plus observations made in their places of origin, we have come to understand some of the strategies they use in the adaptation process; *i.e.*, how they select from among available resources (family and fraternal relations, ties of common origin [*paisanasgo*], shared beliefs), those they consider most effective in transforming homesickness and suffering into some level of emotional wellbeing.

Social liminality describes how immigrants may perceive their psychological state as stressful or transitional, as when a person moves from one social role into another (eg. a different country or language, or a distinct normative system). Cultural negotiation, meanwhile, examines how they actively devise ways to live amid the tensions of two or more cultures, and to respond positively to the challenges of an unfamiliar, perhaps frightening, social world. Though these two psychosocial processes produce stress, they also have the potential to help people adapt by developing positive syntheses of ideas in new sociocultural contexts, while allowing them to achieve and maintain a certain level of emotional wellbeing. This approach may help identify mental health problems, not only by using biomedical models –as has traditionally been the case, since most studies focus on migrants' physical resistance– but also by taking culture and agency into account to reveal the existence of psychosocial resources that can resolve problems related to mental disorders among migrants.

The cases we analyze make it clear that the presence and intensity of social resources such as relatives, *compadres* (godparents of someone's child and parents of someone's godchild) friends, *paisanos* (countrymen), fellow believers and shared religious values can constitute important means of protection, defense and support for immigrants facing the

challenges and frustrations of adapting to a receiving society. In other words, we consider that in order to maintain a certain level of emotional/mental wellbeing migrants use (consciously or unconsciously) the resources at hand, including fraternal and filial bonds and ties of friendship or common origin.

Earlier studies, such as Rumbaut (1999 174-175), of certain groups of immigrants have found highly suggestive indicators regarding the relationship between migrants and health. Those studies reveal, first, that immigrants may enjoy better conditions than the native population and, second, that individuals with less time in the U.S. manifest more positive attitudes towards health than those who have lived there longer; findings that are especially true for Hispanics (López-González et al 2005; Guendelman 1998; Kuo and Porter 1998; Takada et al 1998). The study by López-González *et al.* (2005) suggests that drinking alcohol and smoking are more generalized in the non-migrant population, and that newcomers have lower levels of acculturation (social process of gradual incorporation and/or integration into the receiving society) than immigrants who have lived in the U.S. for years. These authors state that the higher levels of acculturation typical of longer-term immigrants are associated with less favorable behaviors in the area of health, compared to recent, less-acculturated immigrants. However, such studies omit analyses of factors that may explain why acculturated immigrants are more likely to drink and smoke than recent ones; especially considering that the latter are mostly undocumented people who face greater risks and uncertainties of many types than established ones.

The information from our project shows that better or more acculturated Maya immigrants live in more stressful conditions than newcomers. Apparently, the former are subject to greater pressure as they strive to integrate into a dominant culture characterized by a highly competitive social and economic milieu in which their cultural equipment (language, customs) puts them at a clear disadvantage to locals. Moreover, they must exert a huge effort to sustain a certain social status and standard of living in a society that is both demanding and discriminatory. Turning to recent Maya immigrants, however, we find that they show less interest in competing in the receiving society because they are more focused on their places of origin; hence, their energies are directed towards achieving economic success in that society by

competing against people with fewer resources. Based on the case studies developed in this document but also on more extensive fieldwork done among recent immigrants in diverse places in the United States, it can be acknowledged that they perceive their stay in the U.S. as temporary, not definitive, so they devote their energies to reaching goals that are more economic than social or cultural in nature, and that may hold out the possibility of obtaining greater prosperity back home.

These results come from the project entitled “The Other Mayan Route: Migration and Health” (2008/2009) financed by the Programa de Investigación sobre Migración y Salud (PIMSA). The field research was undertaken among migrants from Yucatán (and their families in their towns of origin: Oxkutzcab, Muna, Peto and Dzan [in southern Yucatán, Mexico]) to San Francisco. The three youthful men in the cases examined herein are from the municipality of Oxkutzcab. The empirical information was obtained primarily through the use of the ethnographic method.

