

The Industrial Machine and the Exploitation of Women: The Case of Ciudad Juárez

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Abstract

This paper will briefly describe how industrialization fostered by United States and European interests have historically impacted women throughout the developing world, and explicitly, how it has impacted the women of Ciudad Juárez, in the state of Chihuahua, México from 1993 to the present. Specifically, I will discuss how the construct and policies of neoliberalism, the conditions brought forth by the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA), and the industrialization of Juárez have impacted the economic, working, and sociocultural conditions of women. Within this discussion, I will illustrate how the maquiladoras (factories) have circumvented Latina Mexican cultural and gender patterns, leaving these women vulnerable to unabated poverty, violence, and femicide. This paper will conclude with a discussion from a social justice perspective regarding suggestions of the interventions necessary to improve the conditions affecting these women.

Introduction

Historically, there has been controversy regarding whether women have benefited from industrialization or whether they have been exploited by it. Some scholars believe that women initially benefited by the emancipating effect of working outside the home.¹ However, many more scholars believe that women have been exploited in the name of economics. Because work was segregated, women were paid lower wages than men and even though women had new responsibilities outside of the home they still had the same duties to perform inside the home, due to sexism and gender boundaries.² Contemporarily, the developed world's production costs and competition led many US and European investors to seek lower production costs through the relocation of their assembly plants to developing countries (e.g., Latin America and Asia). This restructuring of manufacturing has led to an over reliance on women as the providers of the cheapest labor throughout the world.³ Labor can be considered a process of exploitation when such labor is appropriated "without commensurate compensation."⁴

Current global neoliberal policies have undermined economic security and safety among the workers in North America, both male and female, US based or otherwise. Neoliberalism simply means "new liberalism." Liberalism is an economic policy in which it is believed that interdependence affords economic benefits for all players (e.g., corporations, investors, workers, and consumers) and easily lends itself to the globalization of commodity production.⁵ Neoliberal

¹ Joyce Burnette, "Chasing the Ghouls: The Juárez Serial Murders and a Reporter Who Won't Let Go," *Columbia Journalism Review* (2004, March/April): 12-14.

² Burnette, "Chasing the ghouls;" Douglas A. Galbi, "Economic Change and Sex Discrimination in the Early English Cotton Factories," Last modified March 8, 1994, <http://www.galbithink.org/womwork.htm> (accessed June 6, 2010).

³ M. Patricia Fernandez Kelly, "International Development and Women's Employment: Issues for a Feminist Agenda," *Women's Studies Quarterly* 14, no. 3/4 (1986): 2-6; M. Patricia Fernandez Kelly, "Broadening the Scope: Gender and the International Economic Development," *Sociological Forum* 4, no. 4 (1989): 611-635; M. Patricia Fernandez Kelly, "Reading the Signs: The Economics of Gender Twenty-five Years Later," *Signs* 25, no. 4 (2000): 1107-1112.

⁴ Fernandez Kelly, "Reading the Signs, 1109.

⁵ Maxwell A. Cameron and Vinod K. Aggarwal, "Mexican Meltdown: States, Markets, and Post-NAFTA Financial Turmoil," *Third World Quarterly* 17, No. 5 (1996): 975-987.

policies favor dismantling the state (or public) sector of the economy by privatizing industry and opening the economy to foreign investment.⁶ Therefore, neoliberalism favors moving development from state-owned entities to private entities, while increasing reliance on free market trade.⁷

An example of neoliberalism is what is occurring under the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA) in which privately owned corporations in the United States (US) export individual parts or components to privately owned assembly plants located in México (e.g., a Maquiladora). The privately owned assembly plant then hires Mexican workers at cheaper labor costs (as compared to the US) to compile the individual components into a finished product (e.g., cars, clothing, or electronics). After assembly, the finished products are then imported back into the US for sale in the domestic market or for export to other countries. Theoretically, the US corporate investors, the maquiladora owners, and the workers will all profit from this arrangement. In reality, this process has only strengthened US corporate hegemony in North America and has hurt workers in both the US and México.⁸

Fernández-Kelly noted that in the twentieth century it became important for the governments in Asia and Latin America to open up their countries to overseas investment by offering foreign companies incentive packages that included cheap and reliable labor.⁹ Hiring women has been a large part of this strategy, as historically worldwide, women have not been able to command the wages of men. In Mexico, this strategy has resulted in undermining the male economy by lowering employment opportunities for men, lowering the standard of living, and creating high rates of male unemployment and underemployment, and changing women's traditional roles in the home and in society.¹⁰ Worldwide, this strategy has led to the creation of "a large number of jobs characterized by lower wages, instability, reduced membership in unions, and few benefits."¹¹ Investors grow rich while workers grow poor and the middle class disappears.

This paper will explore how industrialization has impacted the women of Ciudad Juárez, in the state of Chihuahua, México from 1993 to the present. Specifically, I will discuss how the construct and policies of neoliberalism, the conditions brought forth by the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA), and the industrialization of Juárez have impacted the economic, working, and sociocultural conditions of women. Within this discussion, I will illustrate how the maquiladoras (factories) have circumvented Latina Mexican cultural and gender patterns, leaving these women vulnerable to unabated poverty, violence, and femicide. This paper will conclude with a discussion from a social justice perspective regarding suggestions of the interventions necessary to improve the conditions affecting these women.

⁶ David Bacon, "Health, Safety, and Workers' Rights in the Maquiladoras," *Journal of Public Health Policy* 22, No. 3 (2001): 338-348.

⁷ Charles L. Davis, "Mass Support for Regional Economic Integration: The Case of NAFTA and the Mexican Public," *Mexican Studies* 14, No. 1 (1998): 105-130.

⁸ Paul Ciccantel, "NAFTA and the Reconstruction of U.S. Hegemony: The Raw Materials Foundations of Economic Competitiveness," *The Canadian Journal of Sociology* 26, No. 1 (2001): 57-87.

⁹ Fernandez Kelly, "International Development and Women's Employment."

¹⁰ Fernandez Kelly, "International Development and Women's Employment."

¹¹ Bacon, "Health, Safety, and Workers' Rights in the Maquiladoras," 5.

The Industrialization of Juárez México

The border between the United States and México is a distinctive environment filled with unique needs and opportunities. Both countries share an uneasy partnership. One country is an industrial giant, while the other is still developing its potential. The chance for exploitation between countries is great.¹²

The driving force for industrialization in Juárez came with the ending of the Brazero program in 1964 by the United States.¹³ The Brazero program provided jobs to Mexican nationals within the US agricultural sector and provided US farmers with cheap labor to harvest their fields.¹⁴ The ending of this program created an influx of unemployed Mexican workers into the border areas. In answer to the dilemma of high unemployment and in hopes of attracting foreign investment and technology, the Mexican government created the Border Industrialization Program in 1965.¹⁵ The plan succeeded and the Maquiladora industry was born in 1966.¹⁶

A maquiladora is a factory in México, usually owned by a foreign investor, where Mexican workers assemble imported parts into products for export back to the investor's home country with a duty paid only on the value added by the manufacturing or assembly of the product.¹⁷ According to Amnesty International "maquilas or maquiladoras are factories set up by the US and other foreign companies to exploit cheap labour and favourable tariffs in the region near the US border."¹⁸ According to Mexican law, as long as a foreign company builds these assembly factories outside of México City, they may own and operate them within México. México sweetened the deal for US factory owners by allowing them tariff exemptions and 100% foreign plant ownership, which contradicted current Mexican law. The 1973 *Law to Promote Mexican Investment and Regulate Foreign Investment* had previously required all new companies to have at least 51% Mexican ownership and be in non-competition with Mexican industry.¹⁹

By 1994, US investors owned approximately 2,400 maquiladoras giving these investors access to labor and electricity at one-seventh and one-third of the cost of US expenditures.²⁰ Other incentives for US investors included (a) the ability to require higher production levels and have employees work long daily hours with a six day work week, (b) no requirement to pay overtime and the ability to give workers fewer work breaks, and (c) the ability for corporations to

¹² Delfi Mondragón and Jeffery Brandon, "To Address Health Disparities on the US-México Border: Advance Human Rights," *Health and Human Rights* 8, No. 1 (2004): 178-195.

¹³ Cecilia Balli, "Cuidad de la Muerte (City of Death)," *Texas Monthly*, (2003, June):108-117, 170-173; Paul Cooney, "The Mexican Crisis and the Maquiladora Boom: A Paradox Development or the Logic of Neoliberalism?" *Latin American Perspectives* 28, No. 3 (2001): 55-83.

¹⁴ Balli, "Cuidad de la Muerte (City of Death)."

¹⁵ Balli, "Cuidad de la Muerte (City of Death)."

¹⁶ Carey Aten and Cody Burke, "Maquiladora Industry and NAFTA," last modified March 8, 1999,

<http://wehner.tamu.edu/mgmt.www/NAFTA/spring99/Groups99/ITAM/maquila2.htm> (accessed May 20, 2010); C. Daniel Dillman, "Assembly Industries in México: Contexts of Development" *Journal of InterAmerican Studies and World Affairs* 25, No. 1 (1983): 31-58.

¹⁷ Timothy C. Brown, "The Fourth Member of NAFTA: The US-México Border," *Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science* 550, (1997): 105-121; Barry Castro, "Faust and the Ethos of Business: A Report from Grand Rapids, Ciudad Juárez, and Muskegon," *Journal of Business Ethics* 19, No. 2 (1999): 181-191.

¹⁸ Amnesty International, "México: Intolerable killings: Ten Years of Abductions and Murders in Ciudad Juárez and Chihuahua," Last modified August 10, 2003 <http://www.amnesty.org/en/library/info/AMR41/027/2003/en> (Accessed May 22, 2010), 2.

¹⁹ Cooney, "The Mexican Crisis and the Maquiladora Boom;" Dillman, "Assembly Industries in México."

²⁰ Aten and Burke, "Maquiladora Industry and NAFTA."

maintain stricter workshop control and have less union interference.²¹ These factors were a considerable benefit to US corporations.

