

Yucatec Maya Organizations in San Francisco, California: ethnic identity formation across
migrant generations

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Abstract: Based on field research among Yucatec Maya in San Francisco, we compare two types of migrant associations: Home Town Associations (HTAs) and social service agencies, specifically in terms of the use and expression of ethnic identity. We argue that HTA leaders rely on a *regional* identity, largely based on a shared sense of culture, which reproduces the dominant and widespread view of ethnic identity in Yucatán, namely that the Maya are not indigenous peoples per se. In contrast, leaders of the social service agencies explicitly utilize indigenous identity in their programming and services. We maintain that the latter are re-conceptualizing Maya identity, adopting a U.S. multicultural framework that emphasizes ethnic difference as a basis for making claims for resources and rights.

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Introduction

Compared to migration from other Mexican states to California, such as from Zacatecas and Michoacán in central western Mexico and Oaxaca in south-central Mexico, Yucatec migration is a relatively recent phenomenon. Our focus in this research note is on Yucatec Maya migration to San Francisco, California. While the first Maya migrants to California came under the auspices of the Bracero Program (1942-64), the number of Maya in California was relatively low until the 1990s (Adler 2008; Cornelius et al. 2007).² For years, Yucatecos migrated in large

² 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 indigenous 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 2005 (<http://www.inegi.gob.mx/est/contenidos/espanol/sistemas/conteo2005>). 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.

The director of the state indigenist 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.

numbers to the Cancún area to work in the construction and tourism industries on the Maya Rivera. When the state-subsidized henequen industry closed its door in 1992, many displaced Yucatecos turned to international migration.³

The Maya who migrated to California settled in the urban areas of Los Angeles and San Francisco.⁴ Unlike other migrants in California who speak an indigenous language, however, Maya in San Francisco have not typically utilized a politicized ethnic or racial identity as a basis for organization. First, a point of clarification: the term “Maya” is used throughout the paper to refer to the indigenous people of Yucatán. This 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.⁵ In this research note, we examine two sets of organizations working with Maya migrants in San

³ Notwithstanding the henequen industry’s steady decline for decades, it had been the state’s most important industry and a major employer of agricultural and semi-skilled labor since the last quarter of the nineteenth century. Devastating natural disasters, such as Hurricanes Gilberto and Isidoro, drove many Maya to the U.S., beginning in the late 1980s.

⁴ Migrants from southern Yucatán tend to migrate to San Francisco and migrants from northern Yucatán to Los Angeles. In San Francisco, Maya have established a niche in the restaurant sector; In Los Angeles, many Maya work in the manufacturing sector, particularly in textiles.

⁵ As Restall (2004) has argued, Maya ethnogenesis in Yucatán is an incomplete and fairly recent phenomenon (see also Castañeda [2000, 45 and n.d.] on the use of terminology in referring to the Maya).

Francisco: several Yucatec Home-Town Associations (HTAs) that have recently come together to form a federation of Yucatec HTAs of northern California, and two social service organizations, Asociación Mayab (Mayab) and the Instituto Familiar de la Raza (IFR).⁶ HTAs are “migrant membership organizations formed by people from the same community of origin,” comprised mostly of first generation migrants (Fox and Bada 2008, 443). The two social service agencies are non-profit organizations that provide health and community development services for migrant and Latino clients and are headed up by first and second generation migrants who have been in the U.S. for decades.

Based on fieldwork in San Francisco, we found that HTA leaders rely on a *regional* identity, which is largely based on a shared sense of culture. These leaders tend to reproduce the dominant or “commonsense” view of racial and ethnic identity in Yucatán, namely that the Maya are not indigenous peoples per se and that there is little conflict or opposition between Maya and non-Maya.⁷ Maya have not organized around indigenous identity and do not typically refer to themselves as Indians, indigenous, or as Maya. In contrast, leaders at the Mayab and the IFR

⁶ Mexican migrant associations are referred to by various names in Spanish, depending on region. Yucateco migrant associations are typically called clubs (*clubes*), while migrant associations from central Mexico are called home-town associations (*comités de oriundos*, or more simply, *comités*). Migrant associations that organize for collective remittances have been globally referred to in the English-language literature as home town associations, or HTAs.