In addition to the introduction, this article contains five sections. The second, sub-titled *General background*, presents a reflection on the ethnic question as it relates to the population studied, statistical information on migration from Yucatán to the U.S., a brief description of the migrants’ area of origin and a sociodemographic profile of the men in the three cases. Section three analyzes in detail the case of Roberto¹ to elucidate his successful adaptation process; while section four discusses the second case study, in which Santiago manifests his status in an intermediate phase between those of Roberto and Dante. In section five, we take up the case of Dante, a member of the so-called “one-and-a-half” generation of migrants, who serves as a model of the want to be assimilated American; that is, one who is well on his way towards assimilation² (Alba and Nee 2003), a significant change of status that distinguishes him from both Roberto and Santiago. Section six presents reflections on the case studies that highlight the key aspects of the adaptation process of these three young men, how they utilize various social and cultural resources, and how they enable them to better manage intercultural tensions and, as a result, achieve a certain degree of emotional wellbeing.

General background:**The ethnic question in Yucatán**

Based on 2005 Mexican Census Bureau (INEGI 2005) statistics, 33.5% of the population over the age of five in Yucatán state spoke an indigenous language, the second highest in the country after Oaxaca (35.3%). Unlike most Mexican states whose indigenous population consists of peoples of distinct ethnicities, the indigenous population in Yucatán is overwhelmingly Maya. According to estimates from the INI (now the Comisión Nacional para el Desarrollo de los Pueblos Indígenas) (CDI) published in 2002, Yucatán had the largest indigenous population in the country at 981,064, totaling 59.2% of the state's population. This figure is significantly larger than that reported by the INEGI in 2005³. The CDI's larger number is an estimate based on household data, which is aggregated to the numbers of indigenous language speakers. The INEGI numbers are based solely on indigenous language speakers.

Unlike other indigenous people in California (Mixtecos and Zapotecos for example), who speak an indigenous language, Maya people in San Francisco do not typically utilize nor politicize ethnic or racial identity as a basis for organization (Mattiace and Fortun y 2015). "Indian" is a racial term that groups many different ethnicities under a single descriptor, which is closely tied to the power dynamics of the European conquest of the Americas and colonialism. In recent years, some indigenous peoples across the Americas have appropriated this term and used it to mobilize pan-ethnically⁴. The term "Maya" is used throughout the paper to refer to the indigenous people of Yucatán, although Maya is not a term that individuals would necessarily use to describe themselves, and the use of this term does not imply a social or political consciousness of indigeneity or Indian-ness. We are referring in general terms to people whose parents or grandparents spoke Maya, who have a Maya surname, who may or may not speak Maya themselves, and who may or may not participate in some Maya cultural or ritual practices. As Restall (2004) has argued, Maya ethnogenesis in Yucatán is an incomplete and fairly recent phenomenon⁵. The word "indigenous" is not used on the Yucatán Peninsula, though many people do speak Maya, which is an Indian language. For reasons related to the area's history, the local ethnolinguistic terminology is rather complex and quite distinct from that found in the rest of Mexico. In the state of Quintana Roo, peasants of Mayan origin who

descended from the rebel “Mayas” of the *Guerra de Castas* (Caste Wars), 1847-1902 are called *macehuales* (men), while in Yucatán and Campeche, older people (beyond their 40s or 50s), who speak Maya identify themselves as *mayeros*. *Mestizos* (fem., *mestizas*) is a term reserved for adults –especially women who wear the traditional *huipil* dress– to distinguish them from *catrines*, who dress in western styles. Though the term Maya is considered an indigenous language of the *mayence* family and thus its speakers are classified as indigenous, the peasants, country folk and/or residents of rural towns, as Castañeda (2004) underlines, do not perceive or define themselves as Indians, nor very frequently call themselves Maya⁶. People in Yucatán towns say that “Maya” were the men and women who built the Prehispanic temples and lived in grand cities like Uxmal, Chichén Itzá and Mayapán. The strongest identity referent we found in our fieldwork was *yucateco* in Spanish, and secondly, the individual’s place of origin, either a municipal administrative center (*cabecera*), or a dependent town (*comisaría*). We must add the fact that the Maya people we chat with in San Francisco, hardly ever or never employ the term Mexican as their main identity; in contrast, Mexican immigrants from other parts of the country often do to identify themselves. Only after we asked them from which state or town they came from, then they referred to their specific place of origin.

Maya immigrants who have established relations with official organisms, have begun to reactivate an indigenous cultural identity⁷, though it is not ethnic in the strict sense of the term:

...indigenous identity is basically a cultural identity [...] ascribed to indigenous peoples by non-indigenous ones, [while] ethnicity is a form of self-identification that emerges through opposition, conflict and self-defense. It is important to recall the distinction between indigenous and cultural communities as they are identified officially, and localities that are constituted on the basis of ethnicity...

