

Socio-Economic Trajectory and Geographical Mobility of Lebanese and Koreans. From Motul to Mérida

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ABSTRACT

Through the theories on migration that consider social networks and social capital, this paper compares the socioeconomic trajectories and geographic mobility of Korean and Lebanese migrants and their descendants who once lived in the town of Motul, Yucatán (Mexico). This analysis sheds light on the reasons for the sharply different paths taken by two of the most representative migrations in Yucatán in the early 20th century. It describes the organization of a Lebanese community with a strong sense of identity and economic power in comparison with a dispersed Korean migration that failed to establish strategies of solidarity and mutual support to guarantee the same success as that of the Lebanese.

Keywords: 1. Yucatán, 2. Motul, 3. migration, 4. social capital, 5. social networks.

Trayectoria socioeconómica y movilidad geográfica de los libaneses y coreanos. Un recuento de Motul a Mérida

RESUMEN

A través de las teorías sobre el fenómeno migratorio, que se relacionan con el establecimiento de redes sociales y de capital social, este trabajo compara la trayectoria socioeconómica y la movilidad geográfica de migrantes libaneses y coreanos, así como de sus descendientes que en algún momento residieron en el municipio de Motul, Yucatán. Este análisis nos ayuda a entender algunas de las razones que hicieron tan diferenciados los procesos de integración sociocultural y los niveles de éxito socioeconómico que tomaron dos de las migraciones más representativas en Yucatán desde su instalación a principios del siglo XX. Se trata de una fuerte comunidad libanesa en sentido identitario y con poder económico versus una migración coreana dispersa que no logró establecer estrategias de solidaridad y apoyo mutuo.

Palabras clave: 1. Yucatán, 2. Motul, 3. migración, 4. capital social, 5. redes sociales.

*Text and quotations originally written in Spanish.

*Introduction*¹

It is a well known fact that Mexico has never been characterized as a major recipient of foreign migration. During the first half of the 20th century, however, there was an upward trend in arrivals. Among the groups of foreigners who entered the country during this period are the Lebanese and Koreans who settled in Yucatán.

In the early 20th century,² the city of Mérida, the capital of Yucatán, was a destination with a wide range of possibilities of settlement for foreign migrants, as a result of which most of those who arrived there remained. However, there were those who considered other options in towns within the state, which at that time were favored by the rise in sisal exploitation and marketing. Thus, the town of Motul, located in the heart of the henequen zone, was a destination for some of the Lebanese and Korean immigrants who came with their families or formed them along the way. Although Motul had been a destination for the Lebanese since the late 19th century, it took the Koreans longer to settle in the town, since they did so in the years after the end of the first contract that brought them to Yucatán, in other words, after 1909.³ Korean immigrants arrived in the country in 1905 with previously signed contracts for four years' work as indentured laborers on the Yucatán henequen haciendas (Hwan Jo, 2006; Park, 2006; Dávila, 2010; Gutiérrez, 2011).

As a result of the Great Depression of the 1930s, the severe crisis it caused in Yucatán and the urbanization processes recorded from the middle of the last century onwards, there were popula-

¹ A preliminary version of this paper was presented at the Permanent Seminar on Social History of the Center for Historical Studies of El Colegio de México.

² One of the main objectives of Mexican foreign policy during the Porfiriato was to legally encourage the immigration of foreigners, by promoting the influx of capital, investors and skilled labor. It was a time when immigration took place freely and spontaneously, without major political or administrative obstacles.

³ The first certificates belonging to Koreans found in the Civil Registry Archives of Motul date from 1922 and correspond to the birth of Anastacio Hon, the son of Álvaro Hon, a widowed Korean who lived on the Hacienda de San Nicolás, in the town of Motul.

tion movements within the state, mainly headed for the capital city. This is a process that Ramírez (2006:74) associates with a cultural change linked to “The values governing lifestyles, educational demands and new styles of consumption”, in which foreign immigrants were also involved. Indeed, the settlement and integration of these migrants always involved geographic mobility in the quest for a better quality of life. Among the two-way movements recorded in this work, the municipalities of Motul and Mérida feature prominently albeit not exclusively.

With the support of the review of documentary sources and a series of 14 semi-structured interviews conducted with the descendants of these two migrations,⁴ this paper uses what Nancy Green (2002:27–33) calls the “convergent”⁵ model to compare the migration experience of two groups of foreigners, Lebanese and Koreans in the same territory: Yucatán.

The explanation is not only based on the differentiation of national origins, as is usually the case in such comparisons, but also, as the author suggests, the time factor is included as an explanatory element, thereby achieving a longitudinal study that takes into account the socioeconomic trajectory and geographic mobility of migrants and their descendants, without omitting the historical context, particularly the migratory modality whereby they entered the country. These factors all impacted the paths each migratory group took in Yucatán, which, of course, were very different from each other. A clarification is in order at this point. The purpose of this study was not, in any way, to contrast similar features in order to undertake a comparative history of the similarities and common features of two migratory experiences.

⁴ The study subjects are part of what Bertaux (1997:21) calls “situation categories”, i.e. subjects who have shared characteristics, in this case, being descendants of the second, third and even fourth generation of Korean and Lebanese immigrants resident in the municipalities of Motul and Mérida.

⁵ Nancy Green proposes three models of analysis: “linear”, in which a comparison is made between the country of origin and arrival; “divergent”, comparing the same group of immigrants in different host countries; and “convergent”, in which different immigrant groups are compared within the same host country. The author claims that this model is the one most frequently used to “compare the ‘success’ or ‘failure’ or, more modestly ‘social mobility’ of different populations in American cities”.

Following John Elliot, our intention was to identify, understand and explain the differences between two of the most representative migratory groups in the state of Yucatán, a perspective which, according to Elliot (1999:236), can “open up new areas of inquiry as we explore the reasons for such differences and assess their possible implications.”