⁷ We use “commonsense” in the Gramscian sense. That is, that the porous-ness of ethnic boundaries in Yucatán is the result of the political, social, cultural, and economic history of relations among individuals and groups and the way in which power and consent have shaped social categories.

explicitly utilize racial and ethnic identity in their programming and provision of services. We argue that leaders at Mayab and IFR are re-conceptualizing Maya identity among the Maya they serve, adopting a U.S. multicultural framework that emphasizes racial and ethnic difference as a basis for making claims for resources and rights.⁸

Conceptually, our examination of these two different types of migrant organizations in San Francisco offers insight on the process of identity formation among Maya migrants in San Francisco. We ask the question of how, if at all, migrants use racial (i.e., indigenous) and ethnic identity as a basis for mobilization and/or making demands. Do first generation migrants reproduce widespread views about race and ethnicity from their sending communities? In what

⁸“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-ethnically. “Ethnic” identity is closely tied to place and the shared histories, language, and practices that are typically associated with people living in close proximity. Racial and ethnic identities may or may not be used by collectivities to mobilize and to make demands. In fact, as many social scientists have argued, the formation of ethnic identity requires the forging of boundaries between groups. For our purposes, Kearney’s (1994, 61-62) discussion of ethnic identity and the process of ethnic identity formation are useful. In his work on Mixtec migrants in the U.S.-Mexico border region, Kearney argues that an ethnic consciousness among the Mixtecs arose as a form of self-identification that emerged from opposition, conflict, and self-defense. For Kearney, “indigenous” is a cultural term/concept imposed on indigenous peoples by non-Indians. For a useful summation of the extensive theoretical literature on ethnic identity, see Crow 2010.

ways do first generation migrants shift their racial and ethnic identities after arrival in the U.S.? Is there a shift between first and second generations? To this end, in the first section, we briefly review the literature on Mexico's indigenous migrants to California, focused on Mixtec migrants, comparing the dense networks of Mixtec racial and ethnic organization to the relative lack of racial and ethnic identity organization in Yucatán. In the second and third sections, we juxtapose Yucateco HTAs to the social service organizations, comparing and contrasting their leadership and organizational styles. In the final and concluding section, we offer two explanations for the differences we observe among these organizations. These two factors are time spent by leaders in the U.S., and leaders' occupational backgrounds.⁹

Identity and Organization among Mexico's Indigenous Migrants

⁹ Our findings are based on two trips to San Francisco in 2011 and 2012. In 2011 we conducted open-ended interviews with six HTA leaders. In 2012 we interviewed eight-ten HTA leaders (with some overlap from 2011), Mayab's acting director, the Indígena Health and Wellness manager at Mayab and IFR, and the director of IFR. Most of the interviews took place in the Mission District, where the two organizations are located. Many of the HTA leaders work in or around the Mission District, mostly in restaurants. With one exception, the HTA leaders with whom we spoke were male, typical among HTAs (see Goldring 2003). The overwhelming majority of HTA leaders who we met were undocumented. Migrants from Oxkutzcab, in southern Yucatán, comprise the largest single Yucatec population in San Francisco. Several of the leaders with whom we spoke were from Oxkutzcab. While the estimates of the Yucatec population residing in the San Francisco Bay area vary, most sources report the total number at approximately 25, 000.

One of the central themes in the abundant literature on Mexican indigenous migrants in the United States is the importance of racial and ethnic identity. Much of the literature on indigenous migrants and identity has centered on California, which has historically been their principal destination. In the California context, perhaps the most widely studied indigenous population is the Mixtec people, who live in the Mexican states of Puebla, Oaxaca, and Guerrero. In the now-classic article on ethnicity and migrant organization, Nagengast and Kearney (1990) trace the evolution of Mixtec organization in Baja California and California beginning in the 1960s, when Mixtecs left their home communities to work as agricultural field workers in the north. According to these authors, at the local community level in Oaxaca, ethnicity and race were not salient forms of identification and organization. Rather, people identified with their home towns and were often at bitter odds with neighboring Mixtec communities over land boundaries and access to resources. However, in the 1960s, Mixtec agricultural workers began to organize, first in HTAs and later in broader organizations that united several HTAs. Soon after they migrated to California and Oregon, Mixtecs formed organizations that were based on shared ethnicity, transcending home-town identities.

