

*¡Oye Compadre!*  
**The Chef Needs A Dishwasher:  
Yucatecan Men  
In The Dallas Restaurant Economy**

**Rachel H. Adler**

Department of Sociology and Anthropology  
The College of New Jersey

**ABSTRACT:** Dallas, Texas has a vibrant restaurant economy. Trendy, expensive restaurants, managed by well-known “celebrity” chefs, are plentiful. These establishments could not function without the immigrants, predominantly Mexican, who perform most of the behind-the-scenes labor. Yucatecan men, from a single town in the northern part of that state, are an example of an immigrant group which has become incorporated in the restaurant niche of the Dallas economy. This article presents an overview of the Yucatecan community and describes the men’s incorporation into the Dallas restaurant economy.

## **Introduction**

Take a look behind the scenes of any restaurant in Dallas, Texas, and you are likely to find male Mexican dishwashers and food preparers. Who are these men and how do their work experiences affect their incorporation into Dallas

society? In this article, I examine a group of migrants from an area in northern Yucatán, Mexico, who are employed almost exclusively in the Dallas restaurant economy, and I show how their restaurant employment affects their experiences as migrants in Dallas.

### Yucatecans in Dallas

This study was conducted between 1997 and 1999. At that time, there were approximately 200-250 men, women, and children from Kaal,<sup>1</sup> Yucatán, living in Dallas; today, in 2005, there are even more. As of 1995, the population of the *municipio* (county) of Kaal was 5,621, of which 4,869 lived in the town itself (INEGI 1996). The primary economic activity in Kaal is *henequen* (sisal) production. People supplement their *henequen* income by farming *milpa* (plots) and consuming at least some of what they produce. Despite several government jobs, small-scale commerce, a few domestic positions for women, construction, and the kinds of activities just described, there is not sufficient economic opportunity in Kaal to meet subsistence needs. To support their families, many men migrate either to the capital city of Mérida, to Cancún, or to the United States.

I surveyed 100 Kaaleño migrants in Dallas in a non-random snowball sample. The population surveyed included 37 women and 63 men (this included all the women in Dallas at the time of research). The age distribution of the surveyed population can be seen in Table 1. It is clear that this is a young population and that most of the women are in their child-bearing years. Fifty nine percent of the population are married, 11% are in consensual unions, 25% are single, while the remaining 5% are divorced, separated, or widowed. Of all married individuals surveyed, 76% had their spouses with them in Dallas and 24% had spouses in Mexico.<sup>2</sup> Sixty-five percent of those with children had all their children with them in Dallas. Twenty-four percent left their children in Mexico,

while 11% had some children with them in Dallas and others in Mexico.

**TABLE 1:** Age of Surveyed Population

Year of Birth	Males (n=63)	Females (n=37)	TOTAL (n=100)
1935-1945	1	1	2
1946-1955	5	5	10
1956-1965	24	7	31
1966-1975	22	20	42
1976-1981	11	4	15

Both men and women have a similar level of education, slightly more than half of both groups having finished at least some middle school (*secundaria*). Those who have finished some elementary school (*primaria*) represent about 30% of both men and women interviewed.

In terms of legal status, 70% of those interviewed are undocumented and 30% are U.S. citizens, legal permanent residents, or awaiting legal permanent residency. By gender, 77% of men are undocumented, whereas only 56% of women are without papers. This differential arises because many of the women have husbands who are legal permanent residents who were able to petition for their spouses to become legal permanent residents. If more men had been included in this sample, the ratio of undocumented to legal residency would increase because almost all the first-time migrants are undocumented, and most of them are men.

Most of the migrants in the sample arrived in the U.S. between 1992 and 1998 and, at the time of research, had been in the U.S. from less than a year to 6 years (see Table 2). Breaking down the figures for number of years in the U.S.

along gender lines, women began to migrate in numbers proportional to men in 1992. Before 1992, women constituted considerably less than half the first-time migrant population. Despite the appearance of male-female equity in the post-1992 period, taking into account the fact that I surveyed the entire population of women in Dallas at the time but only a proportion of the men, it is clear that men predominate in this migration stream.

**TABLE 2:** Time in U.S. of Surveyed Population

Year of Arrival	Males (n=63)	Females (n=37)	TOTAL (n=100)
1969-1975	1	1	2
1976-1980	3	1	4
1981-1985	8	3	11
1986-1990	19	6	25
1991-1995	14	19	33
1996-1997	17	7	24
No response	1	0	1

The Yucatecans in Dallas definitely have found their niche in the service industry. Men work in restaurants and hotels, while most employed women work as domestic employees. Luxury hotels and restaurants are plentiful in Dallas. As can be seen in Table 3, 91% of men work in restaurants or hotels. Of all of the Yucatecans who were working, 70% have at least one other Yucatecan working with them at their place of employment. Dividing this along gender lines, it becomes clear that men and women have considerably different employment circumstances in this regard: Among working men, 85% have other Yucatecans working with them, whereas only 30% of working women do. The median number of

Yucatecans working with all Yucatecans is 4; this masks the significant differences between men (median = 5) and women (median = 2).

