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SOCIAL NETWORKS, GENDER, AND IMMIGRANT INCORPORATION: RESOURCES AND CONSTRAINTS*

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Most research on social networks and immigrant incorporation focuses on the short-term and positive functions of networks, neglecting changes in networks over time. I present a dynamic and variable portrayal of networks to demonstrate how they gradually assume different forms and functions for women and for men that differentially affect settlement outcomes, particularly opportunities to become legal. The gendered social relations of neighborhood, work, and voluntary associations interact to produce this outcome. The conclusions suggest that social networks can both strengthen and weaken over time, can change differentially for different segments of the immigrant community, and therefore can have disparate effects on incorporation.

In their attempts to understand contemporary migration to industrialized nations, researchers focus increasingly on the concept of social networks. In the migration literature, networks refer primarily to personal relationships based on family, kin, friendship, and community (Boyd 1989:639). Current migration research emphasizes social networks in various stages of the migration process, including (1) decisions to migrate (Grasmuck and Pessar 1991), (2) direction and persistence of migration flows (Massey et al. 1987), (3) transnational links (Kearney 1995), and (4) settlement patterns and incorporation (Hagan 1994; Massey et al. 1987).

Research on social networks and immigrant incorporation emphasizes how networks reduce the short-term costs of settlement. In the initial stage of settlement, migrants' networks in the receiving area provide social capital to assist them in adapting

to their new environment (Browning and Rodriguez 1985). Immigrants settling in communities with well-established networks generally seem to be incorporated into U.S. society more smoothly than do those in communities with poorly developed networks. Communities with mature networks provide newcomers with emotional and cultural support and various other resources, including initial housing and information about job opportunities; the latter can lead rapidly to access to labor market niches and the acquisition of new skills (Bailey and Waldinger 1991). Over time, networks in the settlement area develop ethnic associations that provide organizational support for newcomers and additional settings for circulating information and assistance (Massey et al. 1987).

Although research on social networks in immigrant incorporation has explained the relative ease with which some immigrant groups adapt to their new environment, Boyd (1989:655) argues that models of networks are too static; they emphasize only the networks' existence, operation, and persistence but pay little attention to their transformations over time, particularly the conditions under which they weaken or erode. Others remark on migration researchers' tendency to overlook variation in the resources that immigrants draw from their networks (Boyd 1989; Grasmuck and Pessar 1991; Hagan 1994; Kibria 1993).

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Recent research on immigrant incorporation challenges this simplistic representation of social networks by taking a long-term view of network dynamics and by examining group variations in the position and use of networks. In her study of Salvadorans in San Francisco, Menjivar (1994) shows that kinship-based networks ease the initial stage of migration, but lack of material resources in the ethnic community and fluctuations in the local economy weaken networks' effectiveness over time. Hondagneu-Sotelo's (1994) study of networks among Mexican domestic workers in the Bay area finds that newcomers breaking into the industry are sometimes exploited by their more seasoned counterparts. These findings are corroborated by Mahler's (1995) study of Salvadoran neighborhoods in Long Island.

Recent debates about ethnic enclave economies also examine whether enclaves are means of long-term economic advancement for all segments of immigrant groups. For example, revisited research on Miami's Cuban enclave (Portes and Jensen 1989) shows that women receive few of the benefits experienced by male coethnics. Similarly, research on New York City's Chinese enclave (Zhou and Logan 1989) finds negative human capital returns for female workers only and suggests that the positive outcomes of enclave economies for men may be enjoyed at the cost of women's opportunities. Gilbertson's (1995) research on Dominican and Colombian workers in Latino firms in New York City also concludes that the success of small business owners and male workers is won at a cost to immigrant women. These studies not only challenge the assumption that social networks have positive long-term benefits but also suggest that networks operate in gendered ways to produce systematic differences in labor market outcomes for men and for women.

In this research I attempt to further the understanding of the links among gender, social networks, and socioeconomic adaptation and mobility. Drawing on a study of the settlement process of an undocumented migrant community in Houston, Texas, I identify particular conditions under which social networks can develop or weaken. Then I show how these variations in network structure influence men's and women's different

adaptation experiences. I focus primarily on the attainment of legal immigrant status. Specifically, I show how the social relations of work, neighborhood, and voluntary associations create different network structures for men and for women. Last I examine how gendered network structures differentially affect men's and women's ability to become legal residents under the Immigration Reform and Control Act of 1986 (IRCA). The findings have implications beyond the effects of gendered social networks on opportunities to legalize: As the period of settlement increases, the differences between men's and women's contexts of adaptation transform their respective network structures. Differences in network dynamics may account over the long-run for divergence more generally in the social, economic, and legal incorporation of immigrant women and men.

