

## **Women in Between: Globalization and the New Enlightenment**

**W**omen's perspectives have attained the significance of a new enlightenment, overtaking the seventeenth-century Enlightenment. In the Cartesian view of nature as something to be controlled and dominated, women were relegated to immanent positions in a world of transcendent male philosophers, scientists, and conquerors who defined, categorized, and ruled a society made rational by their civilizing mission. Women's everyday work in reproducing society was invisible until recent decades, when feminist scholars and activists began to explore women's contribution to society and the survival of the human species. Women's mediating positions linking families to communities, and communities to larger political, economic, and social circuits, become crucial to survival where global development processes have undermined social reproduction.

I shall argue that the multilateral and resilient approach that women and other marginalized populations manifest enables them to assess more clearly their personal situation in relation to global issues. Whether their marginality stems from social, ethnic, gender, or class positions, their consciousness of injustice provides a baseline for understanding global trends in embodied terms. This kind of knowledge, cultivated in the immanent roles assigned to subordinates in the world system, promotes a new enlightenment based on gender-balanced and multicultural understandings. Once collectively mobilized, it could become strategic in providing an alternative to domination by global corporations. The danger lies in the erosion of such a collective perspective when women gain individual success as actors equivalent to men in an individualized and privatized global society.

Those of us who have survived the transformative decades since the

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1970s, during which women's perspectives were introduced into scientific discourse, can now evaluate critically the contested discourses of early feminism. Some feminists drew on the rational, scientific paradigm exemplified by René Descartes, including his identification of women with nature and men with culture—and, by extension, civilization—and the assumptions that women were everywhere subordinated to men.<sup>1</sup> Simone de Beauvoir (1957) targeted the problem, but her desire to join the ranks of transcendent males occluded the importance of female roles. She despaired that the “second sex” was biologically doomed to immanent roles. By that she—and her transcendent mentor Immanuel Kant—meant biologically determined reproductive roles. Her escape was to deny maternal functions and the nurturant roles imposed by “nature” on women.

Contesting this conclusion, a feminist critique of Enlightenment rationalism began to expose the fallacy of universal gender roles based on dichotomized oppositions and unilineal evolution that endowed men, particularly European men, with the roles of philosophers and kings. Pointing to evidence from missionaries, conquerors, and travelers, ethnographers began to construct historicized accounts of how women's roles in the Western hemisphere changed with the advent of colonization (Etienne and Leacock 1980). Others analyzed the transformations in women's roles from egalitarian or complementary roles to female subordination within New World empires (Nash 1978; Silverblatt 1987). The breakdown of gender hierarchy based on naturalized differences opened up research into women's domains of knowledge and methods of discovery. Today the Kantian pole of immanence in the world of lived experience is no longer the Cinderella hearth of a society dominated by transcendent males. Everyday experience is being examined, extrapolated, and extolled as the fount of social science insights and the touchstone of reality.<sup>2</sup> The task remains to incorporate these understandings in collective action.

<sup>1</sup> So pervasive were these assumptions that early feminists (see Ortner 1974 and Rosaldo 1974) accepted Descartes' assumption of the universal subordination of women, along with Beauvoir (1957), who was further burdened with Kantian categories of the immanent and transcendent. Eleanor Leacock and I (1977), as well as Mona Etienne and Leacock (1980), drew on ethnohistorical and ethnographic accounts to question the spurious basis for such universalizing categories.

<sup>2</sup> By reclaiming cognition from the transcendent cerebral sphere and inserting it into the daily interactions of people through communication systems, Jürgen Habermas (1984) opened the door to admitting reflexivity and cognitive thought in the lived world. Michael Billig et al. (1988) expanded the study of interactive communication, which allowed both practical and reflective responses that enable people to act in common. This gave greater impetus to the analyses of narratives as ways of exploring people's consciousness in spontaneous and uncensored discourse.

It is in this immanent field of consciousness that Dorothy Smith (1987, 1990) produced a feminist methodology in which the everyday world became problematic. As a second-generation feminist who learned to understand the subordination of women from Beauvoir but rejected Beauvoir's election of the transcendent sphere, Smith accepted her own immanence in the world of practicality. This allowed her to explore a range of experience ignored by theoreticians of her day. Speaking of her contemporaries, women who came of age in the 1950s, she found that they excelled in communicative interactions. She herself acquired her fundamental notions of what constituted women's work as a wife and secretary, but instead of rejecting these premises out of hand, she recognized their value in social reproduction. In the social sciences, women's culturally constituted perspectives direct our attention to an embodied subject located in a particular historical setting (1987, 110). Smith says of the feminist methodology she was forging with other women in the 1980s: "Instead of constructing theories that will explain, I am concerned in how to contextualize or how to constitute the textuality of social phenomena where conceptual practices remain salient . . . preserving the presence of subjects in our accounts" (1987, 106).