**TABLE 3:** Employment of Surveyed Population

Job	Male (n=63)	Female (n=37)	TOTAL (n=100)
Restaurant	57	4	61
Office Cleaning	1	1	2
Hotel	1	1	2
Fast Food	1	4	5
Domestic	0	8	8
Baby Sitter	0	2	2
Store	0	2	2
Unemployed	3	14	17

A much larger percentage of women than men is unemployed (35%). Compared to men, very few women work in restaurants, and those who do are most likely to work in fast food establishments. Women who were working in fast food restaurants earned an average of \$5.12 per hour. The most common job for women is working *en casa* (as domestics), either cleaning homes or taking care of small children. Women are more likely to have informal employment and work off the books. In such circumstances, their pay is not taxed and they are paid in cash, with the average wage for women employed as domestics being \$7.25 per hour.

Some women work for office cleaning companies, but these jobs are not very desirable because the hours (5:00-10:30 p.m.) are not concordant with childrearing nor is the pay (average \$4.37 per hour) very good. A few women work in clothing factories and bus tables at the convention center during large

events. The average income reported for all women is \$6.52 per hour, about which is \$0.57 less per hour than what men are earning.

The Yucatecans live close to where they work. Most either walk to work or take the bus. The wealthy neighborhood to the immediate east of their homes and the restaurants found in and near their neighborhood and close by offer a wide selection of employment. Despite the undocumented status of many of the Yucatecans, work is freely available. Sixty-three% of all employed individuals found their current jobs from a Yucatecan friend or relative. This finding was very different along gender lines: 72% of men found their current jobs from Yucatecan relatives and/or friends; whereas only 38% of women found their jobs the same way. Women were just as likely (38%) to have found their current jobs from non-Yucatecans as from Yucatecans, whereas only 8% of men found their jobs from non-Yucatecan friends or relatives. These data indicate that Yucatecan job networks are important for the whole population, but more important for men than for women.

The first person to migrate from Kaal to Dallas arrived in 1969. He journeyed with friends from another town but was the pioneer migrant from Kaal. Once established in Dallas, he returned to Kaal and encouraged others to join him, hence the start of chain migration from Kaal to Dallas. Before this Texas-bound migration, several men participated in the *bracero* program (which ended in 1964), working as agricultural laborers in California. Another man, who claims that his father was the first person to go to the United States from Kaal, explained that his father's work as a *bracero* laborer funded the successful tortilla-making business that the family still operates. The father sent money back to Kaal so that his sons could purchase the machinery necessary to begin producing tortillas for sale. Now, they have several stores and are one of the wealthier families in Kaal. Today, Dallas and the San Bernardino Valley

of California are the two principal receiving areas for migrants from Kaal. Both places have several hundred residents from Kaal. There is a constant flow back and forth between Kaal and both receiving areas.

Since the middle 1980s, the major residential concentration of Yucatecans from Kaal in Dallas focused on one apartment complex. This place is where newcomers live at first, only later possibly relocating to other nearby apartment complexes. Almost all those from Kaal live within walking distance of one another. As a result, these Yucatecans shop in the same stores, eat in the same restaurants, use the same bus routes, go to the same schools and churches, and work in the same places as other Yucatecans.

### **Dallas, Texas**

The Dallas Metroplex includes the city of Dallas and the suburbs directly surrounding it. According to the 2000 census, 1,188,580 people live in the city of Dallas and 5,221,801 live in the entire Dallas-Fort Worth Metroplex. Like other southwestern cities, Dallas has intense urban sprawl; it is challenging to get from one place to another without a car, and the heavy automobile use has caused a pollution crisis. There is a public transportation system, but it is inadequate and frustrates the many poor and working-class people who rely on it on a daily basis.

Like so many other U.S. cities, Dallas has witnessed a shift from a manufacturing-based to a service economy (Greater Dallas Chamber of Commerce 1996:4; Sassen 1995, 2000). Services and wholesale/retail trade make up more than one half of the Dallas economy. Dallas is one of the most popular convention cities in the nation, hosting about 3,000 conventions each year (Greater Dallas Chamber of Commerce 2000:19). As an "International Gateway" for business (Greater Dallas

Chamber of Commerce 1999), Dallas also has 28 consulates, 12 foreign trade offices, and 11 foreign banks. Indeed, total trade in the Dallas/Fort Worth Customs District has grown at a rate faster than that of the nation as a whole. Dallas also has 11 free trade zones where companies can avoid or defer U.S. customs duties, eight domestic financial institutions with international departments, and more than 20 foreign-owned firms. In short, Dallas has many domestic firms that operate in global markets and/or that service foreign firms located in the city, epitomizing Saskia Sassen's idea of the "new urban economy" (Sassen 2000).

A good adjective to describe Dallas is "glitzy." The modern skyline is an architectural marvel that symbolizes the enormous wealth generated by the economic activities (banking, finance, and other high-level services). There is a culture of conspicuous consumption on the part of the new wealthy in Dallas that might be considered gauche in other regions of the country. Besides buying and displaying expensive cars, palatial homes, and designer fashions, many wealthy Dallasites take part in a public social scene that rivals that in Hollywood. Much of this party-making takes place in expensive Dallas restaurants owned and operated by celebrity chefs. Wealthy people in Dallas may desire to live a socially insulated life, but they inevitably come into contact with the poor and working classes. Poor people, mostly Mexican immigrants, are the ones who bus the tables, fill the water glasses, cook the meals, mow the lawns, clean the homes, and take care of the children of the wealthy in Dallas.