In order to undertake this analysis, we also relied on some of the theories developed around migration, especially those related to social networks and social capital. For Alejandro Portes, one of the leading exponents of the economic sociology of international migration, social networks do not occur naturally and instead are constructed through strategies designed to achieve the institutionalization of group relations intended to provide other benefits such as economic resources or increase cultural capital (Portes, 2012:84). Regarding the concept of social capital applied to migration, this author uses Bourdieu's definition and understands it as an “aggregate of the actual or potential resources linked to the possession of a durable network of more or less institutionalized relations of knowledge or mutual recognition” (Portes, 2012:84). Here, attention focuses on the benefits migrants obtain by virtue of their participation in a group, whose basis is mainly solidarity and mutual support. Thus, social capital is generated by individual members' disciplined compliance with group expectations. The actor's behavior is not oriented in individual terms but adheres to the fabric of social relations of the entire community (Portes and Sensenbrenner, 1993:1325).

Portes lists four sources of social capital: the first he calls *value introjection*, which, “Emphasizes the moral nature of economic transactions, which are governed by imperatives learned during the socialization process”, and “drives individuals to behave in ways that do not correspond to greed alone”. The second source concerns *reciprocity transactions*. It focuses on the dynamics of group membership, whereby a series of favors, information, approval and other valued items are given and received. The transactions do not involve money or material goods but rather “social intangibles”, in other words, relations. The third is *bounded solidarity*,

which arises from the “Situational reaction of a class of people in response to common adversity”, which will lead, if the feeling is strong, to compliance with rules of mutual support. Finally, there is *enforceable trust* that refers to the “community’s internal sanctioning capacity” (Portes and Sensenbrenner, 1993:1323–1327).

This paper therefore begins with a section that analyzes the possibilities of each group to form a network and social capital, as well as to create and consolidate an organized community of solidarity and mutual support. This is followed by the section on the characteristics of the associations formed by the Lebanese and Koreans in Yucatán. Lastly, there are two sections concerning the local analysis of the Lebanese and Koreans, both migrants and their descendants, who lived in the town of Motul at some point in their lives. They focus particularly on the socioeconomic background and geographical mobility, first of the Lebanese and then the Koreans.

The Formation of the Lebanese Community Versus the Dispersal of Korean Immigration

Arango (2003:26–27) argues that the greatest difficulty in the analysis of migration is that it is too diverse and multifaceted for a single theory to be able to explain. Consequently, there are currently an enormous variety of theoretical perspectives to study migrations in the world. The two groups of foreigners studied in this paper, as we shall see, are the clearest example of how multifaceted and multiform migrations can be.

This analysis, as mentioned earlier, will focus on the theories drawn from social networks and social capital formation. The authors of this paper believe that observing the migration of the Lebanese and Koreans from this theoretical perspective helps explain some of the reasons for the different paths they took since they settled, which lasted for generations. The first contrast that should be noted here is that Korean migration could not develop in Yucatecan territory, despite its attempts to do so. These long-term organizational and even survival strategies in other cases of

immigration, such as those of the Lebanese, facilitated the processes of social, civil and above all, economic integration.

Ribas Mateos (2004:85) states that, “The analysis of networks in migration involves strengthening the role of families as immigration agents,” and Korean migration did not involve families. Pong (1968:27) identified 802 men and 231 women and children. For his part, Hwan Jo (2006:49) said that there were 702 men, 135 women and 196 children. Thus, the majority of those who came were single men who made or remade their family lives with Yucatecan especially Maya women. While Korean girls were much more subject to marriages arranged by Korean parents,⁶ males had greater freedom when it came to making a family. This rapid intermarriage by Koreans, coupled with geographic dispersal, prevented the establishment of close social networks among these migrants. On their arrival in May 1905, just over a thousand Koreans were distributed throughout the Yucatán in 32 henequen haciendas. Subsequently, in 1909, at the end of their contracts, they began a new stage in which they scattered even further, because some left Yucatán for other states, mainly the neighboring states of Campeche and Veracruz and others went as far away as Cuba (Novelo, 2009). Their intermarriage and dispersal was compounded by the fact that the Korean colony was not fed by the arrival of new immigrants, making it impossible to establish chain migration to facilitate the consolidation of social networks. After that 1905 ship, no further entries of Koreans into Mexico were recorded, until many years later, leading to a new community of Koreans with completely different characteristics from those who entered in 1905 (Hyong-Ju, 2003).

In the case of Lebanese migration, Ramirez (2012:175–184) has already explained how family structure was key to the organization and preservation of community life, especially where it was possible to identify endogamy and economic solidarity. The construction of strong social capital was also encouraged by chain migration and

⁶ González Rodríguez (2005:46) mentions that the first case of a marriage between a Korean woman and a non-Korean man was between Rosa María King, who married Alfonso Contán, a Chinese merchant living in the city of Mérida.

the geographical concentration of Lebanese migrants in major urban centers in the region during the first half of the 20th century.⁷ The dynamics of the networks constructed in Yucatán by Lebanese immigrants created, unlike what happened with the Koreans, economic and social opportunities that trickled down to their descendants, children and even grandchildren.⁸ This is obviously a network that was created not only at the level of a locality but also spread throughout the Yucatán municipalities.

Even those of non-Lebanese origin who joined these families were inserted and merged into this scheme. Cuevas Seba (2009:155), of Lebanese descent, tells us in his book that Mexican women married to Lebanese immigrants were received in the homes of the husband's relatives and neighbors to learn everything about cooking. The respondents in this study include the Yucatecan husband of Amira Simón (second-generation descendant, Mérida, October 2013), who ended up working with her in her store in Baca, where he was in charge of the groceries and the husband, also from Yucatán, of Sahara Pedro (second-generation descendant, Motul, October 2013) who worked as a traveling salesman in the towns adjacent to Motul.

