Between the Lines: A New Perspective on the Industrial Sociology of Women Workers in Transnational Labor Processes

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Introduction

The on-going dialogue between Marxists and feminists is one of the most critical exchanges of ideas among those concerned with the changing role of women in the international division of labor. One recent collection of essays attempts to develop a synthesis of Marxist theories of class relations and feminist theories of gender relations (Sargent, 1981). Critics of Marxist-feminist scholarship point to a marked failure to synthesize issues related to race and nationality as important features of capitalist patriarchy (see James, 1974). Marxists-feminists face several dilemmas: (1) the relative scarcity of empirically based research, (2) the lack of action-oriented research, and (3) the need for a theoretical synthesis that incorporates class and gender hierarchies and cross-cultural variations.

Perhaps the theoretical impasse in the Marxist-feminist exchange originates in the tendency for both sides to emphasize a particular aspect (i.e., class vis-à-vis gender) of the political composition of the working class. By “political composition” is meant the internal divisions of power within the working class—divisions based on sex and class as well as factors such as age, ethnicity, nationality, skills, education, and industrial location. What is perhaps needed is an approach that gives relative primacy to whatever one of these aspects is concretely more important in particular compositions of the working class. The perspective of political composition may allow analysts to
overcome the impasse, since the primacy of any particular aspect is determined by the actual composition of workers in real situations of struggle. This perspective is in agreement with Young (1981), who calls for a “culturally-sensitive” Marxism that recognizes the differential interactions of race, gender, and class in specific cultural settings.

This paper examines the dynamics of power relations involving a predominantly female assembly line workforce supervised by an all-male group in a transnational, cross-cultural labor process (the Mexican maquiladoras). The goal is to demonstrate the efficacy and theoretical clarity of the political composition perspective in terms of an actual situation involving relations of domination and resistance.3

Women and Global Fordism

The process of internationalization of capital involves restructuring of the labor process in terms of a global rearticulation of power relations. The labor process is not simply a material aggregate of instrumental functions, but above all a social process based on a specific set of power relations. Currently, capital’s global restructuring depends increasingly on use of female labor in the Third World. The modus operandi of industrial relations in the transnational circuits of capital is based on Fordism. As a system of industrial relations, Fordism involves the following principal elements: (1) the so-called “flow-line” principle, that is, use of an automated conveyor belt system which provides management greater control over the speed and intensity of productive activity; (2) use of hierarchical managerial controls over the quality of production and evaluation of worker performance; (3) increasing and continual division of labor, that is, use of workshift and line reassignments, implicit deskilling, and fragmentation of tasks; (4) a systematic link between worker productivity and wages based on quota and quality performance patterns rather than the older Taylorist piecework system; (5) “preconceptualization” of the entire process so that the continuity, accuracy, and intensity of productive activity is established a priori.

In outlining the specificities of global Fordism it is crucial to note that these five elements are universally applicable regardless of national or cultural setting. However, in comparative perspective it is also important to note that the Fordist system must adapt to local nuances in class composition. In a word, an examination of Fordist systems in a particular cultural setting should reveal changes in basic organizational form.

In the case of the Mexican maquiladoras, differences in the sexual division of labor play a major role in the final determination of the system of capitalist control and conversely of workers’ struggles. Previous research (Peña, 1983) shows that in the Mexican maquiladoras, transnational capital has had to rely on a synthesis of imported Fordist principles and “native” features of Mexican culture, primarily the traditional patriarchal subordination of women.4 The synthesis between imported and native features was necessary due to the increasing resistance of women workers to technical and bureaucratic forms of control.5 Through individual and collective acts of output restriction, sabotage, and wildcat work stoppages, female maquila workers undermined to a considerable degree the effectiveness of a purely Fordist system of organizational control. Disruption of the Fordist system of power relations led to experimentation in which patriarchal modes of domination and subordination were used. Although the subordinate status of maquila workers has always been present, planned use of patriarchal control emerged in the period following the 1973-1975 strike waves. What follows is an analysis of the interaction between Fordist organizational principles and patriarchal modes of control in the maquiladoras of Cd. Juárez, Chihuahua, México.6