### **Dallas Neighborhoods**

The city of Dallas has several hundred neighborhoods, and these are, for the most part, residentially segregated along lines of social class, ethnicity, and race. According to Payne,

there is a schism between North and South Dallas, delineated by socioeconomic status and race, and leading to two distinct lifestyles: rich and poor (1994:415). A closer look reveals more complexity than a simple north-south divide. In this context, it is worth describing the city from all directions beginning in south and ending in the north, with the east and west in between.

The southern part of Dallas, defined mainly by the Trinity River on the south side of the Central Business District, is predominantly African-American and Hispanic. North Oak Cliff, the neighborhood that borders the downtown south of the river, once predominantly Anglo, has become increasingly Hispanic. South Oak Cliff, mainly African-American since the 1960s, also is becoming more Hispanic.

To the east of the Central Business District, neighborhoods are ethnically more diverse. Vietnamese, Taiwanese, Korean and Cambodian migrants live close to and interact with Hispanics on a regular basis. Much of the diversity in East Dallas has been caused by refugee resettlement. Africans from Somalia, Ethiopia, and Sudan; Vietnamese and Vietnamese Amerasians, Cambodians and Laotians as well as Bosnians, Kurds from Iraq, and Russian Jews have been placed in apartment complexes in the east part of town. The Asian groups in particular have followed a pattern similar to "White flight." As they become economically successful, they leave the city of Dallas and head to the suburbs.

Across the river to the west of the Central Business District, large concentrations of Hispanics and African-Americans are found in West Dallas (cf. Achor 1978). To the northwest, in the suburban city of Irving (known as the home of the stadium of the Dallas Cowboys), there has been an influx of Indians, Pakistanis, and the ubiquitous Hispanics.

To the north of downtown, wealthy Anglo neighborhoods dominate the flat, grid-plan landscape. University Park and Highland Park (known collectively as the Park Cities) are

(along with Preston Hollow) the wealthiest areas of Dallas. The Park Cities not only are almost completely Anglo, but boast their own police departments, local governments, and school systems. Oak Lawn, the neighborhood where the migrants live, is immediately west of the Park Cities.

Beyond the Park Cities and the remainder of North Dallas, suburbs such as Addison and Carrollton cater to upper-middle class, predominantly Anglo, populations. In Northwest Dallas, marked by the Love Field airport and Bachman Lake, there is a substantial concentration of Hispanics, including groups of Salvadorans who live together in apartment complexes along one particular street. Mexican immigrants moving from an apartment to a house favor this area because of the low housing prices and the Hispanic atmosphere of the neighborhood. Since the 1980s, Mexican immigrants have increasingly settled in this northwest area and a thriving Hispanic community now exists there.

## **Oak Lawn**

Located immediately south of Love Field and west of the Park Cities is Oak Lawn, one of the most interesting neighborhoods in Dallas and the home of almost all the Yucatecans from Kaal. Oak Lawn has the diversity of East Dallas but, because it is smaller, is less residentially segregated. A large and vocal gay and lesbian community calls Oak Lawn home. Along its main commercial streets, rainbow colors and "family" themes demonstrate the significant presence of the GLBT community: the largest in Texas, according to the website <http://gaydemographics.org>. The annual Alan Ross Freedom Parade and other celebrations of gay pride are well attended. Like their neighbors in the Park Cities to the east, many members of the gay community in Oak Lawn are financially comfortable. Many of Oak Lawn's stores and

restaurants reflect this prosperity and cater to a wealthy clientele. Also in Oak Lawn are pockets of Hispanics and Vietnamese. Businesses here cater to these working-class immigrants such as a "Dollar Store," supermarkets aimed at a Hispanic consumer, money transfer outfits, *taquerías* and discount stores. The median per capita income of the census tract where the majority of the Yucatecans live is a low \$12,481 (with median family income at \$23,678). Some of the migrants live in two other nearby census tracts, where the per capita incomes are \$24,954 and \$46,528, respectively. The differences among these adjoining census tracts reflect the economic and social diversity found in the Oak Lawn area. These days, Oak Lawn increasingly is dominated by apartment complexes, condominium complexes, and old homes renovated into two or more apartments. Well-off residents of Oak Lawn live in expensive condominium units and house-based apartments, while Hispanics and Vietnamese live in less expensive apartment complexes.

### **Mexicans in Dallas**

Mexicans began migrating to Dallas during the railroad boom at the beginning of the 20th century. There was another surge of migration during and after the Mexican Revolution. By the 1920s, Mexican migrants were a sizable ethnic minority in Dallas (Corchado and Trejo 1999:6-7). Throughout the U.S., the 1986 Immigration Reform and Control Act's (IRCA) amnesty provision granted amnesty to more than 3.1 million immigrants, most of whom were of Mexican origin. The effect of IRCA was to enhance the Mexican migrant presence in Dallas. Since then, the Mexican-origin population has continued to expand in numbers and distribution throughout the metropolitan region. According to Laura González, who follows closely the large immigrant group from the Mexican

state of Guanajuato: "Dallas' Mexican population used to be tiny, but it continues to grow, grow, grow with no end in sight" (quoted in Corchado and Trejo 1999:1).