Cuevas Seba (2009:194) highlights the enormous solidarity and cooperation among the families of fellow countrymen, explaining that, "Lebanese and Syrian wholesalers supplied their fellow countrymen with loans based on their word or honor, since they did not see a client without capital or a credit history, but rather a fellow countryman down on his luck". Thus, for example, thanks to Don Antonio, one of the respondents, Amira Simón, was able to set up shop in Baca. He told her: "Go to the store in the port of Progreso, pick out what you want, and pay me when you sell it" (Amira, second-generation descendant, Mérida, October 2013).

⁷ In the case of Mérida, the Lebanese were concentrated in the streets between La Mejorada Park and the district of San Cristóbal. In Motul, they are to be found in the main streets located off the main square.

⁸ These strategies helped them overcome the friction they experienced with Yucatecan society on their arrival. Their economic integration was such that they incorporated certain features of the *habitus* of the local middle and upper classes, achieving the unthinkable for outsiders: marriages with the peninsular elites (Dávila, 2013).

Thus, Amira overcome her economic problems and built up a capital which eventually enabled her to move with her six daughters to the city of Mérida. Her husband would join her years later. Amira's relationship with the family of Don Antonio continues to this day, since one of his grandsons married one of her daughters.

There is a long list of examples showing the moral obligation of Lebanese migrants to help their countrymen cope with adversity, especially newcomers. Unlike the Koreans, who arrived as indentured laborers in a single boat, the arrival of the Lebanese responded more to the scheme of free, spontaneous migration, which resulted in a community-style arrival with ups and downs yet continued until the mid-20th century.⁹ Ramírez (2012) explains how the Lebanese managed to form and consolidate a community in Yucatán, characterized by "solidarity and mutual dependence" within whose functioning it is possible to observe the *value introjection*, *bounded solidarity*, *reciprocity transactions* as well as *enforceable trust*. The latter is found in cases where sanctions were imposed on those who did not meet their commitments, as when members of the community sued each other in court for breach of trust over failure to pay their debts (Dávila, 2010:46–48).

During the second half of the 20th century, the Lebanese community in Yucatán had managed to acquire not only social but also economic and cultural capital, albeit not uniformly, because although the majority belonged to the middle classes, some were also found in the economic elites while a minority were working class. By then, the differentiated social mobility, geographic dispersal and the end of community migration, since the arrival of new migrants had almost completely stopped,¹⁰ gave way to a more extended social network that was not only confined to the consolidation of social capital within the migrant community but also extended to other sectors of the host society. It was an integration process that also involved miscegenation through intermarriage by the new generations.

⁹ According to the table drawn up by Ramírez (2012:118), between 1878 and 1972, approximately 777 first-generation migrants arrived in Yucatán.

¹⁰ The most important time of arrival of Lebanese migrants was in the decade between 1919 and 1929, just after the First World War and before the era of the Great Depression. During the second half of the 20th century, Lebanese arrivals were rather sporadic and corresponded to factors such as family reunification, or the search for spouses of Lebanese origin.

Associations of Lebanese and Koreans in Yucatán

Lebanese associations in Yucatán were designed more to consolidate community life, the main aim being first the survival of the group and then economic mobility rather than the preservation of cultural features, although some of these have remained, such as food. This desire for rapid economic assimilation into the local middle and upper classes may explain why, in Yucatán, the Lebanese community did not bother to establish schools where they would convey, protect and preserve certain aspects of cultural life such as history or language.¹¹ This aspect itself worried some of Korean immigrants, at least during the first years after the end of the contract with which they arrived. A propos of this, we found that in 1909, the Korean military school was founded, consisting of 118 students protesting the annexation of Korea by Japan, where they received military-type training. In his thesis, the descendant of Koreans Gutiérrez May (2011:125) argues that this school, “Managed to become one of the strongest bastions of the Korean community in Yucatan”, although it only operated for four years, since it was closed during the revolution.

In addition, Gutiérrez May (2011:120–122) detected the establishment of five schools in Yucatán, which also remained open for a short time. Thus, in 1910, a classroom was set up in the city of Mérida, to instill interest in Korean history and culture in the second generation, but it was not until 1917 that it was established as a school, which lasted just over 10 years. Other schools were opened at the same time but what is striking is that many of them were established within the state, such as Itzincab in 1916, which was the most representative. In his memoirs, Sánchez Pac (2006:50) comments that in some haciendas, lessons on Korean culture continued for some time, as there were teachers willing to teach after their hard work in the henequen field but in others, this was not possible due to the limited number of Koreans or simply the lack of teachers. This interest in preserving Korean

¹¹ Nowadays, there is the Peninsular Lebanese College, founded in 1999 by a descendant, Enrique Saiden Isaac, and his Yucatecan wife Francisca Ojeda, although its objectives do not include the recovery of Lebanese cultural aspects, even though its logo is the cedar, the Lebanese national symbol.

cultural aspects may have responded to the socioeconomic profile of some of the migrants who arrived in 1905, because according Hwan Jo (2006:49), there were imperial functionaries, officials and military officers, doctors and inspectors. In an interview, Javier Corona mentions that some Korean soldiers arrived, who, “fleeing the Japanese invasion, had broken away from the others and come to Yucatán” (Javier, fourth-generation descendant, Mérida, March 2010).

As noted earlier, despite their attempts, the Koreans were unable to set up an immigrant community as such in Yucatán. The author stress that this was “despite their attempts”, because in addition to the schools, a Korean Day Laborers Agency was set up for those who remained in Yucatán after the end of their first contracts. The main objective was collective recruitment in order to continue working on the henequen haciendas for set periods, although this does not seem to have lasted very long, in addition to the fact that it caused high mobility from one hacienda to another among the Koreans.