RESEARCH APPROACH

This research is based on a three-year ethnographic study focusing on the settlement of a Maya community in Houston (Hagan 1994). The larger study followed the development of the Maya community, tracing the migration and settlement histories of both pioneer and recent migrants. One of the central objectives was to examine how this community of approximately 1,000 undocumented migrants from Guatemala responded to the U.S. legalization or "amnesty" program of the mid-1980s.

I began fieldwork in the summer of 1986. From June 1987 through March 1990, I lived in one of several large apartment complexes that houses the majority of the Maya. I then spent the summer of 1990 in the "sending" community in Guatemala. The study generated data on community- and group-level behavior, and documented in detail the experiences of 74 Maya—32 women and 42 men. In addition, in 1993 I revisited members of this group to assess network changes resulting from legalization.

I studied this Maya community in part because of the mature development of its social structure. Since the arrival of the pioneer migrant in 1978, the Maya have developed extensive community-based networks (e.g., neighborhood, housing, job, and association

networks) while maintaining strong social and economic links with the home community. These networks regulate autonomous migratory flows (Rodriguez 1996) from the highlands of Guatemala to Houston and explain the Maya immigrants' successful initial adaptation (Hagan 1994; Rodriguez 1987).

My chief research question was "What role do immigrant-based networks play in long-term settlement opportunities?" The passage of IRCA provided an opportunity to examine the relative strengths and weaknesses of coethnic and interethnic social networks in facilitating or blocking participation in the legalization program provided by IRCA. Surprisingly I was able to observe some unexpected implications of migrant-based networks for incorporation. As a result I learned not only that networks have diffuse importance to immigrants but also that the differences between women's and men's network structures are critical to their long-run adjustment.

NETWORK DYNAMICS IN THE MAYA COMMUNITY

The social foundation of Totonicapán Maya migration to Houston can be traced to the fall of 1978, when Juan Xuc,¹ a young weaver and subsistence farmer, made his way from the rural western highlands of Guatemala to the postindustrial environment of Houston in search of wage work. Business was booming in Houston during the 1970s. The escalating price of oil had fueled the area's economy to a state of hyper growth and had indirectly created demand for low-skilled workers in the burgeoning service sector. Juan easily found a job as a maintenance worker in a rapidly growing supermarket chain. Within several months he had established sufficient contacts at work to find a position for his brother-in-law, Pablo.

News of opportunities for wage work quickly reached Juan's village, San Pedro. Slowly but steadily, Juan found maintenance jobs for male kin and friends from his home-

town.² By 1981 Juan had been promoted to supervisor (*encargado* to his fellow Maya), was earning \$5 an hour, and had saved enough money to bring his wife, Carmen, and their two children to Houston. His position as *encargado* of maintenance jobs enabled Juan to recruit a steady stream of male migrants, all of whom he directed to maintenance positions in the same retail chain.

Carmen's arrival in Houston coincided with a resurgence of local demand for private household domestic workers and child-care providers, especially for live-in positions, to clean the homes and care for the young children of professional women entering or resuming careers in the area's expanding economy. Assisted by the wife of Juan's boss, Carmen and Juan pioneered the Maya women's entry into this job niche. At the request of her employer's friends, Carmen recruited a small stream of women from San Pedro, who assumed positions as live-in and day domestics in Houston. This initial group included Pablo's wife and the wives and close kin of Juan's earlier recruits. Because wage work for Maya was scarce back home and because of the economic advantages of employment-based, live-in arrangements for newcomer single women, female workers soon streamed north. Increasingly, then, both the men and the women relied on same-sex kin and friends in Houston and San Pedro to organize the migration journey and to gain access to established gendered labor market niches on arrival in Houston.³

² Like Juan, many of the first Maya to leave San Pedro were subsistence farmers who supplemented their income by producing local crafts, especially woven goods. The erosion of economic opportunities for subsistence farmers and artisans in the Guatemalan highlands, caused in part by economic decline and political strife, led many of Juan's fellow Maya to seek wage employment in the United States.

³ Employers of the Maya typically hire men for maintenance positions and women for live-in domestic positions. Although there are non-sex-specific positions in the firm employing the men, such as cashiers and food counter workers, these jobs require English-language skills, and workers in these positions are more visible to the firm's predominantly upscale, Anglo clients. The undocumented Maya cannot meet these qualifications; thus both sexes are excluded from these positions.

¹ Pseudonyms are used for the names of all the Maya, and for the Guatemalan *municipios* (townships and villages) from which they come. Totonicapán is an authentic department located in the western highlands of Guatemala.