According to the 2000 Census (cf. NCTCOG 2001), the Hispanic-origin population in the 16 counties of North Central Texas surpassed 1.1 million (21% of the region's 5.3 million total population). Dallas County had 662,729 persons of Hispanic origin (30% of its 2.2 million population), of whom 537,475 persons were of Mexican origin (equivalent to 81% of the Hispanics). The City of Dallas had 422,587 persons of Hispanic origin (36% of its 1.2 million residents), of whom 356,600 were of Mexican origin (84% of the Hispanics). Within the Dallas area, the largest regional group of Mexican origin (with more than 300,000 persons) comes from the State of Guanajuato in central Mexico.

Regionalism within the Mexican-origin population is important. According to the Mexican Consulate (personal communication), Dallas has mutual aid associations from the following states: San Luis Potosí (14), Guanajuato (8), Hidalgo (4), Durango (2), Guerrero (2), Zacatecas (2), Aguascalientes (1); and Yucatán (1). Among the Yucatecans, the immigrants from Kaal constitute the largest residentially concentrated group in Dallas. They are familiar with Yucatecans in Dallas from other parts of Yucatán.

In one apartment complex close to where the Kaaleños live, one family from Kaal is surrounded by a number of families who have migrated from a town close to Kaal in Northern Yucatán. The migration from this other town began earlier than did the migration from Kaal, and its migrant population exceeds that from Kaal. A difference is that the non-Kaaleños are not residentially concentrated like those from Kaal. One family from this town owns a restaurant/bakery called Chichén Itzá, which has opened several branches throughout the Metroplex.

Dallas has a distinctively Mexican flavor as a result of the migration from all parts of Mexico. The Yucatecans are comfortable with other Mexican migrants and frequently interact with them on the job (for men), and in the Spanish-speaking business establishments and social service agencies that they patronize. Some of the men and women have befriended people from other parts of Mexico, as well as Spanish speaking Mexican-Americans. Nevertheless, the Kaaleños do live and work together and spend the majority of their time with other Yucatecans.

### **Restaurants in the New Urban Economy**

According to Saskia Sassen, the new urban economy is highly problematic, in part because it involves a polarized two-tiered service economy (2000: 6-7). The two-tiered service sector, sometimes referred to as the hourglass economy, is remarkably clear in Dallas. In the upper tier of the hourglass are those performing well-remunerated (in terms of salaries and benefits), highly skilled, professional service jobs such as accounting and law. The lower end of the hourglass include low skilled jobs that are often temporary and lacking the pay or benefits of the upper tier. These jobs involve servicing the upper tier both on the job and at home. Office cleaning is an example of the former; babysitting, housecleaning, and yard work are examples of the latter.

In Dallas, dining out is routine for upper tier professionals. Conspicuous displays of wealth are part of the culture of Dallas, and being seen at the trendiest restaurants is a way to demonstrate to others one's success. Dallas restaurant-goers are fickle, however, and this causes some instability in the restaurant economy as restaurants lose business when a newer, trendier establishment opens up and customers clamor to try the newest "find."

In Dallas, as in other cities throughout the United States, restaurant kitchens increasingly are staffed by immigrants. Part of this is because of employers' preferences for immigrant workers (Waldinger and Lichter 2003: 159). However, as with other jobs in the lower tier of the service sector, the long hours, low pay, few benefits, and service elements of behind-the-scenes restaurant jobs also keeps non-immigrants from pursuing this line of work.

### **The Dallas Restaurant Economy**

The large number of restaurants in Dallas is nothing short of amazing. According to the website GuideLive.com, an affiliate of the DALLAS MORNING NEWS, there are more than 2,000 restaurants in Dallas, without counting those in Fort Worth or any of the distant suburbs. The Relocation Guide published by the Greater Dallas Chamber of Commerce (2000) suggests that:

When you first move to Dallas, cooking meals is one worry you can do without. No matter what your tastes, you will certainly find what you are looking for – there are more than 5,000 restaurants in Dallas, more per capita than New York City. . . You could live in Dallas for 13 years, eat at a different restaurant every day and still not visit every restaurant in town (2000: 211).

According to the GuideLive.com neighborhood categories, *Dallas North and Park Cities*, and *Downtown and Nearby* correspond to the areas where the Yucatecan men are employed in the restaurant industry. In the first category there are 972 restaurants, nine of which have four dollar signs, meaning very expensive. In the *Downtown and Nearby* area, there are 201 restaurants, with seven in the very expensive category. In contrast, in another neighborhood with many Mexican im-

migrants (*South Dallas and Oak Cliff*) there are 203 restaurants, none with four or even three (expensive) dollar signs. Thus, not only do the Yucatecans live and work in a city of restaurants, they live where the best and most expensive establishments are located.

### **Restaurant Hierarchy of Employment**

Restaurants are “close organizations” (Fine 1996:113). That is, workers are encouraged to think of themselves as part of a family. Families, however, are not egalitarian institutions. Rather, there is a hierarchy, and different statuses yield different degrees of power. The various job positions in a restaurant form a hierarchy, especially in the upscale eating establishments where Yucatecan men are employed.<sup>3</sup>

All restaurants have front and back areas. The hierarchy of employment is different in the front and back of the house, but employees can switch from one to the other. One’s place in the hierarchy is based on job experience, language skills, gender, and ethnic/racial factors, although all but the first of these considerations are more important for front of the house employees, since they work directly with customers.

#### **Back of the House**

Employees in the back of the house rarely come into contact with customers. Still, working in the back area involves the Yucatecan men in hierarchical relationships with others in the kitchen domain. From lowest to highest in the hierarchy, the positions are: dishwasher, food prep/pantry worker, line cook, sous chef, and executive chef.