The Mexican government endorsed this idea, because it was assumed the maquiladoras would create jobs for the unemployed, would rectify the Mexican trade imbalance and stabilize the Mexican economy. It was also thought that the maquiladora investment would help Mexico become competitive in a world market and increase the training and skill of Mexican workers.²²

There are currently conflicting estimates regarding the number of maquiladoras in Mexico (or in Juárez specifically), how many of those are foreign owned, and how many workers they employ. Estimates are that 95% of the maquiladoras are Mexican or US owned,²³ with as few as 2,200 plants employing 550,000 workers²⁴ with as many as 3107 maquilas employing 1.3 million workers.²⁵ It is also estimated that 275 – 500 of these plants are located in Juárez employing between 173,642 and 250,000 workers, with 10,000 more workers located across the Rio Grande in El Paso, Texas.²⁶ The largest commodities assembled in these maquiladoras are textiles, clothing, and electronics.²⁷ Corporations with assembly factories in Mexico included, but aren't limited to: AT&T, Cooper Industries, Ford, General Motors, General Electric, Johnson & Johnson, Zenith, Chrysler, DuPont, Eastman Kodak, IBM, Kimberly-Clark, Boeing, PepsiCo, Xerox, Electrolux, Bosch, Foxconn, Flextronics, Lexmark, Delphi, Visteon, Johnson Controls, Lear, Hyundai, Cardinal Health, Yazaki, Sumitomo, and Siemens.²⁸

The North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA)

The purpose of NAFTA was (a) to open up trade and eliminate barriers between Canada, Mexico, and the United States by creating a trilateral trade block in North America and by eliminating tariffs, (b) to provide a cheap labor supply to attract foreign investors, (c) to increase global financial opportunities for all three countries, (d) to take the social welfare burden off Mexico, Canada, and the US and place it on the private sector, and (e) to reduce geopolitical competition.²⁹ Although it is obvious that there was industrialization in Juárez prior to NAFTA, the industry saw a boom after its passing.³⁰ Between the 1993 signing of the treaty and

²¹ Cooney, "The Mexican Crisis and the Maquiladora Boom."

²² Cooney, "The Mexican Crisis and the Maquiladora Boom"; Agustin Escobar, Review of "The Social Ecology and Economic Development of Ciudad Juárez by Gay Young," *Contemporary Sociology* 17, No. 2 (1988): 203.

²³ Aten and Burke, "Maquiladora Industry and NAFTA."

²⁴ Cooney, "The Mexican Crisis and the Maquiladora Boom."

²⁵ Aten and Burke, "Maquiladora Industry and NAFTA;" David Barkin, "Mexico: Towards a New Understanding," *Economic and Political Weekly* 38, No. 1 (2003): 29-31.

²⁶ Brown, "The Fourth Member of NAFTA;" Allen Blackman, Michael Batz, and David Evans, "Maquiladoras, Air Pollution, and Human Health in Ciudad Juárez and El Paso: Resources for the Future," last updated July 2004, www.rff.org/documents/RFF-DP-03-18.pdf (Accessed May 23, 2010), 3-18; Alison Dellit, "A Woman's Place is in the Struggle: Death in Juárez," *Green Left Weekly* 10, last updated July 23, 2003, <http://www.greenleft.org.au/node/29420> (Accessed May 22, 2010); Mark Holston, "Calling for Answers in Juárez: Artists and Activists Bring Attention to the Border Murders," *Hispanic*, (2005, Sept): 14.

²⁷ Aten and Burke, "Maquiladora Industry and NAFTA;" Howard Campbell, "Female Drug Smugglers on the U.S.-Mexico Border: Gender, Crime, and Empowerment," *Anthropological Quarterly* 81, No. 1 (2008): 233-267.

²⁸ Amnesty International, "Mexico Intolerable Killings;" Aten and Burke, "Maquiladora Industry and NAFTA."

²⁹ Peter Andreas, "The Escalation of U.S. Immigration Control in the Post-NAFTA Era," *Political Science Quarterly* 113, No. 4 (1998-1999, Winter): 591-615; Stephen D. Morris and John Passe-Smith, "What a Difference a Crisis Makes: NAFTA, Mexico, and the United States," *Latin American Perspectives* 28, No. 3 (2001): 124-149.

³⁰ Aten and Burke, "Maquiladora Industry and NAFTA;" Blackman et al., "Maquiladoras, Air Pollution, and Human Health in Ciudad Juárez."

December of 1997, the Mexican maquila industry increased by 72%³¹ while the population of Juárez grew 50% between 1990 and 2000 as workers poured in from the interior of México to compete for the newly created jobs.³²

Almost immediately, the passing of NAFTA had a profound and significant impact on the Mexican economy. In 1994, the Mexican peso became devalued by 50%, inflation increased by 52%, and foreign imports came pouring into the country to compete with local producers, all of which created economic havoc in México.³³ This led to significant social and economic repercussions.³⁴ Real wages became depressed, while interest rates, repressive taxes, prices for commodities, and Mexican bankruptcies increased, and the government made cuts in social spending. This all led to a financial squeeze on the shrinking middle class, which created a widening gap between rich and poor. By 1995, México was in a full blown depression leading to concerns that NAFTA was creating increased regional disparity and exploitation.³⁵

One example of how NAFTA affected all sectors of the Mexican economy is seen in what happened to Mexican corn. Corn is a staple of the Mexican diet. In 2001 as per the NAFTA agreement, the full-duty drawbacks on agricultural products were phased out and Mexican agriculture was no longer protected from the foreign imports that had previously been subjected to high import tariffs. Therefore, the US was legally able to sell its corn products to the Mexican domestic market.³⁶ Today the price for Mexican corn has dropped 70%, because of competition from US corn imports.³⁷ This has effectively added to the burden borne by the Mexican people through undermining of their agricultural base. The small Mexican farmers could not compete with US subsidized farming methods and within a couple of years over one and a half million small Mexican farmers lost their land. Today, México is no longer a corn exporting country, but has been forced to import corn for its own use.³⁸

While México underwent an unprecedented economic crisis shortly after the implementation of NAFTA, the foreign owned maquiladora industry grew and prospered at extraordinary rates. The maquila industry was largely unaffected by México's economy, because the maquila products weren't intended for sale in México. Most of the products produced were exported back into the US and sold around the world.³⁹ As can be imagined, NAFTA's neoliberal, global market strategy for Mexico was seriously called into question at this time.⁴⁰

Cooney implicated the United States as a factor in México's economic crisis. Cooney noted that México's exchange reserves dropped from \$26 billion to just \$2 billion as almost 80%

³¹ "Aten and Burke, "Maquiladora Industry and NAFTA."

³² Amnesty International, "México Intolerable Killings;" Blackman et al., "Maquiladoras, Air Pollution, and Human Health in Ciudad Juárez;" Brown, "The Fourth Member of NAFTA."

³³ Cooney, "The Mexican Crisis and the Maquiladora Boom."

³⁴ Morris and Passe-Smith, "What a Difference a Crisis Makes."

³⁵ Cameron and Aggarwal, "Mexican Meltdown;" Cooney, "The Mexican Crisis and the Maquiladora Boom;" Janice Duddy, "What is the Connection between NAFTA and the Murders of Maquila Women?" *Association for Women's Rights in Development*, last updated Dec. 2, 2008, <http://www.awid.org/eng/Issues-and-Analysis/Library/What-is-the-connection-between-NAFTA-and-the-murders-of-maquila-women> (Accessed May 22, 2010); Morris and Passe-Smith, "What a Difference a Crisis Makes."

³⁶ Aten and Burke, "Maquiladora Industry and NAFTA."

³⁷ Steev Hise, "On the Edge: The Femicide in Ciudad Juárez. (Documentary)" Pan Left Productions (2006), <http://panleft.net/cms/taxonomy/term/186> (Accessed May 30, 2010).

³⁸ Hise, "On the Edge."

³⁹ Cooney, "The Mexican Crisis and the Maquiladora Boom."

⁴⁰ Fernandez Kelly, "Broadening the Scope."

of the money the United States invested in México, post-NAFTA, was “in portfolio” rather than direct money.⁴¹ In addition, government bonds shifted from the Mexican peso to the US dollar. In response to these criticisms, the US provided \$50 billion in bailout money for the Mexican economy. However this bailout came with conditions and required the Mexican government to make structural adjustments, which included cutting back the size of the Mexican government, increasing taxes on the Mexican people, and further reducing workers wages.⁴² In addition, despite the increase of jobs within the maquiladora industry, it is estimated that as high as two-thirds of the regular Mexican working population was unemployed or underemployed during this time.⁴³ This is primarily due to the maquiladora industry targeting women for employment, while excluding men. Previously, most of these women had been seriously underrepresented as workers in the Mexican economy.⁴⁴

Cooney argued that there was a “significant contraction of formal employment through 1995,” which “led to a growth of informal-sector employment and the consequent loss of health benefits, pensions, a minimum wage, and other worker protections.”⁴⁵ By 1996, while the US minimum wage was \$4.75 per hour, México’s minimum wage had dropped to \$0.41 cents. This was a tremendous asset to the maquila industry, which helped create its boom.⁴⁶ As economies became more globalized, multinational companies outsourced work to developing countries where labor costs were low, which increased profits for these corporations.⁴⁷

However the cost to the Mexican people was a lowered standard of living and the continuing failure of Mexican industry. As part of the NAFTA agreement, foreign companies in México did not have to pay a duty on imports for materials essential to manufacturing, but Mexican companies did. All of these factors led to an increased standard of poverty in México. The estimated number of Mexicans living at or below poverty, even as late as 2001, was 50-75%.⁴⁸ In fact, for México during the first decade of NAFTA, rates of poverty and malnutrition increased from previous rates.⁴⁹

The Mexican director of Employment and Training in México’s Federal District attributed the high number of individuals engaged in the “informal economy” (e.g., the drug trade) to the low wages and conditions of the maquiladoras.⁵⁰ Juárez has been engaged in a violent and bloody drug war since 2006 in which thousands of people have died. These facts are evidence of a gross negligence and exploitation of the Mexican people for the profitability of US corporations.

⁴¹ Cooney, “The Mexican Crisis and the Maquiladora Boom.”

⁴² Cooney, “The Mexican Crisis and the Maquiladora Boom;” Fernandez Kelly, “Broadening the Scope.”

⁴³ Cooney, “The Mexican Crisis and the Maquiladora Boom.”

⁴⁴ Fernandez Kelly, “Broadening the Scope.”

⁴⁵ Cooney, “The Mexican Crisis and the Maquiladora Boom, 58.”

⁴⁶ Fernandez Kelly, “Broadening the Scope.”

⁴⁷ Dillman, “Assembly Industries in México;” Fernandez Kelly, “International Development and Women’s Employment.”

⁴⁸ Cooney, “The Mexican Crisis and the Maquiladora Boom.”

