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**"IT TAKES YOUR LIFE AWAY:"
WOMEN'S RESISTANCE IN THE MAQUILADORAS**

**by
MARGAUX BELAND**

**A thesis submitted to
the Faculty of Graduate Studies and Research
in partial fulfillment of
the requirements for the degree of**

**Master of Arts
The Norman Paterson School of International Affairs**

**Carleton University
Ottawa, Ontario
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The undersigned hereby recommend to the Faculty of Graduate Studies and Research acceptance of this thesis, submitted by MARGUERITE MARIE JOAN BELAND, in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Arts.

Maureen Appel Molot

Maureen Appel Molot, Director
The Norman Paterson School
of International Affairs

James Keil

Professor J. Keil, Supervisor

Abstract

This thesis examines the resistance of women workers in the maquiladoras of Ciudad Juárez in northern Mexico. The nature of women's organizing and acts of resistance in the maquiladoras reflects the specific reality of the maquiladoras, the gendered division of labour within the maquiladoras, the control mechanisms exercised by the management of the maquiladoras, and the political, social and economic reality of the border region. Using an alternative notion and concept of "resistance" the case study which details the experiences of eighteen individuals attempts to portray these women workers as human beings with some degree of human agency. Through acts of "everyday resistance" and the "weapons of the weak" these women workers of the maquiladoras attempt to alleviate their exploitation and alienation.

Acknowledgements

There are several individuals as well as groups of people whose contributions to this thesis were significant and whom I would like to thank. First and foremost, I would like to thank the women workers of the maquiladoras who willingly agreed to spare some of their few free hours to be interviewed and without whom this thesis would not have been the same. They were my inspiration throughout this lengthy project which never failed to maintain my interest. The groups JOC, the CEBs, RO and COMO facilitated my entrée to the individuals I interviewed and to these organizations I am thankful.

My supervisor Jared Keil contributed significantly to the essence of this research. I thank him for his insights as well as his patience. Without him, I am not sure I would have finished this lengthy project. I therefore owe him a great debt.

I would also like to thank Sister Julia, Sister Juanita and Sister Sylvia in Ciudad Juarez and Sister Victoria and Sister Carmen in El Paso who took me into their respective communities as if I were one of them. They not only helped me with my daily survival but also with the research process by providing me with contacts in Ciudad Juarez and El Paso. For putting me in contact with Sister Victoria who introduced me to the rest, I would like to thank Pat Harrington.

I am very grateful to my family and friends, for their unending support, patience and understanding. I especially want to thank Anthea Mulakala and Nancy Taylor. Anthea for sharing in innumerable discussions on this topic over the years and Nancy who helped with some editing. To my extended family I am very grateful for their continued support which took innumerable forms, too many to mention. Finally to my immediate family, namely Peter Engelmann and my son, Sébastien, who bore the inconveniences of this project with admirable patience, I thank them.

*For women who daily courageously challenge
the myth of women's docility and passivity
whether in their domestic realm or in society at large.*

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INTRODUCTION

La mujer luchando y al mundo transforma!¹

Women fighting to transform the world!

This thesis examines the specific experiences of a small number of women working in the maquiladoras² of Ciudad Juarez in northern Mexico. It concentrates on the women workers' lived experiences of their work and of their attempts at alleviating their exploitation and alienation, where possible, through organization and through acts of "everyday resistance" and the "weapons of the weak".

This thesis argues that the division of labour within the maquiladoras, as well as in the surrounding families and communities, is gendered. Following from this fact, we would expect that the nature of work and the experience of the work force and of the labour process, will be different, and differentially perceived, for male and for female workers. Similarly, we would expect that

¹ A quote of a slogan on a placard in "Women Fight Back," by Denise Nadeau, which appeared in Crossing the Line, Jim Sinclair, ed., 1992, p. 152.

² The term "maquiladora" refers to export-oriented assembly plants operating under the auspices of the Border Industrialization Program (BIP) in Mexico.

any attempts at organizing or any expressions or acts of resistance to that work and to that labour process, will also be differentially effected by male and by female workers.

Thus, in order to understand women's experience of labour, the labour process, and women's acts of resistance within the maquiladoras, a gender sensitive analysis must inform and be part of the substantive, methodological, and theoretical understanding of the gendered division of labour within the factories and within the families and communities of the women workers.

The central argument of this thesis is that the nature of women's organizing and acts of resistance in the maquiladoras will reflect the specific reality of the maquiladoras, of the gendered division of labour within the maquiladoras, and of the women workers' lived experiences of the work, the work place and the labour process within the maquiladoras. The "control mechanisms" exercised by the management of the maquiladoras, which, presumably, have as their purpose the maximizing of management control of the work process and of the work force, may be experienced and perceived by the women workers in different ways. The women workers' experiences of these control mechanisms will, therefore, contribute significantly in shaping the general nature of any attempts by the women workers to alleviate their exploitation and oppression within the work force, either by organizing or by

"everyday forms of resistance".

The maquiladoras are an especially apt location of analysis for women workers' experiences of "control mechanisms" and their "everyday forms of resistance", given the proportion of women workers within the maquiladoras and given the myth of the "passive" and "docile" women workers who are hired within the maquiladoras.

The intention of this thesis is to illustrate women as active agents of social change within the maquiladoras, as well as within their families and their communities. I will achieve this through a broad-based exploration of what constitutes "control" within the maquiladoras and what constitutes "resistance" within the maquiladoras, the family and the community. I will analyze the economic, political and social forces which have mediated the expression of women workers' organizations and acts of resistance. In other words, I will address how women's resistance has been mediated within the context of the maquiladoras, by numerous forces and structures, including women's condition in the home, the work place and society at large.

There is much diversity between women within the maquiladoras, equally evident at the moment of organization and resistance. What needs to be addressed is how a gender-sensitive analysis can come to terms with the notion

of women's organization and resistance. With new definitions and concepts of organization and of resistance and with new approaches to seeing organization and resistance, I will be able to unearth a fresh understanding of the nature of women's agency in the context of the maquiladoras.

While there have been important researches on Third World export factory work, including research on forms of workers' organizations and acts of resistance, these studies tend to focus only on "traditional" male forms of formal organizations and organized labour/union activities. There has been very little research on "non-conventional," "non-Western," and perhaps "non-male" forms of resistance among the work forces in the global export factories.

Similarly, the limited research on organization and resistance within the maquiladoras has generally approached the question from a male (or from a so-called "sex-blind" and, therefore, gender biased) vantage point. The result has been a limited notion and understanding of resistance which once again focuses on conventional expressions and forms of oppositional behaviour. In this literature, women workers are often absent, thereby reinforcing the emphasis in the literature on the maquiladoras that women workers **REALLY ARE** passive and docile "victims" of global patriarchal capitalism.

In this research and in this thesis, an alternative notion and concept of

"resistance" is discussed and utilized. This alternative is heavily informed by recent feminist discussions of the notion and concept of organization and resistance. It is also heavily reliant on James Scott's work on the "everyday resistance" and "weapons of the weak" of Malay peasants. It is through this expanded notion of "organization" and "resistance", as well as through the words and experiences of the women workers themselves, that this research and this thesis hopes to portray these women workers, not as heroines, but simply as human beings with some degree of human agency.

Chapter One discusses the methodology of doing research with women workers in Ciudad Juarez and of the larger research process on resistance and the maquiladoras. If research is designed to uncover women's lived experiences and organization and resistance, then the study of women's particularity must be incorporated in the research method. The method must do more than merely "add on" women to an otherwise essentially male-centric approach to social science research. Chapter One will also provide some background on Ciudad Juarez, on the maquiladoras, on the organizations that work with women workers, as well as profiles of the sixteen women and two men who are the primary "voices" in my research.

Chapter Two will review the literature on the nature of the "new international division of labour" between the First and Third Worlds. While

women were mostly invisible in the literature and in the reality of the "old international division of labour" between the First and Third Worlds (in terms of cash crops, wage labour and the extraction of raw materials, for example), women seem to be the main focus and target of the new international division of labour in which labour intensive processing and manufacturing jobs are being relocated from the North to the South. Here, under conditions of high male unemployment and impoverishment, the preferred work force for the multinational firms and export oriented factories appear to be largely young female workers. Chapter Two also discusses how the new international division of labour between the North and the South coincided with a new "development path" for the South, promoted by the North, of "export oriented industrialization".

Chapter Two then continues this discussion of the new international division of labour and the new development path of export-oriented industrialization, with the specific case of Mexico and its colonial and neocolonial history.

Chapter Three examines the mainstream, traditional definitions and forms of workers' organizations and acts of resistance. Chapter Three then goes on to examine more recent feminist discussions and analyses of organization and acts of resistance. This discussion and analysis relies, especially, on James

Scott's analysis of "everyday resistance" and the "weapons of the weak" among Malay peasants.

Chapters Four and Five present the results of my own research with some women maquiladora workers in Ciudad Juarez. Chapter Four discusses the "control mechanisms" used by the management of the maquiladoras, as experienced by the women workers themselves. The experiences of those interviewed will reveal the extent to which the employers of this largely female labour force seek to insure that employees do not organize in pursuit of better working conditions. Chapter Five examines the forms and expressions of resistance. Using the women's own words and experiences, an attempt is made to more accurately reflect the conditions of women's reality within the political economy of the maquiladoras and how that reality has shaped the expression of their resistance. Women's efforts, whether individual or collective, spontaneous or premeditated, will be discussed in light of the broader definition of what has historically constituted resistance.

Finally, in the concluding chapter I will provide an overview of the nature of the control mechanisms and forms of organization and acts of resistance, as perceived and experienced by the women workers themselves. I will discuss the degree to which the acts of resistance revealed meet the criteria discussed in Chapter Three, and the extent to which these acts of resistance have

contributed, positively or negatively, to women's conditions, and to women's experiences, within the maquiladoras, as well as within their families and their communities. In other words, I will address how their acts of resistance have affected the lives of these women maquiladora workers. I will also conclude with a discussion of how studies such as this give "human agency" to the women maquiladora workers, which, it could be argued, is itself a form of empowerment and, therefore, another example of women workers' acts of resistance to their exploitation and oppression.

CHAPTER ONE:

METHODOLOGY

If we accept that women's behaviours are shaped by women's experiences, then we should not be surprised to see unique, yet varied, manifestations of women's work experiences, the relationships between paid labour and domestic labour, and labour organization and acts of resistance among various women workers in the maquiladoras. That is not to say that women's and men's expressions of labour and resistance are mutually exclusive. Nor is it to say that women's experiences of labour and resistance are everywhere the same.

Women's specificity, in contrast to men in general, can be seen in the condition of women in the household and in the maquiladoras and in the way in which the role of women in the household conditions her role in society and vice versa. Variations among women maquiladora workers will be found in their individual lived experiences of gender, kinship, family type, et cetera.

I had hoped to do feminist research when I embarked on this project. Mies defines a feminist method as one where research is done "with" rather

than "on" people. Her guidelines include: 1) doing research from below rather than above, which is therefore shared and mutually beneficial research; 2) replacing the notion of value free research with conscious partiality; 3) replacing the spectator role of the researcher with active participation by the researcher; and 4) using the research tool as a process of consciousness-raising for those being researched, as well as for the researcher (Mies 1983: 122-126). Stanley and Wise (1979: 360) agree that an underlying assumption of a feminist research project is that the researcher is as much a part of the project as those researched, acknowledging that she therefore brings her experience to the research and analysis.

Feminists have challenged the male model of interviewing where the notion of subject/object is impressed on the researcher. The "professional" distance frequently cultivated between the interviewer and the interviewee prevents any closeness or informality between the parties. A feminist approach to interviewing attempts to valorize women's experience and document women's reality as they perceive it. Moreover, the experiences of these women are valorized by bringing experience into the realm of academe. That is, a feminist interviewing method can be seen as a tool for advancing a sociology of women, as an instrument for making possible the articulation and recording of women's personal business of being female in a patriarchal and capitalist society (Oakley 1981: 48-49).

Feminist research ought to be participatory, serving both the researcher and those researched. This implies that questions can be asked of either party, the interviewer or interviewee. The interviewer must be sensitive to the questions asked by the interviewee and recognize their validity. Therefore, neutrality and objectivity become counterproductive (Oakley 1981: 51). That is not to say that the interviewer must relinquish her whole agenda and research question but that an attempt be made by the interviewer to meet the needs of both parties.

Although I had hoped to do feminist research, I was only partly able to carry out a feminist method. Although I did not do research "from above," nor "on" women workers, it was not fully "from below," nor "with" women workers. And although it was not fully participatory, in that the maquiladora women were not incorporated in the formulation, design and execution of the research inquiry, the participants did not have any objections to its execution. They, in fact, were generally supportive.

When I first went to Ciudad Juarez to do my research in 1989, women workers in the literature on world export factories (including Mexican maquiladoras) were generally seen as "docile" and "passive" victims of capitalist and patriarchal exploitation and oppression. While there was some literature on Asian women organizing in EPZs, FTZs and Third World market

factories, there was virtually none on the maquiladoras. Within feminist research there was a growing body of knowledge and literature on agency which I wanted to explore in the context of the maquiladoras. However, between the time of my primary research and my finalizing my thesis, women workers' agency whether in the maquiladoras or Third World market factories in general, has increasingly been recognized in feminist scholarship.

I was intermittently in Ciudad Juarez for a total of approximately twelve weeks between October of 1989 and March of 1990. I chose Ciudad Juarez as the site for my research partly because of the large number of factories and workers in the area but also because of a contact person in El Paso -- Sister Victoria. Sister Victoria is a friend of my aunt's sister, Pat, in Detroit, who had previously been a nun and colleague of Sister Victoria. Sister Victoria, in turn, had a contact in Ciudad Juarez, Sister Julia, who was living in the colonias with women workers of the maquiladoras. In El Paso, Sister Victoria provided support to fellow Dominican nuns working on the other side of the border in Ciudad Juarez. I also knew about the Centro de Orientacion de la Mujer Obrera (COMO) and their work with women workers in the maquiladoras in Ciudad Juarez.

Once I arrived in El Paso to do my research, Sister Victoria introduced me to Sister Julia and a collective of nuns living in a colonia in Ciudad Juarez. It

was arranged that I live "in community" with Sister Julia and the others, though I also travelled back to El Paso to do research at the University of Texas at El Paso on occasion. When in El Paso I stayed with Sister Victoria and her community.

Sister Julia had an extensive network of contacts within the social justice arm of the Catholic Church within Ciudad Juarez. Sister Julia helped to make contacts for me with people at several social justice organizations, including Joventud Obrera Cristiana (JOC), the Comunidades Esclesiales de Base (CEBS) and Resistencia Obrera (RO). I gradually established a network, gathering the names of individuals and organizations interested in maquiladora workers. The network was extended further by seeking the names of potential interviewees at the numerous interviews attended. I also contacted people at the Colegio de la Frontera Norte in Ciudad Juarez as well as the Colegio de Mexico in Mexico City. I also established contacts with the women's organization, COMO. These various people put me in contact with numerous women who had been or were working in the maquiladoras. Once the specifics of my research were presented to the individual contact persons I was frequently provided with the names of other potential contact people, both workers within the maquiladoras as well as experts on the phenomenon of the maquiladoras.

Working through these various individuals and groups, I gradually reached a wider and wider circle of women, and some men. Through these contacts, and through time and acclimation, I was slowly "accepted" and assumed to be non-threatening. The women were very interested in sharing their stories. It was important to them to have their stories heard and documented. Several of them told me it was rare that anyone ever took their story or viewpoint this seriously.

My research method attempts to reflect the unique reality of all those who participated in the research project. The open-ended interview was an attempt to unearth such unique and diversified realities. A more personalized interview which is not grounded in a structured set of questions nor a formal setting is a means of allowing for the diversified realities of the individuals participating in the research to emerge.

While living in a colonia³ I had regular face to face contact with numerous people in the neighbourhood. They frequently informally shared their stories with me. Several of the women interviewed were asked if they had any other acquaintances, friends, relatives, or neighbours that fit the criteria of the research project and who might be interested in participating in the research.

³ A colonia is a Mexican word for neighbourhood or community, referring specifically to a "shanty town" or urban neighbourhood where there are few urban amenities.

This word of mouth approach aided in minimizing any fears that these women might otherwise have had about divulging such information to a stranger, let alone a foreigner.

Given that the nature of this research could threaten the jobs of the women workers involved in the research, it became apparent and imperative that the research be conducted outside the physical space of the maquiladoras. It is indeed unlikely that I would have been granted permission to carry out this kind of research on the premises of the maquiladoras. The integrity of the research depended on establishing distance between the worker and the employer, a safe forum for the employee to speak freely without fear of repercussions from an employer. In addition, it would have been very difficult to convince workers of the confidentiality of the research had it been carried out on the premises of the maquiladoras.

The vast majority of the interviews, meetings or exchanges took place on the women's own turf, though not necessarily in their own homes. Many of the interviews were carried out at the meeting places of the organizations I worked with, whether it was COMO, the CEBs, JOC or RO. This was to facilitate establishing rapport. I was led to believe, by the women's comments and behaviour, that this was a safe place for them. This was more neutral space since though home was safer than the maquiladora, home was still their

father's domain. Several women expressed how this was where they felt the most free to speak and where they felt most independent.

I extensively interviewed twenty-four women and two men over the course of the twelve weeks. Eight of these twenty-four were lost (due to the lack of "follow up" of the translation from Spanish to English), leaving me with the sixteen (and two men) which are profiled later in this chapter. These women came from throughout the city of Ciudad Juarez. My minimum criterion in the selection of candidates to be interviewed was that the women be either currently working in a maquiladora or have done so at one time. Several of them had worked in numerous maquiladoras. The particulars of the individual maquiladoras in which these women worked is important to this analysis though it is not my intention to establish profiles of the individual work places. Instead, trends and general conditions that touched all or most women working in the maquiladoras are discussed.

Of the eighteen individuals interviewed and discussed in this thesis, thirteen women were now operators, two women were now technicians (one step up from an operator), and one woman was now a supervisor. In addition, I interviewed two men, one a labour expert/lawyer, the other a "labourer priest" who actually worked in the maquiladoras as an operator.

Several methods of data collection were utilized, including open-ended one-on-one interviews, a couple of informal group sessions, informal conversations, as well as return visits and follow-up sessions. Informal unstructured open-ended interviews (with the use of a tape recorder) were the primary manner by which data were collected. Though I had developed a guideline and set of general questions, the interview format was not rigid nor static in that there was not a strict set of questions to be answered. The interviews varied from woman to woman, each interview often taking a course of its own, uncovering a unique personal reality. Though some women took the initiative to make unsolicited comments and to add points of information or to ask questions, very few attempted to direct or control the interview process or to question the method or questions being posed. One woman commented on how the casualness and openness of the interview process was in stark contrast to their very regimented work environment.

The informal interviewing approach in part served to minimize the hierarchy traditionally experienced in a research interview. The unstructured interview style alleviated some of the distance that might have emerged from a more formal approach. Before I had a chance to explain the approach and to put the women at ease through an initial casual opening involving about ten to fifteen minutes of idle chatter, the women appeared quite deferential, formal and serious. Once the ice had been broken they appeared to relax somewhat.

This informal approach appeared to be quite effective in breaking down some of the barriers initially encountered.