(Kearney 1994 61- 62 emphasis added)

Maya migration in numbers

People from the Yucatán state began to leave during the *Bracero* Program (1942-1964), though this phenomenon did not become more visible at the international and national levels until the 1990s. In 2000, 5,839 Yucatec left for the U.S. According to the 2010 Mexican Census, if compared with a traditional migratory state such as Guanajuato (25.1%), Yucatan has a very

low rate of emigration to the United States (6.3%). From 2000 to 2005 emigration to Mexico's northern neighbor increased by 450%, from 0.4% to 1.8% of the total population. By 2007, there were 160,000 Yucatec living in the U.S.; in 2008 that number increased to 170,000, but in 2009 it fell by 5,000. The states on the U.S. west coast are the traditional Maya destinations with a total of 150,000 immigrants. In Los Angeles area alone there are some 50,000 Yucatec, while San Francisco is second in terms of the number of migrants. After California, Portland, Oregon and Denver, Colorado, have the largest concentrations of Maya people from Yucatan state (INDEMAYA 2010). The director of the state indigenous agency, INDEMAYA, Elizabeth Gamboa Solís, recently estimated the Yucatec migrant population in the U.S. to be between 200,000 and 285,000 (qtd. in Chan 2013). The overwhelming majority of these immigrants are Maya. Migrants from southern Yucatán tend to choose San Francisco as a destination place and those from northern Yucatán prefer to set off to Los Angeles. In San Francisco, Maya people have established a niche in the restaurant sector; In Los Angeles, many of them work in the manufacturing sector, particularly in textiles.

Place of origin

The municipality of Oxkutzcab, comprises 29 localities (*comisarías*). We visited Oxkutzcab (the *cabecera*), and the towns of Yaxhachén, Xohuayán, Emiliano Zapata and Xul, where 60% of the population above age 5 still speaks Mayan/Yucatec. The economically active population (EAP) includes 8,139 individuals: 39.50% in the primary sector (agriculture, livestock, hunting); 16.27% in secondary activities (manufacturing, construction, electricity); 43.26% in the tertiary sector (commerce, tourism, services); and 0.97% in "others" (INEGI, 2000). Wages are extremely low and peasants with small or medium-sized orchards are subject to fluctuations in supply and demand for the citrus fruits (oranges, Persian limes, tangerines, grapefruit, etc.) they grow for sale in local markets and, to a lesser extent, in the region.

Social and demographic profile of migrants

The people who prefer to go to San Francisco had relatives who provided the economic resources required for the journey. All were well aware that job opportunities awaited them in the City of the Golden Gate Bridge, so they are either currently looking for work in, or have already entered, the service sector where they work in restaurants as waiters, cooks, preparers,

busboys, waiters' helpers, dishwashers or cleaners. In most cases, before leaving they lived in the paternal household. Most of them had no children and their main occupation was in agricultural work on family-owned fields (growing citrus fruits, as mentioned above) or in cornfields. The incentives that led them to leave their home towns were twofold: economic necessity and young men's desire to become more independent. Virtually all of these immigrants were undocumented and, with very few exceptions, took jobs that required unskilled labor (also mentioned above). It is apparent that the individuals who emigrate are mostly young males who are healthy and fit. Our interviewees came from extended family structures (parents, siblings, sisters-in-law, nephews, nieces) that usually shared the same house lot and religious beliefs and practices, whether Catholic or Protestant (the latter Pentecostal or Presbyterian). They all spoke clearly of their goals –getting ahead, progressing and attaining greater personal freedom– and justified the privations involved in “heading north” on the basis of their desire to improve the precarious economic conditions that prevail at home.

Roberto's social and cultural resources

Roberto is 19-years old and was born in Yaxhachén, Oxkutzcab, where he finished Junior High School (*secundaria*) and was raised in an evangelical church. He left home in 2004, just after turning 15. In 2005, Yaxhachén had just over 1,500 inhabitants, according to the Mexican official census. Most are monolingual in Maya language. It is located 37 miles from Oxkutzcab along a narrow, poorly-maintained road; one of the most distant, isolated and poorest villages in the municipality. Because of its isolation, people still speak Maya, and suffer high rates of marginalization and poverty. Sources of jobs for adults and young people are few –in fact, almost nil– so there is really no way for them to improve their living conditions.