⁴⁹ Gloria Hernández-Flores and Colin Lankshear, “Facing NAFTA: Literacy and Work in México,” *Journal of Adolescent & Adult Literacy* 44, No. 3 (2000): 240-244.

⁵⁰ As cited in Hernández-Flores and Lankshear, “Facing NAFTA.”

Impact on Women

The maquiladora program in México is the largest export-processing experiment in the world.⁵¹ While this paper presents a case that NAFTA has harmed México's people in general, this section will explore how NAFTA has specifically harmed the women of México, particularly in Juárez.

Juárez, Chihuahua (México) sits across the Rio Grande/Rio Bravo River⁵² from El Paso, Texas (United States). The area has a combined population of more than two million.⁵³ Juárez is the largest maquiladora city in México.⁵⁴ Many of the maquiladoras in Juárez are managed by US citizens from administrative offices in El Paso.⁵⁵ These industries are known as "twin plants," due to their dualistic nature, the assembly is conducted in Juárez, while the management and administration is conducted from the US.

Juárez is also the Mexican city with the largest amount of maquila workers, most of whom are women.⁵⁶ Women comprise 65-80% of the workers in these factories.⁵⁷ The age range of these women is typically between 18 and 25.⁵⁸ This large number of female employees contrasts with other job markets in México which typically have a 19% feminine workforce.⁵⁹

The maquiladora industry has targeted women for hire because of the nature of Mexican patriarchal society and the Mexican gender socialization process in which women are expected to defer to male authority and as such, (a) women are considered to be docile, easily controlled, submissive, and less likely to complain or talk back to authority, (b) women have much less union experience or expectation, so there would be fewer union risks, (c) women are perceived as primarily home makers and less ambitious; therefore, female labor is considered more disposable when production needs to be cut, and (d) women expect to be paid less.⁶⁰ In addition, women were seen as ideal for factory work because they were perceived as, (a) more responsible than men, (b) more nimble and meticulous making them ideal for assembly work, and (c) more patient with repetitive, monotonous work.⁶¹

The reliance on women to operationalize the assembly factories in México has led to implications for these women in the areas regarding the traditional roles they play in the family, society, and in the workplace.⁶² The maquiladoras in Juárez have given women both opportunity and exploitation. This section will explore the positive and negative impact of these factors.

⁵¹ Fernandez Kelly, "Broadening the Scope."

⁵² The river that forms the border between the US and Mexico at El Paso/Juarez is called the Rio Grande by the US and the Rio Bravo by the Mexicans.

⁵³ Alicia Gaspar de Alba, *Desert Blood: The Juárez Murders*, (Houston, Texas: Publico Press 2005).

⁵⁴ Dellit, "A Woman's Place is in the Struggle."

⁵⁵ Gaspar de Alba, *Desert Blood*.

⁵⁶ Chowdhry, Geeta. Review of "Patriarchy on the Line: Labor, Gender, and Ideology in the Mexican Maquila Industry," *Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science* 545, (1996): 206-208; Dellit, "A Woman's Place is in the Struggle; Corie Osborn, "Femicidio: Femicide Made in México," *Off Our Backs* (2004, Mar-Apr): 19-26.

⁵⁷ Castro, "Faust and the Ethos of Business;" Fernandez Kelly, "Broadening the Scope; Nancy Folbre and Sandra Schilen, Review of "For We are Sold, I and my People: Women and Industry in México's Frontier by M. P. Fernandez-Kelly and Women, Men, and the International Division of Labor by J. Nash," *American Ethnologist* 13, No. 2 (1986): 392-393.

⁵⁸ Fernandez Kelly, "Broadening the Scope."

⁵⁹ Castro. "Faust and the Ethos of Business."

⁶⁰ Balli, "Cuidad de la Muerte (City of Death); Dellit, "A Woman's Place is in the Struggle;" Duddy, "What is the Connection Between NAFTA and the Murders of Maquila Women;" Fernandez Kelly, "Broadening the Scope;" Hise, "On the edge," Osborn, "Femicidio."

⁶¹ Fernandez Kelly, "Broadening the Scope."

⁶² Jorge A. Bustamante, "Demystifying the United States—México Border," *The Journal of American History* 79, No. 2 (1992): 485-490.

Positive Attributes

Unfortunately, the literature on the positive consequences for women working in the maquiladoras is sparse. Even though attempts were made to provide a balanced view, it was difficult to balance the ledger in favor of the maquiladoras. The information found is provided below.

Support services. Some maquilas offer a variety of support and services to their workers. Some employers offer their employees (a) two meals per day, (b) free consultations with company doctors, (c) televised advice on topics ranging from personal hygiene to child care issues, and (d) transportation to or from the maquila.⁶³ However, it should be noted that much of the literature describes this transportation as inefficient, because many of the factories provide transportation going only in one direction (e.g., from the workers home to the factory or vice versa, but not both ways). This transportation has also been labeled dangerous, because the bus routes often leave women far from their homes and force them to walk through unlit, undeveloped areas even at night.⁶⁴

Female independence. Some researchers noted that working in the maquiladoras does give women some sense of independence from strict male dominance.⁶⁵ It may give women a sense of pride to help their families financially, in more direct and observable ways.⁶⁶

Negative Attributes

Even though balance has been sought, there is much more to report on the negative side of the ledger. The literature and reported personal experience is replete with examples of how globalization and industrialization through NAFTA has been a detriment to the women of Juárez.

Low wages. There is a wide socioeconomic distinction between factory owners and managers and the rest of their workers⁶⁷ Most of the factory owners live in the US and are afforded special privileges while their workers live in abject poverty.⁶⁸ Maquila workers are poorly paid, with most earning wages below the subsistence level.⁶⁹ Sixty percent of Mexican workers live below the poverty level, which is defined in México as earning less than \$1.95 per day.⁷⁰ Most maquila workers earn only an average of \$24-55 (US dollars) per every 45-50 hour work week.⁷¹ Some workers have earned as little as \$3.70 to \$6.00 per day for a 9-12 hour shift.⁷² These wages are also approximately 5-10 times less than the amount earned by workers

⁶³ Castro, "Faust and the Ethos of Business;" Hise, "On the edge."

⁶⁴ Hise, "On the edge;" Corie Osborn, "Femicidio."

⁶⁵ Chowdhry, Review of "Patriarchy on the Line;" Folbre and Schilen, Review of "For We Are Sold."

⁶⁶ Fernandez Kelly, "Broadening the Scope."

⁶⁷ Charles Bowden, "Murder City: Ciudad Juárez and the Global Economy's New Killing Field," (New York: National Books, 2010); Barry Castro, "Faust and the Ethos of Business."

⁶⁸ Bowden, "Murder City."

⁶⁹ Joe Bandy, "Paradoxes of Transnational Civil Societies under Neoliberalism: The Coalition for Justice in the Maquiladoras," *Social Problems* 51, No. 3 (2004): 410-431; Bowden, "Murder City;" Duddy, "What is the Connection between NAFTA and the Murders of Maquila Women."

⁷⁰ Hise, "On the Edge."

⁷¹ Amnesty International, "México: Intolerable Killings;" Blackman et al., "Maquiladoras, Air Pollution, and Human Health;" Castro, "Faust and the Ethos of Business;" Dellit, "A Woman's Place is in the Struggle;" Hise, "On the Edge."

⁷² Bacon, "Health, Safety, and Workers' Rights in the Maquiladoras;" Fernandez Kelly, "International Development and Women's Employment;" Osborn, "Femicidio."

in neighboring El Paso, Texas.⁷³ In order to put this into perspective, a gallon of milk in Juárez costs approximately \$2.00. For some workers, it will take them up to one-third to one-half of a single work day to earn enough money to buy one gallon of milk for their family and an additional hour to buy two pounds of rice.⁷⁴ Another way to compare this is to realize that an undocumented worker in Los Angeles making the US minimum wage can buy the same amount of rice in approximately twelve minutes.⁷⁵

Real wages for workers in México have declined 66% since the implementation of NAFTA.⁷⁶ Twenty-seven years ago, the Mexican minimum wage could pay for 93.5% of a family's basic needs, but today, it covers only 19.3%.⁷⁷ At the same time while Mexican worker wages declined, US owned manufacturing companies in Juárez were reporting labor savings of up to \$30,000 per employee per year.⁷⁸

Due to poverty level wages, most of the workers in the maquilas live in what are known as colonias (e.g., slums).⁷⁹ The dwellings within the colonias are often made of cardboard, packing crates, and any other discarded materials workers can find, including bed mattresses.⁸⁰ These homes usually do not have running water, electricity, sewage, police, or paved roads.⁸¹ The colonias have risen due to the influx of workers coming from the interior of México to fill the job openings in the maquiladoras and this has outstripped the city's infrastructure.⁸² The provisions of the NAFTA treaty compounded the problem by giving US corporations tax breaks and exemptions that transferred the basic costs of building the community's infrastructure to the workers, not the factories.⁸³ Therefore, it costs the factories nothing and they do not have to provide in any way for the community of workers they attract. Due to this overwhelming poverty and the inability to meet their basic subsistence needs, along with the underemployment of men in México, many women have had no choice regarding working in a maquiladora. Women are trapped into it whether they have families of their own to support or whether they are living at home with their parents.⁸⁴ In Juárez, the only way many families can survive is for parents and children working together to make enough money to live.⁸⁵

Poor working conditions. Safety conditions within the plants are minimal at best.⁸⁶ Even where safety laws are present, they are often ignored. Personal safety of the workers is often

⁷³ Fernandez Kelly, "International Development and Women's Employment."

⁷⁴ David Bacon, "Anti-China Campaign Hides Maquiladora Wage Cuts" last updated Feb. 3, 2003, <http://www.zcommunications.org/anti-china-campaign-hides-maquiladora-wage-cuts-by-david-bacon>, (Accessed May 20, 2010).; Osborn, "Femicidio."

⁷⁵ Bacon, "Anti-China Campaign."

⁷⁶ John Cavanagh et al., "Happily Ever NAFTA? A Bad Idea that Failed" *Foreign Policy* 132, (2002): 58-65; Hise, "On the Edge."

⁷⁷ Bacon, "Anti-China Campaign."

⁷⁸ Bacon, "Anti-China Campaign."

⁷⁹ Balli, "Cuidad de la Muerte (City of Death);" Brown, "The Fourth Member of NAFTA;" Bacon, "Health, Safety, and Workers' Rights in the Maquiladoras."

⁸⁰ Bacon, "Health, Safety, and Workers' Rights in the Maquiladoras;" Balli, "Cuidad de la Muerte (City of Death);" Hise, "On the Edge."