Being a First World, white, educated woman, created a degree of distance between myself and these women. However, all interviews were carried out in Spanish. My inadequacies with the language, though not so great as to prevent me from grasping the essence of the interviews, were enough to help to minimize a potentially hierarchical relationship between myself and the interviewees: my language limitations served to reveal my vulnerability and my need of their assistance.

Though my primary interest in this research was to establish the nature of women's resistance, there were many other contextual questions that were addressed in the interviews. Firstly, I was interested in having the women speak of themselves in terms of where they came from. There were questions referring to their work in the home, their work in the maquiladoras and the manner in which the two affected one another. The manner in which their lives have unfolded was important to reflect the continuity of the condition and social position of women. Their own views on their situation were especially important. I sought to understand how management's "control mechanisms" were experienced by these women workers, and the extent to which acts of resistance occurred, and whether or not these were planned or spontaneous,

individual or collective.

Finally, each person interviewed was briefed on the purpose of the study. In addition, they were informed that all interviews would be confidential and that their identities would not be revealed. If their comments were to be quoted, a fictitious name would be used to conceal their identity. However, I did have the interviews translated (in confidence) (eight of these were never translated and have since been "lost") so that I would have an accurate English transcript from which to take verbatim quotes.

Profile of Ciudad Juarez

This research was carried out in Ciudad Juarez, a city on the northern Mexico border. In the 1960s, Mexican landowners, such as the Bermudez family, established the first industrial parks in Ciudad Juarez. They were happy to shift their cotton acreages into industrial parks (Mirowski & Helper, 1989: 25). With the development of the Border Industrialization Program (also referred to as the maquiladoras), Ciudad Juarez was one of the primary sites of Mexico's export factories. In 1990 there were over 300 companies operating within the city (Canadian Labour Congress 1990: 58).

Tiano (1994: 6) claims that Ciudad Juarez was atypical of the border

region in that there was such a significant concentration of maquiladoras that unlike other border cities it did have a problem of labour shortages. That is, "the industry's voracious labour demands...has forced employers to transform their recruitment practices and to make other adjustments in their employment policies to ensure a sufficient supply of labour" (Tiano 1994: 6). This point will become important when we discover that one of management's "control mechanisms" -- the fear or the threat of firing workers -- was not a major deterrent to women workers leaving a bad job or working conditions: the women workers assumed that they could find other work, and often did.

The demographic statistics can barely keep pace with the reality in Mexico and particularly Ciudad Juarez; consequently these figures, although the most recent, are already out of date. As of 1988 the population of Ciudad Juarez was 1,200,000 compared to 400,000 in 1970 (FEMAP 1989). In 1987, 54.5 per cent of the population of Ciudad Juarez were women and 45.5 were men. Women between the ages of 19 and 25, and 13 and 18 comprised 7.48 and 7.49 per cent of the population, respectively. 50.25 per cent migrated to the region (FEMAP 1989). Moreover, as of 1987, 29.18 per cent of the population was employed in the maquiladoras (FEMAP 1989). The population of Ciudad Juarez was growing by an average of 70,000 a year.

Currently the wages in the maquiladoras are 98 cents (CDN) per hour

(McQuaig 1993: 108). The wages in the maquiladoras of Ciudad Juarez are slightly higher than the wages paid in Mexican-owned plants. However, though the cost of labour on the border tends to be approximately 15 to 20 per cent higher than in the rest of the country (Stoddard 1987: 43), the cost of living is equally higher. In 1988 the weekly earnings of a maquiladora worker on the minimum wage covered 28 per cent of the basic food, clothing, shelter and medical needs for a family of four (Dillon 1989: 1). In some cases the price of foodstuff, et cetera in Ciudad Juarez, can approach those on the U.S. side of the border (Kadetsky 1994: 12). Even double-income households cannot afford more than a shanty. This reality is especially evident as a greater number of households require two, three and four part and full-time incomes to meet the household survival needs.

The minimum wage rate is regulated by the Mexican government. Unlike in many countries where it is largely treated as a wage floor, in Mexico "the very low minimum wage is treated as a wage ceiling" (Stoddard 1987: 43). In several of my discussions, women spoke of how increasingly wages are distributed in the form of subsidies and bonuses according to job performance and targets established by management. Companies also include, among other things, "company sponsored athletic teams, beauty pageants, corsages for females on their birthdays," as non-wage benefits. All in all, over the last decade maquiladora wages have dropped by half (Kadetsky 1994: 13).

Profile of a Colonia

Most of the workers live in colonias. "Colonia" is a Mexican word for neighbourhood or community, referring specifically to a "shanty town" or urban neighbourhood where there are few urban amenities. The colonias have skeletal infrastructures, a network of unplanned, unmaintained dirt roads, costly access to water services, erratic electrical services (where available), a lack of proper sewage and drainage, and a generally unsanitary environment. The colonias or barrios are usually located on the periphery of large urban centres where space can still be found for newly arrived migrants. Often the colonias' infrastructures are already stretched beyond their capacities.

The lucky few have houses made of adobe, but the majority have a combination of adobe, scraps of wood, metal, and in some instances used tires, fragments of old clothes and cardboard. Those who cannot afford proper housing live in the squatter slums scattered throughout the colonias. In these parts of the colonias the water and electricity services are particularly erratic if available at all.

Water is often stored in metal drums whose previous use is unknown. Some claim that the drums had possibly been used as containers for toxic materials. Toxic waste is a byproduct of numerous of the production processes

carried out in the maquiladoras. In 1987 the Mexican and U.S. governments agreed that maquiladoras would re-export to the U.S. all their hazardous waste. However, of the 722 border plants surveyed by the Colegio de la Frontera Norte only 20 had notified the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency that they were returning waste to the U.S. (Dillon 1989: 9).

There was regularly a black haze over Ciudad Juarez in the colder months when those without adequate heating would burn used rubber tires to keep warm. The stench was at times quite unbearable. Studies have found higher than normal incidents of skin diseases, respiratory illnesses and anaemia among Mexico's border population (Kadetsky 1994: 12).

Profiles of Organizations -- COMO, JOC, CEBs and RO

The Centro de Orientacion de la Mujer Obrera (COMO) was founded in the 1970s by privileged professional women interested in assisting less fortunate women (Fernandez-Kelly 1983a: 41). Soon after its inception, COMO became a centre for the education of working women, namely orientation and consciousness-raising around workers' rights and interests, including health and family issues. In the late 1970s and early 1980s COMO started to provide consciousness-raising programmes while also doing vocational training. COMO began to look at community-wide issues, in order to foster indigenous initiatives

and development.

Both Joventud Obrera Cristiana (JOC) and the Comunidades Eclesiales de Base (CEBs) are religious organizations interested in advancing the plight of workers and the community at large. The former was exclusively made up of young workers. Its primary focus was on issues of work for young people and always within a Christian framework. While the CEBs were also Christian-based in their philosophy, their focus was on larger community concerns, not exclusively those of young workers or workers in general.

Resistencia Obrera (RO) was established in 1986. It grew out of six different groups of workers from six different maquilas who decided to coordinate their organizational and resistance efforts. They were interested in collaborating to organize awareness campaigns around workers' rights, human rights and other employment issues.

Profiles of Women Interviewed

Nora was an operator who painted bulbs in an electronics manufacturing factory. She had worked in several maquilas and had been working at this particular factory full-time for the previous six months while she attended night school at COMO. She was studying towards a nursing assistant certificate and

at nineteen years old was single, childless and living at home with her parents.

Almira had been working at the same job as a seamstress, sewing pants, for three years, since migrating to the border region from Torreon. Prior to this job she had worked at another factory in her home state for seven years. She was from a family of eleven, including her parents, who continued to live in Torreon. Almira was living with one of her brothers, his wife and their three children, in Ciudad Juarez. Almira worked ten hours a day Monday to Friday in the factory and studied at COMO several hours every week-day evening. She still continued to try to send her mother money, though money was especially tight now that she had to pay for her studies. She also provided money to her brother every week to help with food expenses. On week-ends she contributed to the household by assisting her sister-in-law with domestic chores.

Clara was a twenty year old single woman, who had worked in three maquiladoras over the previous three years. In her most recent job she worked in the refrigeration section of an electronics manufacturer, where she assembled and connected component parts. She was the only daughter of a family of four children and she continued to live with her parents while she worked in the maquiladoras and went to night school at COMO. Clara gave her mother half of her salary and kept the other half to pay for her personal care

needs and her studies. She helped her mother with domestic chores on week-ends and sometimes after night school.

Mona was eighteen and had been working in the maquiladoras for eight months. She had previously worked in a restaurant. In the maquila she sorted coupons. Mona was single and lived with her parents. She was from a family of twelve, of which four, including the father, contribute financially to the household. Mona shared half of her salary with her mother and kept the balance for herself, specifically to cover her tuition and related costs. She attended night school at COMO in the hopes of completing her high school diploma and eventually entering the college system. There she hoped to study to become a secretary. On week-ends she helped her mother with domestic responsibilities such as laundry and other house cleaning duties.

At the time of our discussion, Edna had been an information processor for a year, classifying airline tickets for a major maquiladora company. This was her first and only experience in a maquiladora. At twenty years old, she was single, with no children, and living at home with her parents and her five siblings. She and her father were the only sources of financial income for the whole family. She kept half of her salary for herself, specifically for school related costs (she was studying Business Administration at a local college). She gave the other half to her parents to help with the management of the

household. She also helped her mother with domestic labour by doing dishes and doing general house cleaning.

I had discussions with Lucia in her capacity as continuing education coordinator of the Open Education programme at COMO which offers both primary and secondary education to adults. Before working for COMO she was a production operator for an electronics manufacturer in a maquiladora for six years. She studied at COMO while working in the maquila. Lucia was a single woman with a child and lived with her parents. She hoped that someday she would be able to afford to leave her parents' home.

Trina had been working as an operator for two months when she was shifted to a materials storing job where she worked for six more months. She had since become a materials supervisor and had been working in that capacity for fourteen months. She was a single woman, with no children, and was living with her brother, his wife and their young child. They were all recent migrants from central Mexico. She was required to contribute half of her salary to her brother who used it to supplement his salary in the maquiladoras, which was itself inadequate to provide for his family.

Maria had been working as a coupon processing operator for six months on a part-time basis, from eleven in the morning to five in the evening five days

per week. She also went to school part-time at COMO studying to become a nursing assistant. This was her first job in the maquiladoras. She was single, with no children, and was living with her parents and her two siblings. Three of the five worked outside the home, including her father, brother and herself. Unlike her brother, she helped her mother with domestic responsibilities including, ironing, washing, and house cleaning.

Mariana worked in the maquiladoras for four years from the age of fifteen. She came from a poor family and needed to earn money to take classes at the teachers' college. She hoped to go on to law school, in order to be able to assist workers to fight for their employment rights. The maquiladoras, she claimed, were the only place where a fifteen year old could find work.

Ariana had worked in six different maquilas over nine years. When I interviewed her she was working on a production line in a department where small electronic parts were being made. Her specific role was to carry out a quality control check on a small ceramic part. At previous maquiladoras, she had sorted coupons, assembled tapes for computers, worked on an electronics parts assembly line in the manufacture of refrigerators, and tested parts to be used in the assembling of airplanes.

Ariana was a single woman of twenty-six years living at home with her parents. She was one of the youngest in a family of twelve children. Nine of her brothers and sisters had already married and were living on their own and one sibling was unmarried and living independently. Only her younger sister and herself, along with her parents, remained at home. Ariana's parents were quite elderly, and she was the only family member working outside the home. Her father had once been a carpenter but was now quite ill. Her sister was still in school and so Ariana was the sole breadwinner in the home and therefore needed to maximize her earning potential. She claimed that even now as a technician her salary was inadequate to meet the basic survival needs for the four of them. One of her brothers was paying for her sister's education and school related expenses and still there was a shortfall at the end of every month. Her family migrated from the south of Mexico to the border region in pursuit of job opportunities. Even though Ariana was the sole breadwinner, she came home at night to do her own ironing and washing as she had since she was ten years old. Her mother took care of these chores for the other members of the family but Ariana had to do her own.

Camilla had been working in the maquiladoras for three years when I interviewed her. She had worked in three different maquilas over the three years, working in quality control, inspecting finished products, and as an operator. She was single, with no children, and was living with relatives. Her

family was from central Mexico and had remained there. She had left her home three years earlier in order to seek work in the border region.

Gloria, at twenty-two years of age, had been working in the maquiladoras for nearly five years. She had left school prematurely due to a pregnancy and the need to provide for her child, after having been forced to leave her parents' home. She had been an operator in the same maquiladora for five years and had been afraid to jeopardize her employment status. She lived with her brother, sister-in-law and their two children. Gloria contributed over half her salary to the household, leaving her with barely enough to pay for the personal care needs of herself and her child. Fortunately her sister-in-law, being home with her own two children anyway, was available to care for Gloria's child when Gloria went to work.

Elena was seventeen years old and had just started working in the maquiladoras when I interviewed her. She was an operator, sorting coupons, and found the work easy though somewhat boring. She especially liked the camaraderie among fellow workers. She was very keen, happy to be receiving a pay cheque every week. She was living at home with her parents but did not contribute financially to the household. Elena was the youngest of four children, only two of whom were still at home. Her older female sibling was the primary support to her mother in terms of domestic household duties.

Sylvia, at twenty-six years of age, was single and living with her parents. She was the only one of her five siblings still at home with her aging parents and was feeling the burden of caring for them. Her whole salary was expended in caring for her parents, herself and maintaining the home. Her father was too elderly to work and thus did not contribute financially to the household. Sylvia also performed household duties and responsibilities such as house cleaning given the increasingly limited domestic tasks her mother could carry out in her advancing years. She appeared to be somewhat bitter about her situation, "feeling trapped." Sylvia had had only one other job prior to getting her job as a production operator at RCA. She felt obliged to remain at RCA which is lauded as being the best of all the maquilas. This reputation, according to Sylvia, was based on the superior working conditions at RCA though she was not sure how RCA compared to other maquilas.

Juanita had a "survival of the fittest" mentality. She had worked in the maquiladoras just under a year and was vying for a supervisory position within a year. In the meantime she had been promoted to technician from operator after only a few months in the maquiladoras. She had completed a technical college program as an engineering technologist. She appeared determined to work her way up the echelons of the maquila. She was not very critical of the working conditions or the management approach, convinced that with enough persistence she could aspire to a supervisory position. She was twenty-one,

single and lived at home with her parents. She contributed nominally to the household, both financially and in terms of domestic tasks.

Anna was a twenty-two year old who had been working in the maquiladoras for nearly five years. She had changed jobs five times in five years. She had always worked as an operator and she claimed she was now at the top level and pay scale for an operator. At the time of the interview she assembled component parts in the manufacture of electronics equipment. Anna was quite disillusioned with her long-term prospects in the maquilas having found that there were so few options for upward mobility as long as she had no further education. In her view a college or university education was required to become a supervisor.

Mario had specifically chosen to work in the maquiladoras, for the past year, in order to gain a better understanding of how the maquilas operated and to experience the working conditions first-hand. He was what he called a "labourer priest." He was working as a operator, assembling cable for an electronics manufacturer. He chose to work in the maquiladoras since he felt that that was where one had to work in Ciudad Juarez in order to be "working among the people." I chose to interview Mario because of his intimate experience with JOC as well as other "resistance" organizations, in addition to his experience in the maquila itself. Mario had been with JOC for nearly six

years, ever since its beginning.

Romero was an activist lawyer who claimed to be an advisor to the workers in the maquila industry. He was frequently involved in lawsuits against employers when employees are fired without cause or when their rights are abrogated. Given the high rate of divorce among workers in the maquiladoras, he was also frequently called upon to handle "divorces, family problems, etc.," but basically "we deal with labour problems." He has been involved in numerous suits against employers for illegal acts including unlawful dismissal, sexual harassment and other forms of mistreatment. Romero had been involved in several formal organizations where resistance is expressed, initially in the trade union movement, and later on in non-union resistance-based organizations, groups or coalitions.

It is important to reiterate that these women (and men) do not "represent" anything or anybody; they are not a "sample". Rather, they are sixteen women maquiladora workers in Ciudad Juarez who agreed to spend some time talking to me about the work experience and their lives. Since I initially contacted many of these women through COMO, these sixteen probably are heavily weighted towards those women maquiladora workers who think that "education" is a "way out" of their present jobs. In addition, since all sixteen of the young women are living with parents or other kin, and none

live in independent households of their own or with a partner, these sixteen women probably are atypical of the married maquiladora women workers.

In any case, it is the stories of these sixteen women that form the basis for this thesis, and the discussion of their "acts of resistance" to be taken up in Chapters Four and Five. In the interim, the following Chapter situates the women maquiladora workers within the framework of the new international division of labour between the North and the South and the new "development path" for the South of "export-oriented industrialization" -- on a world scale and in the specific case of Mexico.

CHAPTER TWO:

THE NEW INTERNATIONAL DIVISION OF LABOUR AND MEXICO

In the literature known as "underdevelopment" or "dependency" theory (in contrast to "modernization"), relations between the so-called Northern economies and Southern economies are a product of the development of capitalism as a "world system". Specifically, the capitalist world system came into being largely over the sixteenth through nineteenth centuries during the so-called "Age of Discovery" and the period of European imperialist and colonial domination of the South (Wallerstein 1974; Amin 1976; Amin 1974; Baran and Sweezy 1968). In Wallerstein's (1974) "world-system theory", the economies of the North and South were differentially positioned as the world became divided into core, semi-periphery and periphery countries within world capitalism.

In this process, the economies of the South were distorted and transformed, if not destroyed, and they became the "periphery" of the world capitalist system. In contrast, the economies of the capitalist North became the "core" of such world development. In this approach, little changed when the nations of the South gained their political "independence," since their

economic dependence remained and deepened.

The Old International Division of Labour

Under colonial and neo-colonial relations, a division of labour between the First and the Third Worlds was created, in which raw materials were generally extracted and transferred from the colonies or ex-colonies of the South and shipped to Europe, the United States and more recently Japan. The North extracted these raw materials cheaply. The Third World was therefore incorporated into the capitalist global economy as a source of cheap raw materials, such as tin, iron, coal, copper, silver, gold, timber, spices and varied agricultural products. In the North, these raw materials were transformed, through processing and manufacturing, into finished goods which were primarily consumed in the North (Lipietz 1987: 49). In the North, the accumulation of wealth derived from the extraction of resources from the South allowed the "primitive accumulation" of capital required, along with the "primitive accumulation" of proletarians in the North, for the establishment of the Northern capitalist economies, first in Great Britain, and later elsewhere in Europe, North America and Japan.

This division of labour between the North and South has become known as the old international division of labour (the O.I.D.L.). The OIDL was rooted

in an uneven exchange between the colonizer and the colonized, in which the value paid for the raw materials from the South was considerably lower than the value of the same materials once they were incorporated into the processed and manufactured products of the North (Amin 1976; Baran and Sweezy 1968; Jalee 1968; Jalee 1969).

This unequal relationship between the North and South and the increasing growth of the rate of capitalist accumulation in the North, throughout the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, were the impetus for the success of world capitalism in the North. This unequal relationship -- the "development" of the Northern economies and the "dependency" or "underdevelopment" of the Southern economies -- has continued into the present.