Despite his young age, Roberto knows hard agricultural labor and the limitations of poverty firsthand. *My Dad had a little shop there. Yeah, he sells right in the center of town, I worked there too, sometimes cutting firewood [or] going to the field for corn and stuff like that, that's all I did.*

Roberto wanted to work and save money to build a house, like his elder brother had done a few years before, but the contrasts between Yaxhachén and San Francisco could hardly

be starker: *I felt really different Y'know from my town, and I thought, "what'll it be like in the north once I'm there?" Well, it's just the north, my brother said, this is life here and it sure seemed different, but bit-by-bit I started to get used to [it].*

In 2004, Roberto paid 2 thousand dollars for the trip. His brother Wilfredo advanced him the money and Roberto paid him back from his wages in the ensuing months. He crossed the border with a few cousins, but on his first attempt was caught by immigration officers (*la migra*) and sent back to Mexico. He succeeded on his second attempt.

...when I got here it was really tough, I hung around the border a couple of weeks, eating just Tía Rosa bread and beans. I didn't eat that at home, back there I'd throw [that stuff] away, I put some [rehydration drinks] in my backpack, I helped my cousins who finished their water real quick [so].

Despite Wilfredo's support, he experienced several months of uncertainty after arriving: *I'd been here for like two months but couldn't get used to it, I wanted to go back to Mexico, but after maybe 6... 7 months you get used to the climate here. Y'know, I didn't like it at first and two weeks later I still didn't like it, I wanted to go home. I wasn't working, didn't have no job, just slept at home alone in a house with two rooms, you go to the other room but that's all you see, four walls, you can't go out like at home, go out and have fun, because life here is really rough, you can't go out, if you do... they rob you, they might even kill you.*

During his complex transition between roles, Roberto experienced a short period of social liminality. He was able to overcome it thanks to the psychological force given by the very same liminal state which permitted him to assume, finally, the role of immigrant. He decided to leave his room and the liminal condition by first enrolling in English classes while looking for work. Studying English was part of his resocialization in San Francisco, and he reached the halfway point of level two. He learned to get around on his own in that unfamiliar city and gradually began the process of adaptation or cultural negotiation. That became possible – among other factors– thanks to his brother's unfailing support, and to an important social network that included cousins and *paisanos* who accompanied him in the hard period and made the connections that eventually led him to get his first job. The following extract reveals

Roberto's close affective relationship with his elder brother: *I don't feel lonely here, my brother is always with me, he's never left me, not in bad times or good ones, my brother has never left me in a bad way...*

Paisanasgo networks (based on ties from a common hometown) and others based on kinship/relatives play a key role, not only by making migrants feel secure, but also by becoming a primary source of the information and knowledge they require to survive in this harsh, unfamiliar environment. Roberto is surrounded by cousins, neighbors from home, friends and other Maya who, though from different places, usually recognize and help one another. At the time of our interview, Roberto had taken maximum advantage of the social networks that had opened doors into the working world⁸. But to succeed in a job social networks are not enough, one also needs honesty, efficiency, good manners and, above all, the capacity to adapt to new patterns of living.

Like almost all Maya living in San Francisco, Roberto's first job was in a restaurant on one of the city's main streets, where he worked for almost two years. Then, to increase his income and learn new skills, he changed to his current job as a busboy in another restaurant, a franchise operation. We observed him at his job where he was always good-humored but nervous as he went about his chores: serving tables, cleaning up, attending to tourists, always on the move.

For migrants like Roberto, insertion into labor markets not only resolves an economic problem, but also constitutes an important step towards integration into the receiving culture and society. Moreover, it provides security and autonomy for making vital decisions such as how much money to send home, how much to keep for personal expenses, what rent to pay, when to return to Mexico, and how long to stay in a job.

Here where I work the boss pays me \$10.50 an hour, I work maybe 8, 10 hours (...); the least I make is like \$1,100, \$1,200 [for two weeks], but when things are really slow they take away hours, days, and I get \$800 [instead of] my normal check. [First] I worked maybe two months in the kitchen [so] I know all the kitchen jobs, I worked as a preparer... dishwasher. Now I'm a busboy, sometimes they use me as a runner, throwing away food. If it's real busy, I work all 7 [days],

they don't give me no rest, (...) they treat me real good, thank God, a guy from Oxkutzcab got me the job here.