⁸¹ Balli, "Cuidad de la Muerte (City of Death);" Bowden, "Murder City;" Scarlet Bowen and Emma Pérez "Women's Studies on the Border: University of Texas at El Paso." *Women's Studies Quarterly* 30, No. 3/4 (2002): 73-81; Hise, "On the Edge;" Mondragón and Brandon, "To Address Health Disparities on the US-México Border."

⁸² Barkin, "México;" Barry Castro, "Faust and the Ethos of Business."

⁸³ Cooney, "The Mexican Crisis and the Maquiladora Boom."

⁸⁴ Cooney, "The Mexican Crisis and the Maquiladora Boom;" Fernandez Kelly, "Broadening the Scope."

⁸⁵ Hise, "On the Edge."

⁸⁶ Jean Bowdish, "Sexual Harassment at Maquiladora," *Workers World*, last updated Jan. 7, 1995,

sacrificed for productivity and profit. Bacon interviewed Eluid Almaguer, a labor activist who said he saw:

“People lose fingers in machines cutting the cardboard used to stiffen the bottoms of the [shopping] bags. Safety guards, he explains, were removed from the rollers that imprint designs on the paper lining. The extra time required to clean them was treated as needless lost production. Almaguer recalls the solvent containers didn't carry proper danger warnings, and while workers got dust masks, they were useless for filtering out toxic chemical fumes. "In terms of safety, well, there just wasn't any," he remembers bitterly.”⁸⁷

To add insult to injury, many of the workers in the maquilas have limited or no insurance.⁸⁸ So if injured, they are often left without medical care and consequently are left without a job. Presumably, one attractive feature for foreign investment in the assembly plants in México is the cost saving features of not having to outfit the plants to the high safety standards required by the US. Therefore, factories in México are not regulated for safety and working conditions as rigorously. In addition Aten & Burke stated that historically, there have been many complaints of “continuous abuses of child labor laws and sweatshop conditions in the maquiladoras.”⁸⁹

Environmental hazards. Environmental hazards come with the maquiladoras as there are few standards and safety regulations for Mexican plants, as opposed to US plants. There is also less compliance with what little regulation exists.⁹⁰ While México has environmental and labor laws to address these issues and concerns, they are largely unenforced, especially for the transnational corporations.⁹¹ Since NAFTA, the border communities have seen an increase in illnesses such as respiratory and cardiovascular disease, birth defects, higher rates of cancer, and premature mortality.⁹² This rise in illness at the border is hypothesized to be caused by the surge in industrialization since the ending of the Brazero program and by the lack of proper disposal of toxic waste by the maquiladoras.⁹³ Workers uneducated to the risks and dangers are exposed daily to health and safety risks.⁹⁴ All of these factors have left the people of Juárez, Chihuahua, (México) and El Paso, Texas, (United States) with the worst environmental conditions on the US/México border within modern history.⁹⁵

Difficulty in unionizing. Another factor that made moving assembly plants to Juárez attractive to US investors was to avoid the demands placed upon them by US unions and

<http://www.hartford-hwp.com/archives/46/007.html> (Accessed May 23, 2010); Bandy, “Paradoxes of Transnational Civil Societies under Neoliberalism,” Duddy, “What is the Connection between NAFTA and the Murders of Maquila Women.”

⁸⁷ Bacon, “Health, Safety, and Workers’ Rights in the Maquiladoras, 338.”

⁸⁸ Mondragón and Brandon, “To Address Health Disparities on the US/México Border.”

⁸⁹ Aten and Burke, “Maquiladora Industry and NAFTA,” 3.

⁹⁰ Bowden, “*Murder City*,” Cooney, “The Mexican Crisis and the Maquiladora Boom.”

⁹¹ Cooney, “The Mexican Crisis and the Maquiladora Boom.”

⁹² Aten and Burke, “Maquiladora Industry and NAFTA,” Bacon, “Health, Safety, and Workers’ Rights in the Maquiladoras,” Blackman et al., “Maquiladoras, Air Pollution, and Human Health,” DiChiro, “Living is for Everyone,” Mondragón and Brandon, “To Address Health Disparities on the US-México Border.”

⁹³ Aten and Burke, “Maquiladora Industry and NAFTA; Bacon, “Health, Safety, and Workers’ Rights in the Maquiladoras,” Cooney, “The Mexican Crisis and the Maquiladora Boom,” Mondragón and Brandon, “To Address Health Disparities on the US-México Border.”

⁹⁴ Coalition for Justice in the Maquiladoras, <http://www.enchantedwebsites.com/maquiladora/cjm.html>, (Accessed May 24, 2010); DiChiro, “Living is for Everyone.”

⁹⁵ Bowden, “*Murder City*.”

mobilized workers, which had resulted in good working conditions and high wage rates in the US.⁹⁶ The very fact that the NAFTA treaty is between governments, and not between government and private industry, has served to protect individual companies and their CEOs who ignore labor laws in both México and the US. In addition, the oversight agency set up under the NAFTA agreement has been incapable of holding the Mexican government accountable for workers' rights violations.⁹⁷ Therefore, most labor violations in México are going unchecked and workers have been unprotected. As far as the US is concerned Bacon put it best, "Protecting workers' rights requires the US government to promote the very conditions that undermine the profit-making that NAFTA was designed to further."⁹⁸ This has left US management with the idea they, "can do anything [they] want without repercussions."⁹⁹ These factors have made unionizing or standing up for one's rights difficult and ineffectual for workers in México.¹⁰⁰

There are many violations with the maquilas that need to be addressed. Some of the negative conditions within these plants are (a) sexual harassment, (b) mandatory overtime and work "speed-ups," (c) being denied the right to go to the bathroom or get a drink of water, (d) lack of basic safety equipment such as gloves and masks, (e) lack of proper ventilation systems, and (f) lack of rest breaks.¹⁰¹ If workers complain, they are fired and perhaps even blacklisted from working in other maquilas.¹⁰² In addition, workers are constantly threatened that if they complain the corporation will simply move the assembly plant to a new location within a country with even lower wages such as China or Indonesia. As a matter of fact, 15% of these corporations have followed through on their threats.¹⁰³ During the years 2008 and 2009, 300,000-400,000 maquiladora jobs were eliminated in Juárez and elsewhere in México, with most being relocated to mainland China.¹⁰⁴ Other workers were threatened with job layoffs if they did not take pay and benefit cuts,¹⁰⁵ while other companies only hired temporary workers in order to further control costs. These temporary workers did not accrue seniority, benefits, or labor rights.¹⁰⁶ Due to this and other reasons, such as firing workers over the age of 30, there has been a high worker turnover rate of up to 100% per year.¹⁰⁷

There may also be violent consequences for workers who protest. For example, Bacon states that "On April 14, 1994, after Sony fired three union reform activists, thousands of their workmates sat down in the road leading to the plant gate. Sony brought in riot police, who beat them and forced them to return to their jobs." The current union leader at that time, Martha

⁹⁶ Fernandez Kelly, "Broadening the Scope."

⁹⁷ Cavanagh et al., "Happily Ever NAFTA."

⁹⁸ Bacon, "Health, Safety, and Workers' Rights in the Maquiladoras," 344-345.

⁹⁹ Bowdish, "Sexual Harassment at Maquiladora," 1.

¹⁰⁰ Bacon, "Health, Safety, and Workers' Rights in the Maquiladoras," Robi Chakravorti, "One Country, Two Nations," *Economic and Political Weekly*, 29, No.4 (1994): 162-163; Cooney, "The Mexican Crisis and the Maquiladora Boom;" Hise, "On the Edge."

¹⁰¹ Joe Bandy, "Paradoxes of Transnational Civil Societies Under Neoliberalism;" Paul Cooney, "The Mexican Crisis and the Maquiladora Boom," Giovanna DiChiro, "Living is for Everyone: Border Crossings for Community, Environment, and Health," *Osiris* 19, (2004): 112-129.

¹⁰² David Bacon, "Health, Safety, and Workers' Rights in the Maquiladoras," Paul Cooney, "The Mexican Crisis and the Maquiladora Boom."

¹⁰³ Bacon, "Health, Safety, and Workers' Rights in the Maquiladoras;" Bacon, "Anti-China Campaign;" Bandy, "Paradoxes of Transnational Civil Societies under Neoliberalism;" Castro, "Faust and the Ethos of Business."

¹⁰⁴ Bowden, "Murder City;" Cavanagh et al., "Happily Ever NAFTA;" Daniela Pastrana, "Wall of Hate and Poverty Divides El Paso and Juárez," Inter Press Service, <http://ipsnews.net/news.asp?idnews=51932> (Accessed June 24, 2010).

¹⁰⁵ Bacon, "Anti-China Campaign."

¹⁰⁶ Bacon, "Anti-China Campaign."

¹⁰⁷ Bowden, "Murder City."

Ojeda, was forced to flee into political exile, hiding in Texas. For years afterward, she was threatened with arrest and imprisonment if she were to return to México¹⁰⁸ Other abuses have occurred from state and government supported institutions such as, (a) anti-union campaigns, which have led to worker mass firings, (b) libel, slander, intimidation, physical coercion, and spying on workers, (c) threats of sexual violence, (d) forcing workers to sign protection contracts to avoid violence, and (e) union election rigging.¹⁰⁹

Corruption may also make unionization and solidarity ineffectual. For example, Bacon¹¹⁰ discussed an incident in Tijuana during a legal strike where police were called in by the company asking for help in breaking up the worker demonstrations. The police did this by breaking up worker picket lines, burning worker strike flags, and by escorting strikebreakers past the demonstrating workers in violation of Mexican law. Mexican law states it is illegal for a company to use strikebreakers during a legal strike. This interference in a legal strike was accepted and tolerated. The Mexican government has a history of failing to protect its workers.¹¹¹

There may also be cultural issues that keep Mexican female workers from asserting themselves when their rights are violated. Mexican workers may have difficulty expressing their dissatisfaction to management as they have been taught to respect authority in a largely authoritarian society. Complaining directly to superiors is socially frowned upon. Traditional Mexican work culture rewards submissiveness of employees.¹¹² These cultural issues will be explored in more depth in the next section.