Table 1. Occupations among Members of the Study Group: Maya Immigrants, Houston, Texas, 1990

| Occupation | Women | | Men | | Community | |
|---------------------|--------|---------|--------|---------|-----------|---------|
| | Number | Percent | Number | Percent | Number | Percent |
| Manager | — | — | 1 | 2.4 | 1 | 1.3 |
| Maintenance/stocker | 1 | 3.1 | 35.5 | 84.5 | 36.5 | 49.3 |
| Mechanic | — | — | 1 | 2.4 | 1 | 1.3 |
| Baker | — | — | 2 | 4.6 | 2 | 2.7 |
| Cook | — | — | 1 | 2.4 | 1 | 1.3 |
| Domestic | 31 | 96.9 | — | — | 31 | 41.3 |
| Day laborer | — | — | 1.5 | 3.6 | 1.5 | 2.7 |
| Total | 32 | 100.0 | 42 | 99.9 | 74 | 99.9 |

Note: One Maya with two occupations is counted twice, .5 for each occupation.

By the early 1980's, many households in San Pedro had kin living and working in Houston. By the mid- to late-1980s, social networks had become increasingly complex; they extended beyond San Pedro to reach households in more than eight nearby *municipios* in Totonicapán and also in the neighboring departments of Quezaltenango and El Quiché. By 1986, close to 1,000 Maya from Totonicapán had made their way to Houston and were living in a series of apartment buildings adjacent to the building where Juan initially had settled.

Juan's and Carmen's roles in the development of the Maya community structure were not limited to the initial recruitment of workers. Their efforts, and those of other community members, led to the development of an ethnic neighborhood and several Maya-based organizations, including a Protestant church and several community soccer teams. Today there are more than 1,800 Totonicapán Maya in Houston.

A central function of a well-developed immigrant community structure is to furnish newcomers with resources for finding wage work. This is particularly important for undocumented migrants such as the Totonicapán Maya in Houston. Yet, although all newcomer Maya utilize community-based job networks to find employment, these networks operate differently for women and for men. Table 1 illustrates the occupational clustering of the Maya in Houston. Some 85 percent of the men in the study group are employed as stock or maintenance laborers in the same firm where Juan, the pioneer Maya, has worked since his arrival.

Men's Work

The concentration of men in the maintenance departments of one supermarket chain can be explained largely by local labor market opportunities, by the Maya's well-developed social network structure, and by the men's ability to use these ethnic resources to control the work process. The Maya men work for a Houston supermarket chain that was established in 1966, just before the boom years. Unlike many other businesses, which closed their doors during the area's recession in the mid-1980s, this supermarket chain prospered. Since the beginning of economic recovery in the late 1980s, the chain has grown rapidly; it now employs more than 22,000 workers in 102 stores throughout Texas—half of these are in Houston. This growth facilitated the Maya's construction of an ethnic-based system to control the social organization of the work process. The system is managed by the *encargado*, who holds a supervisory position among coethnics in each of the stores employing Maya men (e.g., supervisor of the maintenance crew). This position is usually awarded to a leader in the ethnic community and who also has worked in the company for a long time. *Encargados* may not be formally recognized by other, non-Maya workers and managers in the store.

This ethnic-based labor system relies on the community's social networks to control recruitment, work schedules, and promotion. Friends and kin already employed in the supermarket chain alert prospective workers, whether in Houston or in Guatemala, of the

availability of a job. A prospective worker arriving in Houston is recommended to the employer by a member of the sponsoring network, usually the *encargado*. Social interaction between Maya workers and department and store managers flows almost entirely through the *encargado*, who also organizes his crew's work schedules and determines their promotions.

As time passes, the store manager relies increasingly on the *encargado* for new workers, and the *encargado* increasingly controls the work process. As Juan explained to me,

We (the workers) know even before the manager when a worker is going to ask to move [to another department], and we ourselves are already deciding who to bring in [as a replacement]. So we know when someone is going to move or leave, even though the store managers do not yet know. They themselves [the workers] say, "I want to move up and I want to talk to them [the store managers] if they will allow me." So one [the *encargado*] knows then [and] . . . talks to the department manager and says, "You know he is going to move up, and I need another worker." And I bring him one. And so there is no time [for managers] to make an announcement about an opening. That's why another [non-Maya] worker cannot enter [the maintenance department]. It is not because they [the managers] don't want him. It is because we know when someone is going to leave and, though the managers do not know, we already have a person ready [for the vacated job]. (Hagan 1994:63-64)

It is no wonder that none of the men in the study group and few of those in the larger Maya community employed in this firm have left.⁴ Social control of the recruitment process translates into social comfort for Maya workers. Under the *encargado* system, Maya workers can miss work for several days without fear of being reported to the store manager. Indeed, during the summer months workers arrange vacations during their hometown's yearly fiesta. The men virtually

have reorganized the work process according to social and cultural practices back home in Guatemala.