This brief digression into feminist ways of knowing serves as a bridge to address what has become visible in the ethnological field as women become both the chroniclers and subjects of social science discourse. This new enlightenment rivals that which occurred in the seventeenth century when Descartes and his colleagues exercised their prerogatives as transcendent males to consign peoples of the world to appropriate places in a hierarchical order of men over women, managers of labor over workers, and the civilized (presumably European) nations over the primitive and/or feudal orders. The seventeenth-century Enlightenment opened up universal visions of liberation, but these could be realized only by elite males. The rest could aspire to join the enlightened only by rejecting their incarnation as women or as primitive others. In mid-twentieth-century Europe, Beauvoir criticized the intellectual elites of a rational Enlightenment but could not accept an alternate life. Smith also engaged the intellectual life but embraced the embodiment of knowledge.

The new enlightenment promoted by the opening up of civil society to women, indigenous groups, and others excluded from the chambers of the elect was not immediately realized. The distance between third-world feminists and those who were socialized in the first world grew from distinct premises that were fomenting in the mid-twentieth century. I became aware of this when Helen Safa and I co-organized the first conference on feminine perspectives for the Social Science Research Coun-

cil in 1974. After traveling for a month throughout Latin America, visiting universities and research centers to find people doing research on gender, we felt we had succeeded in getting a representative group. But when we arrived at the conference site in Buenos Aires, we found ourselves confronted with a picket line of women charging us with yet another imperialist takeover, this time by U.S. feminists. When we were able to enter into a dialogue with the picketers, all of whom were dedicated activist researchers, we recognized the basis for the difference: whereas we had been challenging the gated entrance to academia and the limited vision this portends, these women were fighting for control over reproductive practices, for family welfare issues at the grass roots, and against the militarization of society. Former Argentinean president Juan Perón had just returned from exile in Spain with his new consort, Isabella, and the contest for power in the nation exacerbated the tensions that Argentinean women were challenging us to address. We invited the picketers to participate in our sessions and to raise these issues in the plenary meetings.

Although I was personally transformed by the experience, the tension between theoretical and activist social science remains, and the distinct commitments of first- and third-world feminisms persist. The feminist movement has given prominence to women and to those who share their concerns as mediators between theoretical concerns and activist applications in their nongovernmental organizations (NGOs) and grassroots organizations. In a global society where the threat of nuclear warfare looms closer than ever since the end of the cold war, it is important to assess how specific commitments to living in the world that are characteristic of women, and particularly third-world women, can mediate ideological differences.

The new era of enlightenment is a product of social movements calling for greater participation by those who were marginalized from the civil society constituted by elites of the earlier Enlightenment. The feminist and civil rights movements cultivated the cultural diversity that was suppressed in nations constructed on the model of eighteenth-century Jeffersonian or French revolutions.<sup>3</sup> Feminists who inspire or join such movements are saying that they were never a part of the empires or democracies that were constructed in the five hundred years of conquest and empire building. They point out that the revolutions inspired by the earlier Enlightenment were fought in the name of liberty, equality, and justice for all men and that women (like slaves) were not included.

<sup>3</sup> Ponna Wignaraja spells out the vision of a democratic polity in the introduction to her anthology, *New Social Movements in the South* (1993, 7–8).

Yet women's complicity as reproducers of life—socially as well as biologically—often meant a commitment to the status quo in which they were subordinated. The distinctive knowledge gained by balancing these commitments to life with commitments to progress and advancement in the world is what gives focus to the new enlightenment that I propose to identify and to nurture.

What changes are wrought in the new enlightenment? The division of labor that sustained the Kantian dichotomy between the immanent world of nonreflective subjectivities and the transcendent world of thinking and postulating actors is breaking down. Sharing in what had been roles strictly limited by gender and ethnicity such as child care and housework tends to undermine some of the hierarchical structures based on the separation of such roles. More important, women and other subordinated people are beginning to redefine the division of labor and how that should change. At the same time, women in working families are losing the security of stable households and the income of a male provider along with the dependency that entailed. The imposition of flexible regimes of accumulation translates into job instability as production is shifted to overseas sites and as technological innovation makes people obsolete along with the machines they serve.<sup>4</sup> Gender antagonism develops and explodes in these settings, as I shall describe below. Yet at the same time alternatives to role dichotomy are opening the possibility of a mutual engagement in the project of living. The awakening of consciousness among indigenous women in the third world expands the horizons of feminist and humanistic thought regarding the potential of humankind.

I shall discuss three instances of rapidly changing gender roles in globalization and how feminist activist researchers perceived and analyzed them. The first is in Nicaragua, where women were part of the armed rebellion of the Sandinistas; the second is at the U.S.-Mexican border, where export-oriented assembly plants, or maquiladoras, introduced the neoliberal regime of flexible production; and the third is on Mexico's southern border, where Zapatistas and their supporters are confronting the neoliberal Plan Puebla Panamá proposed by Mexico's president Vicente Fox. By juxtaposing issues raised by feminists with issues affecting both ethnic groups mobilizing for

<sup>4</sup> "Flexible" production regimes followed the demise of Fordist production regimes, which were predicated on a stable workforce and protected by government regulations and union contracts. In global markets the emphasis on swift responses to consumer demands requires that firms respond quickly in order to maintain their competitive edge. This requires flexibility in production schedules, which ultimately means that workers must bear the social cost of movement in and out of the workforce and that they have little control over their jobs.

their rights and workers who are losing their rights of citizenship in global enterprises, we can assess the advances in theory and practice developing among populations who were not part of the social discourse in the early age of Enlightenment. I shall argue that the contribution of these groups is the key to the new enlightenment addressing changes in global society.