One of the first pan-Mixtec organizations in the United States (California and Oregon) was the Asociación Cívica Benito Juárez. According to Nagengast and Kearney (1990, 84), this transnational association used the articulation of a shared ethnicity to make labor demands, such as better working conditions for its members. Like its HTA counterparts, the Association promoted community development projects in Oaxaca, but also focused on discrimination, exploitation, health and human rights abuses among the Mixtec community in California and Oregon (84). Several years later, on the eve of the 1992 counter-celebrations of the Quincentenary, the Frente Mixteco-Zapoteco Binacional (FMZB) was formed as the first

Mexican pan-ethnic organization in California (Velasco 2005). In September 1994 the organization was renamed the Oaxacan Indigenous Binational Front (FIOB, Frente Indígena Oaxaqueño Binacional). Stephen argues that the name change reflected “the integration of a wide range of Oaxacan indigenous ethnic groups into the organization” and “the articulation of a pan-Oaxacan indigenous identity category” (2007, 302).

One of the common themes in the literature on the FMZB and its successor organization is the way in which ethnic bonds were forged as Mixtecs experienced discrimination far from their home communities. The shared sense of solidarity that drew Mixtecs and later Zapotecs together in pan-ethnic organizations in California was based on a deep sense of shared social and cultural practices rooted in their home towns. Velasco (2005, 113) points to the deep sense of community solidarity, reciprocity, and cooperation in Mixtec hometowns, which, she argues, provided a strong basis for pan-ethnic organization in California. While initial Mixtec organizing began in HTAs, over time, new groups organized around Mixtec language and regional affiliation, paving the way for inter-ethnic organizations based on pan-ethnic or indigenous ties to native peoples throughout the state of Oaxaca and in Mexico more broadly.¹⁰

Recent scholarship has underscored the difference in racial and ethnic identity organization in Yucatán as compared to the rest of Mexico. Race and ethnicity are not as polarized in Yucatán as in other indigenous (and Maya) regions of Mexico, such as Chiapas, or

¹⁰ In her work on Mixtec migrants, Velasco underscores the importance of indigenous intellectuals in the formation of collective organizations. It is these leaders, she argues, who articulate a sense of origin among members of the group and who develop an ethnic project. We also found that the leaders of the organizations we observed played a significant role in identity-formation and reproduction in their respective organizations.

in Guatemala. “Maya ethnicity [in Yucatán],” according to Castañeda, “does not exist in a binary antithesis with another ethnic-racial group or identity” (2004, 52; see also Castillo 2005, 2007). In fact, very few Maya-speakers in Yucatán use the term “Maya” to refer to themselves at all. Most Maya-speakers see no connection between themselves and those who built the great pyramids. Since the beginning of the Caste War (1847-1912), Maya in northwest Yucatán, many of whom fled the intense fighting in the east, assiduously avoided referring to themselves as “Indian.” For these Maya, the only “Indians” in the state were the rebellious Maya of eastern Yucatán (now Quintana Roo) who had taken up arms against the white/criollo government. In effect, the Caste War catalyzed a process of de-Indianization in Yucatán: Mayas effectively distanced themselves from any association with Indian-ness. This did not mean, however, that indigenous customs and practices disappeared. On the contrary, they did not. Indian-ness (or indigeneity), however, particularly in the northwest region of the state close to the capital city of Mérida, gave way to a more hybrid identity, that of mestizo. Mestizos were Maya-speakers who dressed in regional clothing (*huipil*, *fustán*, and *rebozo*) and had a Maya surname, but who also had accepted the influence of the Hispanic culture (see Hervik 2003; Gabbert 2004; Solís and Fortuny 2010).¹¹

In the following section, we argue that the Yucatec HTAs in San Francisco have largely followed a pattern of identity formation common to Yucatán, shunning indigenous identity in favor of a more regional understanding of what it means to be Yucatec.

Regional Identity in Yucatecan Home Town Associations

¹¹ For a much longer treatment of this question, looking specifically at Maya ethno-political organization in Yucatán, see Mattiace 2009.

For decades, Mexicans living in the United States have organized into HTAs to collectively pool their resources for community development projects in their home towns. Migrants from traditional sending states in central western Mexico, such as Guanajuato, Jalisco, and Michoacán, were pioneers in the formation of HTAs in the United States.¹² For many years, HTAs formed organically through the work of individual migrants working with *paisanos* to collectively pool resources, even while they negotiated informally with local governmental leaders in identifying and carrying out projects in their local communities. It was not until the late 1980s that the Mexican government—at any level—got directly involved in encouraging and managing collective remittances. The state of Zacatecas pioneered the country’s first matching funds program: the state government would match migrants’ contributions dollar for dollar to finance public infrastructure (Yrizar and Alarcón 2010, 173). In 2001, the federal government joined, making it a 2 x 1 program, and in 2002, municipal governments came on board (3 x 1).