Impact on Mexican Latina culture. The maquiladora industry changed the role of women in the family and society.¹¹³ Previous to NAFTA, Mexican society was patriarchal and authoritarian, where women were governed by “machismo” or male dominance over women, and “hembrismo,” female submissiveness to men.¹¹⁴ Mexican women were dependent upon their men who were the major wage earners. Women were expected to stay in the home, cook, clean, and raise the children.¹¹⁵ These women had few personal resources outside of their family, no real political standing in the community, and primarily worked within the home¹¹⁶ When Mexico’s peso was devalued and the ensuing depression came, work in the male dominated industries diminished, but women were being hired in the maquiladoras.¹¹⁷ Women became the primary bread winners in many Mexican families, which disrupted generations of Mexican gender socialization.¹¹⁸ Therefore, the maquiladoras severely disrupted traditional social life in Mexico, especially in Juárez. Fernández-Kelly¹¹⁹ called this change a shift in the “occupational

¹⁰⁸ Bacon, “Health, Safety, and Workers’ Rights in the Maquiladoras,” 339.

¹⁰⁹ Bandy, “Paradoxes of Transnational Civil Societies Under Neoliberalism; Cavanagh et al., “Happily Ever NAFTA.”

¹¹⁰ Bacon, “Health, Safety, and Workers’ Rights in the Maquiladoras.”

¹¹¹ Bacon, “Health, Safety, and Workers’ Rights in the Maquiladoras.”

¹¹² Mariah E. De Forest, “Thinking of a Plant in México?” *The Academy of Management Executive* 8, No. 1 (1994): 33-40.

¹¹³ Bustamante, “Demystifying the United States.”

¹¹⁴ Candelaria, Cordelia. “Review of “Against all Odds: The Feminist Movement in México to 1940,” by Macas, A. (1983). *Frontiers: A Journal of Women Studies* 7, No. 2 (1983): 88-90; Carmen Diana Deere and Magdalena Leon, “Institutional Reform of Agriculture Under Neoliberalism: The Impact of the Women’s and Indigenous Movements.” *Latin American Research Review* 36, No. 2 (2001): 31-63; De Forest, “Thinking of a Plant in México.”

¹¹⁵ Balli, “Cuidad de la Muerte (City of Death).”

¹¹⁶ Fernandez Kelly, “Reading the Signs.”

¹¹⁷ Hise, “*On the Edge.*”

¹¹⁸ Brown, “The Fourth Member of NAFTA;” Fernandez Kelly, “Reading the Signs.”

¹¹⁹ Fernandez Kelly, “International Development and Women’s Employment,” 5.

hierarchy” as more jobs were created for women than for men, and this new found employment gave women a modicum of independence from the males in their lives.¹²⁰ However, there is some evidence that this change in gender and social status may have increased domestic violence incidents in México.¹²¹

In addition, many of the women who work in the maquiladoras are young and come from the interior of México.¹²² Traditional Mexican culture dictates that young women of a certain age be chaperoned when in public. However, this cannot be accomplished when working in the maquilas. These young women are forced to travel long distances to work, unchaperoned, and unprotected.¹²³ Furthermore, some report these women were subjected to humiliations and objectification by the very maquilas in which they worked. This included sexual harassment.¹²⁴ Gaspar de Alba stated these women were made to engage in “beauty pageants” and remain unmarried in order to keep their employment.¹²⁵ Many have also been subjected to pregnancy tests and were routinely fired if pregnant.¹²⁶ There have also been reports of female workers being forced to abort their fetuses in order to keep their job.¹²⁷ These practices have sent a disturbing message about the sexual availability of these women that has contributed ultimately to the violence committed against them. The issue of violence will be addressed in more detail later in this paper.

Reduced education. Poverty in México has reduced the ability for women to get a basic education.¹²⁸ The increase of low wage maquiladora jobs has undermined the need or ability for México to develop a well-educated, highly skilled, labor force, particularly for women. The need for female adolescents and women to help support their families denies them the opportunity or time for academic pursuits.¹²⁹ As of 2000, 56% of México’s population had not completed the equivalent of a high school education and 10% of adults were illiterate.¹³⁰ Many simply cannot afford the costs of completing their basic education.¹³¹ In addition, Juárez reputedly has only one high school servicing 500,000 people.¹³²

Lack of education subjects women to job prospects that provide work that is repetitive, poorly paid, and even dangerous.¹³³ Candelaria described the women of México as victims of “triple jeopardy.” They are women “living within sexist minority groups,” as “women within a sexist dominant culture,” and “as members of ethnic minorities within a racist society.”¹³⁴

¹²⁰ Chowdhry, Review of “Patriarchy on the Line;” Folbre and Schilen, “Review of “For We Are Sold.”

¹²¹ Amnesty International, “México Intolerable Killings;” Dellit, “A Woman’s Place is in the Struggle;” Duddy, “What is the Connection Between NAFTA and the Murders of Maquila Women;” Hise, “*On the Edge.*”

¹²² Balli, “Cuidad de la Muerte (City of Death);” Campbell, “Female Drug Smugglers on the U.S.-México Border;” Mondragón and Brandon, “To Address Health Disparities on the US-México Border.”

¹²³ Gaspar de Alba, “*Desert Blood.*”

¹²⁴ Bandy, “Paradoxes of Transnational Civil Societies under Neoliberalism;” Gaspar de Alba, “*Desert Blood.*”

¹²⁵ Gaspar de Alba, “*Desert Blood.*”

¹²⁶ Bandy, “Paradoxes of Transnational Civil Societies under Neoliberalism;” Bowden, “*Murder City;*” Bowen and Pérez, “Women’s Studies on the Border;” Cooney, “The Mexican Crisis and the Maquiladora Boom.”

¹²⁷ Bandy, “Paradoxes of Transnational Civil Societies Under Neoliberalism;” Cooney, “The Mexican Crisis and the Maquiladora Boom.”

¹²⁸ Candelaria, Review of “Against all Odds.”

¹²⁹ Hernández-Flores and Lankshear, “Facing NAFTA.”

¹³⁰ Hernández-Flores and Lankshear, “Facing NAFTA.”

¹³¹ Bacon, “Health, Safety, and Workers’ Rights in the Maquiladoras.”

¹³² Hise, “*On the Edge.*”

¹³³ Fernandez Kelly, “Reading the Signs.”

¹³⁴ Candelaria, “Review of “Against all Odds,” 89.

Education for women has not been a Mexican priority and may have been seen as a threat to Mexican male dominated society.

Violence against women and femicide. Since 1993, women have been murdered, tortured, and raped in Ciudad Juárez with little repercussion for the perpetrators. Until this began happening in Juárez, the wholesale murder and rape of Mexican women was an anomaly.¹³⁵

Castañeda blames this activity on globalization and NAFTA in the following powerful statement,

“In the ‘global market place’ women and girls of color remain the target of brutal sexual violence and murder, only now in ‘free trade zones;’ are prey to rape by human smugglers and ‘law enforcement’ agents, including border patrols; and are kept captive in homes where they are maids, housekeepers, and nannies in the ‘domestic economy of service.’ The expanding market in ‘sexual tourism’ is a hugely profitable, global phenomenon.”¹³⁶

Nowhere is this apparently truer than in Ciudad Juárez. Since NAFTA went into effect, the economically disadvantaged young women of Juárez began to be murdered, or simply vanished, never to be seen again. It is estimated that since 1992, 238¹³⁷ to 1000¹³⁸ women have been murdered; while as many as 600¹³⁹ to 4000¹⁴⁰ have simply disappeared. Records and numbers are sketchy due to the blatant disregard for these women. Therefore, no exact records are kept. While the official reported rate is three women a day are murdered, the unofficial rate is deemed much higher.¹⁴¹ The ages of the victims range from infancy to age 80, with the vast majority of victims dying in adolescence and early adulthood.¹⁴² Many of these women were kidnapped, had unspeakable sexual crimes committed against them, were tortured for days, were mutilated while alive, and ultimately were killed and then dumped as if they were garbage.¹⁴³ The majority of victims who had been raped and mutilated prior to death were adolescents or young adults.¹⁴⁴

Many of these murdered women worked at the maquiladoras¹⁴⁵ and many of the women’s bodies have been found in the dessert skirting the maquiladora industrial park in Juárez.¹⁴⁶ Despite the large number of women found killed who worked within the maquila industry, these factories have done little to improve safety conditions for these workers.¹⁴⁷ Many times, shifts

¹³⁵ Balli, “Cuidad de la Muerte (City of Death).”

¹³⁶ Antonia Castañeda, “Introduction: Gender on the Borderlands.” *A Journal of Women Studies* 24, No. 2/3 (2003): xii.

¹³⁷ Duddy, “What is the Connection between NAFTA and the Murders of Maquila Women.”

¹³⁸ Melissa W. Wright, “Paradoxes, Protests, and the *Mujeres de Negro* of Northern México.” *Gender, Place, and Culture* 12, No. 3 (2005): 177–192.

¹³⁹ Dellit, “A Woman’s Place is in the Struggle.”

¹⁴⁰ Bowden, “*Murder City;*” Hise, “*On the Edge.*”

¹⁴¹ Dellit, “A Woman’s Place is in the Struggle.”

¹⁴² Amnesty International, “México Intolerable Killings;” Osborn, “Femicidio;” Diana Washington-Valdez, “*The Killing Fields: Harvest of Women*” (Burbank, CA: Peace at the Border, 2006).

¹⁴³ Amnesty International, “México: Intolerable Killings;” Barbara Bedway, “On Deaths in the Desert.” *El Paso Times* 139, No. 8 (2006, Aug): section A, 38-40; Dellit, “A Woman’s Place is in the Struggle;” Holston, “Calling for Answers in Juárez;” Osborn, “Femicidio;” Washington-Valdez, “*The Killing Fields.*”

¹⁴⁴ Greg Bloom, “Borderline Justice.” *New Internationalist* 354, (2003): 7; Washington-Valdez, “*The Killing Fields.*”

¹⁴⁵ Amnesty International, “México: Intolerable Killings;” Duddy, “What is the Connection Between NAFTA and the Murders of Maquila Women;” Gaspar de Alba, “*Desert Blood;*” Holston, “Calling for Answers in Juárez;” Pastrana, “Wall of Hate and Poverty Divides El Paso and Juárez.”

¹⁴⁶ Duddy, “What is the Connection Between NAFTA and the Murders of Maquila Women.”