Women's Work

The Maya women also cluster in one industry and in one type of job. As Table 1 shows, all but one of the women in the study group are private-household domestic workers; the large majority of these are live-in domestics. Their occupational concentration can be explained by local labor market opportunities, by the Maya's entry into what Diner (1983) calls a "labor vacuum" (a job not wanted by others), and by the women's use of social network strategies.

Historically, domestic work in Houston was dominated by African American women, and a small number of Mexican American and Mexican immigrant women. Beginning in the 1970s, however, the number of African Americans declined as younger cohorts enjoyed greater employment opportunities. During the 1980s, African Americans' domestic employment in Texas plummeted more than 50 percent to its current low level of less than 4 percent (U.S. Bureau of the Census 1993a). At the same time, labor force participation in Houston among women aged 16 and older of all races continued to rise, surpassing the national average in the mid-1980s and reaching over 61 percent in 1990. As U.S.-born minority groups shift out of domestic work, the vacuum is filled increasingly by immigrants, especially newcomer Central American women who rarely move out of this job niche (Hagan 1994; Repak 1994; U.S. Bureau of the Census 1983, 1993b; U.S. Department of Labor 1996).⁵

⁴ After acquiring legal status, a handful of workers left this firm to work in a movie theater chain, and a few more left to work in a restaurant chain. Their jobs are still low-skilled (e.g., janitors, dishwashers) and therefore do not reflect vertical economic mobility. These moves are potentially significant, however, in that they may diversify male-based job networks.

⁵ Data from the 1-percent 1990 Public Use Microdata Sample (PUMS) from the U.S. Census show that while native-born employment in private household domestic work declined by 27 percent from 1980 to 1990, foreign-born employment in this niche increased by 73 percent during the same period. A follow-up survey of the population legalized under IRCA ranked private-household cleaning and private household child care as the leading occupations among women. Central American women especially were concentrated in this job niche over time (U.S. Department of Labor 1996).

As undocumented recent arrivals with little or no experience in the labor market, Maya and other Central American women typically find jobs as domestic workers, as have Mexican newcomers (Hondagneu-Sotelo 1994), other disadvantaged nonwhite groups (Rollins 1985; Romero 1988), and earlier cohorts of immigrant women (especially single women) in urban areas throughout the United States (Diner 1983; Glenn 1986; Katzman 1978). As live-in domestics, the women typically juggle child-care and housecleaning responsibilities over a six-day (often including evenings) work week and generally earn a starting salary of less than \$100 per week.

A handful of the better-established women in the community, such as Juan's wife Carmen, have graduated first to more lucrative and more autonomous day work, and then to what Romero (1988) calls "job work," in which the worker performs housecleaning work in several households. However, unlike Mexican American domestics in southern Texas (Romero 1988) and Mexican immigrant domestics in the Bay area (Hondagneu-Sotelo 1994), many Central American live-in domestics in Houston and elsewhere have not made the transition into day work (Hagan 1994; Repak 1994; U.S. Department of Labor 1996). Historically, this job niche in Houston has been controlled by the better-established immigrant and minority groups and, more recently, by large-scale commercial services.

For most Maya women, the first live-in position is located by kin and friends already living and working in Houston. Typically an established domestic worker learns of a job opening through another worker or through her *patrona*, as the Maya call the female employer. The Maya worker then notifies a recent arrival of the available position. Over time, the newcomer domestic may become incorporated into the larger network structure; this enables her to move on to a more desirable live-in position (e.g., better pay, more time off, fewer children). As the period of settlement increases, a few fortunate domestics (those who acquire English-language skills, purchase a car, and/or acquire legal status) make the transition to day work. However, social mobility to more desirable forms of domestic work remains limited in this competitive and ethnically bound industry.

Network Transformation

Although the social resources provided by community networks facilitate women's and men's initial entry and adaptation in post-industrial Houston, over time Maya men enjoy greater economic and social opportunities than do Maya women. Several structural factors account for this divergence: the different dynamics of men's and women's social relations of work, the extent to which women's and men's job networks are linked to coethnic and nonethnic networks, and the size and growth rates of the workplaces and industries in which men and women are incorporated. These factors interact to increasingly produce observable differences in men's and women's social networks.