In order to obtain matching funds, U.S.-based HTAs must register with the Mexican consulate closest to them, which involves officially constituting themselves as an HTA by electing officers, writing a constitution, and forming a parallel club on the local level in Mexico; this process must be renewed every three years.¹³ HTA leaders must be skillful in dealing with elected governmental officials on all three levels of government, especially municipal officials, as well as the “shadow” or parallel club at the local level. In order to obtain the matching funds,

¹² Fox and Bada (2008, 444) note that the first HTA was a Zacatecan club in California, dating to 1962.

¹³ According to Burgess (2012), 800 HTAs were registered with the Mexican government in 2011, up from 263 in 1995. (The majority of these HTAs are located in Los Angeles and Chicago).

organized migrants propose community development project ideas. Federal, state, and municipal governments then vet the proposals. If approved, each level of government contributes matching funds. In principle, local committees oversee project implementation (Fox and Bada 2008, 447).

Compared to pioneer sending states in central western Mexico, Yucatec migration to the U.S. is a recent phenomenon. Little official attention was paid by state officials to international migration until 2003, when the state government created a Department of Attention to Migrants (DAM, Departamento de Atención a Migrantes), within the state indigenist agency INDEMAYA.¹⁴ According to a study ranking Mexican states in terms of how active they are in terms of executive leadership in area of migration, Yucatán is described as “active” (Vila Freyer 2007, 83).¹⁵ In its early years, DAM focused its efforts on organizing clubs in the U.S. These

¹⁴ Yrizar and Alarcón note that most states in Mexico currently have a public agency for emigrants. As of 2010, only eight of Mexico’s 31 states had not created one. They argue that state agencies dedicated to emigrants emerged in Mexico due to a confluence of three factors: a federal government recommendation in 1990 that all states create such offices; demands on the part of organized migrants for state governments to provide services and solutions to their problems; and the interest of governors, local congresses and political parties at the state level who viewed international migrants as an increasingly important constituency (2010, 190).

¹⁵ Compared to HTAs in other states, the formation of Yucatec HTAs were almost entirely stimulated by the state government—namely INDEMAYA. Solís and Fortuny (2010) argue that the relationship between Maya HTAs and the Yucatec state has largely been cooperative. We hypothesize that this cooperation has further slowed the process of ethnic identity formation among Maya HTAs in San Francisco as ethnic identity is often forged in reaction to some “other.”

efforts included educating municipal presidents on the matching funds program and working directly with HTAs in the U.S. In interviews in northern California, several of the leaders we spoke to mentioned visits by Diana Canto, director of INDEMAYA from 2001-06, who made migrant issues her top concern. For many of these leaders, Canto was instrumental in helping motivate them to create an HTA for their home town. DAM's slogan during these years with Canto at the helm was "*más clubes, más obras*" (Vila Freyer 2007, 101). Interviews with community leaders and migrants in San Francisco while Canto was at the helm of INDEMAYA, suggest that DAM officials may have put considerable pressure on migrants to form clubs.

The literature on HTAs and international migration suggests that immigrant transnationalism in the U.S. is largely a first generation phenomenon, with the second generation being much less interested in maintaining extensive ties with the home country (Portes et al. 2008, 1085). This was borne out in our interviews with club leaders in San Francisco. Club leaders described their chief concerns as helping Yucatecs in the U.S. obtain Mexican birth certificates in order to help claim dual nationality for their children, promoting Yucatec culture to help migrants cope with the difficulty of being far from their home state, assisting migrants in applying for seed money from the Mexican government to set up productive enterprises in their home towns, and collecting money for public works projects in the home towns of the club leaders, the central work of these clubs.¹⁶ The leaders of Yucatec HTAs in San Francisco see their work as extending beyond providing money for the bricks and mortar of development projects. Ángel Granados, president of the Oxkutzcab HTA Honesty and Progress, who also

¹⁶ Some of the recent HTA projects completed in Oxkutzcab, for example, include a municipal dome for sport, four police kiosks, and a new roof for a community center.

leads the Yucatec federation of HTAs in the San Francisco area, believes that HTAs put pressure on local governments in Mexico to become more transparent.¹⁷

HTA leaders do not draw a salary for their fundraising and organization work. Community organizing is something they do “on the side,” and most of the leaders we spoke to work in the restaurant business as busboys, dishwashers, and waiters in the Mission District or downtown. The HTAs collect money by holding fundraising parties—*quermeses*—that include regional food and dance, mostly for fellow Yucatecs. Sometimes, leaders are able to secure governmental funding to pay the expenses of a trio (musical group) or larger band to play at one of these events. However, the Mexican government does not make any direct salary or other payments to the HTAs. On the contrary, Mexican governmental leaders look to HTAs to help defray the costs of public works and social development in their states and municipalities, and