In addition to his full-time job, Roberto works in a second restaurant, one near San Francisco's Modern Museum of Art in a more sophisticated, prosperous zone: *I work as a dishwasher there, washing plates, and as a preparer, but it's not much, **it's not work, it's real easy, 5 or 6 hours**, it's real quiet, only people wearing ties get in there. I just get two part-time days, Fridays and Saturdays. When I work from 6 to 3 here, I go to the other place... just go home... shower, then at 5 I go there and get off at 11 at night* (emphasis added).

With the extra earnings he gets from tips, Roberto has bought clothes and electronic gadgets (an Ipod, an Itouch, a fancy cellular telephone, even a laptop), items that he could not dream of obtaining at home. He has learned enough English to survive on the street but, above all, in the working world. He communicates with his family in Yaxhachén and his migrant relatives in his mother tongue (Maya), but speaks Spanish with a heavy Mayan accent. He eats typical meals from Yucatán almost every day, also enjoys "ethnic cuisine" such as Thai, Greek, Chinese, Italian, and he frequently eats North American fast food such as pizza or hamburgers. This is not one of Zygmunt Bauman's (1998) "global social subjects" who move freely from one culture to another; no, Roberto is an economic migrant with an extraordinary capacity to synthesize cultural and identity values.

During his four years in the City by the Bay, he has maintained a close, constant relationship with his nuclear family back home through his mother. This affective factor is an especially important ingredient for him, and he speaks of the deep devotion that bonds him to his closest relatives with no outward signs of embarrassment. *(...) cause I love my Mom very much, ma'am, I love my Dad too, all my family, I love my brother. (...) On Mother's Day, I call my Mom to see what she wants, I tell my Dad to buy her a gift. Last time, my brother and I gave her around \$10,000 pesos to buy bracelets.*

Roberto sends money home regularly, not only to buy building materials for his new house –always a high priority on his agenda– but also to help satisfy his family's needs or fulfill their wishes. Roberto had invested more than 13 thousand dollars in his house in Yaxhachén, but also wanted to buy a lot in Oxkutzcab to build another one.

Our informant has been able to deal successfully with the hostile environment he chose as his destination when he emigrated because in addition to the unconditional affection of his nuclear family, he is also part of a broad community of cousins, neighbors and friends (from the same locality), who have helped him re-territorialize his culture in San Francisco. Though small, this tight-knit group has succeeded in reproducing its customs and so feels more at home: they eat the same food as in Yaxhachén while at the same time striving to obey the rules of a foreign nation. To endow the cold, strange space where they live with some semblance of historical and cultural identity, this group of intimate cultural migrants had reterritorialized their rented apartments in San Francisco into something familiar and homey where they celebrate Christmas and other important dates almost as if they were back home in Yucatán.

[At Christmas] my cousins and I cook, we all go to the same house where we share everything, we spend Christmas [Eve] and the 25th, cause the restaurant where I work only closes one day. On the morning of the 25th we play soccer and in the afternoon after soccer we come back and the food's ready [so] we eat. At night we don't do anything, that's how it is.

On these occasions they prepare their own traditional meals. According to Roberto, that includes tamales and other regional cooking with, of course, a dash of Yaxhachén flavors. As not all the guests belong to the same evangelical church, in addition to sodas (as non-alcoholic beverages are called in Yucatán), mostly Catholics buy beer. No one uses drugs and those who drink beer do so with moderation, *the ones who drink only have 3 or 4, that's it.*

Early on, it became clear to Roberto that in order to reach his objectives he had to stay away from drugs, alcohol and dubious company. *To make it, you can't get into vices... here in America there's lots of vices, lots of drugs, other guys come and say let's go do it, and sometimes it's your own friends doing drugs, but you can get away from them if you want and find other friends who aren't using.* He is aware of the activities of the many gangs that prowl the streets at night in the Mission District and knows how cocaine and other stimulants are sold and their prices, but remains on the margins, away from addictions to hard drugs or alcohol. *For starters, they never showed me how to drink in Yaxhachén, my Dad doesn't like it cause he goes to the temple. My brother knows I don't drink, he trusts me that way and the day he ever*

saw me drinking, he'd tell my Mom... my Dad don't like me doing that (emphasis added). On the one hand, this speaks of religious principals and family control, on the other, a lifelong socialization process that values sobriety and moderation in both theory and daily practice; so Roberto is following the example set by his father and other men who attend the Presbyterian Church at home. Though his long work hours make it almost impossible for him to attend church regularly in San Francisco as he did in Yaxhachén, the values and principles of the Protestant ethic inculcated during his youth are still operative and function as a kind of armor that protects at least some young migrants from getting mixed up in vices while leading them to a healthier, more organized and perhaps more satisfactory existence.