### **Nicaraguan feminists and indigenous rights**

Feminist and indigenous rights movements are central to what are called new social movements based on issues of identity. Theorists are correct in recognizing these alternative sites of social activism (Alvarez 1998), but in their analyses two qualifying conditions must be kept in mind. First, multiple social positions complicate social interpretations, as Ernesto Laclau and Chantal Mouffe (1985) maintain: a woman is not only a woman but may also be an underpaid maquiladora worker and/or an Indian. Second, in the multiple social positions that they occupy, people are also responding to historical changes in the conditions that affect their lives, as Alain Touraine (1988) argues.

With these qualifications in mind, I shall try to show how structurally based inequalities motivated movements identified as feminist and indigenous in Nicaragua during the Sandinista and neoliberal periods of the 1980s and 1990s. But because both feminists and indigenes shared an identity as poor people and as citizens in the Sandinista revolutionary government, they were also responding to exogenous changes that affected the country in ways that did not correspond to exclusively feminist or indigenous interests. Nicaraguan women who had been engaged in the neighborhood committees to care for victims of the 1972 earthquake and who were angered by the misappropriation of relief funds began to participate in the armed struggle against Anastasio Somoza (Molyneux 1985, 228). This “combative motherhood” role promoted by Sandinistas began to wane as casualties rose in the U.S.-backed action that engaged the country in a fratricidal war. Maxine Molyneux recognizes the government’s success in promoting social welfare throughout 1982 and much of 1983 but shows that, as the war made demands on the impoverished nation, the emancipation of women was sidelined (1985). For women, who constitute 60 percent of the poorest Nicaraguans, state welfare assistance could not replace the social insurance provided by husbands or sons who might be killed in the war. Diane Molinari (1988), who carried out fieldwork in Nicaragua during the early years of the Sandinista victory and returned when the Contra rebellion was well underway, noted that, just as the women of Managua’s poor barrios had mobilized against So-

moza in 1979, so did they turn against the Sandinistas by voting for Violeta Chamorro in 1990. Molinari contends that in both instances the women's inability to fulfill their domestic roles defined their political commitment.

I witnessed some of the contradictions based on conflicting identities of gender, class, and ethnicity when I joined a group of academics organized by the Committee in Solidarity with the Peoples of El Salvador (CISPES) to investigate the Contra war in Nicaragua in 1982. While we were in Nicaragua, educated women of the middle class were engaged in their attempts to write a new constitution that would include the rights of women. The women's organization, the Nicaraguan Women's Association, or *Asociación de Mujeres Nicaraguenses Luisa Amanda Espinosa*, was calling for greater control over their lives and their bodies, the right to divorce, to have the number of children they wanted, and to manage their own wealth, whether inherited or earned.<sup>5</sup> Women of the barrios, in contrast, shared a growing apprehension about the deaths of their husbands and sons in the war against the Contras, an apprehension that made some question their loyalty to the revolution.

The degree to which the Sandinistas forged the construction of women as nonpolitical subjects—ceremoniously making them official members of the nonactivist group *Mothers of Heroes and Martyrs*—perpetuated the dependency of women's groups on the Sandinista party. But after the Sandinista defeat in 1990 the state could no longer contain a radicalized feminist movement that resisted the neoliberal changes ushered in by Chamorro in 1990 (Babb 2002, 206). The Nicaraguan women who became an essential part of the government's maquila industrial program as cheap, expendable labor sustained one of the longest strikes since the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA) went into effect in 1994. In this struggle they defied state authority, the apathy of trade unions representing the male workforce, and the threats of foreign-based firms as they asserted the rights of workers to organize. This new independence in the gender struggle must be theorized along with women's rejection of the demagoguery that confined the parameters of their struggle to a single facet of maternity.

At the same time that feminist issues were beginning to surface in the early 1980s, the Sandinistas had just begun to relocate indigenous Misquito communities inland from their coastal habitat, where they had developed a semisubsistence economy based on fishing and commercial exchanges. This had allowed them to be independent of the central Nicaraguan government from the colonial period through independence. The Sandinistas

<sup>5</sup> Luisa Amanda Espinosa was the first woman killed in the Sandinista rebellion.

justified the relocation on the basis of “security reasons,” since some of these communities had joined the rebel forces or assisted the counterinsurgency effort. With the mediation of a research institute established by Charles Hale, an anthropologist working in the southeastern Nicaraguan region of Bluefields, the Sandinista government was able to reestablish contacts with Misquito of Sandy Bay. The resulting dialogue between the Contra and Sandinista positions allowed both sides to come to a resolution recognizing autonomy and allocating a territorial reserve in 1984. As Hale points out in his book, *Resistance and Contradiction* (1994, 13–15), this compromise was achieved when Sandinistas rejected the economism—or class reductionism—endemic to Marxism, on the one hand, while the Misquito opened their ranks to more radical trends, on the other.