## Dishwasher

This job is the least desirable job in the restaurant because it is unpleasant, boring, hard labor. It is also the least well-paid position. Yucatecan men with little job experience, and without English language skills, often begin as dishwashers. It is akin to the proverbial "mail room" job of the white professional class. If a man can prove to his employer that he is responsible and hard working, and if he is ambitious enough to want to move up within the hierarchy, he will be promoted. There are some men who lack the confidence or ambition to change positions, and will remain dishwashers for years, but these are few and far between. The majority serve their time as dishwashers and get out as soon as they can.

## Food Prep/Pantry

Food preparers, sometimes referred to as pantry cooks, rather than working with people's garbage as is the case with dishwashers, work with food. Hence, it is a more pleasant job than the former. English skills are not required, so it is attractive to Yucatecan men who do not speak English. The position requires processing food and preparing it for use by cooks and chefs. It is lower prestige because pantry workers handle food at the early processing stage – nothing that they prepare goes directly to customers. Chopping vegetables and mixing condiments are common tasks. These workers deal with cold food only. Food preparers earn more than dishwashers and some men remain in this job permanently.

## Line Cook

Typically, line cooks are those who were previously food preparers. This job requires a higher degree of skill and knowledge. It is a high pressure position; when the restaurant is busy, everyone looks to the line cook to cook the food in a timely manner. And timing is of the essence: it is important to get a table's food out at the same time so that the food can be served together. There are levels among line cooks, and there are different positions, including grill and sauté. The levels depend on experience and correlate directly with pay. In hotels with formal pay scales, the positions usually are numbered from one to three, with cook 1 being the highest position. The Yucatecan men who work as line cooks are men with restaurant experience. Line cooks are much more likely than the other employees to have first hand contact with the chef. Chefs rely on line cooks to follow their recipes. Without competent line cooks, a restaurant cannot succeed.

## Sous Chef

Some Yucatecan men have achieved the level of sous chef. Sous chefs stand in for the executive chef when he is absent. This is a position of much responsibility and authority. The pay and prestige are higher than the other back of the house positions. Sous chefs supervise the line cooks and food preparers. They also mediate between the chef and the other employees when language creates a communication barrier. English is necessary to be successful in this position because sous chefs are often expected to take on such responsibilities as managing inventory and ordering from food vendors.

## Executive Chef

The executive chef is at the apex of the hierarchy in the back of the house, and once again it is almost always a position held by men. Chefs usually have had formal training at a culinary institution. In restaurants where the Yucatecans work, the chefs sometimes own the establishments. Many chefs have learned sufficient Spanish so that they can communicate with their Hispanic employees. Chefs are usually responsible for hiring and firing decisions. Compared to other positions discussed here, besides the maitre d', chefs are highly paid. None of the Yucatecans has achieved the high status of executive chef.

## Front of the House

The front of the house positions are those in which customer contact is an expected part of the job. From lowest to highest in the hierarchy, the positions are bus boy, waiter, and maitre d' /host.

### Busboy

Busboy is the lowest of the front of the house positions. Because busboys generally work for tips, remuneration depends on the volume of business at the particular restaurant. In a popular and expensive restaurant setting, busboys can earn a considerable amount of money, rivaling the higher levels of the back of the house positions. This is dependent, however, on a host of factors including luck, skill, number of customers, and the interpersonal dynamics between waiters and busboys, because waiters are the ones who "tip out" to busboys. The preference to be a busboy has something to do with personality factors. Yucatecan men who have outgoing personalities and

are secure enough to interact with higher class, white people will take busboy positions. Some men are intimidated by the prospect of having to do this and so prefer the security of the back of the house. Sometimes busboys are female, but there were no Yucatecan women employed as busboys at the time of the study.

### Waiter

Waiters are the most visible front of the house employees, with the most contact with clients. In the upscale restaurants where the Yucatecans are employed, there are not many women food servers. Yet there are few Yucatecan men who work as waiters. This has to do with language ability, but it is also a matter of ethnic and racial division. One of the few Yucatecan men currently waiting tables happens to be employed at a popular El Salvadoran restaurant. In this exceptional case, although most of the patrons are upper class whites, all the wait staff are Hispanic males. This contrasts sharply with the other upscale restaurants in which the Yucatecans work. In those cases, the wait staff is composed almost exclusively of white males. Waiters earn a living from tips, so remuneration depends on volume of business.

### Maitre d' / Host

The maitre d' or host is at the top of the hierarchy in the front of the house. The maitre d' is usually male. Sometimes the maitre d' is the owner of the restaurant, but even in the case when he is not, he is responsible for all of the operations in the front of the house. The maitre d' deals directly with customers, and mediates disputes between wait staff and busboys and between wait staff and customers. This is a high prestige

position. To date, none of the Yucatecans have been employed in this job.

### **Social Organization of Yucatecan Restaurant Employment**

Most Yucatecan men from Kaal work in restaurants. This has an impact on their migration networks, on their patterns of friendship, and even on their drinking behavior. In this section, I examine how Yucatecan men's lives are patterned around the temporal and structural logic of restaurant employment.