¹⁷ After ten HTAs from a single Mexican state are formed, SEDESOL (Ministry of Social Development), the federal agency overseeing the matching funds program of collective remittances, mandates the formation of a state federation of HTAs. The list of local clubs that have joined the Yucatec Federation are Ticul, Tekit, Oxkutzcab, Peto, Santa Elena, Chapab, Maxcanu, Mama, Teabo, and Tzucacab. HTA leaders in San Francisco spoke of the importance of mayoral visits from Yucatán. These visits are a way for mayors to communicate home town needs to the HTAs, as well as for club leaders to ascertain mayors’ willingness to work with them. Relations between HTAs and mayors can be testy. On several occasions, communication between the San Francisco HTAs from Oxkutzcab and the mayor of Oxkutzcab has broken down. Between 2009 and 2012 few public works in Oxkutzcab were funded by the 3 x 1 program due to a former mayor’s misuse of funds (Bacab 2012).

actively encourage migrants to officially register as HTAs and to form larger federations when a critical mass of associations from the same state have formed.

In addition to their interest in local-level development in their hometowns, club leaders are engaged in state and even national-level Mexican politics. In our interviews, HTA leaders spoke energetically of myriad concerns they have regarding state-level politics in Yucatán. Land and rural development issues emerged as central ones. HTA leaders' tend to be pragmatic and their concerns are largely practical.

Scholars have argued that HTA engagement in hometown issues and development is positively related to engagement and incorporation in U.S. society and politics (see de la Garza and Hazán 2003; DeSipio 2011; Portes et al. 2008). Our conversations with Yucatecan club leaders, who are all first-generation migrants, bore this out. On the one hand, they seem very engaged in the life of their home towns, traveling back-and-forth as they are able, raising monies for their town, and keeping in touch with local political officials and members of the shadow club. On the other hand, several of the HTA leaders we spoke to are also involved in U.S. political activities in the area of worker rights, helping migrants acquire important documents here in the U.S. in order to facilitate their working lives, and encouraging voter participation, among other activities.

In terms of ethnic identity, HTA leaders told us that the Maya language is the *lingua franca* among Yucatecan migrants in San Francisco and their meetings are usually conducted in Maya. Club leaders expressed great pride in their regional identity, even while they do not identify themselves racially or ethnically as Maya or as indigenous people. When we asked HTA leaders about their primary affiliation/identity at a group meeting, they said in loudly and in

unison: “*Yucatecos!*”¹⁸ Culture and cultural promotion is at the center of activities planned by their clubs to raise money for their home towns, and leaders spoke of gatherings where regional food was served, regional music and dances were performed in traditional dress, and where Maya was spoken. No mention was ever made of an explicit Maya or indigenous identity.

Unlike the experience of Mixtec migrants in California, Yucatec club leaders in the San Francisco area have not coordinated extensively with clubs from other regions of Mexico. We asked the leaders if they have had much contact with Zapotecs and Mixtecs in San Francisco. Granados said that he had heard of some collaboration in Los Angeles between Yucatec and Oaxacan clubs, but “not so much in San Francisco.” We also asked club leaders about coordination with Tzeltals and Tzotzils from Chiapas, who have added to the numbers of indigenous migrants in the San Francisco area in recent years, and the response was similar, “not so much.” Unlike Mixtec organization in Baja California and California which seemed, even early on, to be organized around a shared sense of ethnic and racial discrimination, club leaders were emphatic in insisting that they were not the targets of discrimination in San Francisco.¹⁹ In response to our queries about discrimination, club leaders told us that while there was a lot of

¹⁸ While it is true that Yucatec HTAs are organized around sending communities, a sense of Yucatán state identity exists and, as we observed, is reproduced in San Francisco. This sense of state-level identity is quite unique in the Mexican case.

