Deciding To Be Legal: A Maya Community in Houston. **JACQUELINE MARIA HAGAN. Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1994. xx + 200 pp., notes, photographs, tables, bibliography, index.**

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In this book Hagan describes the formation of a Mayan community in Houston, Texas, and the ways in which this community interpreted and responded to the legalization program created by the 1986 Immigration Reform and Control Act (IRCA). The book's title foreshadows one of the strengths of this work: Hagan's portrayal of Mayan immigrants as active and empowered decision-makers. The interview excerpts alone make *Deciding To Be Legal* worth reading. Two of my favorites are "*to have credit is to be American*" (p. 6, ital. original) and "that's what the INS [Immigration and Naturalization Service] is—the biggest coyote [immigrant smuggler] around" (p. 105).

To produce this account, Hagan lived in a predominantly Mayan apartment complex from 1987 to 1990, and gradually became incorporated into the life of the community. Due to the Mayans' undocumented status, Hagan relied on ethnographic observations and unstructured interviews rather than formal interviews. At the conclusion of her project, she visited the Mayans' home community in Guatemala. Her close and lengthy interaction with the Houston Mayans enabled her to produce an in-depth account of this community and also to describe changes in immigrants' perceptions and decisions over time.

Part 1 of *Deciding To Be Legal* recounts the formation of the Houston Mayan community. This was the least satisfying portion of the book because Hagan seemed to equate the maintenance of a distinctive Mayan identity among immigrants with the reproduction of such culturally distinctive symbols of Mayanness as language and dress style. It is possible that Hagan's emphasis on cultural continuity was influenced by the Mayans' own discourse about their culture; but she largely neglects the possibility that a distinctive identity could be maintained even as the meaning of "Mayanness" was reconstructed by the migration experience. Moreover, debates about the meaning of ethnicity in Latin America suggest that ethnic identities are complex and cannot be measured by the presence or absence of key cultural symbols.

One extremely important aspect of Hagan's account is her discussion of the ways that gender influenced the Mayans' immigration and legalization experiences. Female migrants faced the threat of being raped while en route to the United States and therefore had to hire coyotes to bring them the entire way from Guatemala. This made it more expensive for women than for men to immigrate. Upon arriving in the United States, most Mayan women worked in the informal economy as domestic workers, whereas the Mayan men worked in the formal sector for a supermarket chain. Because of their extensive networks of coworkers, the men were able to cover for each other at work when days off were needed and to recruit new workers when vacancies arose. In contrast, women, particularly live-in domestics who spent most of their time apart from the Mayan community, had smaller networks, less control over their work experiences, and more difficulty finding jobs. Because they worked in the informal economy and had limited social networks, Mayan women had a more difficult time acquiring the documentation needed to qualify for legalization, and fewer women then men became legalized. This produced a power imbalance between legalized men and undocumented women, leading some Mayan women to stay in abusive relationships as their only hope of acquiring legal status was through a legalized boyfriend or spouse.

Though Hagan's account of gender is rich, I was troubled by her assertion that it is Mayan women who reproduce Mayan culture in Houston. It may be the case that the Mayans themselves hold women responsible for remaining true to their cultural origins, but are there no ways in which men reproduce and in which women redefine Mayan culture? If Mayan women have indeed deviated less from Mayan cultural values than have Mayan men, can this be attributed to the fact that Mayan men immigrated first, as Hagan suggests? Or are women's social positions dependent on their being perceived as loyal to cultural roots (and to the social authority of parents and others)? If so, then on what does men's social position depend? Greater attention to these questions might produce better explanations for the relationship between gender and social change within the Mayan immigrant community.

Hagan's most original findings come in part 2, where she analyzes Mayan immigrants' responses to the legalization program. Initially, most of the immigrants assumed that they could not become legalized because they were ineligible. As time passed, however, they discovered that the INS was interpreting the documentation requirements of the legalization program fairly loosely. As a result, immigrants who were technically ineligible began to apply, securing the necessary documentation through their social networks. Though their goal at the time of applying was merely to obtain work authorization while their applications were pending, most were granted legal status. Despite obtaining legal status, many of these immigrants maintained that they might eventually return to Guatemala, thus countering the popular notion that U.S. citizenship is every immigrant's dream. In fact, Hagan found that legalization facilitated binationalism by enabling newly legalized Mayans to travel freely between Guatemala and the United States. This in turn fostered increased migration from the home community to Houston. Hagan's research demonstrates that "[t]he Maya were far more than passive recipients of immigration policy: they perceived, interpreted, and ultimately acted upon the program" (p. 91). By describing how Houston Mayans subverted the legalization process in ways that challenged policy makers' assumptions, Hagan has made an important contribution to the literature on immigration.