The importance of those shared beliefs as psychological and social referents for migrants is such that Roberto told us that his brother, cousins and other *paisanos* who attend the church in Yaxhachén took the initiative to organize and send collective –or “social”– remittances as Levitt calls them (2001 56-7) to celebrate their respective birthdays. On these occasions they might collect as much as 2 thousand dollars to deposit as a “first fruits” (*primicias*) or ceremonial offerings for their church in order to request some gift of nature. The minister there uses those funds to pay for bands at future celebrations. The fact that a few young peasants decided to invest a considerable portion of their income in church affairs reflects a profound internalization of belief. Their church taught them to share with others and now, though far from home and family, giving to others is no sacrifice for them... rather, it brings them joy.

Santiago's cultural negotiation

When the solid principles that shared beliefs can provide, or resources and support based on family and bonds of friendship are lacking, and, moreover, there is an unlimited supply of illegal stimulants and money right at hand, it is quite likely that some young immigrants will be unable to resist the stress that their routine, inflexible lifestyle, or the fatigue of working long hours, imposes upon them at their destination. As a result, in a misguided effort to relieve their worries, anxiety, loneliness and sadness some men resort to using and abusing stimulants or other drugs because they allow them to forget, for a time, their

insecure condition as undocumented migrants, often cruelly exploited and bereft of rights but, above all, to erase from their psyches the fact that they have been unable to do much to improve their lot in life. Peer pressure, added to the aforementioned psychological strains, can lead them into addiction and to getting lost in that artificial forest that may end up distancing them from the real world for more time than they would have ever desired.

Something much like this happened to Santiago, a young man of 25 years old from Oxnokutzcab who arrived in San Francisco at the same age as Roberto, 15. He had three brothers waiting for him at his destination. When we spoke with him, 10 years had passed since his arrival. When we asked him about his plans for the future, he first paused for a moment of calm reflection, and then told us that: *there are lots of things I'd like to do, but sometimes life just slips through your hands, like the first three years I was here, I didn't care about nothin', I didn't think things through like you gotta do...* Santiago's infancy was quite distinct from Roberto's. He spoke to us of how young kids can get into the bars back home and admitted that he didn't attend the local (Catholic) church except on special occasions. His parents live in conditions of abject poverty and Santiago can no longer help them because he has begun his own family. When we visited his mother in Oxnokutzcab and showed her a photo of her son, she was overcome and could barely speak in Spanish. She only managed to say: *Here Santiago was always drinking*, referring to her son's behavior before he left home.

Negotiating with a different culture requires not only acceding to the pool of affective resources that the family, one's *paisanos* and friends can offer, but also having the necessary cultural and ecological equipment, including solid principles and values of the kind that one only acquires with time and experience. Santiago was not socialized in surroundings characterized by sobriety and moderation –like Roberto– or under a clear, precise normative system that defined what behaviors were to be followed and which ones had to be avoided in order to live an ordered life. His childhood milieu was one of excesses, permissiveness and celebrations, which explains why he recalled with such sadness how small children were allowed into bars in his hometown; a situation he criticized by comparing it to the restrictions on behavior he experienced in the U.S. At this point, we leave Santiago to discuss the case of

Dante, an acculturated Maya immigrant. Our goal is to highlight the differences between his life history and Roberto's.

Dante, An American boy without papers

Dante is 23 years old and was born in the city of Oxkutzcab, but when he was just four (in 1989) he left his hometown with his parents, two older sisters and an older brother and moved to the Golden Gate city. He has never returned to Oxkutzcab. Here, then, we have a case of a migrant who belongs to the so-called "one-and-a-half" generation of migrants because he grew up and was socialized in the receiving society, though surrounded by a powerful influence of contemporary Maya culture. *We were raised in the Yucatec way*, he says, transmitted through his parents, relatives and the endless flow of migrants, especially from Oxkutzcab, who continue to arrive in San Francisco.