The periods of colonization and decolonization of the South also resulted in various internal dynamics. Within Third World economies, unequal development was also occurring. A small and very wealthy elite was formed, often with close ties to the North and often acting as brokers and middlemen between the North and the populations and resources of the South. This elite, as well as Northern actors, utilized their wealth to obtain land and other resources in the South. The agricultural products grown on such lands and the other resources extracted in the South were exported to the North.

At the same time, the vast majority of the populations of the Southern economies became increasingly impoverished and without resources. As more and more land was utilized for cash crops for export and for the extraction of other raw materials, and as more and more land was under the control of local elites or foreign concerns, less and less land was available for use by the growing numbers of the masses. Migration from rural areas to more urban areas occurred as people attempted to gain access to adequate resources, which were often no longer available from their small subsistence plots, if they had any land at all.

In addition, as the South was increasingly incorporated into the world capitalist system, a need for Western goods and for "cash" was created. Often colonial regimes imposed "head taxes" on their subjects, forcing the latter to either exchange their labour power for cash or to grow or otherwise obtain access to products that could be exchanged for cash. In addition, with the contact with the North and with the products of Western technology, came many new "needs". Hence, many individuals in the rural South also migrated from rural to more urban areas to look for employment and jobs, either in the formal or informal sectors of the economy. Others stayed in the rural areas, attempting to supplement their subsistence fields, if any, by planting cash crops for sale and export. These processes resulted in the creation of large "surplus" populations in the rural and urban areas of the Third World. These processes

were also gendered. In much of sub-Saharan Africa where women were responsible for most subsistence horticulture, it was mainly young men who went to the mines and the urban centres looking for wage employment (cf. Boserup 1970). In contrast, in much of Latin America young daughters were often seen as "surplus" in the rural agricultural economy and so young women flocked to the urban areas where they were the favoured employees as domestic workers (cf. K. Young 1982). In almost all cases, cash crops were introduced to men only and men controlled any cash crop farming (Boserup 1970; Maguire 1984; Beneria and Sen 1981; Mies 1986).

The Post-WW II Capitalist Growth Period and Import Substitution

There was marked economic success in the capitalist First World economies. In the post-World War II period in the North, especially in the United States, there was continued growth in the rate of capital accumulation. This increase in the rate of growth of Northern capital, led by the United States, continued through the 1950s and 1960s. This period was marked by an ideology of democracy, "equality" and a belief that the United States was becoming "one big middle class". For many analysts, this period of unprecedented growth was marked by an unstated "social contract" established between capital and labour. In contrast to earlier periods of labour militancy, the "new social contract" meant that workers would receive "their share" in

this unprecedented growth, through gradual increases in salaries, benefits and better working conditions. Thus, many of the "working class" would attain new levels of disposable income allowing increased purchasing power.

During this same period, and especially in the 1960s, there was a burgeoning of the struggles and calls for equality and democracy. The 1960s witnessed the growth of the civil rights movement, and later the women's movement. The 1960s were also marked by the anti-Vietnam war movement and the "counterculture". There were also increasing struggles and calls for the end of inequality and the establishment of democracy in North-South relations. Following the end of World War Two, the calls for decolonization were taken up by the newly-formed United Nations and, increasingly, by the peoples of the South themselves. Throughout the 1960s, many of these former colonies achieved political independence.

At the same general time, following World War Two, but, especially, in the 1960s, came the notion of Third World "development" and "modernization" and the role of the First World in promoting these processes through "aid". The earlier notion of the Marshall Plan for rebuilding war-torn Europe through massive infusions of (largely) United States finances and capital was now to be applied to the South. Although economic development was still a key aspect of the concept and practice of "aid" and "modernization", throughout the

1960s came calls for "integrated rural development", "human resource development", and "development with a human face." President Kennedy established the Peace Corps and Canadian University Services Overseas (CUSO) was founded in 1961.

Import Substitution (IS) was a development path promoted by the South and, increasingly by the 1960s, by the North as well. IS was seen as an alternative strategy to spur the "development" of the South. The concept of import substitution was to have developing countries produce their own agricultural and industrial goods for their own consumption -- goods that were previously largely imported from the North. This would clearly increase the economic independence of the South and decrease their former dependency on the North.

IS included the "Green Revolution" -- in which scientific expertise in the North and South had developed high-yield variety (H.Y.V.) seeds of grains and rice and other agricultural produce that could grow in precarious environments, in southern environments, and that with multiple harvests produced significantly greater quantities of foodstuff. It was believed that the Green Revolution would enable the South to grow enough food for self-sufficiency within a very short time.

IS also sought to develop local industries in the South to produce goods and services to substitute for previous imports from the North, such as footwear, clothing, furniture, et cetera. The anticipated long-term consequence was domestic self-sufficiency in the South, in terms of both the production of manufactured goods and food production (Mitter 1986: 7).

However, IS strategies, popular in the 1960s, were shortly considered by the North to have been inadequate in providing "developing" economies with a strategy for attaining the level of growth and development required to meet their domestic needs. While IS strategies were still promoted by many Third World countries, they were deemed a failure by the North.

IS partly failed because of the significant infusion of capital required to purchase machinery (from the North, with hard currencies) in order to initiate local production of goods and services. IS partly failed because the Green Revolution also required the input of H.Y.V. seeds, fertilizers, and equipment - again often purchased from the North, with hard currencies. Both the small entrepreneur and farmer were often unable to begin benefitting from the Green Revolution and other forms of IS, while the rich landowners and large industrialists did (Mitter 1986: 32). IS also partly failed because Third World domestic markets were often too small to compete with the economies of scale of Northern industries and products. In addition, IS partly failed because it

"tended to provide luxury items for the urban elites at the expense of necessary investment in the infrastructure of the rural areas, where the majority of the population lives" (Mitter 1986: 31).

IS probably also was deemed a failure partly because it did not help the Northern capitalist economies. Shortly, those Northern economies themselves would be in crisis. Examining what "path of development" was promoted after IS, might shed some light on why IS was so quickly deemed to be a failure by the North.

Export Oriented Industrialization and the New International Division of Labour

Towards the late 1960s and early 1970s the post-World War II rate of growth in the North started to level off. Global recessions and the O.P.E.C. oil crisis were manifestations of this slowdown in the rate of growth of capital accumulation and this slowdown in the rate of growth of profits in the First World. This period of stagnation and recession continued throughout the 1970s in the North. This was the so-called "crisis of late capitalism". This is not to say that individual companies were not profiting from their production sites in the core as even during the years of the world recession in the 1970s these companies were operating successfully (Frobel et al. 1980: 4).

During this same period OPEC experienced a surplus due to the quadrupling of oil prices in 1973 which led to a flood of petrodollars on the international financial market (Gilpin 1987: 315). In addition, the American government's expansionary monetary policy had printed dollars that found their way into the Eurodollar market (Gilpin 1987: 315).

In pursuit of continued growth in the rate of profits, Northern investors, lenders and multinationals began to look to the South as a site for investment and industrial production (Arizpe and Aranda 1986: 176). There the conditions were such that greater profits could be harnessed on loans and investments. Northern bankers began to recycle petrodollars and eurodollars by investing in developing countries which were assumed to be creditworthy (Gilpin 1987: 316).

In addition, not only private Northern banks and lenders but the International Monetary Fund and the World Bank encouraged Third World governments to take loans, requiring that interest payments and eventual repayment of the principal be in Northern currencies. Moreover, interest rates became very high in the North in the late 1970s, and interest payments and repayment of the principal were tied in to these high rates. This, combined with the impoverishment of many Southern economies, led some Southern governments to the verge of default. Mexico declared that it would not be able

to pay its interest due in 1982, and would therefore have to default (Canadian Labour Congress 1990: 93)

In a stagnant economy, labour-intensive production can become more profitable by either intensifying labour's productivity (through speed-up or piece work, for example) or by reducing the cost of labour. In the past, in the United States, for example, similar "crises" in slowdowns in the rate of growth of capital in the early 1960s had resulted in labour intensive industrial processing and manufacturing being largely moved from the unionized industrial northeast to the southern United States, where labour was relatively weaker and cheaper and the "business climate" better (Safa 1981: 422).

In addition, the cost of labour in Northern manufacturing has been cheapened through increasingly subdividing and fragmenting the labour process into repetitive, simple tasks that are more easily managed and controlled.⁴ The purpose of subdividing and simplifying the labour process was to lower the cost of production by limiting the need for skilled labour to only those parts of the production process that actually required that skill (Cho 1985: 187). This was articulated in the "Babbage Principle":

the master manufacturer, by dividing the work to be executed into different processes, each requiring different degrees of skill or of

⁴ For a more in-depth analysis of "scientific management" of the labour process see Braverman 1974: chapters 3-5.

force can purchase exactly that precise quantity of both which is necessary for each process; whereas, if the whole work were executed by one workman, that person must possess sufficient skill to perform the most difficult, and sufficient strength to execute the most laborious, of the operations into which the art is divided (Babbage, cited in Frobel et al. 1980: 38).

This led to reduced wages through the combination of a reduction in the skill levels required and the easy replacement of workers (which increases competition between workers) (Cho 1985: 187). The fragmentation of the labour process was followed by an intensification of the different components of the production process. Labourers were forced to speed up their respective part in the production process. Another important aspect accompanying the fragmentation of the production process was that labour was consequently more easily controlled and monitored. The tendency towards greater exploitation of labour was facilitated.

Finally, labour costs in the North have been controlled historically by creating or utilizing divisions between workers, along lines of gender, class, and racial/ethnic divisions (Mies 1986: 112-113). For example, women and racial/ethnic minorities have been employed extensively in labour intensive processing and manufacturing. In contrast to the historically developed "male breadwinner wage" ideology, women and ethnic/racial minorities and youth are perceived as "secondary" workers, who can be paid significantly lower wages than white men. Women have also been perceived as having various characteristics which "suited" them to labour intensive processing and

manufacturing (but not, for example, neurosurgery): nimble fingers, flexibility, subservience and docility, deference to male authority, and less likelihood to organize (Armstrong 1984). Among the most exploitable female workers are young unmarried ones, thought to be only working for "pin money" or "for lipstick." Women's work in the paid workforce requires that connections be made between their paid work and their domestic labours, child care and mothering work -- all sites of society's gendered division of labour.

In the 1970s, the solution to the North's "crisis" seemed to lie in moving certain labour processes in labour intensive processing and manufacturing from the North to the South, where labour was extremely cheap and abundant and health, safety and environmental laws were lax or absent. This process is known as the new international division of labour (N.I.D.L.) between the North and the South. This NIDL is the "Babbage Principle" on a world scale (Cho 1985: 187).

Northern governments' support for, and encouragement of, multinational firms moving certain labour processes from the First World to the Third World were justified as follows. (1) First, they blamed the socio-economic conditions of the industrialized economies on the excessive demands of workers, their high salaries and benefits and good working conditions (including health, safety and environmental controls), the excesses of the "welfare state", and the restraints

imposed on the business community and government controls on "free trade" and "the market" (Sinclair 1992: 56). One solution to all this in the North was to have a major shift "to the right" ideologically -- as witnessed by the election victories of Reagan, Thatcher, Mulroney and Bush and the establishment in the United States, for example, of the Council on Competitiveness chaired by Vice President Dan Quayle. A clear "pro-business" and "pro-so-called free trade" environment was put in place. (2) Secondly, they attempted to reverse the earlier general Post-WWII trend towards greater salaries and working conditions and health and safety standards in the North, which they perceived as part of the problem. Unions were decimated, concessions and "buy backs" were made in collective bargaining, and unemployment increased (Nadeau 1992: 154). But there were limits to the conditions that many Northern workers would tolerate, especially given the considerable welfare provisions that were still in effect. (3) Thirdly, they blamed the current economic crisis in the North on cheap labour from the South which, they argued, undercut the North's share of the world market. There was some element of truth to this in that the Four Tigers (Taiwan, Singapore, Hong Kong and Korea) were exporting cheap, competitive goods to the North.

In fact, however, by the early 1970s it was often Northern multinational factories that were relocating to the Third World, under the new international division of labour. The North was competing with the North, now partly

located in the South, and under a new "development path" for the south -- export oriented industrialization for export of goods back to the North.

Export orientated industrialization (EOI) emerged in the late 1960s and early 1970s (Mies 1986: 112) as the latest and best "path of development" for the South. EOI was a strategy whereby Third World economies produce and process goods and services for export to the North. EOI was said to enable the development of the South while providing employment opportunities and incomes through industrialization as well as facilitate the transfer of technology from the North to the South (Mitter 1986: 8). Specifically, it was argued that EOI would give Third World countries needed foreign exchange. The NIDL and EOI centred on only certain labour-intensive processing and manufacturing jobs being relocated to the South -- clothing, garments, apparel, electronics, toys, sporting goods, ticketing, among others.

It is hard not to see the North's promotion of the NIDL for the South as a means of the North to solving the problems of the "crisis" of Northern businesses and multinational firms. In addition, it is difficult not to see the North's promotion of EOI as a development path for the South as a means of the North solving the potential crisis of debt default by the South. EOI brings the much-needed foreign exchange to the South, which they should then utilize to pay the interest owed and eventually the principal outstanding on their debt

(Mitter 1986: 70-74). (While this new international division of labour came into being, it is crucial to remember that the old international division of labour did not disappear. Rather, they continue in tandem Lipietz 1987: 190.)

Export processing zones (EPZs), free-trade zones (FTZs) and Third World export factories in the South are manifestations of the NIDL and the "new development path" for the South of EOI. A FTZ, an EPZ or a Third World export factory is a production site whose major function is the industrial utilization of Third World labour for export oriented production (Frobel et al. 1980: 302,307). These production sites have largely been located in the South where cheap labour is exploited for low-cost processing and manufacturing of items originally imported from the North and re-exported back to the North (Frobel et al. 1980: 44).

In fact, laws had to be put in place in the North to allow this NIDL and EOI to develop in the form of EPZs, FTZs and Third World export factories. Previously, if goods left the North and were sent to the South for further processing and manufacturing and then sent back to the North for further processing and sale, duty would have to be paid on the value of the goods re-entering the Northern state. In 1930, the United States Congress passed Section 806.30 of the United States Tariff Schedule, exempting from duties those articles of metal that had been manufactured or subjected to a process

of manufacture in the United States and exported for processing and returned to the United States for further processing. In 1963, Section 807.00 of the United States Tariff Schedule was passed by the United States Congress, exempting from duties all articles assembled abroad in whole or in part from components originally fabricated in the United States and re-exported back to the United States (Ehrenthal and Newman 1988: 190). Import duty is paid only on the "value-added" outside of the United States -- that is, duty is paid only on the cheap labour performed in the South (Tiano 1984: 2).

The conditions that allowed the internationalization of the production process and the emergence of the NIDL include the development of modern transportation, micro-electronics and tele-communications systems which enabled long-distance control of the production process by distant Northern headquarters (Frobel et al. 1980: 13).

In many countries, namely in South-east Asia, these FTZs or EPZs are geographically fenced off in order to control access of persons and products.

In order to attract foreign investment to EPZs and Third World factories, in desperate competition for the needed foreign currency, Third World host governments offer an extensive array of 'perks' such as: ready-made buildings; port facilities; no import quotas; no foreign exchange controls; long tax holidays; cheap loans; subsidized utilities and facilities; reduced custom duties,

if any; anti-strike and anti-labour (or "company unions") provisions; lax or absent health, safety and environmental regulations; and little or lax provisions such as minimum wages, maximum hours, overtime, shiftwork, et cetera (War on Want 1984: 5; Mitter 1986: 39). These were ideal labour conditions for attracting investment from the North. Often, Third World countries provided police and/or army to patrol the area and threaten any labour organizers.

In addition, although the NIDL and EOI were supposedly going to help Third World countries to reduce male unemployment, the preferred work force in export factories, FTZs and EPZs are overwhelmingly young unmarried women workers (Mies 1986; Mitter 1986; Elson and Pearson 1981a). In fact, the significant role of women in comparison to men in EPZs, FTZs and Third World export factories begs explanation, especially in areas of high male unemployment. If capital is merely seeking cheap labour, there is plenty of cheap male labour in the Third World. It is the nature of the worker as female that is crucial. Processing and manufacturing of items such as garments, clothing, toys, sporting goods, and electronics have long been "women's work" in the North and are now considered "women's work" in the South. Women workers in the South have increasingly come to be perceived as "secondary" workers, working "for lipstick" (Joekees 1985: 183) and as flexible, docile, and subservient to male authority and supervision, much as their Northern sisters had earlier been characterized. Patriarchal relations and sexual harassment are

utilized to "control" the female labour force. The NIDL regime of global capital accumulation is thus based on the "comparative advantage" of the South's flexible, cheap and "docile" labour force, namely female workers (Ong 1991: 279-80).

Women's individual lived experiences of their paid labour, domestic responsibilities, and societal attitudes and practices, ultimately shape their consciousness and behaviours both in the workplace and in society at large. These experiences are both shaped by the needs of patriarchal and capitalist relations of domination as well as by the subjective experiences of these women workers. Thus, the women workers' "docility," "subservience," or their participation in protests, struggles and resistances are the outcomes of these processes. That is, women's agency, their coping mechanisms and resistance strategies are mediated by their experiences of their working conditions and their larger society (see Chapter Three).

Mexico: The Old and New International Divisions of Labour

Mexico has a long history as a target of Western imperialism and colonialism. It was "conquered" by Cortez in 1519. The Spanish conquerors enslaved the indigenous peoples of "Nueva Espana" and raped the land of its

natural resources, minerals and other raw materials for export to the mother country (Harris 1984: 264). Spanish colonialism can be characterized by exploitation of people and natural resources with Mexico as the producer of raw materials largely for the Spanish elites in Mexico and back in Spain (Harris 1984: 264). Mexico's colonial status was maintained until political independence was established in 1824 (Harris 1984: 266). However, political independence did not bring with it economic independence.

Mexico was vulnerable in its conflicts with foreign governments, namely the Republic of Texas and the United States. In the 1840s Mexico was engaged in territorial conflicts with the United States. This "Mexican War" of 1846-48 resulted in Mexico losing Texas and other territory to the United States in 1851 (Pearson 1991: 134). Pearson (1991: 134) notes that Mexico lost "more than fifty per cent of the territory which comprised the Republic of Mexico in 1821".

In 1917 "modern Mexico" was established as a result of the Mexican social revolution which began in earnest in 1910 and which resulted in a democratic constitution (Harris 1984: 274). The governing Institutional Revolutionary Party (PRI), was seen as a progressive government which instituted large scale land redistribution and voiced concerns about democracy, human rights and the welfare of the poor and landless. Since 1917, trade

unions have been formally tied to the PRI (Warnock 1992: 40). Mexico has two trade union federations, both affiliated with the PRI, the Confederacion de Trabajadores de Mexico (CTM) and the Revolutionary Confederacion Revolucionaria de Obreros and Campesinos (CROC). According to Hamilton, the constitution of 1917 incorporated the ideal of a strong interventionist state which could eliminate the privileges of foreign monopolies and local elites, ensure control of Mexican territory and resources and protect the interests of the subordinate class (1982: 3). This was not the case, however.

Mexico historically has been protectionist. In the 1950s and 1960s Mexico continued to pursue IS strategies as an alternative to economic dependence on the United States, the "giant to the north" (Pearson 1991: 134). However, this "protectionism" for local industry existed alongside resource extraction and foreign investment. A distinctive provision of legislation in Mexico was that all companies doing business in Mexico must have Mexican majority ownership. In other words, foreign ownership was limited to 49 per cent of any firm or company (Needler 1984: 283). In some areas, a minimum two-thirds Mexican ownership was required (Needler 1984: 283). The Mexican government's IS strategy of the 1950s and 1960s, combined with its protectionist investment and ownership policy, was an attempt to ease the way for local industry to emerge and flourish while being protected from foreign competition.