¹⁴⁷ Campbell, “Female Drug Smugglers on the U.S.-México Border.”

were abruptly changed forcing vulnerable young women to have to travel to or from work alone and unprotected.¹⁴⁸ Some factories had policies that denied entry to workers arriving late to work. Claudia Gonzalez and Claudia Ivette were such workers who arrived four minutes late to their shifts. Both were denied entry to their work places and their bodies were later discovered, murdered.¹⁴⁹ A spokesperson for one of the employers, Lear Corporation, stated the murder was not the responsibility of Lear as the murder did not happen on Lear's property.¹⁵⁰ As Dellit noted "The North America Free Trade Agreement exempts the sweatshops from any laws requiring them to provide better security—because such laws might interfere with 'the ability to make profit.'" ¹⁵¹

There is documented evidence of police corruption and indifference in solving the murders of the women of Juárez.¹⁵² Many authorities have blamed the women for their own deaths, insinuating inappropriate behavior or attire led to their demise.¹⁵³ The authorities often openly discriminated against, and humiliated, the families of these women when these families sought assistance from the police.¹⁵⁴ Despite the evidence that women were being kept alive for days prior to their brutal murders, the police refused to remove its 72-hour restriction toward reporting a missing person.¹⁵⁵ One explanation about this indifference on the part of Mexican authorities was summarized by Amnesty International when they stated that the women targeted were "young women with no power in society, whose deaths have no political cost for the local authorities."¹⁵⁶ Others have noted that these women were not only poor, but also Mexican, which may be a factor in why their deaths have been ignored. Holston summed up prevailing concerns when he quoted Magdaleno Rose-Avila who was the Executive Director of the Seattle, Washington-based Northwest Immigrant Rights Project and an Amnesty International USA board member when she stated, "When a nice, European-looking woman goes missing, like the high school girl in Aruba [Natalee Holloway], the international media go wild."¹⁵⁷ When poor Mexican women go missing no one seems to care.¹⁵⁸

In fact, allegations toward the Mexican authorities includes everything from (a) being totally inept by contaminating the crime scenes to deliberate sabotage by falsifying evidence, (b) interfering with nongovernmental agencies seeking to solve the crimes, (c) to torturing

¹⁴⁸ Dellit, "A Woman's Place is in the Struggle;" Washington-Valdez, *The Killing Fields*."

¹⁴⁹ Dellit, "A Woman's Place is in the Struggle;" Osborn, "Femicidio;" Washington-Valdez, *The Killing Fields*."

¹⁵⁰ Dellit, "A Woman's Place is in the Struggle."

¹⁵¹ Dellit, "A Woman's Place is in the Struggle," 1.

¹⁵² Amnesty International, "Mexico: Intolerable Killings;" Amnesty International, "Mexico: Justice Fails in Ciudad Juárez and the City of Chihuahua," last updated Feb. 28, 2005, Feb. 28th,

<http://www.amnestyusa.org/document.php?id=5AB197BCEE37D92D80256FB600689A74&lang=e> (Accessed May 21, 2010); Balli, "Ciudad de la Muerte (City of Death); Dellit, "A Woman's Place is in the Struggle;" Duddy, "What is the Connection Between NAFTA and the Murders of Maquila

Women;" Hise, *On the Edge*;" Teresa Rodriguez and Diana Montané, *The Daughters of Juárez: A True Story of Serial Murder South of the Border*;" (New York: Atria, 2008); Washington-Valdez, *The Killing Fields*."

¹⁵³ Dellit, "A Woman's Place is in the Struggle;" Duddy, "What is the Connection Between NAFTA and the Murders of Maquila Women;" Rodriguez and Montané, *The Daughters of Juárez*;" Washington-Valdez, *The Killing Fields*."

¹⁵⁴ Amnesty International, "Mexico: Intolerable Killings;" Hise, *On the Edge*;" Rodriguez and Montané, *The Daughters of Juárez*."

¹⁵⁵ Dellit, "A Woman's Place is in the Struggle;" Hise, *On the Edge*;" Osborn, "Femicidio;" Washington-Valdez, *The Killing Fields*."

¹⁵⁶ Amnesty International, "Mexico: Intolerable Killings," 2.

¹⁵⁷ Holston, "Calling for Answers in Juárez," 14.

¹⁵⁸ Bedway, "On Deaths in the Desert."

scapegoats into confession of crimes they did not commit in order to “solve” the crimes, and (d) to being responsible and culpable themselves for the murders.¹⁵⁹

While the murder rate has decreased since 2004,¹⁶⁰ word along the border is that they are still continuing, albeit with less attention and reporting.¹⁶¹ To this day, virtually all of the crimes have been left unsolved¹⁶² Bowden summed it up best when he stated:

“Imagine living in a place where you can kill anyone you wish and nothing happens except that they fall dead. You will not be arrested. Your name will not be in the newspapers. You can continue on with your life. And your killing. You can take a woman and rape her for days and nothing will happen. If you choose, if in some way that woman displeases you, well, you can kill her after raping her. Rest assured, nothing will happen to you because of your actions.”¹⁶³

Nationally in México, only two in every 100 crimes gets solved, and this is said to include those that are solved by throwing a scapegoat into jail¹⁶⁴ In Juárez, in a ten year period, only one of the femicides even came close to being solved and that conviction was overturned.¹⁶⁵ In addition, reporters who try to convey the truth of what is occurring to the women of Juárez, are bribed, threatened, kidnapped, or killed.¹⁶⁶ Many of these reporters are killed by the police and/or the military for which it is said have links to the drug cartels and may be involved in the raping and killing themselves.¹⁶⁷

Despite promises that things will get better by organizations such as *Inter-American Commission on Human Rights for Women’s Matters of the Organization of American States (OAS)*, *Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights of the United Nations*, and various branches of the Mexican Government, nothing changes. The murders have not been solved and women are still being murdered.¹⁶⁸ While there has been international attention placed on what is happening in Juárez through protests in different countries, usually at their Mexican Embassies and Consulates, nothing changes.¹⁶⁹ There remains a deeply rooted institutional discrimination against women that hinders progress.¹⁷⁰

¹⁵⁹ Amnesty International, “México: Intolerable Killings;” Balli, “Cuidad de la Muerte (City of Death);” Burnette, “Chasing the Ghouls;” Osborn, “Femicidio;” Rodriquez and Montané, “*The Daughters of Juárez*;” Washington-Valdez, “*The Killing Fields*;” Wright, “Paradoxes, Protests, and the *Mujeres*.”

¹⁶⁰ Wright, “Paradoxes, Protests, and the *Mujeres*.”

¹⁶¹ Holston, “Calling for Answers in Juárez;” NOW Applauds Passage of Rep. Hilda Solis’ Juárez Resolution: House Expresses Support for Families of the U.S. Border City, last updated May 3, 2006, <http://www.now.org/press/05-06/05-03.html> (Accessed Sept. 11, 2010).

¹⁶² Holston, “Calling for Answers in Juárez.”

¹⁶³ Bowden, “*Murder City*,” xiii.

¹⁶⁴ Balli, “Cuidad de la Muerte (City of Death).”

¹⁶⁵ Bloom, “Borderline Justice;” Bowen and Pérez, “Women’s Studies on the Border.”

¹⁶⁶ Bowden, “*Murder City*;” Burnette, “Chasing the Ghouls;” Washington-Valdez, “*The Killing Fields*.”

¹⁶⁷ Bowden, “*Murder City*.”

¹⁶⁸ Rosanna Borja, “México: More than 300 Women Assassinated in Ciudad Juárez.” *Women’s International Network News* 29, No. 4 (2003, Autumn): 76; Andrea Cornwall and Maxine Molyneux. “The Politics of Rights: Dilemmas for Feminist Praxis.” *Third World Quarterly* 27, No. 7 (2006): 1175-1191; Leslie Fishburn-Clark, “Juárez Killings Escalate as Investigation Stalls: The Mexican Government Drops its Investigation, Leaving Unsolved the Brutal Murders of Hundreds of Young Women.” *Women’s Media Center*. Last updated Aug. 22, 2006. <http://www.alternet.org/rights/40116/> (Accessed May 15, 2010).

¹⁶⁹ Hise “*On the Edge*.”

¹⁷⁰ Fishburn-Clark, “Juárez Killings Escalate as Investigation Stalls.”

Social Justice

There are a number of social justice interventions that have attempted to rectify the horrible conditions found in Ciudad Juárez. Some have been successful, some not. This section will explore the interventions attempted and their impact, followed by suggestions for how these can be improved or how different interventions might be more successful.

Previous Interventions

The first intervention to be discussed is the many social movements that are banding together into transnational networks to challenge the inequalities found in Juárez (and other parts of México). These networks are attempting to combat the free corporate rein and declining social and environmental health in the Maquiladora areas. One example of this type of effort is the Coalition for Justice in the Maquiladoras.

Coalition for justice in the maquiladoras (CJM). This is a coalition of unions, churches, and community organizations in México, Canada, and the United States that offers solidarity and resources for Mexican workers who are tired of being exploited. The CJM mission is to aid workers, to reform labor relations in México's export processing factories, and to hold corporations accountable to the standards set by Mexican labor law.¹⁷¹

The CJM has (a) started health and safety groups within the maquiladoras leading to gains in both areas, (b) trained and mobilized over 20,000 workers in exercising their rights to form unions and helped apply pressure to the factories to improve working conditions and obtain wage increases and also helped to limit corporate repressive actions against workers, (c) maintained a tri-national network of activists, helped rehire previously fired labor activists, and helped workers develop transnational solidarity by creating worker exchanges whereby Mexican and US workers meet in person to gain firsthand knowledge of shared worker conditions, (d) helped win lawsuits that have led to some gains in toxic waste cleanup, and (e) convinced US congressional members to vote against NAFTA Fast Track authority.¹⁷² In its efforts, the CJM has been successful in creating transnational alliances and coalitions unifying workers to improve working conditions, particularly in the area of environmental health protection, limiting exploitive abuses against workers, and creating and supporting opportunities for worker unionization and labor campaigns. CJM has also created an intercultural discussion among the workers of Canada, the United States, and México, creating a culture of hope and has campaigned tirelessly for a minimum sustainable wage for maquila workers.¹⁷³

However, the CJM has also been hindered in its effectiveness by internal squabbling over power, division of labor, resources, goals, strategies, and identity (nationalism, gender, class, and ethnicity) and by persistent opposition by the Mexican government and the maquiladora corporate organizations. These factors have limited the CJM's consistency, unity, and power. Therefore, the CJM has not been as successful in creating reforms in policies of trade, export

¹⁷¹ Bandy, "Paradoxes of Transnational Civil Societies Under Neoliberalism."

¹⁷² Bacon, "Health, Safety, and Workers' Rights in the Maquiladoras;" Bandy, "Paradoxes of Transnational Civil Societies under Neoliberalism."