¹⁹ This could be in part due to San Francisco’s more liberal orientation, its identity as a sanctuary city for migrants, and the relatively large numbers of social service and humanitarian workers who work with the migrant population.

discrimination in other U.S. states, such as Arizona and Alabama, discrimination was not a problem in San Francisco.²⁰

Ethnic Identity: Asociación Mayab and Instituto Familiar de la Raza

Located in San Francisco's Mission District, Mayab and IFR are social service organizations serving the Hispanic community, focused primarily on using culture to promote mental health and wellbeing. The two organizations are closely linked, as the directors of each, Alberto Pérez and Estela García respectively, have worked together for a number of years and often coordinate in the writing and administering of grants. In addition, Juanita Quintero, a long-time social worker at IFR coordinates a program on indigenous health (Indígena Health and Wellness Collaborative) at the Asociación Mayab.

Both organizations draw explicitly on Latin American indigenous traditions and spiritual practices to promote health and wellness, even while they vary considerably in terms of size, level of funding, and longevity. The IFR, founded by Chicano activists in 1978, describes itself as “the first integrated community-based mental health clinic in San Francisco” (www.ifrsf.org). The IFR employs more than 80 individuals, including social workers, psychiatrists, psychologists, mental health specialists, and is funded extensively by the San Francisco country's Department of Community Health. Funding also comes from other non-profits, including foundations.

²⁰ While our question on discrimination was open-ended, HTA leaders interpreted it to refer to discrimination from Anglos. We did not follow up with specific questions about discrimination from other Latinos or from African-Americans.

Mayab is a much smaller organization, founded in 2004, whose main areas of foci are 1) to preserve and promote culture and recreation; 2) to provide social services and emergency assistance; and 3) to promote communication and community advocacy (www.asociacionmayab.org). Mayab offers Maya language, regional craft, and dance classes for children and adults, has a psychologist on staff (who works with Child Protective Services), trains and operates a community health program, and also offers a translation service for Maya-speakers facing judicial proceedings. Mayab employs only a handful of staff members who are housed in several rooms, while the IFR facilities occupy more than a city block, just walking distance away. Like IFR, Mayab obtains its funding from a variety of sources, including philanthropic organizations, other non-profits, and government. For example, in 2009 Mayab received monies from the Seventh Generation Fund for Maya-language classes and from the San Francisco Arts Commission to finance its participation in the Mission District Carnival parade, held each May.

Leaders at both organizations use indigenous spirituality ceremonies as part of their broader effort to use culture to “cure.”²¹ Quintero, the manager of the Collaborative, runs a series

²¹ The web site of the Indígena Health and Wellness Collaborative, run jointly by Mayab and IFR, says that “cultural and spiritual practices connect us to our ancestors, traditions, families, and communities. They provide seeds of resilience, community centeredness, and empowerment from which we are able to heal and grow” (<http://ifrsf.org/ceremonies/this-a-ceremony-test/>) While all of the IFR’s six health and wellness programs focus on culture and the role of culture in helping Latinos cope with mental and physical health issues, the Indígena Health and Wellness Collaborative focuses most specifically on indigenous identity. Indigena Health Promoters, for example, recruit participants to attend ceremonies and cultural events, workshops,

of early morning Maya ceremonies at Ocean Beach, to which participants are invited to bring candles, flowers, copal (a pre-Columbian incense), and other offerings. Quintero told us that the main purpose of these ceremonies, similar to the majority of IFR and Mayab programming, is for mental health and wellness—fostering a sense of community and belonging among indigenous migrants in the Bay area.

Both organizations are strongly focused on ethnic-based discrimination. Leaders speak of the negative effects of ethnic discrimination, and they argue that this discrimination makes it difficult for their clients to successfully acculturate into the United States, keeping them mired in poor health and poverty. Portes and Rumbaut (2006) note that ethnic communities in the U.S. historically have reacted to the discrimination they experience by forming strong ethnic solidarity associations. While first generation migrants tend to focus their organizational activity on transnational issues, much like the HTA leaders we observed, 1.5 and second generation migrants tend to focus more on ethnic discrimination in the United States. Portes and Rumbaut (2006) call this transition across generations as a movement from “immigrants to ethnics.” That is, while immigrants may have, upon arrival adopted a more local or class-based identity, after experiencing ethnic-based discrimination in the U.S., tend to see themselves in ethnic terms and to organize as such.

community forums, and meeting with other indigenous peoples in the region (see <http://ifrsf.org/programs/indigena-health-and-wellness-collaborative/>).

In describing these ceremonies as spiritual we draw on Sutcliffe’s (2003) definition: a hybrid discourse constructed from alternative and popular sources, associated with living experience and inner discourse. In this sense spirituality is different from religion, which is associated with systems and dogma.