In 1909, the Korean Association of Yucatán was created, in which Hwan Jo (2006:119, 121) found that there were initially 305 members, whose ideals were to preserve culture, contribute to Korea’s independence from Japan, and provide support for Koreans’ employment, health, education and housing. The Association’s functions underwent noticeable ups and downs precisely because of the Koreans dispersal within the Yucatán. In an interview, Ulises Park says that this association lasted until the late 1950s and explains how during its last years of activity, as a result of those who disappeared, died or left, “The Association practically closed down” (Ulysses, second-generation descendant, Mérida, October 2013). Moreover, its activities were limited to the city of Merida, excluding Koreans who had settled elsewhere in the state, who apparently constituted the majority. Thus approximately 40 years elapsed during which there no Korean organizations in Yucatán.

The Association of Koreans that exists today was created in 1996, thanks to a Korean missionary, who had arrived in Yucatán at that time and found that there were some descendants within the

state who still retained their Korean surnames. Ulises Park, who became president of the Association, said that at the time, he was convinced that there were at most five families of Korean origin. He was therefore astonished to find out how many there were living in the villages, because he thought everyone had left or died.

Nowadays, in addition to the association, there is also a Museum of Korean Immigration and a Korean school. The three operate thanks to the funds they receive annually from the Korean government, which is their only income, since it is no longer necessary to pay a membership fee to belong to the Association. Ulises remarks that, “It was hard for us to affiliate them so that they would belong. And if you tell them they have to pay a quota, they won’t want to” (Ulises, second-generation descendant, Mérida, October 2013). Thus main promoter of this association is the Korean government, which, as Ulises Park says, “Is very aware of them.” Thus, for example, every year 30 children of Korean descent are sent to study in Korea for six months. Through corporate sponsorship, the government guarantees their airfares and living expenses, in addition to 400 dollars a month for spending money. It is a project the Association signed with the Korean government for 10 years, of which approximately six had elapsed at the time of the interview.

The scope of the Korean Association’s activities is fairly limited, since it is extremely difficult for people living outside the city of Mérida to take part in them, even those living in nearby towns such as Motul. The respondents in this study have never belonged to the Association, in addition to having no interest in attending events. Only the daughter of Dalia Sim Kim (third-generation descendant, June 2011), who lives in Cholul, in the Mérida conurbation, studied Korean and traveled to Korea. The Chion family (third-generation descendants, June 2011) who live in the village of Sacapuc, remark that they have requested financial aid from the Korean Association in Mérida without success, because given its financial characteristics, this is not one of its priorities. Its main purpose, according to its president Ulises Park, is to maintain and disseminate Korean culture in the Yucatán. “We have a

school with 100 students, 80 of whom are from the Yucatán and 20 of whom are descendants. In other words, Yucatecans are more interested in learning the language” (Ulysses, second-generation descendant, October 2013).

Conversely, Lebanese “immigrant associations” in Yucatán have had a long, almost uninterrupted life. The analysis also clearly shows the link between the issues promoted by Lebanese associations and this group’s stage in the migration process, because according to Zapata-Barrero (2009:149), “If what the associations do is mostly provide assistance, then we are at an initial stage, involving the provision of help, and so on successively.” Thus, the Lebanese in Yucatán created several associations whose main objectives focused primarily on solidarity and building social networks, all of which were located in the city of Mérida.

First of all, there was the Maronite Charitable Society, founded in 1897, whose aim was to, “offer assistance and provide social networks for new arrivals, and the Young Syrians’ Association, 1902, which also sought to foster mutual assistance. The Patriotic Syrian-Lebanese Association of 1907 called for an, “Openly Lebanese political identity,” by strengthening the community in Yucatán. 1919 saw the creation of the Lebanese League, an organization that continued to provide for those who arrived in large numbers as a result of the First World War. In 1927, the League was abolished and Club México created, “Which was dedicated to fundamentally social activities with an emphasis on integration,” in which the children of immigrants who already had two identity references, Mexico and Lebanon, participated. In 1930, Club México became the Lebanese Social Club and subsequently the Mexican Lebanese Sports Center, whose objectives no longer include the reaffirmation of ethnic identity and mutual support, or maintaining links with the country of origin. Nowadays, belonging to the Lebanese Sports Center is a status symbol and a sign of belonging to one of the most powerful economic groups in the region (Ramírez, 2012:185–186).

As regards the descendants interviewed by the authors for this study, only Herbé Rodríguez belongs to the Lebanese Sports Cen-

ter. He said that his relations with other members of the Lebanese community had expanded ever since, as a young boy born in Motul, he moved to the city of Mérida. He said that he was extremely grateful, because much of what he has done in his professional life has been, “With the protection and support of the Lebanese”, (Herbé, third-generation descendant, Mérida, October 2013). Other respondents’ contact with the Lebanese community has varied considerably. Thus, for Elías Montañez and his wife, who do not belong to the Sports Center, relations are more casual and social, in other words, parties and gatherings derived mainly from their kinship links (Elías, third-generation descendant, Mérida, October 2013). Meanwhile, Amira Simón referred to her countrymen in Motul as follows: “I broke off ties with them and dedicated myself to my daughters” (Amira, second-generation descendant, Mérida, October 2013). However, in Mérida, she had the opportunity to strengthen links and gain support from the entrepreneur, Asis Abraham. In fact, two of her six daughters married Lebanese descendants.

*Socio-Economic Trajectory and Geographical Mobility
of the Lebanese*

Unlike the Koreans, who are usually fairly widely dispersed, the majority of the Lebanese who settled in the municipality of Motul did so in the city of the same name, particularly in the main streets in the center. Although the authors’ original aim was to limit the study to the municipality of Motul, they found it impossible to ignore the history of some of those they found in the neighboring municipalities, first because of the complexity and extent of the family ties of the Lebanese in the region and second, because of the economic importance of the city of Motul. One of the main features of the Lebanese who settled in these surrounding towns was that they were geographically isolated, in other words, they were the only ones living there. The picture gallery in Cuevas Seba’s book (2009:227–388) shows this was indeed a feature of the settlement of Lebanese families in small villages in

Yucatán. This was the case of the two or three people who settled in Teabo, Kinchil, and Bolonchen.