However, Mexico had limited financial resources and only a shell of an infrastructure in which a manufacturing and industrial base could emerge in the shadow of the "giant to the north". Mexico was plagued with a large, and growing, poor rural population with limited options for economic advancement. Moreover, the "green revolution" was forcing people off their land as farming was being concentrated in fewer and fewer hands. Urban centres within Mexico and, especially, the nearby northern neighbour, the United States, with its strong economy and relatively higher standard of living, therefore served as strong magnets.

Mexico and the United States have had a history of informal cross border migration. Prior to the United States annexation of Texas there were no borders restricting United States citizens from settling in that area:

For years, Mexico had encouraged emigration from the United States to the sparsely settled, vast lands of Texas - provided only that the new emigrants were Catholic, would be loyal to the Mexican government, and would use Spanish as their official language. As the years passed little was done to enforce these requirements (Harris 1984: 267).

Pearson (1991: 134) notes that "the economy of Mexico's northern states over the last hundred years has been more integrated with the economy of the southern states of the USA than with the rest of Mexico." Part of that "integration" has been the migration (legal and illegal) of Mexican men to the United States for better employment opportunities, often as seasonal temporary

agricultural workers (migrant labour) (Fernandez-Kelly 1983c: 209). Migration from Mexico to the south-western United States is not a new phenomenon. Many Mexicans have relatives throughout the south-western region of the United States. Pearson (1991: 134) notes:

The willingness and ability of Mexicans to migrate, often illegally, is partly a reflection of the fact that the population of the south-west of the USA is predominantly of Hispanoamerican origin...It also reflects the high levels of unemployment in Mexico and the failure of the industrialisation programmes of the 1950s and 1960s to generate sufficient employment opportunities to absorb the growing population throughout Mexico.

While Mexican women also migrated from the impoverished rural areas to urban areas hoping for labour as domestics, most migrants to Mexico's northern areas and to the U.S. at this time were male. Mexican men's limited role in the Mexican patriarchal family/household made it easier for them to migrate to the U.S. and leave their families behind. Men in Mexican society do not contribute to any significant extent to domestic responsibilities. Machismo plays a large part in the division of domestic labour which is quite clearly set out and adhered to by men and women. Men contribute to the household primarily in financial terms. Daughters are taught from a very early age that the responsibilities of the household - both management and maintenance - are theirs whether in their mother's home or in their own when they marry. Men do not cook, clean, care for children or manage the domicile. Their physical absence did not, therefore, upset the continued operation of the household.

An organized form of Mexican migration to the United States referred to as the Bracero Program or the Mexican Labor Program, was established in 1942 to respond to the scarcity of labour in the United States at the onset of World War II (Fernandez-Kelly 1983c: 209; Fernandez 1973: 38). It was officially constituted as a bilateral agreement in order to regulate the transfer of Mexican seasonal and migrant agricultural workers to the United States (Fernandez-Kelly 1983c: 209).

In 1961 the Mexican government established the Programa Nacional Fronterizo (PRONAF) in an effort to integrate its northern border region with the rest of the nation (Fernandez 1973: 42). PRONAF was to create the necessary infrastructure -paved roads, industrial parks with water and electrical facilities - to attract domestic private investment to the northern border region and to develop the tourism industry, especially attracting U.S. tourism (Fernandez 1973: 42; Fernandez-Kelly 1983b: 24). The goal was to develop Mexican handicrafts and transform the image of Mexican ports of entry for tourists (Bustamente 1983: 232). The significance of the PRONAF program is that it served to provide the infrastructure that would help bring about the Border Industrialization Program (BIP) in 1965 [see below].

Mexican migration to the United States grew significantly with the emergence of the United States as a major centre of world capitalism and the

need for cheap seasonal labour in the booming agricultural sector of the United States economy of the post-World War II period (Bustamente 1983: 232). The Bracero Program was, curiously, brought to an abrupt end in 1964 after twenty years, by the unilateral termination of the program by the U.S. (Bustamente 1983: 233). This eliminated the ability of many Mexicans to legally migrate and work in the United States. The consequence was a heightened unemployment problem in the border regions of Mexico. In 1966 the unemployment rate in the border cities was as high as forty to fifty percent (Fernandez 1973: 42; Fernandez-Kelly 1983b: 26; Pearson 1991: 135). Fernandez-Kelly (1983b: 26) notes the important pressure such high levels of male unemployment placed on the Mexican state to find some solution to the problem: "Political unrest fostered by the inability of local labour markets to absorb these workers became a likely possibility." Pearson (1991: 135) notes the added pressure created by the end of remittances, which previously had been sent from Mexican migrant workers in the United States back to their relatives in Mexico, "which in some years had contributed up to forty per cent of foreign exchange inflows".

The Border Industrialization Program (BIP) was announced by Mexico in 1965 in response to the massive unemployment and end of remittances created by the unilateral termination of the Bracero Program by the United States in 1964 (Bustamente 1983: 233). The factories established under the BIP have

come to be referred to as the maquiladoras. The BIP, or maquiladoras, is Mexico's export-oriented "development path" and the incorporation of Mexico into the new international division of labour, as discussed earlier in this chapter.

Historically the Mexican term "maquila" referred to the toll that millers collected for performing the service of milling someone else's grain (UN-TNCs in World Development 1988: 170). Today "maquila" refers to the process of assembly and manufacturing operations within the NIDL and within the framework of Mexico's version of EOI. The term maquiladora refers to the factory within which this process occurs (Stoddard 1987: 1). The maquiladoras are the offshore assembly plants, in-bond plants or industrial parks within the BIP of northern Mexico (Bustamente 1983: 232). U.S. components are shipped to northern Mexico, where they are further assembled and manufactured by Mexican labour and then re-exported back to the U.S. for further processing and sale (Bustamente 1983: 236).

There is considerable debate concerning the relationship, if any, between the unilateral ending of the Bracero Program by the United States in 1964 and the forces behind the creation of the BIP and the maquiladoras. It is clear that Mexico did not embrace the BIP eagerly, and the maquiladoras did not "take off" for several years. Pearson (1991: 137) notes that "it took three or four years of official encouragement from the U.S. government...before the

maquiladora plants established themselves in Mexico in any significant numbers." While some analysts point to the role of U.S. labour in ending the Bracero Program (which they had long opposed), others more cynically point to the upcoming BIP and the establishment of the NIDL and EOI throughout the world, especially in Asia. In 1963, as mentioned above, the United States Congress passed Item 807 of the United States Tariff Code, allowing goods from the U.S. to be exported abroad for further processing and assembly and then imported back into the United States, with duty payable only on the "value added" since the goods left the U.S. That "value added" generally constitutes the cheap labour of Third World workers (Tiano 1984: 2). This change in the United States Tariff Code was clearly related to the growing emergence of FTZs, EPZs and world market factories, especially in Asia. The United States, along with the IMF, World Bank and various other national and international bodies clearly were supportive of the NIDL and EOI and the model of export factories. Obviously the United States had a major interest in its impoverished neighbour to the south. Specifically, Pearson (1991: 136) states that the Mexican government got the idea for the maquiladoras from the Asian model of export processing zones:

The initiative for the programme came from the Mexican government, following visits to East Asian countries where such labour intensive manufacturing industries producing for the export market had been established for some years; and where such activity was frequently located in specially created Free Trade Zones.

The original maquiladoras were set up within a limited 12 1/4 mile wide strip in northern Mexico along the Mexico-U.S. border (Fernandez 1973: 43). In December 1965 there were twelve maquiladoras in the Mexican border region, employing approximately 3000 workers (Bustamente 1983: 241). In the 1960s many of the earliest maquiladoras along the Mexican - U.S. border were subsidiaries or "twin plants" of United States companies.

In 1971 there were only 209 maquiladoras in operation, and by 1974, 516 (Chamber of Commerce Mexico, Newsletter 2, no. 2, February 1975, cited in Bustamente 1983: 241). The maquiladoras had a somewhat slow growth before the boom of the late 1980s.

In 1974, 30 maquiladoras were closed, leaving approximately 20,000 unemployed (Bustamente 1983: 241). These closings were said to be largely due to the economic recession in the United States (Bustamente 1983: 242). It has been suggested that these maquiladoras were deliberately closed, in response to organizing by Mexican workers, to force the Mexican government to sweeten the deal for foreign investors, especially given the wage and labour conditions in the Asian FTZs (Bustamente, 1983: 242; Pearson 1991: 137-8). Pearson (1991: 138) points out the outcomes of this period:

New regulations increased the tax holidays enjoyed by the plants; reduced their obligations to pay social security quotas and other local taxes; extended the period during which workers could be legally kept on temporary contracts; and allowed a more liberal

interpretation of the laws about 'justifiable dismissal of workers.'

The subsequent devaluation of the peso and the collapse of the oil industry in the post-1973 period seriously affected the Mexican economy. In 1976, for example, the Mexican peso was "substantially devalued, which reduced labour costs in dollar terms by approximately 100 per cent at a stroke" (Pearson 1991: 139). Also, by 1979, the entire country of Mexico was open to foreign maquiladoras, not just the northern border region (Pearson 1991: 139).

The PRI uses its relationship to the official trade union confederations to control maquiladora workers and to quell any pro-worker activities. The police and army are used against pro-worker activities, and worker organizers are blacklisted, fired, and jailed. Although Mexico adopted liberal labour laws after the 1917 Revolution, most trade union activities within the maquiladoras are "company unions"⁵, appointed by the management, which "do not tend to represent the interests of their members very well" (Grunwald 1985: 170). Similarly, although Mexico has passed "liberal" legislation concerning women's equality, equal pay, et cetera, the Mexican state does nothing to enforce their provisions (Martin 1992: 284-5, 287). While Stoddard (1987: 58) notes that

⁵ Since the 1910-1917 Mexican Revolution trade unions have been formally tied to the Institutional Revolutionary Party. The union executive and leadership are frequently selected by the PRI or the government (Warnock 1992: 40). Company unions are therefore not elected by the membership, nor are they independent of company management and consequently do not represent employees' interests.

"current gender-related distinctions are not peculiar to the border maquiladoras," such distinctions are most evident and heightened in the border region.

The growth of the maquiladora industry has been directly related to the economic decline of Mexico. On August 8, 1982 Mexico announced that it could no longer service its debt of \$86 billion (Canadian Labour Congress 1990: 93). Meanwhile, also in 1982, the maquiladoras program took off with a vengeance when the Mexican government devalued the peso, largely as a consequence of the drop in the world oil prices and the mounting foreign debt. The devaluation led to even more competitive wage rates for Mexico. Tolan (1990: 19) notes that the take-home wages in the maquiladoras are as low as US\$0.55 per hour, while Saunders (1990: B1) claims maquiladora workers earn Cdn\$0.68.

TABLE 1
GROWTH OF MAQUILADORAS 1968 to 1990

YEAR	NUMBER OF PLANTS	TOTAL LABOUR FORCE
1968	112	11,000
1973	247	64,300
1978	457	90,700
1983	600	151,000
1988	1,450	330,579
1990	2,000	434,000

(Statistics cited in Garrett 1993: 53)

Though women once constituted as much as 80 per cent of the maquiladoras work force, they now constitute 60 to 65 per cent of the maquiladoras workforce (Action Canada Network 1992). The following tables (Garrett 1993: 54) illustrate the composition of the maquiladoras labour force between 1975 and 1987, including a breakdown by position and specifically the number of men versus women operators.

TABLE 2

GENDER COMPOSITION OF MAQUILADORA LABOUR FORCE 1975-1987

YEAR	TOTAL	OPERATOR EMPLOYMENT			TECH.	ADMIN.\ MNGMT
		TOTAL	MALE	FEMALE		
1975	65,318	53,771	11,653	42,118		
1979	111,365	95,818	21,891	73,837		
1981	130,973	110,634	24,993	85,691	12,545	7,744
1983	150,867	125,278	32,004	93,274	16,332	9,267
1985	211,968	173,874	53,832	120,042	25,042	13,052
1987	290,579	236,088	78,940	157,090	35,138	19,403

(Source Pearson 1991: 141 as summarized in Garrett 1993: 53)

TABLE 3

PERCENTAGE OF FEMALE OPERATIVES IN MAQUILADORAS 1975-1987

YEAR	FEMALE AS PERCENTAGE OF TOTAL OPERATOR EMPLOYMENT	FEMALE OPERATORS AS PERCENTAGE OF TOTAL EMPLOYMENT
1975	78.3	64.5
1979	77.0	66.3
1981	77.4	65.4
1983	74.4	61.8
1985	69.0	56.6
1987	66.6	54.1

(Source Pearson 1991: 141 as summarized in Garrett 1993: 54)

The turnover rate among maquiladora workers is as high as 20 per cent a month (Saunders 1990: B2), resulting in an annual turnover rate of about 180 per cent (Sinclair 1992: 58). Studies have revealed that workers in the border zone factories generally do not last more than 5 to 10 years before being used

up (Sinclair 1992: 61).

By this time, the governments of Mexico acceded to the "structural adjustment policies" that were being pushed by the IMF and World Bank, among many others. An open door policy to foreign investment was the approach adopted. Opposition from "protectionists" was largely overcome. (Previously, the maquiladoras had been the "exception" from Mexico's protectionist policies, but the maquiladoras were largely seen to be outside the Mexican domestic economy.) Mexico's one party state rule has become labelled a right wing authoritarian and bureaucratic regime servicing the elite and corporate sectors of the country: the PRI is riddled with corruption; has utilized brutal and illegal tactics against the democratic and other opposition; has utilized the army and police to violate human rights; has been censorious of the press; and has clearly "rigged" elections so that it has remained in power. In the words of Broadbent (1993: 3):

Mexico continues to have a poor human rights record. Credible human rights organizations inside and outside Mexico have documented the extent of these violations as "systemic, epidemic, permanent and structural" (Inter-Church Committee on Human Rights in Latin America), pointing out that the impunity of the Mexican security forces is an ongoing problem. Violations include torture, electoral fraud and violence, the systemic repression of independent unions, harassment, threats and assassinations of human rights activists, peasants and indigenous leaders, opposition politicians and independent journalists.

Mexico also experienced the plummeting of oil prices between 1982 and

1988 (oil making up 75% of Mexico's export earnings at that time) with no real economic growth. Mexico's debt rose from \$4.5 billion in 1971 to 100 billion in 1988 (Lavender 1989: 11). The government's approach to these economic problems, in line with the demands of the IMF and World Bank, among others, was not only the devaluation of the peso but austerity measures which included cutbacks to public services in order to attempt to pay the interest payments on the foreign debt and slow down the rate at which the debt is mounting.

It is ironic that the BIP or maquiladoras, which had originally been specifically designed to help reduce the balance of payments deficit and facilitate the transfer of technology from the U.S. based multinationals to the Mexican subsidiary plants, but primarily to help alleviate the accelerating unemployment levels in northern Mexico, has in fact contributed to heightened male unemployment on the northern border (Fernandez-Kelly 1983c: 210). The official unemployment rate in Mexico went from 8.5 per cent in 1982 to 17.9 in 1991 (Nadeau 1992: 154).

This is partly a result of the fact that the maquiladoras overwhelmingly employ young women as their preferred work force in the assembly and processing work, as is true generally of Third World export factories engaged in labour intensive processing and manufacturing. Women workers, especially young unmarried women, are seen as: secondary wage earners; daughters or

wives; temporary job seekers; unskilled; nimble fingered and docile; subservient to males and authority figures; cheap; and unlikely to organize or protest (Tiano 1994; Fernandez-Kelly 1983b; G. Young 1987).

In reality, in the Mexican formal economy 10 million women receive salaries or wages and 80 per cent of these women earn no more than \$100US a month (Nadeau 1992: 154). Women are frequently the sole breadwinners for a whole extended family. They are thus forced to work at whatever is available. Twenty million Mexicans work in the informal economy without any security or benefits. With no welfare system, more than half of the Mexican population of 86 million live in poverty and 15 million are unemployed (Sinclair 1992: 54).

A consequence of structural adjustment efforts and cutbacks has been the reduction in basic food subsidies for rice, sugar, corn and beans (Nadeau 1992: 155). A greater amount of energy is exhausted in the procurement of food at lower prices in order to maximize the salaries provided. This burden tends to fall on women's shoulders. The domestic burden for women is heightened in an economy where the few social services and safety net provisions are being dismantled. Privatization and cutbacks in social spending have been significant (Nadeau 1992: 154). The Mexican government withdrew a proposed two per cent increase in corporate taxes (based on total gross

wages paid by the maquiladoras) when faced with strong opposition from corporations. This revenue was to have been used to help build roads and housing (Sinclair 1992: 52). Twenty to twenty-five per cent of households in the maquiladora regions do not have access to running water and forty per cent have no sewage access (Action Canada Network 1992).

When the health care system is inadequate, the primary care-givers, namely women, must assume the balance of care. Fifty per cent of those working in the maquiladoras do not have health care (Action Canada Network 1992). Domestic support services, such as laundry, dry cleaning, tailoring, are not affordable. The domestic responsibility for such tasks falls on the women of the household. The overall result is that the responsibility of domestic labour is heightened at the household level.

CHAPTER THREE:

EXPRESSIONS OF RESISTANCE AND STRUGGLES

Chapter Two detailed the nature of the working conditions and exploitation of Third World workers, largely female, in the labour intensive processing and manufacturing factories and Free Trade Zones of the new international division of labour between North and South and the new "development path" for the South of "export oriented industrialization". In this discussion, emphasis was placed on the views of the employers of such labour concerning their status as "secondary" or temporary workers, who are working for "pin money" or "lipstick" for a period prior to marriage, as well as the "docility," "deference," "submissiveness" to men and authority, and "lack of organizational temperament and abilities" of the women workers. Clearly, Chapter Two emphasized the exploitation of the workers and their status as "victims" of the NIDL and EOI. This reflects the wider literature on women workers and world market factories, which tend to emphasize women's exploitation and "victimization" (Mies 1986; Elson and Pearson 1981a; Mitter 1986; Fernandez-Kelly 1983b).

Mohanty (1991), for example, argues that Western feminist analyses of

Third World women workers in multinational production are overwhelmingly portrayed as "homogeneous" and "victims." She notes (1991: 29)

[R]elatively few studies address questions of the social agency of women who are subjected to a number of levels of capitalist discipline. In other words, few studies have focused on women workers as subjects -- as agents who make choices, have a critical perspective on their own situations, and think and organize collectively against their oppressors.

At the same time, however, Chapter Two and the wider literature also emphasize the extent to which the employers of this largely female labour force seek to insure that their employees do not attempt to organize and seek better working conditions: workers were often hired for "probationary periods" only; workers were fired or laid-off at will; overtime and shift work was enforced, through locked factory gates, if necessary; male supervision and management of female workers was utilized; male harassment of female workers was a typical "control mechanism"; "company unions" or anti-labour provisions were common; the factories were often located in "zones" for easier control; repressive regimes utilized the military or police to patrol, threaten and punish; any labour organizing was repressed through blacklisting, termination of employment, or intimidation or violence (Mies 1986; Elson and Pearson 1981a; Mitter 1986; Fernandez-Kelly 1983b). This would seem to indicate that the employers of female labour were well aware of the potential lack of "docility" or "submissiveness" and of the potential resistance, struggles and organizational capabilities of their female employees.