Instituto Familiar de la Raza

García has been at the IFR since 1985 and has been the executive director of the organization since 2007. She is a second generation Mexican immigrant: the daughter of farm workers who migrated to California. García describes herself and the IFR as products of the civil rights movement. García has no family tie to Yucatán, but has worked closely with Maya migrants in her work at the IFR. Consistent with the organization's general philosophy, García believes strongly that the rich cultural heritage of the Maya can and should be used to help combat discrimination in the U.S., as well as to help migrants adapt and adjust to U.S. society.

While HTA leaders do not view themselves as indigenous peoples, García underscores the importance of the Maya worldview (*cosmovisión*) as a source of strength and of healing for Maya in San Francisco. García sees the indigenous identity of the Yucatecos “as a flower that has withered from lack of water.” She views the IFR's and Mayab's focus on culture as a way of offering needed water for Maya indigenous identity to flower. García understands “indigenous worldview” as encompassing more than Maya language and the performance of regional dances. She believes that centuries of discrimination against the Maya have resulted in a very deep-seated repression of indigenous-ness. García perceives the programs at Mayab and IFR as helping to “liberate” the Maya, allowing them to flourish as indigenous peoples. For García, expressing indigenous identity is a form of combating discrimination, which has been a focus of her life and work for decades. For example, García has been instrumental in obtaining grants from the Native American Health Center and the Seventh Generation Fund, both focused on native American issues. Working closely with Mayab's Director, García says that she urged

those at the Native American Health Center to see the Maya as “brothers,” ultimately obtaining a grant for \$50,000 for a collaborative project with Mayab on children’s mental health issues.

Asociación Mayab

The director of Asociación Mayab, Pérez Rendón, has been with the organization since its founding in 2005. Pérez is a first generation migrant from Yucatán and was trained as a Medical Doctor. While we did not interview Pérez (he was on a leave of absence in 2012), he has published several articles and research notes. In his written work, Pérez (2007, 84) describes his migrant clients in San Francisco as “a historically oppressed indigenous community.” Similar to second generation migrant leaders profiled by Portes and Rumbaut (2006), Pérez’s framework is one of ethnic and racial discrimination. In the same 2007 piece, Pérez noted that “Maya, as well as other indigenous communities in the United States, struggle more than their Latino counterparts to make their voices heard” (84). While Pérez is a first generation migrant from Yucatán, as an intellectual he seems to have embraced a pan-ethnic framework, through which he understands both his clients’ struggles and his own life’s work.

Mayab’s acting director in 2012, Ruth Gálvez, is a young, thirty-three year old woman born in Oxkutzcab, Yucatán, and belongs to the 1.5 migrant generation. In 1989, when she was eight years old, her parents brought her to the United States. Ruth has adopted a similar pro-ethnic framework used by Quintero, Pérez, and García. While she was filling in as Mayab’s director, she helped coordinate the spiritual healing rituals sponsored by the Indígena Health and Wellness Cooperative, which promote Maya identity.

Although there are only a handful of employees at Mayab, the center has a team of community organizers (*promotores*). Gálvez’s older sister, Loyda, for example, works as a

promotora, and she is paid by the hour to teach embroidery to migrant women who attend morning workshops. We also spoke at length to another Mayab *promotora*, whom we will call Lidia, an undocumented migrant from Yucatán. She told us that she was invited to apply to be a *promotora* because she could speak Maya and that Mayab needed Maya-speakers as translators in the court system. Lidia urgently needed the money and a sanctuary away from an abusive husband. In addition to translation, she guides the workshops together with Loyda, teaching sewing, embroidery, and other handcrafts. Part of her job is to participate in the healing ceremonies sponsored by the Indígena Health and Wellness Cooperative. Participating in these ceremonies puts Lidia in an awkward position, as she converted to Pentecostalism several years ago. She wonders whether the Maya rituals are pagan, and is worried that she is betraying her own faith.

Analysis

The literature on Mixtec organization in California suggests that over the course of several years, Mixtec migrants moved from organization based on individual sending towns to pan-ethnic associations, uniting several indigenous peoples from Oaxaca in California and Oregon. Oaxacan pan-ethnic associations were formed as a response to ethnic and racial discrimination in the U.S., which provided indigenous migrants with a unifying principle around which to organize. Our preliminary findings, based on fieldwork in San Francisco among Maya, suggest that pan-ethnic organization has not occurred among HTA organizations. Maya HTA members in San Francisco do not see themselves as indigenous people and do not perceive racial and ethnic discrimination as a problem. In contrast with the social service organizations, HTA leaders do not perform any type of spiritual ceremonies, in fact some are Catholics and others

belong to diverse Protestant churches. Spiritualism within a Maya framework is not an issue for HTAs. In part, we argue, the absence of pan-ethnic organization among Yucatec HTAs is due to different histories of ethnic formation in Yucatán as compared to other states in Mexico.²² As Maya migration to San Francisco is a fairly recent phenomenon, future researchers can begin to parse out whether Yucatec resistance to pan-ethnic organization diminishes with more time spent in the U.S.