Class and Patriarchy in the Maquiladoras

A major aspect of capitalist restructuring in the Mexican maquiladoras proceeds on the basis of divisions related to sex stratification. Division of workers includes sexual hierarchies in the internal labor markets (e.g., women are confined below the first-line supervisory level). These divisions based on sex are not unique in themselves. Such fragmentations have been a feature of capitalist restructuring since the development of large-scale industry, as Marx demonstrated. Their uniqueness in the context of the maquilas resides in two related dynamics: (1) a synthesis of “imported”
Fordist principles with traditional patriarchal features unique to the host Mexican setting, and (2) capital’s ability to manipulate wage and productivity differentials due to both the transnational character of the labor process and male-centered, male-controlled supervisory systems which manipulate the gender specificities of Mexican culture.

Managerial control of the labor process in the maquilas largely relies on a combination of changes in technical organization and in the forms of managerial supervision. The Fordist assembly line in the maquilas typically combines speed-up with line reassignments, male-administered admonishments, and use of informal surveillance networks to control workers’ resistance and productivity. The synthesis between imported Fordist principles and native Mexican features is clear in maquila management’s willingness to rely on informal contacts and networks to exert control. While modern, U.S.-based corporations, as Edwards (1979) argues, increasingly rely on bureaucratic forms of control, in the maquilas there is also a marked reliance on informal dimensions of the host culture. That is, management relies heavily on the tendency for Mexican workers to establish work relations on the basis of personal links as opposed to reliance on universal rules and formal role definitions.

The patriarchal structure of the internal labor market in the maquilas owes its existence to the manner in which it provides transnational capital an alternative form of control to supplement and at times supplant more typical technical approaches. Van Waas (1981) has pointed to management’s use and manipulation of the sexual demographics of the maquila work force: a predominantly female assembly line stratum is subject to supervision by a predominantly male stratum. Thus, in the maquilas the task of productivity supervision is under control of male technicians, engineers, first-line supervisors, and production managers. Moreover, the unique native features of male/female relations are transferred from the general social milieu to the factory setting: the “maleness” of factory command is partly a transplant from the traditional, patriarchal Mexican household. This study supports Fernandez Kelly’s (1983) claim that male managers use traditional value systems to manipulate women into submission, for example, the promise of favoritism (cf. Kanter, 1977).

One example of the synthesis between Fordist forms of control and native patriarchal features is the relationship between female lead operators and male first-line operators. The relationship between lead operators and first-line supervisors is a critical juncture in the network of shop floor relations because the interactions and conflicts between these two positions can largely determine the outcome of productivity supervision. If male first-line supervisors are unable to exert sufficient control over female lead operators, then control over output restriction and other types of informal resistance will be undermined.

Thus, whereas traditional forms of Fordist control like line and workshift reassignments are often undermined by female line workers, native Mexican forms of patriarchal control may impede the formation of shop floor networks. A co-opted lead operator is capital’s final resort to control in the maquilas. A major feature of capitalist control in the maquilas is based on increasing access to rewards, opportunities, and power for a limited number of women.

Maquila workers’ rejection of promotions from line to lead operator may imply rejection of a reward system controlled by men. Yet, among workers accepting such promotions, movement up into the lead operator position increases the level of interaction with males. It also increases sharing by select women in a male-controlled system of admonishments, that is, it gives a select few, co-opted women petty increases in power. But a critical factor seems to be the increased level of female/male interactions, since first-line supervisors are not as involved with primary work groups as are lead operators. This exposes lead operators to a greater risk of co-optation and manipulation under the sway of opportunity and power systems controlled in patriarchal fashion. In a word, men “own” the right to make decisions regarding promotions, seniority, wage increases, and so forth. Women must conform to the male-centered system of managerial control or face expulsion.

The second dynamic at work, that is, productivity and wage differentials, also assumes a unique form in the context of the maquiladoras. Van Waas (1981) and others have already provided an in-depth analysis of the transnational character of production and its implications for productivity and wage differentials. This study is concerned with the unexamined impact of patriarchal relations on productivity and wages in the maquilas.