The newcomer men enjoy almost immediate access to jobs, and their wages increase steadily. They benefit from their cultural affinity, from which they developed the encargado system to control and restructure the social organization of the work process. They benefit from working in a growing retail chain that provides opportunities for promotion, rising wages, and benefit packages. They also benefit from resources and information flows circulating throughout an extensive set of well-established and mature male networks, ranging from the neighborhood to workplaces to community life-cycle events at the ethnic church. As their length of time in Houston increases, the men also forge links with nonethnic neighbors and coworkers, and begin to take advantage of the weak ties generated from membership in a large recreational association in the area (McPherson and Smith-Lovin 1982); thus they bridge and maximize information flows.

Opportunities are much more limited for Maya women. Newcomer women in the community encounter less mature and thus less resourceful job networks. Live-in domestic workers can provide only limited assistance to recent female arrivals. Confined largely to the employer's house and to unequal patterns of exchange within the employer's family, they do not benefit from the social relations of reciprocity that men find in the ethnic neighborhood. Nor do they benefit from the network resources provided through recreational organizations such as

the soccer league. News of a job opening is restricted to information passed through the employer or through other live-in domestics they see at Sunday religious and other community gatherings. Further, because only a few household positions are open at any one time, domestic workers compete with their own friends and kin. Consequently women wait far longer than men to find jobs; each newcomer woman must gain access to a separate employer, while teams of men are hired by one employer through the *encargado*. Moreover, women workers are rarely recruited from Guatemala because employers of domestic workers require a personal interview before hiring, particularly when child care is part of the job description. Also, working in an unregulated industry usually yields earnings below minimum wage for work weeks extending well beyond the customary 40 hours. Thus, unlike the Maya men, who use ethnic ties to control the work process and enhance mobility in the workplace, Maya women derive little long-term benefit from their cultural affinity.

Perhaps the most important factors leading to network transformation in the Maya community are the social consequences of women working long and unpredictable hours in the confines of an employer's house (Gonzalez de la Rocha 1994; Hondagneu-Sotelo 1994; Repak 1994; Rollins 1985; Romero 1988). Working in employers' homes in affluent residential enclaves located some miles from main bus lines, women have few opportunities to interact with coethnics from the neighborhood or with other working-class families elsewhere. Their relationships are constrained by residential isolation among Anglos, who are economically, socially, and geographically remote. The women are uprooted from the social relations of exchange and reciprocity that characterize working-class urban families (Hernandez-Leon 1996); thus their ties with other coethnics weaken. Social contact with local shopkeepers and other providers of goods and services is also constrained by the physical remoteness of the employer's neighborhood.

Unable to maintain horizontal links with either coethnics or nonethnics, the women become increasingly dependent on and controlled by their *patronas*. This situation leads to the breakdown of ethnic-based networks

and to eventual isolation. In contrast to the men in the community, who live and work side by side, pool rides to work, and meet for soccer matches on weekends, the women typically work alone from Monday through Saturday in their employers' households. Only one day (Sunday) is left to reestablish community ties through neighborhood and religious activities.

Women's uneven participation in coethnic voluntary associations also limits the formation of extensive networks. Religious activities are organized largely by small groups of Maya women. Although these associational activities, such as Bible-reading classes, Quiché language classes for the young, and tamale sales for the upkeep of the church, are crucial to maintaining ethnic solidarity and reproducing Maya culture in Houston, they limit women's involvement in other neighborhood events that might provide opportunities for developing social ties with nonethnics. Ironically, some of the women—those who leave their children in Guatemala with relatives—still possess their closest ties with friends and family in the home community.

Because of their particular neighborhood and work conditions, Maya women's initial social network structure (which linked them to Houston, the neighborhood, work, community events, and church activities) steadily deteriorates. Ties to the Maya community become weaker as a more limited social network structure emerges; thus domestics become increasingly vulnerable to their employers' whims. This situation is especially problematic for single women in the community (a group that constituted more than half of the study sample at any one time) because they cannot rely on support either from spouses and other coethnic males in Houston or from their parents in Guatemala for information leading to better employment opportunities.

Thus, over time, the structures of men's and women's networks diverge. Men's networks expand; women's contract. The implications of these gendered networks extend beyond social and economic opportunities; they also influence men's and women's long-term settlement opportunities, as is evidenced by their uneven participation in a major legalization program.