### **Migration Networks and Ethnic Brokering**

When young men migrate from Kaal to Dallas for the first time they typically do not travel in the company of their nuclear families; instead, they go north with other men (friends or relatives) with the intention of earning money and remitting it back to their families. In such cases, restaurants are at the center of the migration network. Men in Kaal talk with their *compadres*, friends, and relatives and discuss job possibilities in Dallas.

This situation creates a climate in which ethnic brokering is facilitated (see Adler 2002). Men who already have jobs in Dallas restaurants, and have curried the favor and trust of chefs, become labor recruiters for those same chefs. Sometimes, either the chef or the veteran migrant will pay for the trip of the new migrant with the expectation that he will work in the restaurant to repay the debt. This happened with the case of José, a man who had migrated before but had returned to Kaal. Roberto, a man who worked as a sous chef in a fine Italian restaurant, paid for José's trip so that he could come to work in the restaurant. José had to work there for several months repaying his debt before he was able to switch jobs. This improved Roberto's

relationship with the chef and, at the same time, improved his status in the migrant community.<sup>4</sup>

### Male/Paisano Bonding

Yucatecan men do not venture out on their own and work in restaurants where there are no Yucatecan employees. They prefer to work together with other Yucatecans. This has the effect of male bonding, for the Yucatecans are not just fellow countrymen (*paisanos*), they also are fellow employees. Since Yucatecan women do not work in restaurants with the men, it gives men an opportunity to spend time with other men in the absence of their wives. Restaurant hours are long, and many of the men work split shifts. The typical scenario is a lunch shift from 10:00-2:30 and a dinner shift from 4:00-11:30 or even later on weekends. Men return home to rest and eat in between shifts. This long work day results in men socializing after work until late at night and then sleeping late the following morning. Women have adjusted their schedules somewhat to their husbands', but the pattern of getting up late is not particularly compatible with child care needs. Since children must leave for school early in the morning, women wake up to help them get ready for school. Also, women who work as house cleaners usually start early in the morning. Men who do not have their wives with them in Dallas typically live with a number of other men in apartments. This gives married men a place to socialize after work.

### Drinking Behavior

Yucatecan male socializing invariably involves alcohol, most often beer. Many men are heavy drinkers. Drinking gives men another opportunity to bond with other men. After work

men get together to drink. They do this in several places. When weather permits, men prefer to drink outside. In some cases, men will gather around a beer-filled car trunk in the parking lot of the restaurants where they are employed. When that is not possible they like to drink in the parking lot of the apartment complex. Since public drinking behavior is prohibited by law in Dallas (unlike in their home town in Yucatán), the men go inside when the police are in the area (cf. Hirsch 2003: 194). A combination billiards hall/bar, recently closed, was the site for much Yucatecan male drinking. The bar was walking distance from the apartment complex so men could walk home after last call.

There is an enormous amount of peer pressure to drink. As one man explained, when a man has no money, other Yucatecans will not give him money for food, but will gladly buy him a beer. "Come on, just have one," is the baiting phrase; once they have the man imbibing, they continue to hand him open beers just as he is about to finish the one in hand. There is a social taboo against not drinking while in the company with other men who are. Felipe, a man who quit drinking, explained to me how difficult it was for him to socialize with Yucatecan men, given the intense peer pressure to drink. Felipe and his brother chose to live with a married couple and their children instead of with other men because, Felipe explained, the pressure to drink at home was absent in that context.

Drinking is an excuse to participate in a host of deviant behaviors that would be unacceptable while sober. Both men and women excuse other men who violate social norms while drunk because of a cultural perspective that a drunken individual is not really him/herself. Violence, especially spousal abuse, is common under these conditions. Males bond through alcohol and they tease each other about their wives. Lest they be considered *mandilón* (literally, "big apron," equivalent to the American slang expression "wearing the apron strings"), many men return home drunk and beat up their wives. While

they do not condone this behavior, women believe that their husbands would not be abusive if sober. This is not just the case among migrants; it also occurs in Kaal.<sup>5</sup>

### **Social and Cultural Implications of Restaurant Employment for Yucatecan Men**

With more than 90% of the male Yucatecans in Dallas sharing the experience of restaurant work, they have much in common, even if they did not in Kaal. If they had entered a different job niche (such as construction or gardening) or if they worked in many different occupations, they would lack this common set of experiences. In the following section, I discuss social transformations resulting from men's restaurant work.

#### **Community Cohesion**

The job networks of men sustain the Yucatecans both socially and spatially. When I began fieldwork in August 1997, nearly all of the Yucatecans lived in one Oak Lawn apartment complex. Today, that apartment complex has deteriorated to the point that many residents have left for other residences. These other apartments are still in the same neighborhood, so that most Kaaleños still live within walking distance from one another. A select few, with legal permanent residency status, have purchased homes in the suburbs. Nevertheless, they still work in the neighborhood and visit the other Yucatecans regularly.

When newcomers arrive, which they continue to do despite tougher immigration enforcement at the border, they are hosted by Yucatecans already established in Oak Lawn. When the new men seek work, they find positions in the same restaurants where the veteran migrants are employed. This continual stream of migration keeps the Yucatecans united in two ways:

it sustains the veteran migrants' connections to Kaal while it replenishes the restaurant work force. In Kaal, men who are about to embark on a journey to Dallas understand that they are not just going north to Dallas, but are joining their extended community in Dallas (cf. Kemper 2002). Restaurant employment facilitates their ability to continue living and working in the presence of their *paisanos*.