The division of the maquila work force on the basis of sex has implications for productivity and wage differentials. First is the manner in which supervisors manipulate certain attitudes seen as tradi-
tionally held by Mexican females (i.e., respect for male authority, a willingness to perform for attractive males). In the case of a particular plant operation, in 1977, management substituted younger, friendlier, handsomer supervisors for older, more impersonal supervisors. The younger supervisors had more direct interaction with line workers (Oral History 1, Cd. Juarez, November, 1981). Prior to 1977, management relied on older, mixed-ethnic (Anglo and Mexican) supervisors. There were a number of incidents involving conflicts between line workers and supervisory staff. There were also a variety of incidents involving conflicts between Anglo and Mexican supervisory staff. Older, more aggressive supervisors conflicted with Mexican workers and production management staff. Apparently, management based subsequent development of its supervisory styles on the premise that Mexican women appreciate and obey young, handsome, friendly men. Thus, management relies on the ability of these younger male supervisors (an increasing number of them Mexican) to forge friendship and social networks with line operators in order to extract greater productivity and control.

Essential for success in managing the productivity of female line workers in this setting is participation by male supervisors in afterwork events, that is, parties, dinners, dances, and the like (Oral History 1). Women, seemingly, work harder for a supervisor who lavishly entertains them after work (often at company expense). Wage hierarchies are also developed partly on the basis of male supervisors' participation in social and friendship networks. Women who join male supervisors for entertainment and perform well on the shop floor are rewarded with wage increases, bonuses, vacations, and the like (see also Fernandez Kelly, 1983). Women who resist the "seduction" are ostracized or threatened with termination. Sexual harassment in this manner becomes a fundamental aspect of control in the maquiladoras.

The same processes characterizing female/male relationships on the floor seem to operate in the traditional, male-dominated trade unions. Only 4 of the 223 workers in the survey taken for this study reported ever being elected or appointed to a union stewardship. Only 12 percent of the workers reported participating in union elections, and 25 percent reported conflicts with male trade union officials. Over 95 percent of the workers rejected established unions as a preferred organizational form, citing male unionist cooperation with management and sexist behavior.

The "classic" case of how male trade unionists cooperate with maquila management is Acapulco Fashions (see De la Rosa Hickerson, 1979). The contract signed between the CROC (Confederacion Revolucionaria Obrera y Campesina) and Acapulco Fashions included a clause allowing the company unilaterally to establish production standards without input from the workers or the union itself. Another clause gave the firm total control over work force reductions and production schedules. These clauses were used to eliminate female workers involved in informal struggles.

As on the shop floor, female union members must socialize with union officials in order to gain access to rewards, opportunities, and power. The result is either co-optation or expulsion. One male trade unionist boasted that his female members were a personal "harem" (Field Journal Entry, February, 1982). A critical aspect of the relationship between male union officials and female rank-and-file members has to do with the fact that male unionists often mediate between supervisors and workers. This is particularly true in the case of shop stewards, who play a major role in the settlement of disputes between workers and supervisors. The present study suggests that union stewards admonish, reprimand, and fire workers on behalf of male supervisors (see also Van Waas, 1981).

Women's Resistance in the Fordist Factories

Capitalist labor process organization in the Mexican maquiladoras—based on imported Fordist principles and native patriarchal relations—is not without opposition. Given the features of capitalist restructuration described above, female organizational forms involve tactics and strategies which serve to overcome the divisions imposed by capital.

On the shop floor, female organizational forms tend to revolve around the line operator/lead operator/first-line supervisor conjuncture. This female/female/male triad is the key constellation around which the process of political recomposition in the maquilas revolves. A major challenge for women is overcoming sanctions that male supervisors impose for resisting absorption into social networks. One worker described her fears of being laid off as a consequence of not socializing at dinner parties with her supervisor (Oral History 3, Cd. Juarez, November, 1981). Maquila workers, never-
theless, show a capacity for overcoming divisions imposed through technical or managerial restructuration, that is, line and workshift reassignments.