The authors therefore decided to include the trajectories of two Lebanese descendants, because of their sharp contrasts. The first is that of Amira Simón, who was born in Dzinzantún. Her grandparents were pioneers of Lebanese migration in Yucatán, because, according to Cuevas Seba's records, (2009:292), they arrived in 1890. On her marriage to a Yucatecan, Amira moved to the town of Baca where, as mentioned earlier, she set up shop with the help of one of her fellow countrymen. Amira spent nearly 20 years of her life in that town and says that she was the only Lebanese person in the village. This did not, however, mean that she broke off ties with her family or the rest of the Lebanese community. Amira is a descendant of the Simóns, one of the largest families living in the region, many of whom were concentrated in the town of Motul (Amira, second-generation descendant, Mérida, October 2013).

The story of Antonio Sodá's family was quite different. When his father was widowed, he stopped being a traveling salesman and moved from Motul to Telchac Pueblo, where he opened a store. By then, his sons had already grown up. Juan stayed in Motul and the other son, Antonio, after moving back and forth between Motul, Merida and Mexico City, finally moved to Telchac Pueblo at the age of 40 to take over his father's shop on his death. There he met Antonia Quiñones Chan, his partner for 11 years until his death, with whom he had three children. Antonio's financial situation was always fairly perilous, due to a serious illness he suffered. The shop "gradually lost customers," says Antonia, and, "There was no choice but to close," (Antonia, the wife of a second-generation Lebanese man, Mérida, October 2013). Friné Soda, the daughter, says that the only thing her mother inherited was debts had to pay off, as it was she who signed the creditors' letters rather than Antonio, because of his health (Friné, third-generation descendant, Mérida, October 2013). But what is striking is that this family was unable to join and benefit from the social networks which, as shown earlier, among other things, involve solidarity and the mutual support of the community. Instead, they were completely isolated. They were unable to receive assistance from the brother who lived in Motul

because “he was even poorer” and of the relatives living in the same city, Antonia says that she met José Jairala, “Who was their first cousin but offered no assistance”. “Hi,” “Hi, how are you? Nice to see you,” and that was it (Antonia, wife of second-generation Lebanese man, Mérida, October 2013).

Of all the families of Lebanese origin whose history the authors were able to found out a little about, this was the only one that remained outside the community. Several factors could explain this situation, added to the fact of living in a town without a population of Lebanese origin, such as Antonio’s poor health, which deprived him of the mobility required to establish networks with his countrymen, which would have provided financial benefits and the opportunity to incorporate his family into the customs of the community. Antonio left them in a somewhat precarious economic situation, which would permanently cement their distance from the world of the Lebanese. Nowadays, Antonia and her children live in the city of Mérida, and when daughter Friné was asked whether they had any kind of relationship with other descendants of the Lebanese, she replied that they had lost contact with them because, “Lebanese families only marry rich people” (Friné, third-generation descendant, Mérida, October 2013).

In the Civil Registry birth certificates archives in Motul, the author found 54 birth certificates of Lebanese descendants dating from 1900 to 1950. They were all registered in the town of Motul, although in actual fact, four were born in the city of Mérida and subsequently registered in Motul years later. Here one can clearly see the geographical concentration, since in 22 of the birth certificates, the place of birth was given as streets 26, 27 and 17.

The genealogies constructed from the archive data showed that 20 families lived in Motul, although it must be remembered that the framework is quite complex. However, endogamy does not seem to have been the norm since of the 14 marriage certificates found in the archives of the Civil Registry in Motul, eight correspond to couples with Lebanese surnames and six to those with mixed surnames. However, it should be pointed out that as in the case of Amira Simón, intermarriage did not mean a break

from the community or social networks, because the offspring of these mixed marriages sometimes married Lebanese descendants. This is the case of Elías Montañez Jure, who married Lilia Arroyo Abraham, whose mother, Matilde Jure Siqueff, and Xama Siqueff Abraham, were first cousins. There were also the marriages of Herbé Rodríguez Abraham to Ligia Sahui and Rafael Mena Quiñones, who married Juana Abud Jairala.

Luis Alfonso Ramírez (2012:177) has already highlighted the key role played by Lebanese women in the perpetuation of the family and therefore of Lebanese identity. In the case of Motul, we find genuine matriarchies where the role of women was crucial, even for the consolidation of the economic prosperity of some of the leading families. This was the case of the family of Herbé, who in an interview, stated quite firmly: “We are the descendants of a matriarchy” (Herbé, third-generation descendant, Mérida, October 2013) and talked about three women. The first is his grandmother, Rafaela Siqueff, whom he describes as the “heroine” of his life. After a brief stay in Mérida, Rafaela and her family settled in the city of Motul. She went into business while her husband, Pedro Abraham lived the good life. Aunt Xama was also a very important reference for Herbé, who recalls that she eventually seized control of the family, working with the grandmother in a market stall. Finally, there was the figure of his mother Sahara, whose marriage to a Cuban was short-lived. Sahara also managed to survive with her three children with the support of her mother, and by charging interest on loans. Herbé admits, “I am what I am because of these three Lebanese women”, to whom he says he is deeply grateful (Herbé, third-generation descendant, Mérida, October 2013).

Another woman who managed to amass a substantial capital, “By charging interest on loans”, was Sada Siqueff Mattar, the grandmother of Elías Montañés, who recalls “She was the one who ran the... because my grandfather was quieter ... Whenever there was a house, she would buy it and re-sell it (Elías, third-generation descendant, Mérida, October 2013). In fact, even today, the family still retains part of the inheritance left to them by

Sada the grandmother. Another woman of Lebanese origin who took over the reins of the family was Amira Simón. At one point, her mother had had to raise her family when she was widowed. Amira inherited the commercial spirit, as a result of which she had a shop in Baca for 20 years: “I started to grow, and the people in Motul envied me. People from Motul used to come and buy in my house. I already had shop windows and I got started immediately, selling fabric, shoes, wedding gowns, everything” (Amira, second-generation descendant, Mérida, October 2013).