Comparing these two dissimilar but parallel instances of actors responding to identity interests—women threatened with the loss of their sons and husbands, and natives threatened with the loss of their subsistence base and way of life—we can perceive the importance of identity politics but also its inadequacy as a holistic explanation. Cartesian dichotomies are not predictive of beliefs and behavior. Larger structural issues are at stake than those made explicit in the discourse about the demands of women or of indigenes as actors in defense of their identity. Women, especially those in the barrios who were asked to sacrifice their men and children to the revolution, were questioning the course of militarism and what some considered to be an intransigent position in Nicaraguan relations with the United States. If gender interests are to be realized within the larger context, as Molyneux (1985, 251) hypothesizes, then the political institutions charged with them must eventually respond to the women’s specific interests as well as to class demands.<sup>6</sup> In the case of the ethnic revolt, strategic intervention and the cultivation of a dialogue that resulted in autonomy legislation resolved the larger issue that had threatened the allegiance of the Misquito. Responses to these specific demands of women and of indigenes prove to be transformative for society as a whole.

<sup>6</sup> Activist groups in the United States, including CISPES, were trying to get the U.S. Congress to stop appropriations for the Contra war. Yet on the eve of the vote Sandinista leader Daniel Ortega made an inadvisable trip to Russia, where he was photographed in a meeting with Soviet leaders. When this photograph appeared on the front pages of newspapers throughout the United States, it diminished the hopes of activists who were trying to get Congress to stop the funding for the war against Nicaragua.



### **Flexible production and the maquiladoras**

Turning to another site of global capital advance, this one on the northern border of Mexico, Patricia Fernández-Kelly's (1983) study provided a landmark case of the expansion of export-oriented production in Mexico as foreign direct investments increased exponentially in low-wage areas in the Americas. With unusual clarity and foresight Fernández-Kelly shows how foreign capitalists were able to gain entry into the low-wage Mexican labor markets at a time when restrictions on Mexican migration to the United States were imposed. Because of the desperate economic situation, investors were able to gain tax-free production sites with few environmental restrictions, where they could avoid costs related to social reproduction. They also gained assurances from the Mexican government that labor unions would not be permitted. At the same time the owners of the maquilas gained access to the huge U.S. market with a U.S. congressional act allowing for tariffs to be calculated on the basis of value added (i.e., the low wages of the women themselves) rather than the total value of the product.

Women were drawn to the border by illusory promises of secure jobs and access to consumer goods beyond their dreams. Fernández-Kelly shows the growing contradictions in a distorted labor market where women, as the major wage earners, challenged the culturally constructed image of men as breadwinners.<sup>7</sup> The promises were illusory since the women were subjected to uncertainty because of high turnover and the lack of benefits that could provide security to them or their families. Gender antagonism was present from the early years. Men who were turned back in their attempt to cross the border into the United States still had better access to organized labor unions, and they, along with state and national politicians, pressured the maquilas to open some positions to male workers. Since it was assumed that the men would be "permanent" workers, in contrast to the necessarily "temporary" female workers, they were able to enter training programs for the few supervisory and managerial positions available in the maquilas. In these positions they could impose control over the sexuality as well as the work performance of the workers. Fernández-Kelly reported the required use of birth control pills and the firing of women who got pregnant. Gender antagonism

<sup>7</sup> Comparative studies of export-processing labor carried out two decades ago can be found in Nash and Fernández-Kelly 1983. Safa's recent (1996) study shows how the preferential hiring of women and the loss of the male breadwinner role affect gender roles in Caribbean society.

combined with class antagonism flourished in a sexist and racist environment that cultivated misogyny (Fernández-Kelly 1983).

If we fast-forward to the late 1990s, we gain another perspective on the tangled story of women on the northern frontier. As of this writing more than 4,476 women and girls have disappeared since 1993, and 303 were murdered in the vicinity of Ciudad Juárez, Chihuahua. They had in common the characteristics of being poor, young—between teenage and thirty years of age—and dark-skinned, and many were workers in the maquilas. The owners of the maquilas refused to take even the minimum precautions advocated by women's rights groups during the decade of phenomenal growth in maquilas. The cases, which were ignored or treated in a desultory fashion by Mexican border police, attracted the attention of the Interamerican Commission on Human Rights and women's groups. These groups put pressure on the police, especially at the time around International Women's Day, to carry out more extensive investigations (Villamil 2003).<sup>8</sup>

The maquilas are a classic example of an institution structured on Cartesian principles of gender. First, there is consistent pressure from the start against political organization of and by female workers in the maquilas. Second, the conjunction of male-dominated trade unions with male-dominated government agencies, which provide the institutional basis for the hiring and training procedures of maquilas, ensured male prerogatives in the Mexican borderlands. Trade unions on both sides of the Mexican-U.S. border have historically neglected women workers because they have been considered temporary or, even worse, competitively destructive of the higher wages men could command. Lacking the support of government representatives who might respond to the trade unions, women are further cut off from wage-earning opportunities. Until recently the women's only alternative was to turn to human rights commissions in international courts less responsive to the patriarchal system that operates in the local settings.