Table 2. Year of Arrival and Immigrant Status of the Maya Study Group: Houston, Texas, 1990

| Arrival/Status | Women | | Men | | Community | |
|-----------------------------------|--------|---------|--------|---------|-----------|---------|
| | Number | Percent | Number | Percent | Number | Percent |
| <i>Year of Arrival</i> | | | | | | |
| Before January 1, 1982 | 2 | 6.2 | 8 | 19.0 | 10 | 13.5 |
| 1982 | 2 | 6.2 | 3 | 7.1 | 5 | 6.7 |
| 1983 | 2 | 6.2 | 3 | 7.1 | 5 | 6.7 |
| 1984 | 3 | 9.4 | 5 | 11.9 | 8 | 10.8 |
| 1985 | 6 | 18.7 | 11 | 26.2 | 17 | 23.0 |
| 1986 | 11 | 34.4 | 8 | 19.0 | 19 | 25.7 |
| 1987 | 1 | 3.1 | — | — | 1 | 1.3 |
| 1988 | 2 | 6.2 | 4 | 9.5 | 6 | 8.1 |
| January–April, 1989 | 3 | 9.4 | — | — | 3 | 4.0 |
| Total | 32 | 99.8 | 42 | 99.8 | 74 | 99.8 |
| <i>Post IRCA Legal Status</i> | | | | | | |
| Legalization program | 9 | 28.1 | 32 | 76.2 | 41 | 55.4 |
| Political asylee | — | — | 1 | 2.4 | 1 | 1.3 |
| Permanent resident or visa holder | — | — | 3 | 7.1 | 3 | 4.1 |
| Undocumented | 23 | 71.9 | 6 | 14.3 | 29 | 39.2 |
| Total | 32 | 100.0 | 42 | 100.0 | 74 | 100.0 |

GENDERED NETWORKS AND LEGALIZATION

A central provision of IRCA was the general legalization program, which provided legal status for undocumented immigrants who could show that they had lived continuously in the United States since before January 1, 1982. At the same time, IRCA imposed sanctions on employers who hired unauthorized workers. Having arrived in Houston after the eligibility cutoff date, many members of the Totoncapán Maya community did not qualify for legalization (see Table 2). Consequently most persons in the community assumed a "wait and see" attitude: They *waited* to be fired from their jobs, at which time they would *see* about returning home. Thus, when the doors to the legalization office opened, only a handful of eligible immigrants in the community began preparing their applications. Under the guidance of legal counsel, the first cohort of applicants meticulously organized their papers and submitted their applications in late June of 1987.

The community waited. Within a few months, several of the applicants had received temporary residence cards. Their success stories spread quickly through the community; many were quite surprised to learn how easily the applicants had been screened by INS and had received documentation. Some went so far as to compare the program to lotteries in Guatemala. Interest was piqued, and legalization became a major topic of discussion at community events. By late fall of 1987, no one had lost a job as a result of employer sanctions; in fact, several of the women encountered no difficulty when they changed live-in positions in the summer of 1987, and several return migrants slid easily into job slots in the supermarket chain despite their lack of work authorization.

Events then moved in an unforeseen direction. Cesar and Andres, two young men in the community who technically were not eligible, decided to take a chance and file applications. They breezed through their first INS interview. Less than a month later, they received work authorization cards and were

notified that their residence status would be determined within six months. In less than a week, community networks had circulated their success stories among the Maya; by now, surprise had turned into mild astonishment. The information that passed through these networks relayed to community members both the technical workings of the application process and, most important, the short-term benefit of applying (i.e., immediate work authorization). Coworkers, neighbors, household members, and even teammates at soccer matches discussed "how to do it."

By the end of 1987, formal eligibility was no longer a significant consideration for migrants applying for legalization; their decisions depended more strongly on the experience of others in the community. In the long run, whether formally eligible or not, most Maya decided to apply in response to the information passing through the migrants' social networks. If a coworker applied, other coworkers followed suit. If a housemate applied, others did the same. Most migrants interpreted the program as a way to buy time to earn money; few expected their petitions to succeed.

Not all of the Maya benefited from the accumulated information about legalization. The women were much less well-informed than the men: Their live-in domestic positions had restricted their interaction with others in the community, and therefore their knowledge about the legalization process. Although most women eventually decided to apply for legalization, they encountered an additional obstacle when it came time to document their eligibility.

During the course of the legalization program, INS substantially relaxed its documentation requirements. Applicants originally were required to present three types of evidence to INS: proof of residence since January 1, 1982, proof of financial responsibility, and proof of identity. In the ideal scenario, these pieces of documentation would include verifiable evidence such as rent receipts, telephone bills, W-2 forms, and paycheck stubs. As the INS watched the immigrants flow through the process, however, it quickly learned how difficult it was for an undocumented person to gather such documentation. By the final quarter of the year-long pro-

gram, then, INS had relaxed its requirements; it accepted affidavits and intermittent evidence as adaptations to the realities of undocumented life (Hagan and Baker 1993). Although this more inclusive position triggered a rush of applications in the final quarter of the program, many in the Maya community found it difficult even to secure affidavits.