During the first half of the 20th century, the Lebanese in Motul behaved like an elite, producing a strong commercial dynamic in the region, which successfully consolidated new fortunes that were not from the Yucatán, or directly related to the production of sisal, as was customary at that time. As Elías Montañez remarks: “They were not poor... you could say they were upper middle class. Apart from my grandmother and siblings, they all had a good income and their offspring did too because, as I told you, they worked” (Eliás, third-generation descendant, Mérida, October 2013). This view was shared by the residents of Motul, such as Faulo Sánchez, who in an interview describes them as, “Authentically middle-class, although within the village, because they were rich, so to speak” (Faulo, a native of Yucatán born in Motul, Mérida, September 2012).

But this situation did not last long, because although in his study Ramírez (1993:28) claims that the intense accumulation of capital of Lebanese immigrants in Yucatán has been fairly visible in the form of “supermarkets, shopping malls and large department stores in both Mérida and the other major urban centers in the peninsula,” this was not the case in Motul, where the henequen crisis drove the Lebanese to the city of Mérida and other destinations from the mid-20th century onwards, which sometimes led to the closure of their businesses. This was the case of the Pedro sisters’ uncle, Antonio Simón. They mentioned in their interview that in order to move to the city of Mérida, he sold the building where he had a large store selling perfume, footwear, lingerie and other items (Pedro sisters, second-generation descendants, Motul,

October 2013). In fact, nowadays the visibility and participation of the Lebanese in the economic life of Motul is fairly marginal, as the municipal market only contains the Pedro sisters' store, the tortilla shop owned by the son of Elías Montañez Jure and a number of properties still belonging to some of the descendants.

In this respect, there were many who, at some point in their lives, settled in Motul and subsequently they or their descendants moved to other destinations, severing their economic ties with that city. One of the most notable examples, due to the number of documents found in the General Archives of the State of Yucatán (AGEY, Fondo Registro de la Propiedad Privada) on his financial transactions, especially in real estate, is the case of Elías Simón. Elías owned a piece of property in the port of Telchac and six properties in the town of Motul, all located on 26th Street, one of the main streets overlooking the central square. However, by 1928, Elías declared that he was a resident in the city of Mérida, although for some years he maintained his properties and business transactions in Motul. Surprisingly, none of the Lebanese descendants interviewed declared that they knew this person. It seems that Elías was one of the few who not only severed his economic ties in Motul but also his social ties with the community in that city. The most recent date found in the archival documents was 1934, when he finished paying off a debt he had incurred to a fellow countrywoman Sada Siqueff, whose grandson Elías (third-generation descendant, Mérida, October 2013) said he knew nothing about him and that his stay in the city of Mérida appears not to have lasted long, because Elías Simon moved to Mexico City, where some of his descendants still live.

With the information obtained in the archives, the authors embarked on the task of determining how many Lebanese descendants still live in the town of Motul. There we found the Pedro sisters, who belong to the second generation, in other words, they are the daughters of Lebanese people who were born there and are still engaged in trade, because they have kept the market stall their mother opened almost as soon as she arrived in Motul. Members of the third generation, i.e. the grandchildren

of Lebanese migrants, still living in the town of Motul include the Abraham Espadas siblings. The sister is the director of the Motul Institute of Advanced Studies and there is also a daughter of one of the Pedro sisters, who is a teacher. The fourth generation includes one of the sons of Elías Montanez, who owns a tortilla store but lives in Merida, and another son who lives in Motul but works in Mérida, and a person by the name of Pavia Siqueff. As one can see, only the Pedro sisters continue to engage in the activity that distinguished the Lebanese for years, whereas the new generations have already been incorporated into Motul's middle class through activities other than trade. However, among these new generations, there are several who had to leave Motul for a time to receive professional training in the city of Mérida.

And, indeed, one of the main reasons given by the descendants of Lebanese origin for leaving Motul was their children's education: "We used to live in Motul," says Elías Montañez, "But the children grew up and there was no secondary school, so we moved so that they could study", (Eliás, third-generation descendant, Mérida, October 2013). However, study does not seem to have been the only reason. The Pedro sisters are under the impression that their uncle Antonio Simón decided to move to the city of Mérida, "So that his daughters would have a future and marry well", (Pedro sisters, second-generation descendants, Motul, October 2013). Amira did not like the idea of her youngest daughter being courted by a young man from the village, in addition to the fact that her other daughters came and went from Mérida to Baca to study. Amira decided to sell her store in Baca. The proceeds from the sale of the house and her savings enabled her to buy a house and a car in Mérida, in addition to which she had a "nest egg" in the bank to tide her over until she found an activity in that city. Elías, Antonio and Amira were involved in family migrations, whereas Herbé moved to Mérida while he was still a child in order to be admitted to the newly-opened Federal Junior High School for workers' children, which operated as a boarding school. Herbé never returned to live in Motul, although he still maintains the properties his mother left him in that city.

While it is true that it is possible to determine the history of most of the families of Lebanese origin, there were others about which it proved impossible to obtain any information, whose family trees are fairly simple. There are those who died young and childless, such as Antonio Farah, or who had children in the early 20th century and soon moved elsewhere, such as the Elías Raful family, the Abraham Karams, the Raful Alcoceros and the Daguer Sarrafs.

As one can see, families of Lebanese origin who settled in Motul in the early 20th century managed to excel economically through trade, usury and the purchase and sale of real estate, becoming “the rich people in town.” However, this financial boom was neither long-lasting nor far-reaching, as the descendants, both those who remained in Motul and those in the city of Mérida, were inserted into and remained within the Yucatán middle classes, with a diversification of economic activities, which are no longer so closely linked to the mutual support and solidarity of an immigration community. By the late 20th century, the Lebanese were no longer grouped into a territorial space within the main urban centers. Those from Motul had mainly moved to Mérida, but not to join those living there and instead, following the dynamics of the community at the time, settled throughout the city, mainly in the North, losing forever the spatial reference of certain downtown streets that had characterized them during the first decades of their residence in Yucatán.