¹⁷³ Bandy, "Paradoxes of Transnational Civil Societies Under Neoliberalism."

processing, changing governmental economic policy, and has had limited success in helping workers unionize.¹⁷⁴

Other organizations that are similar in nature to the CJM are the Support Committee for Maquiladora Workers (SCMW), the Border Women Workers Committee (BWWC),¹⁷⁵ the Texas Coalition for Responsible Investment (TCRI), the Interfaith Center for Corporate Responsibility (ICCR), and the American Friends Service Committee (AFSC).¹⁷⁶ The Texas AFL-CIO developed a “twin pant” program in order to review labor violations and help develop common strategies for workers who worked for the same corporations, albeit in different countries. All of these organizations were formed in response to the fact that the maquila corporations had little accountability, which created a culture whereby investors could put profitability ahead of worker relations or welfare.

The coalition against violence toward women and families on the border. There have also been coalitions specially aimed at helping women, particularly the women of Juárez. One example of such a coalition is the Coalition against Violence toward Women and Families on the Border, which I’ll call the Coalition against Violence (CAV) for short. The CAV is a group located in El Paso, Texas composed of labor organizers, religious groups, women’s groups, community activists, politicians, teachers, and students.

The focus of this organization has been to (a) develop a federal bi-national task force to investigate the murders of the women of Juárez, (b) to promote cooperation and resource sharing between Mexican and US forensic scientists, (c) to create a reward fund to solicit tips to police leading to an arrest, and (d) to create safer working conditions for women including transportation to and from the maquiladoras.¹⁷⁷ Not much has been written about this group and they do not appear to have a web page so information is scarce about their effectiveness. Currently it appears to be led by professors from the University of Texas at El Paso (UTEP) and while CAV was very active from 2002 – 2006, presently it seems to exist only through a listserv.¹⁷⁸ What is encouraging is that this group has focused specifically on women’s issues in Juárez.

Increasing the international and local spotlight. Increased international attention brought to this issue by organizations such as Amnesty International and The Human Rights Watch Commission has led to some changes as pressure was applied to US corporations and their practices. For example, the Human Rights Commission was able to bear pressure on the maquilas, successfully reducing pregnancy testing and subsequent firings of pregnant women.¹⁷⁹

Women taking care of women. In conjunction with increased international pressure, local action and attention needs to continue. Often small local efforts can be successful, because they are more relevant to the local population, are congruent with the culture and current political

¹⁷⁴ Bandy, “Paradoxes of Transnational Civil Societies Under Neoliberalism.”

¹⁷⁵ Bacon, “Health, Safety, and Workers’ Rights in the Maquiladoras.”

¹⁷⁶ Bandy, “Paradoxes of Transnational Civil Societies Under Neoliberalism.”

¹⁷⁷ Bowen and Pérez, “Women’s Studies on the Border.”

¹⁷⁸ This knowledge was gained through personal correspondence with Dr. Kathleen Staudt and Dr. Irasema Coronado from UTEP.

¹⁷⁹ Cooney, “The Mexican Crisis and the Maquiladora Boom.”

climate, and are locally managed.¹⁸⁰ Such local pressure has been successful in the past in getting the Mexican government to become involved in the violence against women in Juárez.¹⁸¹ Keeping the issue alive and in the spotlight is essential as causes wax and wane. It could mean life or death to the women of Juárez.

On the local front, many women in Juárez and other maquila areas in México have banded together to help and protect each other. One example of this is The Comadres. The Comadres is a group of women in Nogales México who are trying to make a difference in the colonias. They use education and activism to help the people. Their educational campaigns have included, (a) information about women's and children's health, domestic violence, and the importance of ensuring water quality,¹⁸² (b) help in finding new workers food, clothing, and discarded materials to aid in home building, and (c) they challenge the government to stop railroad tankers filled with toxic materials from passing through worker communities.¹⁸³

Another example in Juárez is the centers opened by women, for women, to help deal with issues of abuse, and to advocate for safety. One example is Esther Chavez who opened the first, and possibly still, the only women's crisis center in Juárez called *Casa Amiga*. Ms. Chavez has been very active in helping women who have been abused and in trying to bring attention to the murders. She believes the murders are directly related to the profound social changes that have taken place in Juárez since the maquiladoras were created.¹⁸⁴

Grassroots organizations and citizen protests. Amnesty International, the V-Day Foundation, and local nongovernmental organizations (NGOs) in Chihuahua and Ciudad Juárez sponsored a "V-Day" march to call attention to the murders of women in Juárez and the city of Chihuahua. Approximately 2000 people participated in the march, which included Hollywood actresses from the US (Eve Ensler, Sally Field, and Jane Fonda).¹⁸⁵ From the "V-Day March" in Juárez to the 6000 strong "Mourning March" in México City, to the *International Caravan for Justice in Juárez* in October 2004, ordinary citizens who have been impacted by what is happening to the women of Juárez are voicing their discontent with the status quo.¹⁸⁶ These events are important and keep the murders and working conditions of these women on the radar of the local, national, bi-national and international public.

All of these interventions have had both success and limitations. Perhaps there is no one thing that can be done to end the atrocities committed against these women. However each intervention, no matter how limited, serves to keep this issue alive and hopefully moving forward toward a solution.

¹⁸⁰ Dellit, "A Woman's Place is in the Struggle;" Mondragón and Brandon, "To Address Health Disparities on the US-México Border."

¹⁸¹ Amnesty International, "México: Justice Fails in Ciudad Juárez."

¹⁸² DiChiro, "Living is for Everyone." The Comadres educated workers in how to store their potable water in heavy polyethylene plastic lined barrels instead of discarded barrels that once contained toxic materials.

¹⁸³ DiChiro, "Living is for Everyone."

¹⁸⁴ Dellit, "A Woman's Place is in the Struggle."

¹⁸⁵ Bowden, Charles, "Murder City;" Wright, "Paradoxes, Protests, and the *Mujeres*."

¹⁸⁶ Bloom, "Borderline justice; Hise, "On the Edge."

Recommended Interventions

This author does not profess to be an expert in social justice, capitalism, neoliberalism, Mexican labor relations, or even Latina issues within Mexico. The following suggestions are made to stimulate dialogue, ideas, and education about these important issues. These ideas are derived from the literature and through discussions with people who live on the border.

Tri-national unionization and cooperation among North American groups. One suggestion for intervention is to bolster tri-national unionization efforts so that union members have solidarity in all three NAFTA countries. Therefore, when workers strike in one country there is solidarity of response in the other two countries, which will place more pressure on the offending corporations.¹⁸⁷ Such collaboration could improve worker bargaining power for better wages and working conditions and minimize the power and control the maquilas currently enjoy. This idea could be extended further to worldwide unionization and collaboration among workers associated with the same parent company in Latin American, North America, and Asia. This idea is illustrated by AFL-CIO secretary treasurer Rich Trumka when he stated, “If a corporation does business in fifteen countries, we’d like to be able to confront them as labor in fifteen countries.”¹⁸⁸

Cultural and national mistrust needs to be broken down among workers that could be united. The CJM instigated worker exchanges that brought together Mexican, US, and Canadian workers to meet in each other’s homes to help build solidarity and unity around commonalities, rather than distance and distrust through diversity. Education and cultural exchanges between these three countries needs to continue in order to break down perceived “first world,” vs. “third world” bias and prejudice. Such prejudice allows neoliberal restructuring to polarize workers and magnify inequality and global conflict.¹⁸⁹ One error made by the CJM is that there was a loose association of agencies and organizations that had no formal structure, agreements, or rules for participation. This led to discord among these organizations, which made the coalition less effective than they could have been. There needs to be more structure within coalitions with formal processes in place for resource sharing, decision making, and accountability between organizations to minimize conflict and fracture within these groups.¹⁹⁰

Also along these lines it could be important to unite organizations with diverse goals, but with a common enemy (e.g., the maquila factory owners). Therefore, groups could collaborate to provide greater resources and impact than they could do alone. These groups might be environmentalists fighting toxic waste dumping on the border, workers fighting for their rights [e.g., human rights, workers rights, women’s rights], and the various social justice organizations.¹⁹¹ It may take larger organizational collaborations to work effectively at changing the prevailing culture and inequalities of neoliberalism and the maquiladoras.”¹⁹²

¹⁸⁷ Bacon, “Health, Safety, and Workers’ Rights in the Maquiladoras;” Cooney, “The Mexican Crisis and the Maquiladora Boom.”

¹⁸⁸ Bacon, “Health, Safety, and Workers’ Rights in the Maquiladoras,” 347.

¹⁸⁹ Bandy, “Paradoxes of Transnational Civil Societies Under Neoliberalism.”

¹⁹⁰ Bandy, “Paradoxes of Transnational Civil Societies Under Neoliberalism.”

¹⁹¹ DiChiro, “Living is for Everyone;” Hise, “*On the Edge*.”

¹⁹² DiChiro, “Living is for Everyone;” Hise, “*On the Edge*,” 127.

In addition, there needs to be more unification of Mexican and US women across ethnic, political, class, and regional lines to foster women's rights in Mexico.¹⁹³ Historically many of the feminist organizations in Mexico have been in conflict and competition, rather than united or working together collectively, while US women's groups have largely ignored Mexican women. Groups of women (e.g., poor, rural, less educated) are often left out of the discourse in both countries.¹⁹⁴ This lack of unity and purpose has made feminism in Mexico largely ineffectual and leaves Mexican women susceptible to masculine organization and power. In Juárez, this has created a culture or ideation that women's lives are worthless and expendable.

There also needs to be more cooperation between grassroots organizations and nongovernmental organizations (NGOs) in regard to the femicides. Historically, there have been conflicts between organizations, which have led to disorganization, ineffectiveness, and undermining of interventions intended to help victim's families and aid prevention. Additionally, there needs to be purity of intent and increased transparency among these organizations. There have been many accusations cast regarding the intention of some of these organizations. For example it is said that some organizations are profiting and taking advantage of the situation in order to promote their agendas at the expense of the victims and their families.¹⁹⁵ Perhaps there needs to be a clearing house these organizations can go through to match community needs with resources and who can organize and monitor the grassroots and NGO's response.

The bottom line is that all of these entities have not been as successful as they have hoped and cannot be successful working in historical and traditional ways. Prior strategies have not been effective against the changing world of globalization. New ways of protest and collaboration must be found to confront privatization and the diminishing workers' wages. This is not an issue that will only impact Mexico, but will soon impact the world.