A gendered network structure, characterized by unequal access to resources provided by strong and weak ties, enabled most of the men to gather the documentation necessary to legalize but restricted females' participation in the program, even though a large proportion of both women and men were ineligible (see Table 2). Being well integrated into community-based networks, the men received detailed information about others' experiences (e.g., the absolute minimum documentation necessary to submit a file, knowledge of who might supply affidavits for periods impossible to document with verifiable evidence).

In addition, because the men were concentrated largely in a regulated industry in which the INS made great outreach efforts, employers of the firm were better informed about their responsibilities, rights, and protections under IRCA than were employers in the private-household domestic industry. Male workers easily obtained evidence of an employment history from their employers in the form of pay stubs. Rent receipts, telephone bills, and electrical bills were used to verify residency. Coworkers (and their family members), neighbors, and other (non-Maya) immigrants from the soccer league supplemented application files with affidavits attesting to proof of residency and employment for periods not covered by more verifiable forms of documentation. These weak ties—ties with longer-established immigrants and native-born persons in the Houston community—became crucial in providing the men with affidavits during the documentation process.

In contrast, although most women attempted legalization, all but a handful abandoned the attempt because of the numerous obstacles they encountered while collecting documentation. Because they did not live in households in the ethnic community, few of the Maya women were able to furnish proof

of residency in the form of rent receipts or electrical bills. Being confined to an employer's house and being paid in cash for domestic work proved to be a tremendous disadvantage for the Maya women, as it probably was for other immigrants working in unregulated jobs. When it came time for the women to gather documentation, they found that they were dependent on affidavits from only one source, the female employer, who in most cases refused to provide them.⁶

One employer, Martha, a 34-year-old professional and mother of one, gave the following reasons for refusing to provide documentation for her domestic, Graciela, a single Maya woman who had been working and living in her home for three years. Martha's comments reflect a common tale:

I would like to help Graciela, but we are a bit nervous about the legal implications of writing an affidavit. It's not INS. We haven't paid social security for Graciela in the past. Now we would have to report it. My husband is a lawyer; it might get a bit sticky. He won't bend on this. My mother and he believe that INS will report us to IRS. I just can't take the risk.

The concerns of Martha and of other employers proved prescient with the emergence of the "Nannygate" scandal. Yet their decision not to provide affidavits (even employers of eligible domestics refused) caused most women in the study group to abandon their attempt to legalize. Moreover, if one domestic gave up, others became disenchanted and followed suit. This suggests that although the strong female-based ties helped recent arrivals in their search for a job, they acted as a hindrance in the documentation process. The redundant information transmitted through strong ties of kinship and community are more likely to be characteristic of the information passed via women's networks than information circulated through men's networks, because women's contacts tend to be localized in family and neighborhood, while men's ties tend to extend to a variety of occupational and associational set-

tings (Gonzalez de la Rocha 1994; Smith-Lovin and McPherson 1993). Women suffered a clear disadvantage in that (unlike the men) they had not developed weak ties with persons outside the Maya community. They could not rely on landlords, neighbors, co-workers, or area service providers to verify their residency or their employment. Sonya, one of the many women who couldn't obtain an affidavit from her employer, was so desperate that she roamed her employer's neighborhood, going door-to-door, in search of a familiar-looking person who would help her. None did.

Nine women in the study group, however, did acquire legal status; four of these worked as day domestics, and seven were married. Both day domestics and married women benefited from their links to a more extensive network system that included weak ties. Day domestics had a greater chance of finding one employer, among the several for whom they worked, who would provide an affidavit. The seven married women in the sample had an advantage over single women in benefiting from the resources provided by their husbands' weak ties to members of established immigrant and native-born groups (Kossoudji and Ranney 1984).

Despite the resources provided to women through their husbands' social ties, however, several of these women commented on the patriarchal constraints and consequences associated with legalization. Some men refused to help their partners; other men who attained legal status used it as a bargaining chip in their precarious relationships with their female partners, thus increasing the women's dependence on them. In two cases, women remained in abusive relationships with their husbands in the hope of a successful petition once their husbands became legal.

In sum, for most members of the community, the process of documenting residency and work began with insurmountable problems. Community-based networks, however, made the process increasingly less difficult because these ties provided the detailed knowledge needed to convert awareness into action. Nonethnic ties produced the documentation necessary to file a legalization application. The Maya women, however, were the exception to this pattern.

⁶ In 18 cases, women asked me to act as intermediary in collecting documentation to prove residency and employment. Although I assisted them, I never solicited this role. Moreover, as their outcomes reveal, my help was to no avail.

DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

The findings of this study suggest that we must rethink our understanding of the long-term interactions among immigrants' social networks, gender, and incorporation outcomes. Critical for immigrants' long-term incorporation is whether the social context of neighborhoods, workplaces, and associations fosters the development of an expansive network of "weak ties" (Granovetter 1973) with non-coethnics. Most of the research on immigrants' settlement and social networks highlights the short-term benefits of family- and kin-based resources for initial settlement, but does not illuminate the effects of network dynamics over time. This case study of the Maya in Houston illustrates how newcomers to the community draw on the resources of these social networks to find housing and jobs. Immigrants also can draw on such social relations long after the initial settlement stage: The circulation of information through these networks facilitated many community members' decision to legalize.

As the settlement period lengthens, however, disadvantages of immigrant-based social networks can and sometimes do emerge. Migrants can become so tightly encapsulated in social networks based on strong ties to coethnics that they lose some of the advantages associated with developing weak ties with residents outside the community. The social context of private-household domestic work prevented the Maya women from developing horizontal links of exchange and reciprocity with non-Maya. As they were confined to a diminishing set of personal networks and to the strong ties on which those networks are built, their pool of resources diminished. In contrast, the Maya men benefited from the social relations of work, neighborhood, and recreation, all of which enabled the development of social ties with other long-term immigrants and native-born persons. These weak ties proved invaluable for securing affidavits in their legalization efforts.

Gendered networks for immigrant incorporation have far-reaching implications. In the case of the Maya, such networks operated so as to limit the women's ability to settle legally in the United States, while they enhanced the men's ability to do so. Because of

residential isolation of private-household domestic work, undocumented domestic workers in other metropolitan areas probably could not verify employment and residency for legalization. It is also likely that other undocumented women working in similar settings (small, unregulated, segregated by sex and ethnicity, personalistic, and involving patriarchal or vertical ties with the employer) found it difficult to produce a six-year paper trail of their residential and employment history in the United States. Nationwide such gender differences in employment and in consequent network phenomena may account for the high turnout of men—a sex ratio of 1.38 for the total legalized population of 1.7 million—as well for the 127,000 spouses and 46,000 unmarried partners of legalization applicants who were in the household at the time of application but did apply (U.S. Immigration and Naturalization 1992).⁷

The gender differences in network formation that I identify among Guatemalans may well apply more generally to other immigrant groups and other incorporation outcomes. This will be true insofar as men's and women's residential patterns, occupational niches, and association memberships imply the development of different network structures (Gonzalez de la Rocha 1994; Sassen 1995; Smith-Lovin and McPherson 1993). This does not mean, however, that other gendered networks will necessarily take the same form and direction as those in the Maya community. Nor does it mean that gendered transformations in migrant-based social networks always benefit men's incorporation experience. Among Vietnamese-American families in Philadelphia, for example, Kibria

⁷ Despite the stable gender composition of the U.S. foreign-born population enumerated in the Current Population Survey, the predominance of women in legal streams (Donato 1992), and the almost equal representation of women and men in undocumented flows (Passel and Woodrow 1984), men outnumber women in the total legalized population by roughly 58 to 42 percent. This sex ratio of 1.38 is considerably higher than the undocumented sex ratio of 1.14 estimated in 1980 (Passel and Woodrow 1984). Moreover, the number of spouses and unmarried partners who did not apply was probably even larger because this figure does not include unmarried women not in the households at time of application (i.e., live-in domestic workers).

(1993) showed that network transformations sometimes can benefit women's incorporation outcomes. In particular, she found that when females' responsibilities are expanded in the settlement area, women's networks can grow and diversify to include contacts with institutions and organizations outside the ethnic community. Regardless of the direction, however, the outcome remains gendered: The development of each sex's network structure may yield different benefits.

To date, most migration studies have focused exclusively on the dynamics of personal networks. We need additional research on the development and role of nonethnic ties in immigrant incorporation. In this paper, I have demonstrated that the development of weak ties is crucial for providing opportunities to settle legally in the United States. Scholars outside migration research emphasize the importance of weak ties in enabling economic mobility (Granovetter 1973), facilitating better health (Berkman and Breslow 1983), and providing job access to disadvantaged inner-city populations (Wilson 1991).

Migration studies could benefit from paying more attention to this distinction between strong ties and weak ties and from broadening their focus to outcomes beyond labor market performance. By addressing the concept of weak ties, we have the potential to shift the focus from personal ties among immigrants to include the role of contacts with nonethnic organizations and institutions in the incorporation process. By refining the ways in which we employ network considerations and by incorporating a broader and more dynamic view of social networks, we will be better able to understand the impact of gender and other group differences on immigrant incorporation.

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