The other key to women's vulnerability in the rapidly expanding industrialization of the border area is the fragmentation of society and the precarious household economy. Here we can learn more from activists

<sup>8</sup> Melissa Wright (2001) uses an extended metaphor of women's precarious employment to connect women's stilled lives to the reproduction of value in maquilas. However, she fails to come to grips either with the power issues that promote the managers' negligence in introducing security precautions or their lack of commitment to pursuing justice when violations occur. These wider conditions reinforce the lack of job security and the lack of mobility that women experience in flexible production regimes.

than from a postmodernist deconstruction of discourses. Esther Chávez Cano, founder of the Casa Amiga (House of a Friend), a group whose members are mothers of disappeared or murdered daughters, points to the fragmentation of society that erupts into mass psychosis. The sexist tradition allows misogynist practices such as violence against women in the home to be carried out with impunity. Records of interventions made by Casa Amiga in 2002 indicate a rising incidence of such violence in Ciudad Juarez, with 973 cases of domestic abuse, fifty-five of incest, and forty-nine of rape of adult women. In 85 percent of these cases women relate a family history of incest. Chávez Cano indicates that “here the social fabric is so damaged that the danger is as great *inside* the house as outside” (Villamil 2003).

The women who are found murdered share not only the fact that they are young, that they work principally in the maquilas, that they are dark-skinned, and that they are of poor, working families but also the fact that they were systematically raped before their death by strangulation. Forensic examination shows clear signs of torture, cigarette burns to their bodies and genitals, the twin-pointed injuries made by electrodes used by police, and in one case, wrist injuries suggesting that the victim was handcuffed and forced into submission. Police called this case a “crime of passion” and attributed other cases to drug overdose. Although there is no specific link between the maquilas and the murders, the practices of the managers—their delay in introducing safety measures and their prerogatives in disciplining workers—add to the vulnerability of the women. For example, some managers reserve the right to lock out any worker who is late in reporting to work. One seventeen-year-old who was later abducted, tortured, and murdered was not admitted to work because she was three minutes late.

Law enforcement authorities blame members of bands calling themselves *los Rebeldes* (the Rebels), *los Choferes* (the Drivers), *la Foca* (the Seal), and *el Cerrillo* (the Untamed) or suggest that a serial murderer committed the killings. Activist groups such as Casa Amiga and Nuestras Hijas de Regreso a Casa (Our Daughters Must Return Home) charge authorities in the investigation with negligence and false arrests. They also charge the authorities with aggravated assault against lawyers defending those falsely accused and on forensic detectives who undermine the cases police construct to protect those in powerful positions.<sup>9</sup>

<sup>9</sup> The data on cases of murder and abuse are provided by Chávez Cano in an interview published by *La Jornada* (Villamil 2003). I am indebted to Sarah Hill for Ed Vulliamy’s article, “Murder in Mexico” (2003).

Can we develop a new enlightenment theory linking local misogyny to the disintegration of social structures, a theory that will contribute insights to liberation struggles of peoples in a globalizing world? We can start with the insights of those striving to overcome the disadvantages of working women. Rosario Acosta, director of *Nuestras Hijas de Regreso a Casa*, states: “The maquiladoras are a big part of the problem. Here the transnational corporations have all the rights and no obligations. Up to now they do not ensure the safe return of their employees to their homes. Local companies are also responsible; they are the first to experience the crisis like a boomerang” (Villamil 2003). The systematic lack of responsibility on the part of the maquila managers and the instability forced on the workers account for a great deal of the fragmentation of society. Women’s labor is the principal component of the new “flexible” regime of capital. These workers’ very vulnerability as women alienated from patriarchal homes and as workers with scant government regulation or union representation makes them especially desired in the flexible organization of production. The general invisibility of women’s work in the domestic sphere is perpetuated even as these women became wage workers, further distancing them from benefits that male workers can win. This is due in part to their government’s concessions to the investors in the maquilas that did not allow any access to trade union organizations. It is also due to the shame associated with married women who work. Since these women lack institutional and emotional support for their position in the workforce, the owners of the maquiladoras can operate with impunity in laying them off peremptorily, thus destabilizing the household schedules of thousands of women who support families in the frontier zone.

The instability inherent in the export-led development programs is not coincidental; it is a programmed part of flexible production introduced in the 1970s and modified in the 1980s.<sup>10</sup> At the height of the debt crisis from 1983 to 1986, when Mexico was forced to devalue its currency, managers perfected the system of flexible labor employment that responded to changes in production schedules and increasingly gave priority

<sup>10</sup> Orlandina de Olivera (1987) assesses the cycles of expansion and recession attendant on the employment of women in twelve areas of Mexico, showing that the stable growth that began in the 1970s decreased in the 1980s and was followed by a crisis of unemployment for male wage earners with increased employment of women in services and commerce as well as self-employment. In the nineteenth century, Charles Babbage elaborated the principle named after him, which called for the segregation of lower-paid, “unskilled” labor in categories that were often socially discriminated against because of the workers’ gender or status as recent immigrants (Nash 1989).

in hiring to women in lower-level jobs. Since the women lacked both trade unions and government regulations, they were forced to accept home assembly work at lower rates when there was a downswing in production. This subcontracting furthered their invisibility and exclusion from trade unions and public agencies. The so-called flexible regime of production characteristic of neoliberal development is based on the forced acceptance of uncertainty by women in increasingly precarious household situations.