However, overcoming divisions based on the patriarchal manipulation of social networks is more difficult. Given the personalized character of social networking, resistance to change becomes highly visible, since interpersonal relationships are the governing criteria upon which workers are ultimately judged. Most susceptible to this type of pressure are the lead operators, who depend on male first-line supervisors for their initial job evaluations, promotions, wage increases, and the like. Line operators, on the other hand, largely depend on lead operators for their initial evaluations. This study indicates that line and lead operators cooperate in matters related to output restriction and other issues concerning job performance and productivity. However, the relationship between lead operators and first-line supervisors may become conflictual, particularly if the lead operator is discovered participating in or concealing output restriction networks.

Therefore, female maquila workers focus much of their effort on either trying to free themselves of manipulation by co-opted lead operators or reducing the level of co-optation among lead operators. The first task seems much easier than the second. Reducing lead operator co-optation involves risking the “wrath” of male supervisors, a prospect most line workers prefer to avoid. There are severe limits, in the end, on how successful female line workers are in developing autonomous shop floor networks. The predicament entails having to form primary shop floor networks without the benefit of the vast information in the hands of lead operators. While primary shop floor networks can function without lead operator participation, their effectiveness in the struggle is thereby limited.

Thus, female resistance in the maquilas seems to develop along various tangents of activity: (1) output restriction struggles and other forms of resistance to managerial control and productivity supervision, (2) efforts to prevent co-optation of lead operators and to avoid absorption into social networks controlled by male supervisors, and (3) friendship ties. The primary shop floor network is the principal form of organization among maquila line workers. Yet disruption of these networks through various forms of capitalist restructuration often necessitates networking activity beyond the confines of the factory setting.

It is in the circulation of networking, organization, and struggle from the factory to the community or small groups that female organizational forms attain a greater degree of autonomy and relative success. Autonomy here means independence from patriarchal domination, from male-centered working-class organizations, and from managerial control. COMO (Centro de Orientación de la Mujer Obrera), Despacho Obrero, and the dozen or more independent worker coalitions are emerging as formidable autonomous networks of struggle in Juárez. Prior research demonstrates that former maquila workers, trained as “external promoters” (community and cooperative organizers) at COMO, circleulate struggles and organizational initiatives through the CEBIs (intensive primary education centers in marginalized areas), the various self-managed cooperatives in the Juárez area, and strike support groups. External promoters often must confront and transform the traditional views of women held by members of cooperatives and the working-class community in general.

There are a number of terrains of struggle among Juárez maquila workers both inside the factories and in the community that have a distinctly female character: the struggle against reproductive hazards in the workplace, against sex segregation into low-paying and hazardous jobs, the struggle for inclusion of more men in the maquila work force, and various struggles related to the reproduction of the working-class community as a whole (education, health, housing). While these struggles affect men as well, women have initiated demands and developed the organizational resources for conducting self-activity.

Maquila workers are developing their own organizational priorities and struggles. A major issue centers around how best to organize struggles related to the social reproduction of the working class. Female maquila workers, particularly those acting through COMO as external promoters, have emphasized networking tactics, which often build on preexisting relationships among other women in the community (e.g., comadre networks). An example is the manner in which CEBI instructors organized struggles for more educational resources, better housing, and a sanitary water supply in the southwestern periphery of Cd. Juárez (Colonia Libertad). They appealed to the mothers of children attending the local CEBI to help them organize meetings where educational, housing, and water supply issues were discussed. The mothers, already involved in com-
munity networks, accepted the challenge with enthusiasm. CEBI instructors, many of them sensitized to the experience of child-rearing, formulated a strategy which recognized the needs of marginalized mothers and their children. Education, adequate housing, and safe drinking and cooking water were foremost among the concerns voiced by mothers during the CEBI community meetings (Oral History 5, Cd. Juárez, November, 1981; Field Journal Entry, November 20, 1981). In this manner, the CEBI workers circulated organizational activity without imposing an agenda on the women’s community, that is, they respected their autonomy.

The findings on decision-making processes in the household are particularly relevant to the consideration of the possible relationship between male/female relationships in the household and the entire range of organizational forms and struggles. The findings suggest that maquila workers are often the primary source of income for many households (see also Fernandez Kelly, 1983; Carrillo and Hernandez, 1982). This occurs in situations where the women are single daughters living with their primary family, in cases involving married couples, and where workers are divorced, separated, or widowed and live with children and/or other relatives and friends.