*Socio-Economic Trajectory and Geographical Mobility
of the Koreans*

Although the Lebanese were concentrated in the town of Motul, it was more common to find Koreans in the surrounding villages, since they did not all settle permanently in a single place. As mentioned earlier, for some years, Koreans were hired collectively to work in the henequen haciendas, meaning that small groups suddenly appeared, but this only lasted for a few years, according to the length of the employment contract and then they

moved to another hacienda for another set period of time. These laborers lived in a parlous financial situation. Pac Sánchez (2006), a second-generation descendant, says in his memoirs that, “For these daily laborers who survived on their daily earnings, saving money was a luxury”. *La historia de la vida de los coreanos, 1905-2005* also talks about the poor conditions of Korean immigrants in 1942, with “Low wages and terrible conditions” (Hwan Jo, 2006:195). Very few Koreans managed to acquire capital and the few that did had to change jobs, in other words give up farming and settle in urban centers. Embedded in the dynamics of the Yucatán peasantry, Koreans were part of the rural-urban migration produced by the process of urbanization that has taken place in the state since the 1950s.

In the Civil Registry archives of the municipality of Motul, we found a total of 27 birth certificates of Korean descendants. Sixteen lived in Motul, four of which correspond to the Lías Pérez family, seven to the Kim and Ek families (the only ones still living in the town of Motul), three to the Kim Pool family (two died in childhood), one to a King Ham and one to a Kim (who also died as a child). The only thing the authors found out about one of the members of the Lías Perez family was that Samuel lived in Mérida in 1945 and was a driver (AHMM, Fondo Población). It was impossible to locate the others in either Motul or Mérida.¹² The other 11 birth certificates gave the Hacienda de San Nicolás and Timul as their address. We only know of Juana Corona Kim, who died as a child, but her older brothers, who were born elsewhere due to the high mobility of their parents (Tecoh, Oaxaca, Coatzacoalcos, Mérida, Izamal, Timul and so on), lived in the city of Mérida and others in Mexico City (Javier, fourth-generation descendant, interview, Mérida, March 2010). The authors also found two other families, Kim Lei and King Teljan, among the five Korean death certificates, whose relatives also proved unable to locate. This can be explained by the fact that one of the main characteristics of Koreans in Yucatán already mentioned above was their rapid dispersal outside the state or even abroad.

¹² The author's search was conducted in the Population Fund of the Municipal Archives of Merida, the phone book and on the Internet via Google.

Lastly, among the five marriage certificates found in the marriage certificates archives of the Civil Registry of the municipality of Motul, the author also identified the family of Crisanto Chion, born in Kantunil to a Korean father and Yucatecan mother, who settled in Sacapuc, where he married Florinda Pech, who still lives with her offspring in the same town. In an interview, the authors found that their economic situation was quite complicated, making it difficult to continue the grandchildren's education (Chion Pech family, third-generation descendants, Sacapuc, June 2011). In summary, of all the families found in the archives, the authors currently only know the fate of the Kims and Eks in Motul, the Corona Kims in Mérida and the Pech Chions in Sacapuc.

However, from their trips into the region, the authors obtained information on two other families. In Cholul, they met Dalia Sim Kim, who lived with her family for some time in Timul, which belongs to the municipality of Motul. Her grandparents had set up a store that sold everything but were moving to Tijuana, so her father, who, because of his trade as a tinsmith, had already visited several villages in the state, decided to settle in Timul to take over the store. Except for a two-year break in Tijuana, Dalia's father lived in Timul, where he eventually died. When she married, she moved to Mérida and recalls: "When my dad died, my mother and my sister came to live here and from here they went to Santa Ana, California, where my sister got married. She now lives in Oregon, which is where my mom died" (Dalia, third-generation descendant, Cholul, June 2011).

The other Korean family, whose surname is Ham, has now spread throughout the surrounding villages to the town of Motul. In that city, the authors found the granddaughter Ramona, and in Suma, they located Esperanza and the grandson Alberto, and in Kini, they found the son, Augustín. They are all descendants of Pedro Pablo Ham Kim, who arrived in Korea and was sent to the Hacienda de Tixcuytun in the town of Mérida, where he lived for 10 years and married Emilia Aké, with whom he had 12 children. Esperanza Hamnos says that when they left Tixcuytún, her father lived in many places, "Because my dad used to get upset

if he lived in a place he did not like and would up sticks and go” (Esperanza, second-generation descendant, Suma, June 2011) until he reached the Hacienda de San Nicolás in the town of Motul. From there he went to work in several other places within the same municipality, putting his family in a rather perilous situation. Esperanza recalls: “He left us, but my brothers had wives by then, and couldn’t support us... He separated from my mom and went off. He didn’t get married, he just moved in with a widow” (Esperanza, second-generation descendant, Suma, June 2011), with whom he had Agustín, who lives in Kini. Agustín does not use his father’s surname and only lived a couple of years with him. Although Agustín (second-generation descendant, June 2011) knew his brothers, he never had close contact with them.

For its part, the grandson Alberto says that his father worked with his grandfather Pedro Pablo at the Hacienda de San Nicolás cutting sisal leaves and weeding, and that he himself also worked there as a laborer scraping leaves. Alberto did not complete elementary school. “I can read, but my dad did not let me go on studying because I was the oldest of my siblings and had to help” (Alberto, third-generation descendant, Suma, June 2011). Thus, Alberto lived in San Nicolas until he was 47, when he decided to move to Suma so that his six children could continue their primary education.