The context in which this situation develops lethal consequences is one in which men and women are held at the border subject to the whims of U.S. immigration officials. Some accept work for the drug trade operations, and others, particularly women, are forced into prostitution. These illegal operations are also tied into big business interests. In Ciudad Juarez this means maquila operations, landowners, construction barons, and energy suppliers—all of which are connected within a group of families (Vulliamy 2003). It is suspected that the investigation teams subvert the investigations, possibly with instructions from above.

The very processes that promote globalization also give hope for a resolution of the discrimination women face in border communities. Human rights organizations working with grassroots coalitions are promoting transnational cooperation between police and courts in addressing the deaths and disappearances. The 1997 *Human Rights Watch World Report* included a report of the Women's Rights Project on sex discrimination against female workers in the free trade zone of northern Mexico indicating that some maquilas fired pregnant workers. This resulted in charges against North American maquilas, charges that can now be directed to the National Administrative Office of the United States, which oversees regulations in the North American Agreement on Labor Cooperation. However, the practice of firing pregnant workers continued among Mexican maquilas, resulting in a charge by the National Administrative Office of the United States in 1998 that doing so constituted an extensive violation of human rights (Nathan 2003, 5). Other charges of violating workers' freedom of association are being adjudicated at a multinational-owned auto parts plant in Ciudad de los Reyes (Stevenson 2003). These networks now operating among the three countries involved in NAFTA promise to give women a greater voice in their workplace and community.

As Saskia Sassen (2003, 260) reminds us, there are two distinct dynamics emerging in the lives of migrant women workers. Though their invisibility and disempowerment as a class of workers remains, they still have access to wages and salaries, however low. Even more important, the growing outcry against the crimes has resulted in a proliferation of human

rights groups that are putting in place the institutional networks to address these problems. They too are a product of globalization processes and cannot be forgotten in assessing changes.

**Plan Puebla Panamá: Indigenous resistance and feminist voices**

My final case is drawn from indigenous people of Chiapas, where many pueblos support the Zapatista movement. For semisubsistence farmers and housewives who are forced to compete with subsidized agricultural products in the world market, the future is clear. Without protection from foreign exports, they must expect ever-diminishing returns for their subsistence crops or join the streams of migration to urban centers in Mexico or the United States. On January 1, 1994, when NAFTA was to go in to effect, the Zapatista National Liberation Army said *¡basta!* (enough) to neoliberal development and took up arms against a government that had ignored its members' claims to land titles in the colonized area of the Lacandón rain forest and their need for protection against the dumping of subsidized U.S. crops.

The alternatives offered by the neoliberal regimes of Mexico and Central America stress exogenous development of export-oriented production. In 2001, during his first year in office, Fox's administration launched a major hemispheric development scheme, Plan Puebla Panamá, designed to promote modernity in the southern sector of Mexico. It projects a new vision of Mexico's place in the hemisphere by directing attention to the southern border with its Central American neighbors and away from the northern border where maquilas abound (Fazio 2001, 3). The scheme promises the integration of sectors in the basic infrastructure of the state through education, the growth of productive enterprises, and protection of the environment. Promoters claim assets that include the abundant labor supply available at competitive costs at the global level (i.e., below most wages in the world labor market), a privileged geographic position, political democracy, and commercial agreements already in place.

The plan, which is now being discussed in Zapatista circles, denies the central concerns of this new revolutionary movement. Zapatistas have called for endogenous development for the advance of human subjects who are agents of their own enterprises. They seek expansion of traditional industries such as organic foods, including coffee and honey (already being marketed by indigenous cooperatives). In order to accomplish this, they need credit and access to domestic and foreign markets.

In contrast, the plan promotes direct foreign investment in enterprises exploiting the rich resources of the region, including oil, hydroelectric

power, the biodiversity of fauna and flora, and the tourist attractions provided by the indigenous populations. In their statement (Presidential Office 2001), the government planners devote pages to the improvement of roads, communication, and port facilities and to the further development of highway, rail, and canal facilities that will parallel the Panama Canal through the Isthmus of Tehuantepec. Yet nothing is said of the institutional means to draw indigenous people into the planning process. Even more ominous for small-plot cultivators who seek sustainable development (Fazio 2001) is the fact that there will be no restriction on remissions of profits to foreign capital. Based on the history of foreign capital investments on the northern border, we can expect that similar commitments will extend to labor practices, fiscal regulations, and environmental considerations in Chiapas.