The economic importance of maquiladora workers within their households has resulted in higher levels of decision making compared to non-maquila workers or women who are confined to the domestic sphere. The data suggest that women are assuming a greater role in many decision-making areas—including areas traditionally reserved for males by Mexican cultural norms. Shopping, bill paying, plans for education and household activities, and discipline of children are all areas in which maquila workers show high levels of participation.17 This participatory role in decision making and planning has involved considerable struggle within the household. Conflicts with fathers, mothers, brothers, and spouses are reported by some workers (Oral History 1, 6, 8, Cd. Juárez, November, 1981-March, 1982). It seems maquila workers are challenging traditional patriarchal authority within the household. This issue may be of considerable importance for understanding self-activity within the factories.

If women are taking steps to challenge authority relations in the household, does this necessarily mean that they are also likely to challenge them in the factories? This issue is complicated, since it is difficult to establish a causal relationship between household and factory self-activity. This study does suggest that women involved in higher levels of decision making in the household also have proportionately more significant representation in output restriction struggles.18 However, this study does not determine whether increasing militancy originates in the factory or household. There is little doubt women’s entry into the maquila work force transforms traditional gender relations in the household. But the connection between such change and the process of political recomposition in the workplace is ambiguous.

Creative Praxis in the Labor Process

Braverman’s (1974) research initiated a debate concerning the thesis that capitalist organization of the labor process results in increased deskilling of workers. The Fordist assembly line certainly strips workers of traditional craft skills and control over the pace of production. However, this does not necessarily imply that workers are also stripped of the capacity for creative activity and technical innovation.

Nearly half of the workers surveyed in this study were involved in one or more skilled activities. In this context, skilled activity involves engineering, repair and maintenance, and innovations which go beyond the formal job training or job descriptions of workers; 45 percent of the workers reported repair and maintenance activities and 48 percent reported engineering activities. To determine the accuracy of these reports, respondents were asked to describe their activities. The largest group of cases (29 percent) reported repairing tools or machinery to continue working. Another 23 percent reported job setups, and nearly 8 percent reported time and motion study. Almost 44 percent of the cases reported inventions and technical innovations; of these, 39 percent reported modifications of tools or machinery; 26 percent, modifications of product or components designs; 14 percent, modifications of two or more types.19 A strong association was found between worker involvement in these creative activities and the incidence of production speed-ups: chi-square tests of significance revealed associations between speed-up and repair/maintenance activity at $P < .02$, engineering at $P < .003$, and inventions at $P < .001$.

Thus, there are two opposing tendencies in the maquiladoras. On
the one hand, line workers are involved in skilled activities beyond tasks formally expected and remunerated—largely in response to productivity pressures. On the other hand, line workers engage in informal types of resistance, such as output restriction and work stoppages. The existence of these opposing tendencies suggests a need for further research on organizational dynamics and work attitudes. Prior research indicates that workers with more militant attitudes are more likely to participate in output restriction networks (Peña, 1983). These militant workers are also less likely to participate in skilled activities, unless they result in less work and reduced stress.30

The “creative praxis” of maquila workers—involving both skilled activities and informal struggles—suggests Braverman’s theses on deskill labor are an oversimplification. Deskilling of labor does not necessarily imply depoliticization of workers.31

Summary of Implications

The tendencies described above have implications for theories of transnational labor processes and the interaction between class and gender in cross-cultural settings. First, capital’s reliance on native patriarchy implies that control strategies under global Fordism must often focus on changes in the social, cultural, and demographic composition of the work force. Changes in the technical organization of the labor process and in managerial supervision are important. However, often the primary and most important control strategies involve manipulation of the social and cultural characteristics of the work force—in this case through patriarchal domination of female maquila workers. This is not meant to imply that Mexican culture is the only patriarchal system interacting with global Fordism. It is merely suggested that transnational labor processes, particularly those operating in cross-cultural settings, may of necessity rely on certain native features for control over workers. Identification of these native features of control and how they are modified and used by capital must become a major theoretical concern in future research.