*I grew up here. (...) I was just like any ordinary kid here. I remember very little about Mexico. I remember where my Mom lived, where I lived, the dogs I had, some friends, but I can't remember anything else. I went to school, learned English and somehow started to pass the time here. My friends are blacks, whites, Filipinos. **I hardly spend any time with Hispanics.** Most of my girlfriends have been Afro-Americans or white and I've gone out with a few Mexicans, but it's not what I like. **[I'm] an American guy but without papers** (emphasis added).*

Dante feels more comfortable speaking English. His Spanish has a strong North American accent and is peppered with English words and phrases. Before entering high school in the U.S. at 15, he sank into the world of violence, drugs and street gangs. After a period of moral reform under the guiding hand of a –Latino– Presbyterian pastor, he managed to finish high school in San Francisco and today attends a Presbyterian university in Oakland. His studies are paid for by bursaries and donations from members of congregations that belong to the same Presbyterian denomination. In addition to university, Dante does volunteer work as a spiritual and moral mentor for 150 young people (12-to-20 years old) from the Latino community in Oakland. The following excerpt reflects the pride he takes in his work:

I talk to them about my experience, how I come from life on the streets and gangs, and talk to them about changing their goals, going to school, things like that. They like it, so they follow me; we go to the movies, hang out together, go places, their families invite me to their homes; basically I'm their pastor.

Dante now has very clear goals and objectives that entail an enormous personal and psychological effort; indeed, he has set himself some colossal challenges:

Once I earn my B.A. I want to go back to school, study Spanish, then get my Master's and do a Doctorate. I want to finish school because a lot of young guys if they don't see someone who does it, someone where I came from, they're not going to do it. But if they see that I could do it, they're going to want to as well.

If not for the short period when he got lost in “the world” of street gangs, Dante might seem to be a model of a Hispanic boy who, in spite of his social origins, status as a foreigner, and experience of growing up in a sea of social and cultural hardships, overcame all the obstacles in his path to ultimately earn success. However, in contrast to Roberto's serenity, Dante's discourse reveals an obsessive insistence to both reaffirm his identity and vindicate his parents. Our dialogue with him inside the Presbyterian Church in *The Mission District* occurred on his initiative, for he felt an urgent need to talk about himself, his achievements and his dreams. He did his best to convince us, at all costs, that all was well with him, and that from a gangbanger and drug addict he had been transformed into a “visionary” with grand plans for the future. Everything seemed to be going just fine until he began to reveal certain factors that caused him anxiety:

*I didn't even know I was an undocumented [alien]. I was fifteen when I found out. I'm trapped in this country **because the people here don't want me around, because I'm undocumented, but I don't want to be here either.** Because, you know, **I want to go and see the world, but I can't.** I feel claustrophobic...*
(Emphasis added).

In contrast to both Roberto and Santiago, Dante has internalized the “American way of life”, including an unrelenting individualism replete with personal ambitions and challenges in a milieu marked by an implacable competitiveness. This young man does possess many of the

resources we mentioned at the outset and, at least as far as his level of formal schooling is concerned, has even surpassed them. Nonetheless, because of his considerable social, cultural, economic and political disadvantages, he finds himself in a position of inferiority and subordination in America's intensely competitive milieu. It is as if he were a physically challenged person running a marathon: his opponents are not the same as him, and though he perceives himself as "an American boy", the other runners all have more social, symbolic, economic and political capital than him. Thus, no matter how fiercely Dante struggles to achieve the goals he has set for himself, he will always lag behind. The very remote possibility that he might someday occupy a better position in the power game in which he is immersed – which he believes is his "right" – generates much personal frustration. Indeed, he feels impotent because of his illegal migratory status, a situation that simply reflects other spheres of his existence. As a result, though he is much closer to achieving acculturation than a recent immigrant like Roberto, his suffering is actually much more intense, because Roberto is in a more privileged position in his, admittedly, more modest social field, at least in terms of achieving the goals he has set for himself. The accounts of these two young men explain in part why more acculturated migrants display behaviors that affect their physical and mental health negatively; and, moreover, why non-acculturated immigrants tend to behave more positively with respect to their mental wellbeing.