### Gender Relations

Migration to Dallas has affected gender roles and relations, but women's employment has not significantly reduced their household responsibilities (cf. Goldring 1999; Min 1998). Restaurant employment requires that men acquire skills – such as cooking, washing dishes, and clearing tables – traditionally associated with women. Do these men go home to cook and clean for their wives and families? The answer is no. Men not accompanied by their wives, however, do cook for themselves, clean their apartments, and do their own laundry. From a Yucatecan male perspective, bringing one's wife to Dallas means no longer doing domestic chores: she can do them, just as she did back in Kaal.

Many of the women are unemployed or work as domestic workers. This does not facilitate female independence to the same extent as some other scholars have found among migrant women (cf. Pessar 1995). However, the men's similar work schedules offer women many opportunities to socialize with other women in the absence of their husbands. Every Friday and Saturday night women are left home alone. One group of women has surprise birthday parties for its members on Saturday nights. Aside from the presence of young male children, these parties are female-only events and give women the opportunity to bond with each other. Alcohol is usually served at these parties, although the women who do drink do so in

moderation. The social injunction to join in the drinking is absent among women; in fact, the Yucatecans in Dallas denounce women who drink to excess.

Men's restaurant employment is easier to find than the less well-paying domestic, fast-food, or factory positions available to the women. The contrasting job situations for men and women serves to slow down the rate of change in traditional gender roles. If the women were to take on restaurant employment, gender relations might be transformed dramatically.

### **Effects of a "Flexible" Job Market**

Restaurant employment is "flexible." New restaurants open with some regularity, while many close at a similar rate. Men hired to work in a new restaurant cannot be sure how long their jobs will last; if the establishment is not successful, they will be back on the street. Some Yucatecans work in restaurants that have been around for years, and these jobs seem more permanent. However, in the Dallas restaurant economy, even the most stalwart establishments can fail if the public (or owners) become disenchanted with the enterprise. For example, one Italian restaurant was successful for more than a decade, and hired almost exclusively Yucatecan busboys, cooks, and sous chefs. Newly arrived Yucatecan men knew that they had a place to work if there was no other job to be found. In 1999, however, declining business led to the restaurant's demise.

This job market has social consequences. Men, who already have a propensity to indulge in heavy social drinking, sometimes let their drinking get out of hand. Hung-over men sometimes call in sick; some develop a pattern of irresponsibility that leads to temporary unemployment. For example, on one New Year's Day, I was at a Yucatecan family get-together where there was considerable drinking going on. Alejandro, the thirty-something younger brother of the family patriarch, was

drinking hard liquor even though he had to work a dinner shift at a local restaurant. When it was time for him to go to work, he managed to get himself there; when the boss saw how drunk he was, Alejandro was sent home. Alejandro returned to the party ready to drink more (about an hour later, he literally fell off his chair) and proud that, rather than calling in sick, he was honorable enough to go to work despite his drunken state. He was told to report for an early lunch shift the next morning.

This irresponsible behavior is common among some of the Yucatecan men. Miguel, a man who had managed to become a legal permanent resident, was an experienced and talented cook. He also was an alcoholic. To his wife's chagrin, Miguel constantly lost good jobs because he failed to show up for work after (or during) a drinking binge. Miguel had a résumé that included some of the finest restaurants in all of Dallas, but he had difficulty keeping any one job for too long. On probation for domestic abuse, Miguel was eventually deported when he failed to follow the guidelines of his probation.

The flexibility of the restaurant economy facilitates transnational activity. Many men quit their jobs when they want to go back to Kaal for Christmas, for a fiesta, for a wedding, for a funeral, or just for a spur of the moment visit. Men know that they will likely not be granted vacation time to visit Mexico, but they figure that, if they are fired, they can just look for a similar position at a different restaurant when they return. For example, a talented cook named Albin works two jobs at a time and whenever he wants to take an unapproved vacation to Yucatán he quits the jobs and starts new ones upon returning. Fortunately, for the past two years, he has had supervisors who would approve his vacations; therefore, he has remained loyal to those establishments.

## New Hierarchies

The hierarchy of restaurant employment has the potential to transform the Yucatecan men's former system of social stratification. Men who had little wealth, prestige, or power in Kaal can become important individuals in Dallas, while those who were at the top in Kaal may experience downward mobility. For example, Roberto, the man who helped facilitate the migration of José to work in an Italian restaurant, comes from a family in Kaal which resides far from the prestigious town center. Instead, his family lives on a peripheral *hacienda*, where residents are bilingual Maya/Spanish speakers stereotyped as being poorer than the people who live near the central plaza. In contrast to his original situation, Roberto moved his way up the ranks in the Dallas restaurant scene. He became an owner's second-hand man and played a key role in recruiting workers from Kaal for the restaurant. When the restaurant closed in 1999, Roberto used his influence to start a transnational business transporting money and goods back and forth between Kaal and Dallas. He travels to Yucatán every two weeks, and is now considered very successful among the Kaaleños. His success in Dallas has trumped his *hacienda* roots. Even in Kaal he has become an important figure. Some veteran migrants accrue the social capital to help newcomers enter the Dallas job market. This has the effect of turning long-standing traditions of stratification on their heads.

## Conclusion

Yucatecan men may have ended up working in restaurants rather than landscaping or construction through chance. However, once they became established in this niche, chance ceased to be at issue. When a Yucatecan man wants to change jobs, it means that he is thinking of switching from one restaurant

to another. Working in another economic sector is really not a consideration.