Clearly, the employers of female labour did not really perceive the women as "merely" passive exploitable labour. This is, of course, only to be expected, as many of the supposed "natural features" of female labour are anything but natural -- they are preeminently cultural and social constructions or ideological rationalizations for the exploitation of women workers.

At the same time, the recent literature concerning women workers and "traditional" organizing, protesting and resisting through "additional" means such as labour unions and strikes indicates that women have a different relationship to these than do men. Unions historically have worked to promote men's interests or a genderless workers' interests which have inevitably been male since unions require additional organizing time and meeting time which women, with their additional domestic and familial responsibilities, cannot afford to attend. As Elson and Pearson (1981a: 105) notes: "The failure to take account of gender means that in practice they have tended to represent male workers".

Yet, in fact, there is now clear evidence of women workers resisting and struggling against their oppression in world market factories, EPZs and FTZs and working to improve their salaries and working conditions through "traditional" means. The Canadian film and video, "The Global Assembly Line" portrayed female Philippine export factory workers and Mexican maquiladora

workers, along with men, actively protesting and struggling against their exploitation. These protests included public protests and demonstrations, picketing, union organizing, striking and hunger striking, even in the face of brutal repression by the armed forces and police. Similarly, recent accounts of women workers in Third World export factories indicate that women workers do organize and struggle to improve their situation through many public and "traditional" forms of organization.

For example, Mohanty (1991: 29) praises Ong's (1987) analysis of "the construction of third world women's resistance and subjectivities in the context of deep material and structural transformations in the lives" of the Malay women workers she studied. Other case studies include Ong 1991; Ong 1990, Hart 1992; Hart 1991; Tirado; 1994; Kopinak 1994; Kopinak 1989; Pena 1983; Tiano 1994: and various chapters in Rowbotham and Mitter (eds.) 1994.

Pena (1983, 1980) has made a significant contribution to the literature and analysis of resistance in the maquiladoras in general, especially formal resistance. In Nuevo Laredo between 1973 and 1975 and in Tijuana between 1979 and 1980 women resisted not only their working conditions but the "official trade union". Between the winter of 1973 and the summer of 1975 female maquiladora workers in Nuevo Laredo organized an offensive against the "official union" that had dominated trade unionism, known as 'charrismo' in the

border region (Pena 1980: 180). This offensive called for increased wages, fits and better work conditions but it also called for the democratization of the union structure. The autonomous workers' movement used work stoppages and slowdowns as strategies of resistance (Pena 1980: 180).

in the Tijuana region between 1979 and 1980 a similar autonomous workers' movement, known as Zaragoza, also emerged as an alternative to charrismo. Many women had been fired without severance pay after having developed optic nerve disorders from working with unregulated microscopic equipment (Pena 1980: 189). These women decided to organize an alternative voice to the formal and "official" trade unions. "From the 1973 and 1975 Nuevo Laredo struggles, it was evident that the female workers of the maquiladoras were not the 'cheap' and 'docile' labour force envisioned by North American capitalists" (Pena 1980: 186).

Women are only docile to the extent that it is harder to get them to participate in official trade union activities, however, "struggles tend to erupt outside the official trade union framework taking, for instance, the form of 'wild cat' sitdowns or walk-outs (Elson and Pearson 1981b: 27). They can even be "quite militant and [have] progressive tendencies (Pena 1980: 186).

Tirado had studied women workers in sweatshops in Mexico City.

Following the 1985 earthquake that devastated Mexico City, Tirado interviewed women who organized the Nineteenth of September Union. In her recent publication, Tirado (1994) discusses how these women garment workers successfully formed a "traditional" union, but one which directly addressed the issues of women: specifically issues such as literacy, culture and sexual harassment.

In addition, however, the concepts of "resistance," "organization" and "struggle" against exploitation and unjust conditions have also been transformed and expanded in recent years, especially in feminist work. The traditional definition of labour struggle and resistance was mainly limited to trade union activities and public, overt and visible acts, such as strikes, rebellions or revolutions (Aptheker 1989: 170). The notion of "resistance" and "struggle" was linked to the marxist and mainstream economic emphasis on workers' capacities for developing "class consciousness" and organizing against their exploitation as limited to workers "at the point of production" on the factory floor. Resistance was held to be in opposition to notions of accommodation and collaboration. Moreover, the notion of resistance was understood to involve "a social rather than individual, political rather than personal" approach to change (Aptheker 1989: 171).

More recent analyses of labour activities have unearthed a rich and varied

inventory of inventive and creative ways in which workers resist, manipulate, and otherwise attempt to limit their exploitation in the workplace. This more recent literature has included a focus on women and Third World workers. As Pat Armstrong (1984: 25) has remarked in another context: "Women have seldom passively accepted a predetermined part in the social drama". Mohanty (1991: 38) notes that:

[R]esistance clearly accompanies all forms of domination. However, it is not always identifiable through organized movements; resistance inheres in the very gaps, fissures, and silences of hegemonic narratives...Agency is thus figured in the minute, day-to-day practices and struggles of third world women.

Women's specificity has been overlooked in much of the literature on the labour force and women's particular experiences of work and strategies of resistance have especially been overlooked. The more recent literature on women workers and world market factories is beginning to reflect the forms of resistance and struggles that are taking place throughout the Third World. This broader literature on resistance focuses primarily on the most informal and often times covert forms of "everyday resistance" (Scott 1985).

These recent analyses recognize that women's condition in the home and in society at large mediates women's experiences of work and potential strategies of resistance. Therefore, this analysis must address the gendered division of labour and the distribution of domestic power within households, as

well as within the paid labour force. In order to understand domestic power and politics Lamphere (1974: 98-99) considers the distribution of power and authority within the family and how the structure of the domestic group and authority shift and change over time. What strategies women employ in order to exercise influence, attain their ends or circumvent the domestic power structure are also considered (Lamphere 1974: 98-99). Some writers stress the different nature of women workers' activism:

[M]uch of women's political activity occurs at the local level and stems from their involvement in the sustenance of life, they often manifest an ethic of activism that confronts domination without smashing and terror so characteristic of masculinist revolutionary action. (Diamond/Quinby 1988: xvi).

Given the gendered division of labour in most societies, women are more responsible and more aware of the connections between (their own and/or their families') paid employment, domestic labour and child care, and the needs of the household. This, in turn, can mean women are more "conservative" or more "revolutionary", depending on circumstances and perceptions. As Harder's (1985: 8) discussion of Cape Breton miners' wives' views concerning their husbands' labour resistance at a time of a strike reveals, some wives were against their husbands striking, given the wives' knowledge of their household needs and requirements on limited incomes, while other wives encouraged their husbands' labour activities, being aware of their husbands' continued exploitation.

Historically, women's role in the home, nurturing, bearing children and assuming the responsibility for most reproductive tasks, has led some women to resist involvement in strikes which would render it difficult for the family to survive. This has often been interpreted as conservatism among women. At the same time, other women have often been in the forefront of bread riots, peasant rebellions, and recent protests against the structural adjustment policies of the World Bank and the IMF, again precisely because of their position as producers and reproducers, responsible for family survival in an era of cut backs in social expenditures.

This touches on a critical contradiction in women's condition in the waged labour force and the household: on the one hand, women do benefit from some new level of power and independence by gaining access to a wage for their labour, while escaping perhaps from some of the oppression of village and familial patriarchy; on the other hand, women's participation in waged labour is performed under new patriarchal controls of sexual harassment, male managers and supervisors, as well as accusations of being "western," immoral or loose, while their domestic labour - including possibly child care, are intensified by their wage labour. This must impact on women workers' perceptions of themselves as "workers", their perception of the relationship between their paid employment and their domestic responsibilities, and their perceptions of, and participation in, any forms of protests, struggles, and

resistances.

Ong (1987; 1991) also recognizes that women workers' experiences of work and potential for resistance are mediated by gender and by "culture." In her study of Muslim women factory workers in Malaysia, Ong discusses the workers' claims of the discomfort of "female problems", their legitimate claim to five daily prayer periods, and "spirit possession" as a culturally legitimate means of disrupting the production process. Similarly, MacLeod (1991) discusses ways in which women in Cairo utilize "the veil" as a means of "accommodating protest".

In Mexico as well, more informal and innovative means of women's resistance strategies are emerging in the literature. Tiano (1994) looks at women workers in the maquiladoras of Mexicali, the capital of Baja California. Tiano notes (1994: 4) that the stereotypical images of women workers denies "the diversity of backgrounds and....the creative uniqueness of women's responses to life experiences." She (1994: 4) stresses the "scope of women's often multiform employment histories" and "the multiplicity of factors leading them to enter and remain in the work force." Tiano (1994: 4) feels that the "conventional characterization" of women, women's work, and women's responses to their work "ignores the range of creative strategies they formulate in confronting the challenges of their employment experiences."

In addressing women workers' consciousness and responses to their exploitation, Tiano (1994: 198) suggests that a "more accurate conceptualization may view [women workers'] consciousness as ranging along a continuum from docility to militancy." As an alternative, Tiano (1994: Chapter 10) discusses the related concepts of acquiescence, alienation, accommodation and resistance. Tiano concludes:

The stereotype of the docile woman assembler fails to account for the diversity in consciousness among women in this study. Although maquila workers were more acquiescent than women in other formal jobs, they were more apt to express either accommodation or alienation than acquiescence. Moreover, in diametric contradiction to the docility stereotype, some electronics assemblers displayed the resistance-oriented consciousness that can underlie collective action. Electronics participation increased women's propensity to be critical of their workplace and to show solidarity with women across class lines. Thus these findings belie the common stereotype of maquila operatives as docile and passive.

Pena (1983) discovered that women workers in Mexico created informal networks of friends - partly in response to supervisors' efforts to forge friendships with women workers in order to control them. These women's networks however were used to mobilize resistance efforts, namely limiting production outputs and sabotaging production. COMO was able to reinforce and support these networks while unions which reproduce the same patriarchal practices as found in management were unable to defend women workers' rights (Kopinak 1989: 225).

Pena suggests that female maquiladora workers have gone beyond economic struggles: "factory struggles have become a generalized assault against the very structure of bourgeois society" (Pena 1980: 181). Often the struggles of women workers focus on the injustices of factory exploitation, as well as the injustices of familial and village patriarchy and the gendered division of labour throughout society. "These struggles will be of limited use, however, from the point of view of women workers, if they deal exclusively with economic questions of pay and working conditions and fail to address problems which stem from the development of new forms of subordination of women as a gender" (Elson and Pearson 1981a: 105).

In recent times the Roman Catholic Church, and its liberation theologians in particular, has spoken against the injustices in the maquiladoras, namely the unfair wages and working conditions and has supported of the maquiladora workers (Kopinak 1989: 21).

The Centro de Orientacion de la Mujer Obrera (COMO) was founded in 1968 to allow working women an organization devoted to their self-orientation and consciousness raising from a cultural core that was their own (Kopinak 1989: 223). Though women of the maquiladoras did participate in the organization in the early years, the philosophy was one of "a mutual helping characteristic of conservative conceptualizations of social work" (Kopinak

1989: 224). COMO was involved in consciousness raising efforts and assertiveness training.

In the early 1970s COMO was hired by the maquiladoras to give training courses for women in dealing with the work world, around issues of drug abuse, alcoholism, marital conflict and health issues. However, by 1975 the maquiladora management stopped hiring COMO, claiming COMO's staff was too radical when they criticized the health and safety conditions within the plants (Kopinak 1989: 224).

In the beginning COMO's philosophy was to teach maquiladora workers to improve their lives by helping themselves and their community through worker-owned cooperatives, as opposed to becoming dependent on foreign capital (Kopinak 1989: 225-6). It eventually began to be threatened by the "official union" movement for becoming what they referred to as a women's union (Kopinak, 1989:226). COMO was very involved in the formation of community organizers and social activists, including assisting the independent workers' union within factories at the maquiladoras with logistical support, promotion of support networks and fund-raising (Kopinak 1989: 227). However, by the mid-1980s COMO had overextended itself and was facing a financial crisis. PRI offered to take COMO under its wing, but COMO refused, only to accept a government grant only one year later (Kopinak 1989:

228). Some analysts refer to this as "the co-optation by the PRI" (Kopinak 1989: 229).

Both G. Young (1987) and Staudt (1987) also discuss women workers in the maquiladoras of Ciudad Juarez, and include discussions of the role of COMO. Staudt (1987: 171) found that the "although women are empowered by the center [COMO] experience, most are personally empowered but not politicized." G. Young (1987: 124) states "not only that some maquila workers depart from the female stereotype but also that they are far from unorganizable."

One analyst who recognizes the need to expand the notion of struggle and resistance, and who coined the phrase "everyday resistance", is James C. Scott (1985). In Scott's (1985: 29) anthropological research on peasants in Malaysia, he encountered practices such as foot dragging, dissimulation, false compliance, pilfering, feigned ignorance, slander, arson and sabotage, and he labelled these as forms of everyday resistance (1985: 29). Scott noted that the conditions of Malaysian peasants were such that conventional methods of insubordination would have been futile and fruitless.

Scott challenges the claims of those who argue that the oppressed "buy into" their oppression, accept their oppression as "inevitable" or are victims of

the total hegemonic control of those in power. In doing so, Scott (1985: 324) reclaims human agency for the oppressed:

This argument [of inevitability] as I understand it, asks us to believe that for subordinate classes, the larger structure of domination is typically experienced in the same way a peasant might experience the weather...[Yet], the inevitability of the weather has not prevented every group of traditional cultivators from personifying this natural force or from developing rituals to influence its course or, when their efforts have failed, from cursing their fate. Thus, far from removing it to the realm of the inevitable, the peasantry has historically considered even the weather to be amenable to human manipulation. If there is any "mystification" of natural laws in traditional societies, it is in the direction of bringing them under human control, not the reverse.

In addition, Scott (1985: 44) recognized that the form and direction taken by peasant Malay resistance would target their immediate oppression and not some abstract "system of oppression":

[T]he Malay peasant experiences increasing land rents, stingy landlords, ruinous interest rates from moneylenders, combine-harvesters that replace him, and petty bureaucrats who treat him shabbily. He does not experience the cash nexus or the capitalist pyramid of finance that makes of these landlords, combine-harvester owners, moneylenders, and bureaucrats only the penultimate link in a complex process.

Scott focuses (1985: 32) instead on self-help methods of oppositional behaviour that require little if any planning and coordination. Consequently, Scott coined the phrases "everyday resistance" and "weapons of the weak," which he defines as covert, unorganized, spontaneous and possibly individual forms of informal resistance. The "weapons of the weak" include story-telling,

rumours, gossip, dreams, as well as religion and ritual.

According to Scott "everyday forms of resistance" are intended to mitigate or deny claims made by superordinate classes or to advance claims against those superordinate classes (1985: 32). Such forms of resistance depart from the more common forms of resistance in that there is an "implicit disavowal of public and symbolic goals" (Scott 1985: 32). This is an extension of a lack of faith in the system's ability to satisfy its needs: "where institutionalized politics is formal, overt, concerned with systematic, de jure change, everyday resistance is informal, often covert, and concerned largely with immediate, de facto gains" (Scott 1985: 33).

This approach is expressed in the form of covert insubordination that appears not to challenge authority. It tends to find success in small, less obvious individual acts of resistance, which are often "highly opportunistic" and "aimed directly at securing immediate material gain" (Parikh 1994: 17). Scott (1985: 295) writes:

It is no coincidence that the cries of "bread," "land," and "no taxes" that so often lie at the core of peasant rebellion are all joined to the basic material survival needs of the peasant household. Nor should it be anything more than commonplace that everyday peasant politics and everyday peasant resistance (and also, of course, everyday compliance) flows from these same fundamental material needs...To ignore the self-interested element in peasant resistance is to ignore the determinate context not only of peasant politics, but of most lower-class politics. It is precisely the fusion of self-interest and resistance that is the vital force

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animating the resistance of peasants and proletarians.

In Scott's (1990) more recent work, Domination and the Arts of Resistance, he expands on his theory of everyday resistance. Here he explores power relations when the subordinated are precluded from overtly expressing their oppositional behaviour. Social sciences focus on the official or formal relations between the dominant and the weak (Scott 1990: 13):

A view of politics focused either on what may be command performances of consent or open rebellion represents far too narrow a concept of political life - especially under conditions of tyranny or near tyranny in which much of the world lives. (Scott 1990: 20)

Scott (1990: xii) claims that subordinates are often forced to express their opposition in the form of a "hidden transcript," which represents a critique of power spoken behind the backs of the dominant. However, not only does Scott therefore claim and explore the hidden transcript of the subordinate, he also addresses the hidden transcript of the dominant and the public transcript of both.

Scott (1990: 2) defines the public transcript as "the open interaction between subordinates and those who dominate." But the public transcript is not necessarily totally representative since it is often deliberately construed to reflect a calculated representation of reality. It is often in the interest of both parties to mislead the other, to keep the other off balance or to be sufficiently

ambiguous that the other is confused or unsure as to how to interpret an act or comment (Scott (1990: 3).

Scott (1990: 24) uses the example of a bow or greeting by a subordinate to illustrate the difficulty in interpreting the subordinate's intentions. It reflects the outward appearance of conformity. A literal reading of the public transcript would generally lead one to believe that the subordinate endorses the terms of their subordination (Scott 1990: 4). One may even encounter apparently happy, enthusiastic subordinates who appear to be in complicity in their own subordination. However, it is not until the hidden transcript is revealed that the whole picture emerges. The hidden transcript is used by Scott (1990: 4) to describe the discourse that takes place "offstage," beyond the direct view of the dominant. The hidden transcript are those offstage speeches and behaviour that either support or contradict the public transcript (Scott 1990: 4-5). The hidden transcript is the "privileged site for non-hegemonic, contrapuntal, dissident, subversive discourse" (Scott 1990: 25). By looking at the discrepancy between the public and hidden transcripts an accurate assessment of the impact of domination on the public discourse is possible (Scott 1990: 5).

Scott (1990: 19) claims that subordinates have generally been able to find space in which a critique of their oppression is permissible. The limitations of the space will dictate the degree to which the critique is overt. The context

in which those everyday forms of resistance are being expressed needs to be understood in order to give meaning to the resistance. He refers to the notion of "infra-politics" of subordinate groups as a wide variety of low-profile forms of resistance that dare not speak in their own name (1990: 19).

Scott (1990: 21) states that comparable structures and modes of control and domination tend to incite expressions and forms of resistance that are not dissimilar from one another (1990: 21). In his words, "if the domination is particularly severe, it is likely to produce a hidden transcript of corresponding richness" (1990: 27).

Finally, for Scott (1985: 290), any act by a member of a subordinate group which denies or lessens the claims of the dominant group is an act of resistance. Any act by a member of a subordinate group which advocates an alternative vision of the future, or which attempts to redistribute or renegotiate the existing unequal power relations, is an act of resistance. Scott seems to be saying that intent or meaning by the actor is not a requirement for an act to be labelled as resistance. In contrast, Giroux (1983: 109) argues that to interpret any act as a case of resistance without understanding the motivations behind such behaviour is to do a disservice to the meaning of the concept of resistance: "the behaviours displayed do not speak for themselves; to call them resistance is to turn the concept into a term that has no analytical preciseness".