Second, any theory of women in the labor process that aims at a two-sided class and gender perspective must give equal attention to capitalist restructuring and changes in the internal power relations of the working class. In a transnational setting, analysis should deal with local, plant, and community-specific processes and international linkages between home-base and local operations. The circulation of workers’ struggles and capitalist restructuration should be analyzed to specify how local processes and class composition impact on the overall constellation of power relations and to understand the effects of global processes on local struggles.

Third, labor process theory has been limited by a focus on industrial workers and factory work. This study suggests a need to focus on the interconnections between the labor process and household/community experiences and struggles. More research and theoretical analysis is needed to understand the significance of women’s experiences in the household as a factor affecting workplace experiences and vice versa. Much can be learned about the labor process through analysis of the circulation of workers’ struggles from factory to community and vice versa.

Fourth, a theory of the transnational labor process which recognizes the interactions between gender and class must include analysis of international differentials in working-class power, accounting for sex-specific inequities in power. Political economists have focused on the international division of labor as if the working class is only labor power—another factor of production. A focus on the working class as a political and social entity would be more useful, particularly for those concerned with action-oriented research. The political composition perspective provides a theoretical framework for such an analysis in that it understands the internal divisions of the working class primarily as divisions based on differences in social and political power. Future theoretical inquiry might lead to analysis of how women “fall between the lines” of internal divisions based on gender and class relations. Women in the interstices of the transnational labor process face not only class divisions, not only gender divisions, but also the cross-cultural and cross-national inequities which characterize the current situation of the international working class.

Finally, the transnational character of capital and the working class calls for comparative analysis in light of cross-cultural and cross-national differences. The findings of this study have implications for understanding the situation facing Chicanas and other Third World women in the United States. Chicana, black, and Filipino women comprise a large proportion of the labor force in
U.S. electronics and garment operations (Snow, 1983). In California's "Silicon Valley" these women represent close to half of the assembly line work force. Most analyses of Silicon Valley workers have focused on workers' demographic and socioeconomic characteristics or on capital's strategies for control. However, a number of important studies of struggles among Chicanas have found interactions between class and gender relations. For example, Coyle et al. (1979) studied the El Paso Farah strike and found that garment workers experienced considerable sexual harassment. Workers who refused to socialize with supervisors were punished with high quotas, hard tasks, and other stressful working conditions. Magdalena Mora's (1981) study of the Tolteca workers' strike found that preferential treatment of workers by supervisors created internal divisions. Mora also found that informal resistance to speed-up and efforts to reform the union played critical roles in the workers' struggles.

Future research on women's struggles in the global electronics and garment industries must include further analysis of formal and informal modes of struggle and study of the dialectical interactions between class and gender relations outlined in this and other studies. Issues related to cross-cultural and cross-national divisions must be carefully considered. For example, in the United States, unlike Mexico, there is a pronounced division among workers on the basis of race, ethnicity, and nationality. In southern California, Nalven (1983) found that the internal labor market in an electronics firm was characterized by an all-Anglo, mixed male and female supervisor stratum. Assemblers and inspectors were predominantly Third World women. Between these two strata was a group of lead operators and lead inspectors comprised of about half women and men and about half Anglo and Third World workers. Thus, in the U.S. setting, divisions at supervisory and staff levels cut across both gender and nationality lines. In Mexico, by comparison, all positions of first-line supervisor and above are held by males of mixed Mexican and Anglo-American nationality. All women are confined below the first-line supervisor level, and few men are found in operator positions. Thus, in Mexico's maquiladoras there is a more pronounced sexual division of workers compared to the United States, where divisions based on race and nationality figure prominently. This comparison serves to illustrate the significance of cross-cultural and cross-national differences in working-class political composition. Obviously, the implications for struggle are that U.S. workers organize to overcome race, nationality, and gender divisions, while Mexican maquila workers primarily face gender divisions related to the highly patriarchal structure of internal labor markets.

Chicanas and other Third World women occupy a strategic position in the new international division of labor. They are concentrated in key sectors of the global capitalist economy. Comparative studies of women's struggles in the global electronics industry could provide important insights concerning changing power relations, tactics for organization, and the possibilities for linkage of struggles at the transnational level. This study, hopefully, will stimulate such future inquiry.