Women are suspicious of a plan that talks about invigorating the local economy but intends to send the men to distant areas where they work on constructing the infrastructure for bigger and more costly enterprises. They have heard bulletins about the existing maquilas in Central America and are not enthusiastic about having their own “underutilized labor” allocated to working ten to twelve hours a day with no time left to tend their families (Earle and Simonelli 2005). Faced with similar projects in Oaxaca, campesinos are concerned that their lands will be seized by eminent domain and that the region’s archeological zone will be affected. The highway between Mitla and Oaxaca runs through the sacred Zapotec valley that may have generated the religious discourse that was the founding nucleus of Mesoamerican civilization. As one spokesperson saw it, these new enterprises threaten the fabric of society: “We want to continue being administrators of our resources, we want a social corridor that supports our pueblos, we do not want projects that make our culture yield, we want to be actors in and not spectators of the CBM [*Corredor Biológico Mesoamericano*, or Mesoamerican Biological Corridor], we want a corridor of campesina enterprises, not a maquila corridor” (Gomez Mena 2003).<sup>11</sup>

In the colonized areas of the Lacandón rain forest and in the Christian Base Communities of the highlands of Chiapas, women in the Zapatista movement are seeking a new way of relating to their families and communities. In their cooperatives and collective work groups they try to promote egalitarian relations that deny the hierarchical orders based on

<sup>11</sup> “Queremos seguir siendo administradores de nuestros recursos, queremos un corredor social que apoye a nuestros pueblos, no queremos una suma de proyectos que hagan sucumbir nuestra cultura, queremos ser actores y no espectadores del CBM, queremos un corredor de empresas campesinas, no un corredor de maquiladoras.”

gender and wealth that were their destiny in the plantations or highland pueblos from which they come. In my limited stays in the rain forest I could sense remarkable transformations in gender relations, as Duncan Earle and Jeanne Simonelli (2005) discuss. Men often engage in child care and cooking, just as women participate in public arenas. These are the conditions that both men and women want to replicate in any development enterprises, just as they are putting them into practice in their daily lives.

The growing uncertainty in a changing world shows a gender and class bias. Men find themselves displaced in the wider society by other competing workers and even by technological innovations more than do women. This is due to the nature of the work in which they are customarily engaged as well as to the place in which it is carried out. When women's work in the home becomes commoditized, their service jobs play on skills that are part of deeply ingrained socialization. They cannot easily be replaced by machines in the fields of building interpersonal communication networks, nursing, child care, education, and other gendered activities. The innovative work of rural women migrants in creating income-generating jobs processing and selling food in the markets and streets of Latin American cities ensured the survival of their families throughout the political and economic crisis of the 1980s.<sup>12</sup> Women's acceptance of these necessary adjustments is, I would strongly emphasize, a correlate of their living in the world.

In contrast, men's vulnerability in economic crises stems from the very transcendence of their roles in normal periods. By training and acculturation, men are not expected to respond to daily needs; rather, they expect to be waited on by family members or servants. Young men are finding it increasingly difficult to find and hold a wife. When they lose the services of wives and daughters, they lose a sense of themselves in the world, and when they abandon their families, they rarely send remittances to support their children (Ehrenreich and Hochschild 2003).

This vulnerability is also characteristic of indigenous male campesinos insofar as they have capitulated to the dominant patriarchal models of the household. Jacinto Arias Pérez, a Tzotzil-speaking scholar who has a master's degree from Princeton in anthropology, gives us an insider's view of the disorientation he and other Indians experience when confronted with many alternative choices in life. He writes: "We have doubts about how

<sup>12</sup> Florence Babb (1989) describes the ingenuity with which Peruvian women managed complex processing and selling operations in the sale of food items, maintaining low costs and carrying out child-care operations that ensured the survival of low-income families during the 1980s.



to live. . . . In the early part of the twentieth century, the objectives were clear. This may be my limited vision, from experiences in my life. What Indians considered to be domination by ladinos was outside of their world but now it is within their world. The boundaries of Indian-ness have widened and are less definable in themselves now that many of those who were considered Indian have much of the same outlook as the conquerors or invaders" (1994, 379).

The conflicts that once separated Indians from ladinos now operate within indigenous communities. "Traditionalists" (made up of the *caciques*, or native leaders who were co-opted in seventy-one years of Institutional Revolutionary Party [Partido Revolucionario Institucional] hegemony) oppose those who introduce change through religious conversion and political party competition.

Gender hostility, cultivated in a setting where young men with little chance to gain land and without wage-earning opportunities are unable to find a wife or keep her, aggravates the usual competitive hostilities faced by people in a situation of limited opportunities (Aubry and Inda 1998; Garza Caligaris and Hernández Castillo 1998). Gender hostility is rising as well because women no longer accept as natural their subordination, abuse, and confinement in the home. Women are marrying later, and some choose not to get married when they have alternative economic opportunities (Collier 1990; Nash 1993). When women of indigenous communities in the Lacandón rain forest and highlands of Chiapas break their isolation in the domestic unit and demand a voice in change, they emphasize their roles in the transformations they can make in their lives and in their society. They have one strong factor in their favor: they are not as implicated in the co-optive strategies of the state and political organizations as are men because fewer women have voted or entered public office.