Following Scott, for the purpose of this thesis, resistance constitutes any act that is intended to, or that does (even if unintended) challenge the 'powers that be'. An attempt will be made, however, to distinguish, where possible, between conscious intended acts of resistance and unconscious unintended acts of resistance. Often this becomes very difficult to differentiate. For example, if women maquiladora workers use the bathroom facilities "more often than necessary", is this a conscious or unconscious, intended or unintended, act of resistance?

The difficulty with the analysis of these forms of everyday resistance, and possibly why it has so often been ignored, is that its very nature makes it rather invisible at worst and ambiguous at best. Indeed it is precisely this ambiguity and covertness of these acts of resistance that explains both their success and the difficulty of differentiating them from accommodation or conformity. MacLeod (1991) points to these difficulties in her title: "accommodating protest."

In fact, questions may be raised concerning the effectiveness of such protests. Scott's (1985: 258) response would be to note that, for those truly living on the margins, no gain is too trivial or too minimal, including psychological and ideological "victories".

While recognizing the richness of Scott's approach and analyses of "everyday resistance" and "the weapons of the weak", a limitation remains: Scott did not address the differences between men's and women's conditions and social positions, and therefore did not address how women's unique conditions and social positions might bear on the specificity of their struggles and resistances. One recent attempt at fusing Scott's notion of "everyday resistance" and "weapons of the weak" with feminist analyses, in the instance of Filipina domestic workers in Canada, is Parikh (1994). In using a gendered analysis of class formation Hart "rethinks" Scott's notion of everyday forms of peasant resistance among Malaysia's Muda rural workers (1991: 93).

Minimally, given that women workers in the Third World are among the "weakest of the weak", we would expect that women workers, even more so than male workers, would engage, not so much in the formal protests and labour activities of "traditional" struggles and resistances, but more so in the everyday resistances of the weak described so well by Scott in reference to largely male peasants.

CHAPTER FOUR:

CONTROL MECHANISMS WITHIN THE MAQUILADORAS

Control mechanisms in the maquiladoras are means by which managerial control is maintained (or attempted) over the labour force. Managerial control can also utilize cultural norms and social relations in the wider society to help discipline the work force within the maquiladoras.

The degree and intensity with which control mechanisms are exercised shed light on the nature of the workers (or, especially, on the workers' potential "militancy" as perceived by management) and also impact on the forms and nature of acts of organization and resistance. The fact that management imposes such control mechanisms illustrates the fiction of the supposed docility and subservience of the (largely female) work force.

Control mechanisms can range from highly coercive management surveillance and disciplining of the workforce to "participatory management schemes" in which workers are given the pretence of input into the management process itself.

Fragmenting the production or work process, also referred to as Taylorism or Fordism, ensures greater control over not only the production process but more importantly the workers. The deskilling and degrading of work and the work process serve to alienate the worker from the work process and from herself as worker. Thus, as illustrated in Chapter Three, the entire new international division of labour and the movement of labour intensive processing and manufacturing to places like Mexico's maquiladoras is, in itself, a form of control over the labour force, world wide.

In the case of Mexico's maquiladoras, the same features that have attracted multinational (especially American) investment -- unemployment, "secondary" female workers, little or no labour regulation, little or no health, safety and environmental controls, a repressive state, and the other features discussed in Chapters Two and Three above -- are all also utilized to control and discipline workers and to repress worker organizing and resistance.

The high level of poverty characteristic of the bulk of the population in the Mexican border region, resulting from the area's peripheral relationship to world capitalism and the local history of the region, ensures the availability of a large and desperate work force and a reserve army of the unemployed or underemployed. Women workers are forced to accept the working conditions available to them, which in the case of the maquiladoras means: long hours;

shift work; and management-imposed scheduling. Many of the women workers are young, new to formal employment, and often migrants from elsewhere in Mexico. These latter are often living with more distant relatives, and lack the support network of immediate family.

In addition to the long and irregular hours of work in the maquiladoras, these women often have considerable household labours and many are involved in education and training. The latter often entails as much as three additional hours every week-day evening. All this results in a maquiladora work force that is overworked and whose resources are stretched in many different directions.

Access to wage labour is crucial in today's Mexico. There is no public unemployment insurance system and only a very rudimentary state welfare system in Mexico. Mexico spends the equivalent of twenty-one dollars per capita per year on its social safety net, compared to Canada's 2100 dollars (McQuaig 1993: 109). Maria noted that: "[we] can get the social security benefits, we can save our money with the savings system they have and we also can get a loan, but then, they take that money off your cheque".

Mariana expressed her concerns with the limited infrastructure, including roads, hospitals, schools and even basic housing in the maquiladora region:

The city doesn't have the infrastructure to deal with such big factories. There isn't sufficient housing or transportation. People

come from all over the country to work here and yes they have a job but nothing else. They can't even find a place to live...They are desperate for work and they leave the children at home alone. The mother has to work but the children end up home and alone. They are not attending school. There are no daycares available.

Ariana's decision to work in the maquiladoras was motivated by survival, a typical situation: "I don't have a lot of options. I plan to keep on working. I have to keep eating and pay my bills. It's a fact that I need money and I need to keep my job and make the best of it."

Sylvia was especially fearful of the possibility of losing her job if she voiced any problems with her working conditions and the ease with which she could be fired and replaced by any number of unemployed people: "at my age there are not many maquiladoras which would be interested in taking me on. I am getting too old. But where do I go from here?"

It is only in the last decades that Mexican women have begun to work in the formal economy in significant numbers. As a consequence, the women workers interviewed projected a sense of insecurity about their right to employment: "there are groups that confront the system and there are groups that try to talk with the workers but [it] is greatly discouraged by management. If they know you are involved you will be hassled and possibly lose your job"

[Mariana].⁶

Mexican labour law, or its absence, is also a factor in the control of maquiladora workers. Often labour unions are repressed, outlawed or simply not recognized. Often, independent non-P.R.I. affiliated unions are not allowed to register as recognized unions. Elsewhere, existing unions are "company unions"⁷. Moreover, unions in Mexico do not have the right to strike without the consent of the Boards of Conciliation and Arbitration. Between 1982 and 1988 there were 78,801 requests to strike and only 2.3 per cent were approved (Warnock 1992: 41). Lastly, Mexican workers are routinely expelled from unions and lose their jobs for political and union activism.

In addition, where there are legitimate unions, they are usually dominated by men. Many of the women interviewed, including Sylvia, Lucia and Mariana, said that the unions were primarily male-dominated and fail to address many of the issues of concern to the largely female maquiladora work force.

Mexican state intervention in the maquiladora labour force, through the

⁶ The name of the person whom I am quoting from the content of my interviews will either appear in the text within quotation marks or their name will be bracketed following the indented direct quotation.

⁷ The term official union is also used to denote those trade unions which have not been elected by the union membership but are appointed by the government, in collaboration with the maquiladora management.

use of the military and police force, has also been a particularly blatant form of control over labour organizing and resistance. Romero spoke of a particular instance where police used undue force when confronted with an uprising at a factory in the Ciudad Juarez maquiladora park:

I remember well in November 1986 when the workers of RCA stopped the most important area [Bermudez Park] of the maquilas. Not only the factory but the whole area. So then what happened was the CTM [Confederacion de Trabajadores Mexicanos] utilized the "porros" or what we call hit-men. They are an armed group to fight against the workers...they kill the workers that go against the bosses...for example the Ford company in Cuautitlan where the CTM killed a worker of their own union that went against them.

In addition, private police forces have, when necessary, been used to control dissent in Mexico (Murphy & Sinclair 1990: 71).

One method of controlling workers was to tie wages to merit, for example, a base salary plus a bonus. Individuals were therefore rewarded for their behaviour, including punctuality and productivity, with lunch coupons, for example. The bonus system which rewards certain behaviour is an attempt to control the worker. Mariana stated that the use of the bonus system was a means of controlling attendance. Bonuses were most frequently used to reward, or punish, attendance, or absenteeism. According to Anna, "they give us an extra bonus if we are on time every week, but if one day you come to work even ten minutes late, they take your bonus away".

Several of the women workers interviewed were working on piece work based assembly lines where a fixed amount of money was paid per piece or task completed. Almira was expected to produce 200 pieces of a specific component of a garment per day to receive her base salary. Every subsequent additional piece was paid on the bonus system. The piece work and bonus systems were to keep workers focused on their work and productivity, maximizing their outputs.

Gloria explained about the production contests and bonuses in several, but not all, maquiladoras. The female winner is frequently rewarded with coupons for gifts, including cosmetics, cooking supplies or kitchen utensils, and other women's gifts. When I asked about what men received for a bonus she said that they would have the option to choose something from a selection of gifts for male workers. I, unfortunately, did not ask if any woman had ever requested to choose something from the male selections. Thus, the maquiladoras stress the image of women as concerned with their domestic lives and their appearance in a Westernized context.

The workers are often initiated upon arrival at the maquiladora with a training/indoctrination session that usually lasts about one week:

[T]he ideological [control] mechanisms, as we say, here have to do with brain-washing, that the factory asks you to go through the week of training and it's a training that has little to do with machines or the work you will be doing. It has a lot to do with

watching videos and listening to the Personnel Manager and to the different senior personnel of the maquila [Mario].

In the case of the maquiladoras, ethnicity and gender are especially significant factors in management control of the work force. Almost all management positions are held by American males while supervisory positions are held by Spanish-speaking Mexican males of European descent and increasingly mestizo men who worked up from positions as technicians whereas almost all line workers and operators are indigenous or mestiza women. Both gender and ethnic hierarchies are thus utilized within the maquiladoras to emphasize the high status of the Spanish male management and the subordinate status of the female indigenous/mestiza work force.

According to Mario, male supervisors were often selected according to their appearance and "sexuality," as a means of pacifying women. The guapo⁸ supervisor is believed to pacify and distract the "passive" female workers from the tension that exists between management and labour. Sexual tension, which is the intended result of this process of selecting "guapo" male supervisors, serves to create a diversion or distraction for disenchanted and "passive" women labourers and is endemic to the maquiladora workplace.

* Guapo is a Spanish word which means attractive. It is used in everyday Mexican discourse to refer to a sexy, attractive man.

The hierarchy of jobs in the maquiladoras, with operators at the bottom, technicians in the middle, and supervisors at the top, is actually quite complex with many layers of hierarchy within each job classification: "a production worker...that position is number ten. A technician is a number twelve...There are different kinds of technicians like me. I am a number fourteen and a supervisor is about a twenty" [Ariana].

The effect of a highly hierarchical work place is twofold. Firstly, superiors can use their position to command certain behaviour of subordinates. Secondly, the hierarchy can be used to foster hope among workers that they may move up the hierarchical structure if they behave appropriately. Supervisors and managers can, therefore, attempt to use the promotion "perk" as a means of soliciting certain behaviour and in controlling workers.

Differences in pay are not the only differential in this hierarchy of jobs within the maquiladoras: "as an operator you stay in the same place all day. As a technician I get to walk around and check things at different parts of the line. You get treated differently and trust[ed] more" [Ariana].

Women workers whom I interviewed disliked the ambience of mistrust that pervades the maquilas, and which they claim is largely fostered by supervisors and the job hierarchy. Any discussion with supervisors of problems

with the work environment, the women workers stated, lead to the supervisors "bothering you more" [Mona].

Supervisors used their authority to move workers from one work station to another as a means of punishment should workers misbehave. Clara stated that "if your supervisor doesn't like you, he would give you the heavy jobs."

The women workers interviewed frequently talked about male supervisors who used their position of authority to coerce young girls not only to increase productivity but to go out with them. Mariana stated that "there are many abuses from the bosses, even emotionally they are after the little girls. They ask them out and are always making passes at them, they want to have sex with them."

Teenagers were often hired in the maquiladoras, largely because they were generally less experienced, more vulnerable, and perceived to be more deferential to authority. Romero insisted that the primary reason for hiring young workers, especially young women workers, was that they had a history of being less covertly assertive in the workplace and usually less informed about their rights than older workers.

Mariana stated that "the culture in the maquiladoras, especially the relationship between the young female workers and the male supervisors, is difficult for a young, inexperienced, fifteen year old to deal with". This results, Mariana felt, in numerous teenaged girls getting pregnant and having abortions. Mariana went on to say that when she joined the maquiladoras at fifteen years of age, she was not psychologically or physically prepared to face what the maquiladora environment demands from a worker and a young girl.

High turnover rates have been characteristic of the maquiladoras. Moreover, workers spoke of the frequent use of redeployment of the work force, moving a worker to another production line in the same factory, for example. Most of the women workers interviewed had held at least two, if not four or five, different jobs in the maquiladoras. The length of relationships between workers affects the degree of trust and solidarity among workers. One of the consequences of a high turnover rate and frequent redeployment is that few workers remain in any given workplace or workspace long enough to forge trust and solidarity with fellow workers.

Sylvia, who had worked in the maquiladoras for several years, spoke about the frequent redeployment she had had to endure: it always involved "having to make new friends and feeling unsure of yourself until you have a good sense of your co-workers."

One of the more furtive control mechanisms encountered in my discussions with workers in the maquiladoras was the use of informers, strategically located on the assembly line. The role of the informer was to ensure that workers were never able to fully trust other workers. Mona was very insistent that there were informers among the line workers: "supervisors have a lot of friends among the workers, so if some of them hear that we are talking against them and they get to know it, we can get in trouble".

Elena explained how difficult it had been during her first year of work in the maquiladoras to make friends and to come to trust co-workers since she assured me "there are always informers on the production line." Elena also spoke of a maquiladora where she used to work which used personnel managers trained as psychologists as a way of controlling workers. Employees with a grievance were sent to the personnel manager who had been trained to pacify employees. Although Elena had difficulty explaining to me how the personnel manager would effect this, she said that they "played with her mind" in such a manner that she felt manipulated.

The notion of the company as "one big happy family" was used to lessen the tensions between management and the workers. Efforts were made within the maquiladoras to create this family identity, which it was hoped, would instill loyalty towards the company.

Workers commented on the fact that the maquiladoras often seemed to be intent on making sure that the women workers did not "enjoy" any time spent in the canteens and washrooms, even as a "refuge". Clara and Camilla both commented on how dirty the canteens and washrooms were, the latter often without any toilet paper. Both women claimed that these were deliberate tactics by the maquiladora management to discourage women from loitering in the washrooms. Mona said that she and several of her friends did not feel comfortable eating in the canteen for fear of becoming ill: "a lot of us, we don't eat there because we are afraid to get sick, or because it is not very clean."

Finally many maquilas have consolidated their interests through the Association of Maquiladoras. It has frequently succeeded in voicing a united front on behalf of maquilas. It has organized transportation to and from the maquiladoras, for instance. It has also served as a forum for exchanging information on potential employees and employers advise one another on the track record of previous employees who are looking for work, especially blacklisted employees (employees engaged in any form of resistance activities). Romero claimed that the Association of Maquiladoras of Ciudad Juarez had become more powerful than the government, suggesting that the government was in fact a puppet of the maquiladoras.

CHAPTER FIVE:

WOMEN OF THE MAQUILADORAS AND ACTS OF RESISTANCE

This chapter will address the existence and forms of acts of resistance as revealed through the testimony of women maquiladora workers during my field research in Ciudad Juarez. The resistance encountered was largely informal, covert, unorganized, spontaneous and individual as opposed to formal, overt, organized and collective. This was to be expected in light of the literature on "everyday acts of resistance" and "the weapons of the weak" as discussed by Scott (1985; 1990) and as summarized in Chapter Three.

The acts of resistance detailed in this chapter will be organized under the following broad categories: organized union activity, organized non-union activity, and informal premeditated and spontaneous individual acts of resistance. The specific "weapons of the weak" in the case of the maquiladoras are numerous and not completely unfamiliar to us. However, their combinations and multifacetedness are not widely known. There appear to be numerous "weapons" operating simultaneously at different levels.

Many of the women interviewed were clearly aware of their exploitation

in the maquiladoras. For example, Mariana was particularly cognizant of employment rights and labour issues in the maquiladoras, claiming that her father had made her aware of these issues. She had been raised, she said, to be concerned about "how we should be treated and the rights we should have". She explained that her father had taught her about social problems: "people are being exploited and we are paying a high price for the dollars being brought in by the maquilas. The country needs to be renewed but not by abusing the people." Other women seemed less concerned with their exploitation, and more aware of the limited "freedom" and "independence" that working in the maquiladoras allows. Other women stated that their wage was clearly inadequate to meet the basic survival needs of themselves or their families and dependents. And still others indicated that their wages allowed them considerable freedom and also allowed them to contribute to the household in which they lived with a portion of their wages. Some women found their work experience boring and laborious; others boring and relatively easy. Some women workers commented on the competition among workers; others stressed the camaraderie among the maquiladora workers. Some women workers were aware that opportunities for "advancement" were extremely limited; others seemed to have great hopes for their futures, either within the maquiladoras themselves, or elsewhere as a result of further education and training. Still others felt that their children would have a better life as a result of the education that the women workers were able to provide

for them.

The two men interviewed had unique relationships with the maquiladoras and workers' "acts of resistance". Mario was a "labourer priest" who worked with the JOC helping maquiladora workers to resist their exploitation. He had chosen to work in the maquiladoras to gain a better understanding of the workers' working conditions. Romero was an activist lawyer who worked with maquiladora workers, often instituting lawsuits against the employers for unlawful dismissal, sexual harassment and other forms of mistreatment.

Organized Trade Union Activities

Many of the women showed only limited interest in trade union activity. Some were unaware of the role of trade unions, while others had become disillusioned with the trade union movement having lost faith in the ability of labour unions (often "company unions" or unions affiliated with the corrupt P.R.I.) to democratically advance their interests.

Gloria had found that over the years, since coming to work in the maquiladoras, she had seen many distasteful union leaders, with "big egos" and "not interested in the needs and wishes of the employees." She went on to say that the longer they were involved in the union and in power, the more

corrupt they became.

According to Romero, "the trade unions cover barely fifteen per cent of the workers." In fact, the vast majority of the workers have no trade union representation. Romero also spoke of "ghost unions", which exist only on paper, and which are then used by management to prevent unionization of the workers: "they are already unionized"! Political parties, such as the PRI, are known to use their political machine to organize workers merely in order to get their vote. Moreover, Romero spoke about how the women workers of the maquiladoras frequently spoke to him about the "male-dominated" trade union leadership and in particular the difficulties they had in finding the necessary time to become involved in the trade union movement.

Mona claimed that the union was male-dominated and that she knew nothing about what the union did since there were no opportunities to get information about the union and its activities, either on paper or in person. She then went on to say that it appeared that the union worked very closely with the supervisors: "sometimes they [union] call all the workers and they bring us together and the supervisor talks, then they ask our opinions, or they tell us what their plans are."

In addition to the questionable legitimacy of most trade unions, several

women interviewed, including Mona, also spoke of the limitations of a male-dominated trade union in advancing issues of concern in a female-dominated work force:

We women workers have very little time to meet or attend information sessions about the union because most of us have either school or domestic responsibilities to get to after work. Men can meet all evening long having no domestic chores awaiting them when they return home from work. That may be why the union executive is all male [Sylvia].

She appeared rather resigned and disillusioned with the union since it lacked female representation.