In contrast, leaders of Asociación Mayab and IFR actively attempt to forge an explicitly indigenous identity among their clients. The use of Maya spiritual ceremonies, information about indigenous rights, and promotion of Maya cultures and traditions are all part of Mayab and IFR's efforts to promote mental health and wellbeing. For Maya, especially among first generation migrants, this understanding and use of culture is an unfamiliar one. Maya spiritual ceremonies, for example, are much more common among the New Age visitors (often foreign) to Mayan archeological sites such as Chichén Itza than anything practiced in contemporary Mayan villages throughout Yucatán (see Castañeda 1996). Over time, however, the children of contemporary migrants may very well adopt and embrace a very different view of ethnicity and race than their parents.

Preliminarily, we suggest two main explanations for the differences we observed between HTAs and the two social service organizations regarding their use of ethnic identity as a mobilizing factor: 1) time spent in the U.S. and 2) leaders' different occupational trajectories.

²² Pan-ethnic organization would involve reaching across several state-lines given that Maya is the overwhelmingly dominant indigenous ethnicity in Yucatán peninsula (Yucatán, Campeche, Quintana Roo). By way of contrast, the FIOB, for example, unites several indigenous peoples from within the same state.

First, the HTA leaders with whom we spoke were all recent migrants and still very focused on their home towns and on events in Mexico more broadly. This is quite typical: “Recent findings indicate that, at least in the U.S., immigrant transnationalism is largely a first-generation phenomenon with the second generation being much less interested in these pursuits” (Portes et al. 2008: 1085). In contrast, Gálvez and García, 1.5 and second-generation Mexican-Americans respectively, are focused on their lives in the U.S. and concentrate their professional activity on migrant health and incorporation into U.S. society.

The collaboration between Mayab and IFR leaders is premised on the pervasiveness of ethnic and racial discrimination against Maya in San Francisco. Scholars have suggested that as immigrants spend more time in the U.S., the experience of common discrimination binds them together. Specifically, Portes and Rumbaut (2006) have argued that over time, immigrants organize reactively; ethnic militancy among subsequent generations is tied to reactions against discrimination. These authors note that children of immigrants are more likely than their parents to assume an ethnic identity because of discrimination they have experienced.

Second, Granados and the overwhelming majority of HTA leaders with whom we spoke work in the restaurant business as waiters, busboys, and dishwashers. In terms of their lives in the U.S., they have very concrete goals, such as building an addition on their house in Yucatán, providing an education for their children, buying a new vehicle for their business or a plot of land in Yucatán. Gálvez, Pérez, and García are social workers, and have had extensive contact with governmental officials and the non-profit sector. These very different backgrounds shape the worldviews of these leaders. HTA leaders are much more pragmatic and entrepreneurial in their orientation, while social service providers have embraced U.S. multiculturalism as a framework for understanding their life and work.

In conclusion, all of the leaders we spoke to focused on the benefits of shared cultural ties in helping migrants adapt to life in the U.S., giving them a sense of belonging and of community. HTA leaders draw on a shared sense of regional culture to bring migrants together to raise money for their various projects. The cultural ties that unite migrants are not based on a shared sense of ethnic or racial discrimination in the U.S., but on a regional Yucatec culture, focused on a connection to land, traditional dance, food, music, and language. Ethnicity and culture serve as a kind of glue. As we have seen, Leaders at Mayab and IFR promote a pan-ethnic Maya indigenous identity among their clients. For these leaders, Mayan spiritual ceremonies help their clients cope with the trauma, abuse, and discrimination to which they are subject. In this view, Maya migrants are seen as possessing an inherent indigenous essence that can (and should) be nurtured and cultivated. HTA and social service agency leaders diverge in the way they define and understand Maya ethnicity and culture, but they agree that it has content and can be defined. As social scientists, we tend to look at ethnicity and culture as a process, rather than as something to perform or to possess. Just like the leaders we interviewed, our view of ethnicity and culture is shaped significantly by our own backgrounds and profession.

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