Magnification of corporate activities. Activists need to call more attention to the actions of the counter movements from maquila corporations, state, national, and the "official" Mexican unions. These include efforts to shut down, sabotage, and repress Mexican and tri-national labor organizations. The maquila industry has "official" unionization, but these are ineffectual and are puppets of the maquila industry and they do not represent worker interests, but rather corporate interests.¹⁹⁶ The maquilas are fighting back as previously mentioned. These actions must garner international attention and be held up to a world spotlight. International pressure needs to be placed on those global corporations that are exploiting and endangering workers.

Increased pressure on offending corporations. One method of applying pressure would be a call for global boycotts of products produced by the greatest corporate offenders. For example, boycotts could be called for products of corporations with the greatest record of worker and human rights violations, environmental pollution, substandard pay scales, or other rallying issues. This could be done in a rolling boycott (e.g., alternating between the corporations products) so that no one group of workers in any one country employed by the corporation would

¹⁹³ Rebecca E. Biron, "Feminist Periodicals and Political Crisis in Mexico: "Fem, Debate, Feminista and La Correa Feminista" in the 1990s." *Feminist Studies* 22, No. 1 (1996): 151-169.

¹⁹⁴ Biron, "Feminist Periodicals and Political Crisis in Mexico"

¹⁹⁵ Wright, "Paradoxes, Protests, and the *Mujeres*."

¹⁹⁶ Bandy, "Paradoxes of Transnational Civil Societies Under Neoliberalism."

be significantly affected, but together these boycotts would send a financial message to the offending corporation. However, this idea would need a mass amount of coordination, which might be difficult to maneuver.

Another idea would be to increase the amount of bi-national lawsuits filed against US and European companies who own and operate maquiladoras that have a history of labor violations.¹⁹⁷ These lawsuits could be filed by the developing tri-national or global labor unions. Bi-national actions were found successful in forcing the Mexican government to clean up the landfill in Nogales México that was poisoning communities on both sides of the border.¹⁹⁸ Such lawsuits are needed to place pressure on both the US and México to clean up their labor relations and environmental standards. Regardless of method, it is clear from the literature that corporations and governments need to be held accountable for their human rights transgressions.¹⁹⁹

Increased pressure on México and the US. This pressure needs to focus on labor relations and workers' rights, but also on the femicides in Juárez and neighboring Chihuahua City. Currently, Mexican law states there must be a 72-hour waiting period after a family first reports a missing person before the Mexican police will get involved (if they get involved). It may take international pressure on the Mexican government to mandate that a "formal" investigation begin immediately after a disappearance is reported to ensure that families get justice under Mexican law.²⁰⁰ Such early action is also likely to save lives as evidence shows that many of the women were kept in captivity for several days prior to their murder.²⁰¹ In addition, México does not have an "open record" law, which makes sharing or publicizing information very difficult.²⁰² This makes it too easy for agencies and the government to cover up information that could lead to solving these murders.

Washington-Valdez²⁰³ and Fishburn-Clark²⁰⁴ strongly assert that the investigation of the femicides should be removed from Mexican authority. In seventeen years very little has been done to solve or stop the murders of women. Some activists call for an international tribunal or a bi-national task force to step into the investigation, while others ask for a bi-national response and that the US take on a greater role. These requests are in response to the blatant neglect and cover up by high ranking Mexican officials and because the murder of young, poor women has spread to other parts of México²⁰⁵ Accordingly in 2006, the US Congress approved identical resolutions in both the house of representatives and the senate urging US involvement in these investigations²⁰⁶ These US resolutions publically condemned the murder and abduction of

¹⁹⁷ Bacon, "Health, Safety, and Workers' Rights in the Maquiladoras."

¹⁹⁸ DiChiro, "Living is for Everyone."

¹⁹⁹ Hise, "*On the Edge.*"

²⁰⁰ Amnesty International, "México: Intolerable Killings."

²⁰¹ Washington-Valdez, "*The Killing Fields.*"

²⁰² Bedway, "On Deaths in the Desert."

²⁰³ Washington-Valdez, "*The Killing Field.*"

²⁰⁴ Fishburn-Clark, "Juárez Killings Escalate as Investigation Stalls."

²⁰⁵ Amnesty International, "México: Justice Fails in Ciudad Juárez;" Bowen and Pérez, "Women's Studies on the Border;" Fishburn-Clark, "Juárez Killings Escalate as Investigation Stalls;" Osborn, "Femicidio;" Washington-Valdez, "*The Killing Fields.*"

²⁰⁶ Fishburn-Clark, "Juárez Killings Escalate as Investigation Stalls;" "NOW Applauds Passage of Rep. Hilda Solis' Juárez Resolution: House Expresses Support for Families of the U.S. Border City. Last updated May 3, 2006. <http://www.now.org/press/05-06/05-03.html> (Accessed Sept. 1, 2010).

women in Juárez and Chihuahua and the use of torture to garner confessions from alleged perpetrators and supported the creation of a DNA database to aid in identification of the bodies.²⁰⁷

More pressure needs to be placed on México to hold them accountable for the agreements they have made under NAFTA. In addition, pressure may need to be asserted to give NAFTA more teeth in protecting Mexican workers.²⁰⁸ México is currently in breach of agreements and international conventions.²⁰⁹ Some of these standards specifically outline México's responsibility to end violence against women. México has not followed any of the provisions laid out in its agreements with the *International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights* or the *American Convention of Human Rights and the Convention of the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW)*. These standards include México's "obligation to establish the truth, dispense justice and provide reparations to victims, even when their rights have been violated by private individuals"²¹⁰ In addition, the Mexican state must ensure that the maquiladora industry meets their legal obligations to their workers under NAFTA. Amnesty International asserts these worker rights must include the physical, sexual, and mental health wellbeing of female workers.²¹¹ For example, female workers should have an inherent right to safe working conditions, which should include transportation to and from work given the high rate of femicide.²¹²

Increased attention to gender issues. There needs to be more focus on gender issues within Mexican labor rights movements. Male workers are not subjected to the same abuses as are women, such as sexual harassment, gender discrimination, pregnancy testing, child care issues, or femicide.²¹³ Women's issues and rights need to be inclusive and not excluded from labor debates. Perhaps one way of calling attention to women's issues in the global economy is to foster global publications highlighting the issues faced by female workers in México and around the world, especially as it relates to assembly plants.²¹⁴ Publications such as these might help unify workers, and women, and help develop commonality and solidarity.

In addition, many Mexican women have filed lawsuits against maquila corporations in the United States in order to pursue severance pay and damages for poor working conditions.²¹⁵ Helping these women with free legal representation to pursue these suits can empower them to take some control over what is happening and provide them with resources to combat it. In addition, opening up class action lawsuits in all countries against a company guilty of violating worker rights may be effective in compensating workers for abuses.

Creation of a bi-national trans-border authority. The border between the US and México is a unique area that culturally envelopes and transcends both nations. This is especially

²⁰⁷ "NOW Applauds Passage of Rep. Hilda Solis' Juárez Resolution."

²⁰⁸ Hise, "On the Edge."

²⁰⁹ Amnesty International, "México: Intolerable killings."

²¹⁰ Amnesty International, "México: Intolerable killings," 5.

²¹¹ Amnesty International, "México: Intolerable killings."

²¹² Bowen and Pérez, "Women's Studies on the Border."

²¹³ Bandy, "Paradoxes of Transnational Civil Societies under Neoliberalism;" Hise, "On the Edge."

²¹⁴ Biron, "Feminist Periodicals and Political Crisis in México."

²¹⁵ Bowdish, "Sexual Harassment at Maquiladora."

true for the El Paso/Juárez region that was historically one city prior to the US/México war when the Rio Grande/Rio Bravo River became the national boundary. Up until the Narco war and ensuing anarchy in Juárez, the border was porous and El Pasoans and Juarenses considered themselves as one people. This border region has become uniquely bicultural, which is categorically and contextually different from either the US or México. Therefore, the border should be considered as a separate entity from either México or the US.

A bi-national, trans-border authority should be created that considers the needs of both countries, but rules in ways that are best for the border people. This border authority would work with both governments and would hold each accountable to their agreements, but would be a separate entity from both of these governments. This is important, because only the border people must breathe border air, drink border water, live in the border cities, and work in the border factories. Authorities in Washington and México City are too far removed from the issues of the border to effectively govern it, especially during the era of the maquiladoras.²¹⁶

While idealistic, this concept is not without historical precedence. Bi-national authorities and arrangements have existed between Switzerland and France (e.g., Basel-Mulhuse), between the Catholic Vatican and Italy, and between Hong Kong and the crown colonies just to name just a few.²¹⁷ If we follow these models, a bi-national authority at the US/México border should be possible to allow for mutual directives and solutions to border problems. It is necessary for the border to be hegemonic in dealing with the issues that face it. Control and power cannot come from afar. Democratic processes should come bi-nationally through a border authority.²¹⁸

Summary

The current experiment in neoliberalism in México has had resounding success in fostering great wealth for foreign investors and US corporations making their upper echelon (e.g., CEO's and management) increasingly rich, but it has also created despairing power inequalities, devastating poverty, competitive cultures, violence, and unsafe conditions for workers. The policies of neoliberalism have created the decline of the middle class, while increasing the number of people living in, or near, poverty. This has occurred in many areas of the world, but most significantly in Juárez México.

The women of Juárez have paid the most significant price. The cost to these women has been in more than just labor issues or poverty. They have borne the brunt of the exploitation, some paying with their very lives. The increase in violence toward young, poor women, mostly from the maquila industry has been unprecedented and very little has been done to stop this violence.

A number of social justice interventions has been attempted to improve conditions, with varying success. A large issue is that these concerns span nations, which could aid in creating solidarity, but cultural mistrust often gets in the way of any lasting success. This cultural mistrust takes place between countries, regions, ethnicities, social class, and gender, making solidarity

²¹⁶ Brown, "The Fourth Member of NAFTA."

²¹⁷ Brown, "The Fourth Member of NAFTA."

²¹⁸ DiChiro, "Living is for Everyone."

and unity obsolete. This paper suggested a number of ideas to improve current trends in intervention to foster discussion and education.

In reviewing this issue it has become abundantly clear that despite biblical prophecies that the “meek shall inherit the earth,” they will not. It has become increasingly apparent that the rich will seize the earth through neoliberal practices, capitalism, and assembly export plants that exploit workers and deprive them of a sustainable living wage. Toward this end, the United States has effectively conquered México and devastated its people without firing a single shot.

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