Women who were engaged with men in the armed takeover of four cities, the military barracks, and the state prison on January 1, 1993, voiced their demands from the first week of the rebellion. Their attempt to change the subordination of women in the home as well as that of indigenous people in the nation highlights the broadening of social movements with the participation of what were subaltern voices. The statement of purpose drafted at the First Chiapas State Convention of Indigenous Women reveals the strength of their conviction about women's participation in changing the world:

Take up the word of women, what we have been saying, demanding, reclaiming in our communities, *ejidos* [lands held communally by

indigenous townships], assemblies, and houses to our husbands, brothers, fathers, authorities and to the government that does not listen to our voices, so that the words do not remain within the four walls of our houses. They speak not only of their oppression and discrimination but of the participation of rural women in the seizing of land and the struggles of the Zapatistas that give an example of struggle and rebellion. The voices include the women of civil society, the NGOs, the teachers, the students involved in this process of search for utopias toward a more just and equal society.<sup>13</sup>

Indigenous women and men in the autonomous communities of Chiapas are joining together with mestizos and transnational NGOs to help bring about the changes needed for a democratic society. Women are now calling on men to shoulder some of the child rearing and other domestic responsibilities in the autonomous communities. In turn, women seek greater public participation in the decisions that affect their lives. By sharing these everyday tasks, they may promote a consciousness that gives priority to life. If this consciousness were to prevail in national and global centers of power, we might hope for peaceful resolutions of internecine and international hostilities.

The Zapatistas' attempt to gain a multilateral engagement of all members of the society on many fronts exemplifies the resilient approach to social change. The concept of resiliency is taken from environmentalists who demonstrate the survival value of nonlinear dynamics by which ecosystems maintain themselves in the face of changed circumstances. Susan Walsh demonstrates the effectiveness of such policies in her study showing the success of multilateral coordination among subsistence-based communities in the Bolivian highlands (2003, 49). Their self-sustained economy based on the genetic diversity of their potato crops and on reciprocal exchanges reinforced by ritual and kinship ties contrasts with the unilineal, hierarchical control advocated by modernization theory, which has dominated development circles for the past half century.

### **Conclusion**

In the beginning of the third millennium we find ourselves in the midst of a new enlightenment yet still trapped in the limitations of outmoded structures of intellectual and social life. Women in the social movements that

<sup>13</sup> Flier distributed at the meeting of the First Chiapas State Convention of Indigenous Women, March 1995; my translation.

have expanded their horizons through the inclusion of feminist, civil rights, and indigenous goals emphasize that they do not seek power but rather a free space where a democratic society can emerge. The emerging paradigm that Ponna Wignaraja (1993), editor of *New Social Movements in the South*, highlights is that of a positive synthesis of ideas and sentiments with social praxes, promoting sustainable development that embraces all life.

These goals and the approach to realizing them are emblematic of the new enlightenment, emphasizing an all-inclusive civil society that embraces the social welfare of all humans. The goals seem elusive in a world where an emerging empire threatens nascent democracies and where those who claim ownership of the technological progress created in the age of enlightenment use it for destructive ends. In the neoliberal world in which the precarious existence of more than one-third of the people hangs in the balance, bodies, as Florence Babb states, “function as a battleground in discussions that center on how quickly adjustment measures may be introduced and how much the population can withstand before irreversible damage is done—or before political protest grows stronger” (2002, 197). Nicaragua, the maquila zone, and Chiapas serve as testing grounds as these propositions are hotly contested by women working in maquilas and as indigenous peoples pose alternative development programs in their autonomous territory.

The global assembly plants have increased the intensity of labor exploitation using predominantly female labor. While indigenous people at Mexico’s southern frontier are seeking a cultural renaissance and liberation from the racist subordination to which they were subjugated, what some have called a hybrid society at the northern border is enmeshed in a nightmare of neoliberal development. Women trying to maintain their families with low-paid jobs in a flexible labor force are subject to the violence brought by narcotic and sex traffickers at the same time that men are held back from labor streams to the north by U.S. immigration policies. The development program known as Plan Puebla Panamá for the southern border threatens to introduce the combination of flexible production for low-wage women workers with men forced to migrate, join the military, or engage in narcotic trafficking that is found at the northern border of Mexico and in Nicaragua. Indigenous people and the NGOs that support their claims for sustainable development offer an alternative that springs from immanent sources against the destructive path of universalizing free-market initiatives.

Despite the dismal prospects faced by workers in global assembly plants, women are joining in union organizations, as Jane Collins (2003) documents in her study of garment workers in the United States and Mexico.

The efforts of workers organizing unions to counter world trends toward low-wage labor are paralleled by the efforts of indigenous people striving for a sustainable autonomous development that includes all people. As they gain a sense of their right to exist in the world, indigenous and poor working women and men, joined by middle-class professionals, religious activists, and other grassroots activists, are changing the way that revolutions are mobilized and the ends for which they struggle. Just as they have done during crisis periods throughout history, women are bringing the knowledge and skills they have acquired in building mutual assistance networks into a political arena. There they call for dignity and increasingly for peace as entrenched interests turn to war in a last-ditch effort to ensure their dominant positions. Working collectively with men, they might overcome the gender and class hostility that shred the fabric of society.

The conjunction of class, gender, and ethnicity in today's social movements can be analyzed only in holistic terms. Whereas Cartesian oppositions classify social actors in unique categories, only some of which are expected to exercise power, the dynamics of global processes must take the multiple visions of all social actors into account in order to analyze and propose changes that embrace all social sectors. Thanks to our developing feminist heritage, we can now envision that goal with clarity and pursue it with enthusiasm.

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