Almira, Edna, Clara, Lucia and Maria, as well as numerous other women workers, claimed there was no union at all in their shop. Almira, for one, said it most clearly: "No, in some of them [maquilas] there are [unions], but not in this one." Either there was no union or there was one on paper but it was not active. Almira also claimed that even had there been a union she would not have been involved with it. Edna and Maria wished that there was a union because they were particularly concerned about the abuses perpetrated by the supervisors: "the supervisors commit a lot of abuses. They ask us to stay working extra time all the time, and I would like someone to defend us [the worker] [Edna]. Lucia claimed they were "not allowed to organize groups or to have a union or anything like that": "there is a lack of orientation, or promotion of their rights. Most of the people don't know the law that protects them."

Mona, on the other hand, spoke of the limitations of the union:

Most of the time they [union] don't pay attention to your problems, and some of the times, I think that if I go I will get in trouble. It is the truth that sometimes we don't speak out when we see or suffer something that is unjust. But I am doing okay in my job, sometimes I would rather put up with it than to get in more trouble.

Organized Collective Non-Trade Union Activity

Given that my entrée into the world of the women maquiladora workers in Ciudad Juarez was through organized groups such as COMO, the women I contacted and interviewed were likely to reflect a high proportion of women active in such collective organizations. The involvement of fifteen of the women interviewed in collective organizations, including COMO, JOC and RO, represents a conscious attempt by women to channel their resistance within an organized arena. These groups provide "a support system for female leadership where women can collaborate in combating sexism within the workplace or other work issues such as employment rights and health and safety standards" [Sylvia].

The women in all the organizations referred to were working for change in society at large as well as in the maquiladoras. Recognizing that the maquiladoras do not function in isolation from society, the women understood the importance of global and structural change, as well as personal and familial

change. The women often worked on such issues as squatter rights, adequate access to water, and basic public services such as utilities, transportation and health care. At the same time, many of the women workers were also aware of, and attempting to alter and redress, the gendered division of labour in the home and in the socialization of children.

Specifically, many of the women I interviewed were active in COMO, especially as a means of obtaining training and education, which many women hoped would be their "ticket" out of the maquiladoras and into better employment for themselves and their children.

The Centro de Orientacion de la Mujer Obrera (COMO) was founded in the 1970s by privileged professional women interested in assisting less fortunate women (Fernandez-Kelly 1983a: 41). Soon after its inception, COMO became a centre for the education of working women. COMO became a woman-centred orientation and education organization for working women. It refers to itself as a workers' organization in Juarez mandated to do orientation and consciousness-raising around workers' rights and interests, including health and family issues.

In the late 1970s and early 1980s COMO started to provide consciousness-raising programmes while also doing vocational training.

Courses on women's issues, such as health and safety and family relations, were being eliminated for being too radical. COMO began to look at community-wide issues, in order to foster indigenous initiatives and development. However, in the mid-1980s it began to lose its focus and sense of direction and became financially overextended. It has also been accused of being coopted by the government after having accepted government contracts in order to overcome these financial difficulties. At the same time, others, such as Lucia, stated that COMO representatives still went to meetings set up by the maquiladora workers to help them with problems, and to give them advice. COMO was therefore seen as the enemy by the maquila management. Since its inception many researchers, including myself, interested in the maquiladoras and women workers, approach COMO for access to the maquiladora workers.

Lucia was the continuing education coordinator of the Open Education programme at COMO which offered both primary and secondary education to adults. Before working for COMO she had been a production operator for an electronics manufacturer in a maquiladora for six years. She had studied at COMO while working in the maquila. Lucia spoke extensively and passionately about her experience at COMO:

[W]e [COMO] give orientation seminars. We [talk] about sexuality, the relationship in the family, human relations. We give them [talks] every month, but we have seen that we have very little attendance even though we go and invite people from the maquilas. On the radio we announce it, in the newspaper, but we still have very few people coming.

She went on to say that women workers need:

to get some strong organizations going, some movement that would accomplish something because things [have] happened and apparently nobody cares. There are women who have died because of high contamination of the materials they give them to work [with] and nobody does anything, and if somebody starts complaining, they fire them.

When asked about specific organizations which have been working towards advancing the rights of workers in the maquiladoras, Lucia agreed that there was Solidaridad Obrera, JOC, and RO, in addition to COMO.

Both Joventud Obrera Cristiana (JOC) and the Comunidades Eclesiales de Base (CEBs) are religious organizations interested in advancing the plight of workers and the community at large. The former was exclusively made up of young workers. Its primary focus was on issues of work for young people and always within a Christian framework. While the CEBs were also Christian-based in their philosophy, their focus was around larger community concerns, not exclusively those of young workers or workers in general. Given the importance of the maquiladoras in the lives of their following, issues around the maquilas featured prominently in both organizations. Many of the women interviewed who were members of JOC were also members of the CEBs and vice versa. Both organizations appear to support one another's initiatives.

Approximately one quarter of the women interviewed, primarily from JOC and the CEBs, worked within the radical factions of the Catholic Church

where the likes of liberation theology are being discussed. The JOC and the CEBs and the local version of liberation theology are specific to this region of Mexico, and the role that religion, namely Catholicism, has played in the lives of the people living here. Organization and acts of resistance are mediated by cultural beliefs and values.

Ariana spoke about JOC being "very significant" for her and that it "changed my life." She claimed her life took a 180 degree turn after becoming involved with JOC. JOC helped her to start looking at herself as a person. Her motivation for getting involved in JOC was:

[A] lot of people are making their lives there [in the maquiladoras]. They give their lives in the maquilas, and the owners of the maquilas just take away our efforts, our lives, our blood. I mean it is ridiculous what they pay the majority of the workers, they pay us nothing yet you work from six to five and your life revolves around the maquilas. It takes your life away.

She then went on to speak of the goals of the organization:

What we try to do there is discover ourselves and the reality we live in, at work and at home and in God. We are trying to be more aware of what is going on around us, in the environment. We are trying to recuperate our dignity as men and women, to be more aware of our brothers and sisters around us.

JOC provides a forum, though frequently quite ad hoc and informal, for discussions around issues of work. Some claimed that the organization was more often a place to vent frustrations. However, they also try to be pro-active in their efforts, namely through discussions and gatherings and by providing

solidarity and support to other groups like the CEBs.

The Church, and the JOC and the CEBs as parts of the Church, play a prominent role in Mexicans' lives. The theories of liberation theology have played a role in the contemporary churches of the colonias and barrios or poverty stricken Mexico. JOC and the CEBs use the theory of liberation theology to mobilize their members around issues of workers' rights, for example. These organizations speak of living the gospel through service to the poor (Kopinak 1989: 233). In the case of the Mexican maquiladora workers, religion has been useful in empowering working women through organizations such as JOC and the CEBs.

Resistencia Obrera (R.O.), according to Mario, was established in 1986. It grew out of six different groups of workers from six different maquilas who decided to coordinate their organizational and resistance efforts. They were interested in collaborating to organize awareness campaigns around workers' rights, human rights and other employment issues. On numerous occasions R.O. was involved in confronting management with collective requests for improved working conditions, much like a legitimate union that represented the workers might. Today they are not as active as they once were but have been "present in different conflicts related to workers in the maquilas."

Mario spoke of how women in R.O. tended to make the "individual" problems of co-workers into collective concerns:

So what turned [out] to be the problem of one of the women ended up being a collective problem and through these supportive dynamics and conscious efforts to accomplish their goals they were able to deal with different common problems that many of them were facing.

Another organization mentioned by Mariana was the "Liga 23 of septiembre" which gave out information on the rights of labourers in the maquiladoras. Its membership was primarily made-up of workers in the maquiladoras. The organization was quite aware of the kinds of abuses encountered in the maquiladoras, and tried to empower the workers to address these abuses collectively. Mariana also spoke of other ad hoc groups that emerged around specific issues. For example, an emergency safety awareness committee and campaign might arise following an accident which occurs on the job or after a widely known public sexual assault.

Informal Individual Acts of Resistance

Informal acts of resistance occurred in both the maquiladora and outside the maquiladora, in the domestic sphere or home of the maquiladora worker as well as outside the home. In some instances it was quite clear whether the acts of resistance were aimed at the oppressive conditions in the maquiladoras

or in the home. However, in other instances the target of the resistance was not so clear. At times resistance appeared to be aimed at both spheres, namely the oppression of the patriarchal conditions that occurred in both the maquiladoras and the home.

Although there was evidence of a degree of conventional expressions of organized resistance among the women maquiladora workers I interviewed, the overwhelming majority of the women workers spoke more of informal, unconventional and largely individual acts of resistance. These acts were frequently deliberate and pre-meditated but also spontaneous and unplanned. Gloria, who has worked in the same maquiladora for five years and who fears losing her job if she complains, stated: "I have to express my frustrations in a manner that is not obvious, in a way that could be confusing to my supervisor...he must not think that I am consciously opposing his orders." Gloria, therefore, felt confined to express her resistance in largely covert and invisible ways, such as extending her washroom breaks unnecessarily or feigning sickness, as will be explored further later in this chapter.

These informal acts of resistance were generally invisible and covert precisely because any more explicit forms of resistance would have resulted in the firing of the overt resistor. It could even be argued that these forms of everyday resistance were so soft and watered-down as to be ineffective and

possibly even advance the interests of the maquiladora management. It could be argued that these otherwise disenchanted and possibly even angry women might have eventually engaged in conventional forms of resistance in due time. Instead by "letting off some steam" they reduce their level of frustration and the likelihood of engaging in conventional acts of resistance by instead of engaging in these everyday forms of resistance. The reality of the maquiladoras is that any more explicit act of resistance would likely jeopardize these women workers' jobs. In fact, it is precisely because these acts of resistance are ambiguous and vague, and possibly even contradictory, that they are allowed to be expressed.

These everyday forms of resistance are such that they may cause minor work slowdowns and stoppages, or temporarily interrupt the flow of the assembly line but they do not have the more severe effect that an all out strike might entail. Whatever the overall short-term or long-term effectiveness of these acts of resistance or the conceptual differences between acts of resistance, which is important when measuring or assessing the degree of effectiveness of such acts, are questions that, though important for further research, are not part of this research. What is important to this research is that the conditions for these women whether in the formal economy or the informal domestic realm are such that their expressions of resistance are required to take on a form that enables them to avoid threatening their

continued participation in both those spheres. These women workers generally need to be working in the maquiladora, for reasons of survival, though they are unhappy with the conditions within them and likewise in the domestic sphere.

One of the constraints for women maquiladora workers I interviewed who might have otherwise considered participating in conventional acts of resistance such as a union was that they had little time for unions and non-union organizations and resistance, aside from the role that organizations such as COMO played in their training and education. Many of the women workers I interviewed spent approximately three hours every weekday evening at night school, often at COMO, and they still had major responsibilities concerning domestic labour and child care at home: "When the work is done, [I've] finished the shift I come to this place [school] and I don't talk to nobody. There's no time" [Almira].

It could be argued that the maquiladoras provides women financial resources which they may not otherwise have and that access to these resources therefore reduces women workers' likelihood of engaging in conventional resistance activities. However, though the maquiladoras does provide women workers some financial power it must be seen for what it is. That power is limited to the size of the pay cheque. In other words, women may continue to feel oppressed despite the pay cheque. Further, though many

women workers prefer to maintain their jobs in the maquiladoras for as long as it suits them, many believe that they have other options, as will be discussed later. Although their resistance is affected by this fact the possibility of resistance is not necessarily eliminated. It is precisely my argument that such conditions shape the nature of the expressions of the resistance.

Most women interviewed were single and kept at least half of their earnings to pay for their studies and to cover personal care needs. The other half was generally turned over to their household. However, there was considerable variation between women. Juanita, for example, had paid for her education while working in the maquiladoras. However, now that she did not have to pay for her studies she kept that extra money for herself and contributed only nominally to the financial management of her parents' household. She was keen to tell me about how she did not need to rely on her parents for any money: she proudly suggested that she was completely financially independent, even while she was living in her parents' household!

Nora and Anna kept all of their money for their personal care needs and school related expenses: "I am working to pay my way. No one else will provide for me since my parents have very little to spare. I need to be able to provide for myself" [Anna]. Nora, however, did provide her mother with money when her mother needed it.

Women are working in the maquiladoras, not exclusively to contribute to the family wage, but also in order to establish a certain degree of financial leverage or independence, however limited. In such instances young women in particular may be attempting to escape the domination of their fathers by going to work in a factory: "there are lots of persons inside working that dislike the work, but they need to work...because they don't want to depend on their fathers" [Nora]. However, entering the maquiladoras as an attempt to escape their fathers, they frequently did not realize the domination by managers and supervisors they would have to contend with once in the factory.

Other women workers stressed the fact that their income allowed them some "independence" and "freedom" within their household to maximize their status in the family and to minimize the pressure to get married or to take on the domestic responsibilities of the household. Mona, for example, felt that her financial contributions gave her some personal options, and also gave her voice some weight in family decision-making. She assured me that these were significant gains weighed against the pressure that is "to be expected" from management and especially one's immediate supervisor in the factory.

Women have at times secretly withheld some of their earnings from their husbands or the household account. This is a way of gaining greater control over their financial situation. Mariana kept her total salary to pay for her

personal care needs, including her school related expenses. Her father had encouraged her to keep her resources for her studies. Elena, too did not contribute to the household finances. She claimed her older sister who was equally still living in her parents' home was the source of household financial support and so she could keep her salary for herself. However, Juanita who only contributed nominally financially to her parents' household implied that her parents were not aware of how much she was making in the maquiladoras. This therefore permitted her to have greater control over how much she contributed to the household.

Though the women interviewed all wanted higher salaries, many were not interested in a supervisory job. Upon further exploration it became evident from my discussions with Maria, for example, that a supervisory job would require her to "be a traitor" to her fellow women workers. She was not interested in taking on a job that would require her to side with, and possibly defend, management before her "fellow" workers. There were other women workers, however, such as Juanita and Anna, whose "survival of the fittest" approach was reflected in their interest in their own advancement and their own promotion to a supervisory role: "there is only one way to get a better salary in the maquilas and I hope to be able to get promoted ... not to be in the same place five years from now" [Anna].

Gossip, exchanged among line workers, was usually aimed at the supervisors. Nora stated that she would not be interested in becoming a supervisor precisely because of the gossip that was commonly exchanged about the supervisors: "a lot of gossip inside the plant, commentaries you know...that this person is having an affair with this one or that one, they are lovers, and so on."

Gossip is usually initiated on the shop floor about supervisors, informers or those in a dominant position. However, the fact that no one is immune from the possibility of being the subject of gossip was of some concern to Almira, who spoke of the difficulties in maintaining any anonymity on the shop floor amid such "storytelling" and gossiping: "everything is common knowledge and everybody knows everything about everybody, because even if you don't want to know, they tell you what happened between so and so, or who is a friend of the boss, or what so and so is saying, etc."

Gossip was sometimes seen as a means of lashing out at supervisors in a manner that does not jeopardize one's work and yet allows one to deal with one's frustrations with a supervisor:

[M]ost of the production workers are unhappy with their pay and jobs and they are angry with the whole maquila structure and they reflect [project] it against the people with higher position[s], making more money. So there is a lot of envy and gossip [Ariana].

Although it was recognized by the women workers that gossiping had limited effect on the supervisor who was the target of the gossip, I gathered that the importance of the behaviour was that it served as a coping strategy.

Gossip was generally targeted at and reserved for supervisors, informers and other "traitors." It, therefore, did not generally prohibit the emergence of informal networks of women workers. Support from fellow workers consistently emerged as an important survival mechanism for women working in the maquiladoras. Almira, for one, commented on the importance of friends and a support system even in light of the difficulties in finding the time to make friends let alone speak to them.

Clara commented on how the support of friends was what was keeping her going: "The supervisors...give you a hard time, they make you work a lot, too much. I don't like what I do. I like being with friends".

Edna lamented the lack of opportunities to talk with people given the limited time available at breaks. Even "the lunch break," at Edna's place of work, "is only thirty minutes long". Many women workers get a ten minute break to use the washroom.

Camilla disliked her job in the maquila but suggested that it was her

informal network of friends that kept her sane:

[T]he supervisors are uumm...well they give you a hard time, they push you to work more all the time, too much...it bothers me that we are treated badly or they [my friends] are obliged to do certain things that they can't...I don't like what I see and do...but I like my friends and the support they offer.

Mona spoke of the role of an informal support network as an outlet for one's frustrations with the situation in the maquiladoras. The opportunity to talk about problems might help to stem an outburst or comparable behaviour that could jeopardize one's position.

Ariana, once an operator but now a technician (a step up), managed to find opportunities to network with ex-fellow workers, in spite of the isolation of her new position: "I belong to different groups and we have different activities to try to improve the environment and conditions here to help the workers and I find some fulfilment in that."

Juanita also explained the difficulties in working as a technician as opposed to an operator and the role that informal networks played among operators: "I liked it before because I had more contact with the people and now it's more difficult to just be with the people". She missed the camaraderie among operators and reflected on how she frequently felt quite alienated in her new position, though she desperately wanted to become a supervisor

nonetheless.

The importance of the informal networks was that they provided women workers a safe place for sounding out their frustrations. They helped to counter the otherwise highly alienating and isolating environment of the maquiladoras. Again these informal networks could in fact be advancing not only the individual women worker's short-term interests but also the maquiladora management's interests by serving as a means for employees to vent their frustrations in this rather unoffensive manner as opposed to more radical ways. However, the point is that such tempered forms of resistance are occurring.

Concerns about informers were relatively common. In our discussions about informal gatherings, Mona said that the only way to be assured that she was not in contact with an informer was to limit her discussions about work problems and concerns to a select few co-workers. She therefore relied on the same few people as her network of support, and she claimed her co-workers did likewise: "usually what happens is that usually you are friends of three or four people and you are all the time with them. So everybody has their little group...but there aren't any big groups."

I did encounter among several women, including Mona, Sylvia and Gloria,

a fear that one might unknowingly or inadvertently befriend an informer. Clara, however, claimed that there were very few if any informers and that workers stuck together and "helped each other."

Whether or not absenteeism due to sickness or health problems reflects innovative forms of resistance is debatable. Both real and feigned sickness have historically been used as a means of defying work demands. Several of the women interviewed claimed to use the excuse of poor health as a justification for not going to work. Unfortunately, these women did not have an employment benefits package that included financial compensation for sick days and therefore were not paid when they did not go to work. There was therefore a major personal disincentive to miss work whether one was legitimately sick or not. Nonetheless several women spoke of the need to "pretend to be unwell every now and again" according to Sylvia, as a coping mechanism in order to "stop from going crazy."

Absenteeism was particularly elevated on Mondays after the week-end festivities which included dancing and drinking, according to Clara. The impact of a high rate of absenteeism was a reduced work pace on Mondays given the numerous gaps in the production line. Those who went to work spoke of the more manageable work pace that resulted from the absenteeism of fellow workers.

Several women spoke of using poor health as a spontaneous act of resistance. When suddenly they could not stand another minute of the monotony of their work they would pretend to suddenly have become faint and unwell: "we sometimes become desperate to get out, usually for only a bit of time, not too long, and show false signs of sickness, like a very bad headache, stomach pain, blurred vision [Elena].