Restaurant employment leads men to live their lives according to the temporal pattern of the dining establishments. Men work together and share the same schedule, which reinforces male friendships and encourages socializing after work hours. Restaurant employment also causes changes in social practices such as gender relations, community cohesion, and traditional patterns of stratification.

Today, Oak Lawn is being transformed. The forces of gentrification have gained momentum and low-income immigrants are being pushed out of the neighborhood. Rumor has it that the apartment complex where the Yucatecans started their careers is slated for demolition. The migrants are concerned that the apartment complex will be replaced with housing beyond their limited means. In anticipation of this crisis, many have left to live in apartments in other areas of Oak Lawn, for they have come to see Oak Lawn as their neighborhood and hope to remain as long as they can. They also believe that Oak Lawn owes them the opportunity to have affordable housing, for it is precisely these Yucatecan men – and others like them – whose labor sustains some of the finest restaurants in Dallas.

#### NOTES

- 1 Kaal is a pseudonym for a town in Northwest Yucatán. All names of individuals mentioned in this article are pseudonyms.
- 2 This number cannot be generalized to the larger population because I interviewed both husbands and wives whenever possible, so the number for spouses in Dallas is disproportionate.
- 3 Other scholars have studied hierarchical relationships in family style restaurants (Paules 1991); in many respects, the situation in those kinds of eateries is different from what is being analyzed here. Gender relations, for example, are not the same, since, in contrast to less expensive restaurants, in fine dining establishments the wait staff is more likely to be male than female.

- 4 This recruitment pattern, common among the Yucatecans, occurs widely in transnational migratory flows (cf. Krissman 2005).
- 5 One man, who was told an unsubstantiated story that his wife slept with another man, has been routinely beating her for years. He only beats her when he drinks, but he drinks every day. She has had to go to the hospital several times and routinely threatens to leave him.

### REFERENCES CITED

- Achor, Shirley (1978). *Mexican Americans in a Dallas Barrio*. Tucson: University of Arizona Press.
- Adler, Rachel H. (2002). Patron Client Ties, Ethnic Entrepreneurship and Transnational Migration: The Case of Yucatecans in Dallas, Texas. *Urban Anthropology and Studies of Cultural Systems and World Economic Development* 31(2): 129-162.
- Corchado, Alfredo and Frank Trejo (1999). Urban Renewal: Dallas' Mexican Population Brings Boom Times to Once-Dying Areas, Creates Challenges. *Dallas Morning News*, September 20, p. 1A, 6A-7A.
- Fine, Gary Alan (1996). *Kitchens: The Culture of Restaurant Work*. Berkeley: University of California Press.
- Goldring, Luin (1999). The Power of Status in Transnational Social Fields. *IN Transnationalism From Below*, M. Smith and L. Guarnizo (eds). New Brunswick: Transaction Publishers, pp. 165-195.
- Greater Dallas Chamber of Commerce (1996). *Dallas at a Glance 1995-96*. Dallas.
- Greater Dallas Chamber of Commerce (1999). *Dallas at a Glance 1998-99*. Dallas.
- Greater Dallas Chamber of Commerce (2000). *International Dallas 2000-2001*. Dallas.
- Hirsch, Jennifer (2003). *A Courtship After Marriage: Sexuality and Love in Mexican Transnational Families*. Berkeley: University of California Press.
- INEGI (1996). *Yucatán: Instituto Nacional de Estadística Geografía e Informática*.
- Kemper, Robert V. (2002). Migration and adaptation: Tzintzuntzeños in Mexico City and beyond. *IN Urban Life: Readings in Urban Anthropology*, George Gmelch and Walter P. Zenner (eds.). Fourth Edition. Prospect Heights, IL: Waveland Press, pp. 193-204.
- Krissman, Fred (2005). Sin Coyote Ni Patrón: Why the "Migrant Network" Fails to Explain International Migration. *International Migration Review* 39(1): 4-44.

- Min, Pyong Gap (1998). *Traditions and Changes: Korean Immigrant Families in New York*. Needham Heights, MA: Allyn and Bacon.
- NCTCOG [North Central Texas Council of Governments] (2001). *Census 2000: North Central Texas – Population by Race and Hispanic Origin*. Source: U.S. Census PL94-171, <http://census.dfwinfo.com/pdf/2000/reports/poprace.pdf>.
- Paules, Greta Foff (1991). *Dishing it Out: Power and Resistance among Waitresses in a New Jersey Restaurant*. Philadelphia: Temple University Press.
- Payne, Darwin (1994). *Big D: Triumphs and Troubles of an American Supercity in the 20th Century*. Dallas: Three Forks Press.
- Pessar, Patricia R. (1995). *A Visa For a Dream: Dominicans in the United States*. Boston: Allyn and Bacon.
- Sassen, Saskia (1995). *Immigration and Local Labor Markets*. IN *The Economic Sociology of Immigration: Essays on Networks, Ethnicity, and Entrepreneurship*, A. Portes (ed.). New York: Russell Sage Foundation, pp. 87-127.
- Sassen, Saskia (2000). *Cities in a World Economy*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Pine Forge Press.
- Waldinger, Roger and Michael Lichter (2003). *How the Other Half Works: Immigration and the Social Organization of Labor*. Berkeley: University of California Press.