NOTES

1. In fairness to the collection of essays in Sargent (1981), the issue of racism is acknowledged. However, none of the essays, with the possible exception of Young (1981), attempts to develop such a synthesis. One excellent effort in this direction is the work of Cavendish (1982). Also cf. O'Barr (1982) and Reohane et al. (1981).

2. One of the tendencies in the Marxist-feminist literature is a striking absence of analyses dealing with women workers' actual struggles. There is a marked emphasis on analyses of relations of domination, with much less attention given to relations of resistance.

3. This summary of Fordism is based on a synthesis of various works, including Aglietta (1979), Braverman (1974), Burawoy (1979), Clawson (1980), Cooley (1980), Hales (1980), Pallis (1976), and Sohn-Rethel (1976).

4. Most of this paper is based on my doctoral dissertation. See Peña (1983).

5. For commentary, see Edwards (1979), who outlines three basic forms of control in the development of the capitalist labor process: simple, technical, and bureaucratic.

6. The data for this study are based on a ten-month research project in the Juarez maquiladora sector. Data included 223 survey interviews, 15 oral histories, 11 management interviews, and observations from September, 1981, through June, 1982.

7. For further discussion, see Zurcher et al. (1965).

8. Lead operators, also known as group-chiefs (jefes de grupo), are assembly line operators chosen by management to perform supervisory tasks in conjunction
with first-line supervisors. The lead operators are so called because they lead the group in establishing the upper limit on performance or quota standards. In the language of U.S. industrial sociologists, the lead operators may be seen as rate-busters, that is, workers who consistently surpass the quota levels informally established by the primary work group.

9. This study found that over 60 percent of the workers in the survey reported rejecting promotions. The major motive cited by workers for the rejection was fear of disruption of friendship ties.

10. Van Waas (1981) argues that maquiladoras are interested not only in the relatively lower wages paid Mexican workers but also in their considerably higher productivity. The setting of wage policies in the maquilas is based not only on government guidelines but on the unit-output per worker as well. See also Carrillo and Hernandez (1982).

11. See also De la Rosa Hickerson (1979); Carrillo and Hernandez (1982); Gambrill (1983).

12. One worker described her reasons for her discontent with traditional charrieta trade unions: "The men expect the women to cater to their every whim. Make coffee, go get burritos, clean the office, arrange the files, deliver the mail to the post office... and some, many, I would say, expect sexual favors. But if you ask for help, say with making sure a union member is represented by a lawyer at an arbitration hearing, forget it! The only thing they care about is their own power which is a direct function of their good standing with managers . . . " (Oral History 8, March, 1982, Cd. Juárez).

13. For further discussion of COMO, see Peña (1983: chap. 8). This organization, founded in 1969, is an experiment in alternative worker education (utilizing a critical, social problem-solving or neo-Freirean pedagogy) and cooperative self-management.

14. External promoters trained at COMO combine skills in community organizing with social work principles of change agency and advocacy. COMO trains maquila workers in three major areas of activity: public education, public health nursing, and social work.

15. The CEBIs (Centros de Educación Básica Intensiva) are outreach primary education centers serving marginalized communities with high levels of illiteracy.

16. The term comadre, literally translated as "godmother," has a variety of meanings dependent on the speech situation and the persons communicating. My use of the term is meant to suggest a network of friends and not kinship ties per se, although in many cases the comadres COMO workers referred to were actual godmothers in more than a figurative sense.

17. Shopping and plans for household activities are traditionally areas of decision making for women in Mexico. Bill paying and the discipline of children are traditionally reserved for men. Plans related to education and household activities are often jointly shared areas of responsibility. This survey, however, included many cases reporting participation in the disciplining of children and bill paying.

18. A chi-square test of significance on the relationship between output restriction and worker participation in household planning and decision making revealed that workers with a participatory background in the household had proportionately greater representation among the output restriction cases as well ($X^2 = 6.79987$, 4 df, significant at the $P<.01$ level).

19. For detailed descriptions and commentary on inventions and technical innovations among maquila workers, see Centro de Orientación de la Mujer Obrera (COMO) and Centro de Estudios Frontierizos del Norte de Mexico (CEFONOMEX) (1984). See also Peña (1983: chap. 6).


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