Even the need to go to the washroom was a common theme among women when first asked about acts of resistance. The washroom was like a quasi-haven from the frenzy of the operation floor. Anna said "the bathroom is a good place to go to get away from supervisors" since male supervisors, though allowed, avoid "going into the women's washroom." Though this method was "used discretely" I was told that management had on several occasions suspected that women were using washroom breaks as a reprieve from the shop floor. It was suggested that management would often question women's need to use the washroom but no woman knew of anyone having been fired because of excessive use of the washroom. Again this tactic was subtle enough to render it difficult for management to know definitively what the employee's motivations were.

On numerous occasions I was told of incidents where women workers used the washroom as a means of escaping the fast and seemingly relentless

work pace. The purpose of going to the washroom was in some instances to deliberately slow down the work pace and to escape the pressure from supervisors to maintain that fast pace. In other instances it was also to cope with the boredom and monotony of the repetitive tasks as well as to get a break. Regardless of the reason for going to the washroom it has a slowdown effect on the production process. Mona's experience with washroom resistance was voiced as follows: "sometimes it gets very boring. So then, they start making a lot of mistakes and the supervisor gives them a warning, so what they do is that they go to the washroom to smoke a cigarette or to drink some water."

Work slowdowns were felt to be a very common and relatively safe manner of defying the oppression of the pace of the production process imposed by management. Several workers, including Juanita, Sylvia, Ariana and Mariana spoke of the spontaneity of slowdowns and the diversity of approaches to slowdowns. Examples of slowdowns included going to the washroom or feigning sickness or a minor injury such as a sore wrist, sore back, or sore legs, from standing too long or a sore behind from sitting too long. Sore eyes from viewing through a microscope for hours on end was another example. Absenteeism and tardiness also may result in a work slowdown.

Sabotage in the form of defective components or materials, or lost materials or tools, can also be used as a means of slowing or halting the production process. Juanita spoke about how invariably difficult it was to know, even of a fellow operator or technician, whether or not the slowdown was inadvertent or deliberate. Lucia said the following:

[T]here is nothing structured or seriously organized or planned, and what happens is that spontaneously when in the maquila the bosses are asking for a lot of production, and abuses are being committed very often, what they [the workers] do is that little by little they organize themselves and at some point stop the production lines or try to go on strike or things like that.

Almira referred to incidents where she would leave her work station to go to talk to a friend on the pretence that the discussion was work related: "if they notice that you are spending a lot of time with that person or going to him or to her very often, for sure you will get a warning." Leaving her work station and distracting a fellow worker from her work had the residual effect of a work slowdown because "the material goes from one worker to the other, so if one stops working in one of the lines, the other people will have to stop working too because they are waiting for the material."

Sylvia mentioned breaking electronic parts, thus slowing down the production process. I was told that if management even suspected that her acts of sabotage were intentional she would have been fired immediately.

Maria spoke of slowing down her pace of work as a means of coping with the repetitiveness and monotony of her work. She claimed the monotony had driven people to quit on the spot. Carmen spoke of suddenly misplacing component parts, necessary for the production process to advance, as a means of halting the pace of production.

Though I was expecting to encounter theft as a common form of sabotage, I was told by Sylvia that theft was much riskier than merely the sabotage of materials. The worker could claim components or materials were defective much more innocently than if caught with materials in her personal possession. The purpose of either theft or sabotage was to slowdown the work process, but the latter had fewer risks. On occasion the supervisors revealed their scepticism and at times reprimanded the one who reported the flaw or defective input component. Invariably, though, it was impossible to assess at what point the material had been sabotaged given the number of people in contact with the materials. Moreover materials were frequently sabotaged in a manner that mimicked an actual defect previously encountered, allowing a deliberately inflicted defect to appear authentic.

Edna also spoke of how "some people choose not to do their work right" -- that is, to be slow or to produce defective products. When probed about how the workers could do this without getting caught, Edna stated that the

supervisors "just give you a warning, because they don't know that they [the workers] are doing it as a form of protest".

Although the majority of the incidents or work slowdowns and sabotage I encountered were highly individualistic and spontaneous, although infrequent they were at times the beginnings of larger collective actions.

Initially it may seem surprising that the supervisors, who in enough cases had once been operators and technicians would not be familiar with such resistance strategies. Although in many cases the supervisors might suspect something, the beauty of these strategies is that they are so nebulous as to be difficult to definitively identify and isolate as bona fide resistance tactics. They could just as easily be legitimate accidents, et cetera.

Another informal individual act of resistance was evident in the manner in which workers dealt with the bonus system. The bonus system appears to have somewhat of a loophole. Though it was designed to encourage a maximization of output on the part of workers it has not always had that effect. Several women, including Gloria, Edna and Almira suggested that there was no use in speeding up their production because eventually the managers would establish a higher base rate and would then expect more for less. The workers, therefore, tried to maintain a consistently lower pace than the one

targeted by management. Romero also mentioned that women workers often did not seek to obtain bonuses or perform overtime, as expressions of resistance: "they would rather do that because it's the only thing they are capable of doing. What I'm saying is people have dignity...The workers prefer to lose their bonus than to be used and the owners have to put up with that underground resistance."

Although high employee turnover can be seen as a result of management's attempt to control and discipline cheap workers, it can also be seen as a form of worker resistance. In the maquiladoras, where there are limited overt avenues for expressing dissatisfaction, workers resort to expressing their frustrations with their work conditions by quitting. Women dissatisfied with their jobs periodically make a decision to quit. Most women interviewed had worked in several maquiladora plants and explicitly said that they used their right to quit as a means of expressing their dissatisfaction with their job and/or managers.

As discussed above, some women workers periodically quit their maquiladora job to resume training and schooling, in the hope that, in the long run, they would obtain better jobs outside (or, rarely, inside) the maquiladoras. To leave one's job or to quit, whether to get out of the maquiladora system altogether, or to move on to another was a frequent method of escaping the

frustrations of the job, according to Maria and numerous other workers. She also said that women workers quit for a multitude of reasons, including, pregnancy, being tired of the work, or to look for a better job in a factory with higher wages or better working conditions and benefits, like RCA. She claimed that if there were problems with a particular aspect of the work, be it with co-workers, the management or otherwise, there was usually very little that could be changed, leaving one with no choice but to put up with the situation or to quit.

Other women workers do not quit -- they are fired by management. Lucia said that she was forced to quit by management who were uncomfortable with the role she was playing on the shop floor, talking to co-workers about their labour rights and generally inciting oppositional thoughts and behaviour. The pressure they put on Lucia finally led her to quit. She subsequently ended up working for COMO.

At one point Ariana had been ready to quit her job, largely because she felt frustrated by her poor salary. Out of desperation she decided to go to management and negotiate for a higher position and better salary: "I was ready to quit. As a production operator I wasn't making enough money to survive, I asked for the job [as technician] and they gave it to me." Though this was the only such case I encountered, Ariana was pro-active in proposing an

alternative to management. It is not clear why management acceded to Ariana's request. It should be pointed out, however, that the maquiladora management used a divide and conquer management style or approach and that it should not be assumed that Ariana's successful individual act would be successful if initiated collectively.

Quitting appeared to be used by some as an expression of dissatisfaction and resistance, and the consequences seemed to be taken lightly, even within the reality of unemployment in the Ciudad Juarez area. There were other women workers who saw it as being rather pointless to quit or to change jobs, since they were all seen as equally unpleasant places to work. Almira stated that "there are problems everywhere, but I know that I have these problems here, and if I change myself to another maquila, I know there would be other problems and maybe worse than the ones I have here." Quitting was a last resort for the majority of the women interviewed.

Paradoxically, though the women interviewed had, in general, a clear sense of their current reality and exploitation, and in most cases were quite realistic about their short-term and long-term goals and aspirations, they also seemed to utilize "fantastic dreams" of the possibilities and probabilities of education as a "way out" for their futures. Perhaps this was a "coping mechanism" for these women workers. This "everyday act of resistance" may

advance not only the psychological survival interests of these women workers but the maquiladora management interests by serving to reduce the likelihood of more severe, conventional forms of resistance.

Education seemed to be most women's answer and hope to their oppressive conditions and exploitation. This sentiment may have been overly represented in my sample given that I went to COMO, an adult education centre, to find women workers to interview. According to over half of the women interviewed it was felt that further education would eventually provide them with alternative employment opportunities outside of the maquiladoras. Though many of the jobs these women hoped for (nursing assistant, teaching, secretary, cashier, among others) do not pay much more, if at all, the nature of the work and the overall working conditions seemed to appeal to them.

Work in the maquiladoras was typically not viewed as a long term goal for these women, not even as a supervisor where the pay would be better. The women workers interviewed invariably spoke of someday getting out of the maquiladoras. For many of them this meant getting through their studies: completing a high school diploma or a nursing assistance program, for example. I frequently heard from these women a yearning to become a nursing assistant, if not a nurse, a teacher, or in some cases even just a cashier or secretary. Though the women interviewed generally aspired to any job outside the

maquiladoras, in the meantime they continued to work in the maquiladoras, in order to survive.

Almira was attending school in order to complete her secondary school diploma in the hopes of trying to find a better job. She aspired to a job as a cashier which she thought would be a less stressful job even if the pay was not better. She had become very tired of the repetitiveness of the kind of work she was doing in the maquiladoras but felt she needed to hold on a little longer while she finished just a few more courses. If she persisted in taking these night classes, she would complete her high school diploma in just over one more year. She claimed that goal was what kept her going on the days when she wanted so badly to quit her job in the maquiladora.

Clara once quit working in the maquiladoras to return to school and she then continued to work while going to night school. She was trying to complete her high school diploma in order to get a job "outside of the maquila where I would just have to work for eight hours per day and my salary would be better." Though she did comment on how difficult it was to work full-time, attend classes, complete homework and domestic chores in the evening and on week-ends, she appeared quite determined to attain her goal. She exuded a strong and clear sense of where she was going and that was not to remain in the maquiladoras.

One of Mona's motivations for pursuing further studies was to qualify for a position as a supervisor within the maquiladora. She felt that further studies would strengthen her chances for a supervisory position which she believed involved less labour-intensive work than the work of an operator. Given her experience, she was looking for less arduous and less stressful work. She went on to explain why the supervisor is supposedly paid more, but questioned the rationale because of the extra stresses involved in labour-intensive work:

[B]ecause they [supervisors] have better positions...they get paid better. Sometimes I think that it is okay and sometimes I think that it isn't. Yes, because they know more, because of what they have studied, that is why they pay them more. No, because sometimes we think that they should be paid the same because we work more, but at the same time we know that they studied. That is why they don't have to work as hard and make more money.

Overall she was studying "to get a better job, because when you study you can do more things so then they pay you more."

Maria too was studying towards a certificate as a nursing assistant in order to be able to move ahead in the workplace. However, in the meantime she was "going to work just temporarily [in the maquiladoras in order] to...finance my studies." She was quite content with her work and the working conditions and in fact seemed quite pleased with her overall work situation.

Ariana had worked in six different maquilas but quit several times to

return to her studies. As soon as her grades got too low she would quit and return her attention to her studies in the hopes of one day becoming an engineer. Then when she ran out of money she would leave studying to get a job, in order to bring money home. For Ariana studying and working had been cyclical depending on the more pressing need. However, when I spoke to her, it had been nearly five years since she had returned to studying. She appeared to have put her dream behind her (of getting an engineering degree) as she struggled to make enough money to meet her basic survival needs.

Camilla, as well as numerous others, also quit their jobs in the maquilas to return to school. Camilla quit on two occasions, but she returned to the maquiladoras both times in pursuit of a job that would "pay the bills" as she described it.

Lucia, on the other hand, spoke of her frustrations with the lack of women workers interested in COMO's programme. She spoke in her capacity as coordinator of the open education programme: "Now it is even harder than some years ago because we have tried to invite them to the COMO to learn to study and we see that there is...very little interest in general in coming to school."

None of the women (with the exception of Mona, mentioned above)

spoke of going to school in order to return to work in the maquiladoras, at any position. Nora spoke of the unpleasant ambience in the maquiladoras and her lack of interest in returning to work there, regardless of the level she might be promoted to, or offers she might receive.

Interestingly, the women workers interviewed who had attained a higher level of education, namely Mariana and Edna, tended to be more sceptical of the degree to which further education could really change the plight of women in the maquiladoras. In general, however, they recognized that it did marginally aid in their individual advancement.

In addition, if these women workers had inflated "dreams" concerning the possible role of training and education in altering their own futures, these paled before the "dreams" these women workers had in the future role of education for their children and the future generation. Also, many of these women workers, who were also trying to alter some of the gendered division of labour within the households and villages, similarly seemed to have much higher hopes of a more equitable gendered division of labour for their children and children's children.

Several of the women interviewed talked about the incremental changes they were trying to make in the division of labour in their respective domiciles.

Several of these women, including Sylvia, Anna and Gloria expressed a conscious decision to have fewer children, possibly only two, unlike their parents who generally had at least four or five children. The reason given for having fewer children was that they hoped to provide more opportunities to their children and not be faced with the financial constraints their parents faced. They desired that their daughters aspire to more satisfying and valorizing professions than working on an assembly line in the maquiladoras.

Almira fantasized that the children she did not yet have would have a better life, one that did not involve working in a maquiladora. For Sylvia a better life for her children meant fewer financial constraints than she had faced as a child but it also meant options other than working in the maquiladoras.

Mona seemed determined to raise her yet unborn children in as equitable a manner as possible. She spoke of her frustrations with the inequities in the workplace, as well as the home, with the following statement:

[T]hey should respect one another and that they are the same regardless if they are a boy or a girl. Because sometimes the woman has finished her studies and the man hasn't, and the man still thinks that he is more than that woman...they give better promotions to men...nowadays you cannot find a man that thinks different. They all think that when they get married they are going to be the boss of their house. They don't think that the woman is a partner. They think that women should stay home and take care of the children, etc. The men they go and do whatever they want.

Even Mona's mother, who used to "say that my father was the right one," had

changed and been much more supportive of Mona, even at the risk of defying
Mona's father.

CONCLUSION

This thesis examined the specific experiences of sixteen women workers in the maquiladoras of Ciudad Juarez in northern Mexico. It focused on the women workers' experiences of their work, of their labour process, of management's "control mechanisms" and, especially, of their attempts at alleviating their exploitation and alienation, where possible, through organization and through acts of "everyday resistance" and the "weapons of the weak".

When I began this research project I had hoped to contribute to the redress of the "myth of women's passivity and docility" within the maquiladoras, in particular. Through the voices of the women workers interviewed, I had hoped to reveal that, not only were these women workers not passively allowing themselves to be victimized, but they were in fact engaging in acts of resistance.

Since this research began, however, there is now a growing literature doing just this -- showing that workers, including women workers, throughout world export factories in Asia, in the Caribbean, and in Mexico's maquiladoras, are not the "mere victims" of exploitation, although they are the victims of

exploitation. On the contrary, this newer literature, of which this thesis is now a small part, shows that world workers, including women maquiladora workers, are human beings with some, and various, and varying, degrees of human agency. One aspect of these workers' human agency is their particular lived experience of their particular work force participation and of their particular labour process, and the ways they interpret these and react to them. Further, one aspect of this latter is their perceptions of management's "control mechanisms" and the workers' own "everyday forms of resistance" and their use of the "weapons of the weak" to counter their exploitation and working conditions. Furthermore, this growing literature points to the fact that women workers in Third World export factories often begin to connect their exploitation in the work force with their oppression within the gendered division of labour within their families and communities.

The sixteen women I interviewed in depth portrayed some of the variation to be expected of women workers' perceptions of their exploitative working conditions and of their attempts at alleviating those oppressive working conditions. There were many variations in the expressions of these sixteen women workers' perceptions, experiences and acts of resistance. They varied from woman to woman. A balance needs to be struck between generalizing about women's reality, while still recognizing that individual women's lived experience shape their individual realities. Many of the sixteen

women saw their "hope", or that of their children, in "getting some training or education" in order to move beyond the exploitation of the maquiladoras, however much this might not come to pass. Some of these women feared being fired or laid off, and attempted to never be seen as "resisting" or "organizing" in any way, shape or form. But, as we saw in Chapter Five, therein lies the possibility and the reality of those "weapons of the weak" and the "everyday acts of resistance" of which we spoke in Chapter Three.

Moreover, the acts of resistance and the strategies of resistance of these sixteen women maquiladora workers were not merely reactive; at times they were quite pro-active. And while these acts and strategies were some times unconscious, or subconscious, others were quite deliberate. These acts of resistance were in large part a reflection of the context of the maquiladoras.

Women workers' agency was revealed through a definition of resistance that was sufficiently gender-sensitive to account for the particularities of women workers' conditions in the workplace and the domicile. The nature of women's domestic labour, the particularities of the socio-economic climate of northern Mexico, and the balance of power which rests in the maquiladoras, have created a set of parameters which have influenced the form and nature of women workers' resistance. Once the definition of resistance was broadened and allowed for women's specificity it became evident that these

women workers were either deliberately or unconsciously attempting to redistribute and renegotiate the existing unequal power relations.

The difficulty with the analysis of these forms of everyday resistance, and possibly why it has so often been ignored, is that its very nature makes it rather invisible at worst and ambiguous at best. Indeed it is precisely this ambiguity and covertness of these acts of resistance that explains both their success and the difficulty of differentiating them from accommodation or conformity. On their own, many of the individual acts of resistance may appear petty and trivial. However, it is the cumulative effect of these varied acts that substantiate my thesis that resistance is occurring daily in the maquiladoras. Moreover, with the balance of power so heavily in favour of the maquiladora management, even the slightest attempt at resistance is testimony to these women workers' agency.

Given that women workers in the maquiladoras are among the "weakest of the weak", we should not be surprised that women workers engage, not so much in the formal protests and labour activities of "traditional" struggles and resistances, but more so in the everyday resistances of the weak.

Many of the women workers interviewed were optimistic about the possibility for individual change in their own lives. They did not see themselves

without options. Many saw the possibility of going to school and getting "better" jobs. However, many women workers also hoped for societal change. Some chose to express their resistance through collective organizations, namely religious, worker-based or women-centred organizations, working for social change. Several women were able to articulate their long-term goals which included the overcoming of the structural limitations of not simply the maquiladoras, but of the gendered division of labour within Mexican social life.

While spontaneous acts of resistance were invariably individualistic, where action was taken as a group the notion of cooperation was central. The structures of the organizations tended to be more informal, more flexible and less hierarchal and therefore possibly more accessible to these women workers. There was also a sense that the role of the collective organizations, whether formal or otherwise, were not merely to mobilize efforts but to provide a support system. The collective organizations saw their role as one of empowering their members. A fundamental characteristic that set them apart from formal trade unions was that women's gender-specific oppression, both within the maquiladoras and outside of them, were clearly recognized and were the focus of discussion.

This thesis did succeed in illustrating women as active agents of

resistance and, perhaps, of social change, within the context of the maquiladoras through a broad-based exploration of what constitutes resistance. Even though these individual weapons may at times not offer more than a momentary reprieve or refuge from the oppression of the maquiladoras, for these women workers living on the margins, any gain, no matter how minor, including psychological and ideological "victories" is important. And, it is important to keep in mind that "a momentary reprieve" and "refuge" may constitute major victories for any individual woman worker feeling especially harassed or exploited.

The fact that these "everyday forms of resistance" and "weapons of the weak" have not been especially and fully effective in bringing about major reforms or major structural changes, is to precisely miss the point of their effectiveness -- they serve to enable the achievement of minor, yet important, victories in the individual empowerment of living human beings.

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