Ramona the granddaughter recalls that her mother moved to be with her grandfather Pedro Pablo, who was still working as a steward and lived with him, moving from plantation to plantation from the age of seven to 14, when she married and went to live in Motul. While Ramona’s father worked in his salon, her mom, “Stayed at home, because she could not read a word”. She did not study anything. She did the housework. We made tortillas, we used to make tortillas by hand, and take in ironing. It was what we did at home” (Ramona, third-generation descendant, Motul, October 2013). Ramona only studied primary school because at the time, her father said, “Women should not study because, well, because they marry and their husbands have to support them. That’s what my poor dad thought”, (Ramona, third-generation descendant, Motul, October 2013). Ramona spent her childhood

in a straw hut on her father's plot of land, but she never went hungry. She had three changes of clothes and a pair of shoes. At 16, she married a Yucatecan baker who also worked for a time in Cordemex and also knew about masonry, since she says that he built much of his house, which now has several rooms, a porch and a ceramic floor. In the mean time, she became a stylist. She said that what her husband earned was for food and what she earned was for their children to study and for their things, "Like I said, I tried to make sure my kids had what I didn't have" (Ramona, third generation descendant, Motul, October 2013). Her three children finished high school, one of them has a tricycle taxi but worked for a time at the Maquiladora Monty. The other has spent 14 years working in the same maquiladora and the daughter lives in Cancún, where she is a customs agent.

As we can see, this account of the descendants of Korean families the authors found shows a completely individualized trajectory in which success or economic difficulties did not take place within an organized community. In other words, the fact of being part of the group of migrants who arrived in the early 20th century did not entail any advantages, since, unlike the Lebanese, they failed to establish effective links of solidarity and mutual support to achieve upward social and economic mobility from the first generations onwards. Thus, for example, we have the case of Emiliano Corana Kim, who had the help of other Koreans to find work at different haciendas. However, due to the precariousness of this work, he was always moving from place to place with his family. Javier Corona recalls that from Timul, "The family moved to the city of Mérida, where he worked as a tinsmith, barely eking out a living. We suffered again as there were days when there was no work" (Javier, fourth-generation descendant, Mérida, March 2010). The three daughters went to live in Mexico City, while the three sons remained in Mérida. Javier is the grandson of one of these three sons. In other words, he belongs to the fourth generation of Koreans residing in the capital city of the state, in which it is possible to observe a degree of social mobility. He explains that there were nine grandchildren, and that two of the three women are professionals, like all the men.

To further illustrate this individualization of the trajectory of the Koreans and their descendants, let us return to the example of Ramona, whose neighbors in the town of Motul are the Kim and Ek family, although she says that despite knowing each other, they do not socialize. She greets them and if necessary, as a hairdresser, she styles the women's hair, "But nothing more". Ramona argues that the distance between these two families also lies in the fact that the Kims and Eks have always had a better financial situation than hers. "They all have nice houses", and she explains that all houses on the block belong to that family (Ramona, third-generation descendant, Motul, October 2013).

But the wealth of the Kim and Ek family was a direct result of the marriage between Luis Kim and Esperanza Ek, the daughter of a farmer in Motul. Luis Kim was born in Tekantó, the son of the Korean Feliciano Kim and the Yucatecan Pastora Pool. María Luisa Kim y Ek notes that her father, "Was a farmer, working where sisal grew and weeding in the countryside. Always in the countryside. He was always a day laborer" (María Luisa, third-generation descendant, Motul, October 2013). Although her father liked drinking and womanizing, María Luisa says that she did not experience hardship during her childhood, because she lived with her family on a farm with fruit trees. She used to sell the fruit. This farm was what María Luisa's mother left her and where the children would build the houses they live in today.

María Luisa Kim y Ek's socioeconomic status improved after her marriage. Her husband is a Yucatecan from Motul who worked for a construction company in Mexico City. The family prospered due to the fact that the husband worked for many years outside the town of Motul and even outside the state of Yucatán for that company. María Luisa and her husband say that they had to leave Motul to progress, "Because all the others around here are farmers and therefore just earn the minimum wage" (María Luisa, third-generation descendant, Motul, October 2013). She admits that this helped them grow and raise their seven children.

Conclusions

Mexico is certainly not a country where foreign immigration is representative in quantitative terms. However, the qualitative importance of this population throughout its history makes the study of groups that decided to settle in Mexico at one point significant. In the case that concerns this paper, Lebanese and Koreans were two of the most representative migrations in Yucatán in the early 20th century, albeit with completely different paths. Staggered and of course free immigration meant that the Lebanese had many more possibilities of moving up the social ladder more quickly and steadily, by engaging in trade and organizing a community of extensive networks of solidarity and mutual support. For their part, Koreans had first of all to work for the duration of their four-year contracts with which they came to work as laborers on the henequen haciendas. Having arrived as indentured laborers, geographic dispersal, early intermarriage especially with the Maya and the lack of new flows of Korean immigrants were instrumental in preventing them from creating social networks as the Lebanese did, or creating the social capital needed to collectively overcome the adversity they faced. On the contrary, there are individualized histories that are difficult to trace, since there were many that proved impossible to track.

Both migrations were embedded in the processes of urbanization the state underwent during the second half of the 20th century, triggering strong geographic mobility. Many of the Lebanese living in the city of Motul, who were more closely identified with the middle classes, moved to the city of Mérida, whereas the mobility of the Koreans who were embedded in the rural world has been much more intense both inside and outside Yucatán, with some even venturing overseas. Thus, for this period, the trajectory of both migrations and their offspring is characterized by mobility and geographical dispersion, the absence of chain migration, and the complete integration of the new generations into the local context. But the result is very different. Whereas Koreans and their descendants have blended into Yucatecan society, the Leb-

anese and their descendants remain highly visible, not because they belong to a closed, endogamous migrant community, but because they belong to the middle and upper classes in the region.

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Date of receipt: May 15, 2014.

Date of acceptance: September 29, 2014.