Reflections on the case studies

When a migrant has a clear goal (however modest) and –like Roberto– finds the resources needed to reach it, he can then negotiate more healthily and positively with the culture/s he confronts. Though they may remain in their destinations longer than they might have wished, economic migrants know that their stay in the U.S. is temporary; hence, they do not strive to integrate completely into the society or pursue social recognition or acceptance, like those who have already settled there or who plan to do so. Recent migrants need only negotiate ably in those areas of the social world in which they must participate, like labor markets, a key element in their agenda. But they can remain on the margins of other social and cultural domains beyond that sphere because of their strong bonds to their own cultural world

through their relatives and *paisanos* who accompany them and fill the void of the social world they left behind.

Though Roberto arrived in the U.S. at a young age, he had already crossed one frontier: the one separating his maternal culture (Mayan) from the wider Mexican culture. Thus, adapting to a third culture (Anglo-Saxon) was perhaps easier for him than for Dante, who was obliged to make that jump at a very early age and no longer recalls his former life on the Yucatán peninsula. Both of these young men were raised in the same evangelical church (Presbyterian), but Dante's religious socialization was interrupted by his nuclear family's move to San Francisco and the resulting crisis that such drastic changes can trigger. He was the youngest of four siblings who emigrated with their parents. His two older sisters recounted the painful episodes that the family had to endure during their early years in the U.S. Among the losses they suffered upon leaving their place of origin were their strong bond to the church they attended there and everything it meant to them. The reencounter with their faith that occurred many years later was positive for all of them; in the case of Dante it helped him get through his moral reform during adolescence and then to continue his studies and even reorient his life while still quite young. Roberto, meanwhile, has maintained his close links to his faith uninterrupted, though he cannot attend church regularly in his destination. His constant communication with his mother constitutes a thread that continues to transmit the values he had internalized before leaving home, and his ongoing interaction with fellow believers in San Francisco is another effective way of obtaining control over, and protection from, the innumerable risks (especially vices) that surround him. Due to his age, inexperience and a certain naivety or innocence, Roberto should be an especially vulnerable social subject in a society like that of San Francisco. However, as we have seen, up to the time of the interview he had dealt successfully with invitations to join peer groups that abuse alcohol and/or do hard drugs. He has managed to keep a balance in his life and, therefore, also in his health and mental wellbeing. But this does not mean that he is free of internal conflicts, doubts and worries about today and tomorrow. Rather, it suggests that he has the psychological wherewithal to survive the cultural tension he faces while maintaining a certain level of mental wellbeing.

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Notas

* We thank Quetzil Castaneda's knowledge and kind advice concerning the complex use of Maya and Yucatec terms to refer to people from Yucatan, an issue which is still in discussion today. Castañeda suggests the following: "This is the correct terminology that should be used in Yucatán. A Maya is a Yucateco [or Yucatec in English] but not all Yucatecos are Maya = All indigenous of the region are Yucatecos by fact of being from the region, but not all those from the region are Maya, nor indigenous. Further, not all those we might call or that someone might call Maya call themselves Maya, or only situationally." (Personal dialogue, august 2013, through emails and skype conversations).

¹ The names of the young men interviewed are fictitious to protect their identities.

² *Assimilation* is defined as a simultaneous process that includes integration into the destination, but without abandoning one's cultural traditions.

³ <http://www.inegi.gob.mx/est/contenidos/espanol/sistemas/conteo2005>

⁴ Indigenous and/or ethnic groups from Oaxaca have used their Indian-ness as a powerful and strategic ethnic identity both in Mexico and in the United States (see Kearney 1994, 61-62).

⁵ See also Castañeda [2000, 45 and n.d.] on the use of terminology in referring to the Maya.

⁶ During the Caste Wars, the Yucatán government allied with the federal government to offer Mayans in northern Yucatán amnesty if they agreed to join the federal army and fight against their rebel brothers. Ever since, the Indians have called themselves *mestizos* to distinguish themselves from the dominant white class and the social classes that enjoyed an economic, political and social position above that of the Indians. The words indigenous and Indian gradually fell into disuse as *mestizo* became more popular.

⁷ See Mattiace and Fortun y (in press), as well as Solís and Fortun y (2010).

⁸ This does not mean that social networks always have positive consequences; as Portes (1998) and others have demonstrated, social networks often may act as straightjackets that impose control and restrict migrants' possibilities.