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The Rhetoric of Globalization:

Can the Maquiladora Worker Speak?

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The Rhetoric of Globalization: Can the Maquiladora Worker Speak?

by

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Dedication

Dedicated to my students in the Red Hook, Brooklyn,
Adult Education Class—all of them—and particularly
Diane Gregg, Earline Wooten, Ana Avila, Erminda Rodriquez,
Deborah Latham and Delores who changed her name.
No, I didn't forget you, or what you taught me.

Acknowledgements

Because I like to read and write, I have been in school for a long time, but I have learned most deeply outside my role as student—as a teacher, for example. That's why I dedicated this to my adult education students in Brooklyn and why I must acknowledge now the workers of the Comité Fronterizo de Obreras/os I have met at the border. They showed me, in their off-hand way how to see through bigotry, and, with their sense of irony, to read power. I thank all whom I have met, including in Piedras Negras: Norma, Marguerita, Julia, Amparo, Juany, Tere, Mathilda, Oscar, Rosi, Graciela, Ana, Velia, Leticia, Paty de L., and Paty L., and sisters Norma and Raquel; In Ciudad Acuña: Maria Elena, Juany C., Juan, Marselo, Fernando, Enares, Irma, Oswaldo Sr. and Jr., Liseth, Angela F. and M.; in Reynosa and Río Bravo: Maria Elena, Ania, Nora, Lupe, Nabor, Atanasio, and Doña Vicki; in Nuevo Laredo: Olga Alicia, Paula, Juan Pablo, Paola, Jorge.

On the other hand, getting this far in graduate school is both an excruciating and transformative process and I never would have had the wit and stamina for it if I had not met certain professional individuals. First there was Professor Rosemary Hennessey at the State University of New York at Albany, who saw in me the wherewithal to earn a PhD when I had no inkling. Then, at Austin, there was the intrepid Professor Linda Ferreira-Buckley who not only saw my passion for the border, but also had many ideas for how the resulting material could become a dissertation. Then there was the quixotic pedagogue Professor Patricia Roberts-Miller who, in the spring of 2003, "tricked me" into signing up to give my first conference paper. I thought May 2004 would never come. It did. Presenting to that particular group—the Rhetoric Society of America—proved to be the moment when my border activism began to make sense—to me—in an academic context. Then it really moved along. Throughout Professor Roberts-Miller has been able to see where I was blind—and I benefited. One more important bridge between the border and the academy was compañera graduate student Virginia Raymond. Our paths crossed when, during an advisement period, I was wandering the UT campus, lost.

I had finished course work, but not yet seen how to connect my interest in the border with an academic program. At coffee we brainstormed the first concept.

I acknowledge finally with gratitude the friendship and mentorship of compañera Josefina Castillo. Her knowledge of Mexican society, language and culture, her love of Mexico, and her furious will for a better world have guided and inspired me.

No one can survive the pressure of the doctoral program without some techniques for keeping body, mind, heart and soul together. Mine were Tai Chi (thank you Master Jingyu-Gu), the love and support of St. Hildegard's spiritual community, Chinese herbs to abate my spleen chi deficiency (thank you Master Janet Lee Cook), and the Dream Group. This last is a unique collection of people, skilled in dream interpretation, mostly from a Jungian perspective, who have met every Wednesday night for the last 7 years at a member's home—to look at see in the dark and accompany each other. Without out them I cannot imagine how I would have navigated the inner obstacles I had to completing the task I had chosen. Because of them, it has been an adventure rather than a nightmare.

Preface

Students of the sciences are familiar with competing methodologies for gaining knowledge about the world. Some are based on theory; others are supported by field research and tend to be more empirical. Sciences, indeed, define themselves by the way they combine a priori thinking and empirical data. The tension between the two approaches is fundamental, also, to the liberal arts and has concerned me since my first attempt to sort and understand arguments about truth, reality, and history. In a high school Ancient History class, the teacher identified Plato as an idealist and Aristotle as an empiricist. Thus, in what turned out to be an early stage in my education, the terms of the debate were set. This schema, which described the orientations of our Western founding fathers, suggested that the split—or difference—was endemic to all Western knowledge systems. Many years later, the fraught relationship between the theoretical and the empirical—and between theory and practice—continues to concern me, especially now. In our particular historic moment, I perceive hostility between, on the one hand, proponents of theory and ideologies generated at a distance—in the seclusion of one kind of ivory tower or another—and, on the other hand, researchers and observers "on the ground" looking in their disciplines and in their lives for experienced and experiential data.

I see this split acquiring urgency today and this is why. First, I would argue, "globalization," has become a language, or rhetoric, for representing the political and economic world and it dominates the present historical era. Second, the discourses that compose the political and economic domains of globalization are themselves dominated by a particular body of ideas—and an agenda—called "neo-liberalism." Myriad concepts, such as "free trade, "competitive advantage", "privatization," "fiscal austerity," "deregulation," and "market liberalization," constitute economic neo-liberalism (also called the "Washington consensus") and provide prescriptions for an orthodoxy of policies. Many governments, ours especially, and transnational institutions espouse these views and this agenda.

However—and this is the third and crucial point in my argument—all these concepts are theoretical formulations. They have circulated since the 18th century (Adam

Smith's *Wealth of Nations*, published in 1776, is considered the first comprehensive formulation); they were produced to guide the early years of the industrial revolution in a world dominated by Europe. How do they apply today? Where are the assessments for today? Where is the evidence that tests the theories and measures their impact and effectiveness? While we have the theory, abundantly, the supporting evidence is hard to find.

Economic liberalism prevailed in the United States until the early 20th century and the Great Depression of the 1930's when British economist John Maynard Keynes, focusing on the necessity of full employment in developed nations, theorized a role for governments and central banks to intervene and increase employment. Keynesian economics influenced President Roosevelt's New Deal and the prosperity that followed. However, the 1970s was a (re)turning point in economic policy, and in the perception of it, and the rhetoric about it. Keynesian precepts could not explain the "stagflation" of the 1970s—the combination of inflation and "stagnated (or non-existent) growth." Those were the euphemisms of public and official parlance. Meanwhile, critics of the government spoke of the "capitalist crisis," "shrinking profit rates," "saturated markets" and the urgent need to continuously generate new markets—"growth," the sine qua non, conceived abstractly—or macro-economically. These problems precipitated a shift, a return to the economic model of liberalism, hence "neo-liberalism" (Martinez).

The administration of President Ronald Reagan is associated with the implementation of neo-liberal policies and the "trickle down theory," a slogan referring to the unsubstantiated claim that if policies generate wealth for corporations and their owners, they will equally benefit employees—through the trickle down mechanism, wealth apparently being subject to gravity. Consequently, in a metaphoric variant, these policies will "float *every* boat." Evidence has not supported this theory, yet it is still widely in use. To the contrary, evidence shows that wealth has polarized extraordinarily in the United States since the 1980s. Many boats have sunk and are sinking; while others ride higher and higher. This claim is easy to document and is often called the "income gap," or just plain "disparity." Despite the absence of corroboration, proponents of neo-liberalism today have great authority. They assert their theories apodictically. They may

even be averse to data and willfully ignore or suppress non-supporting information. Writing in *Harper's*, William Finnegan notes that

> there is plenty of evidence that rich countries, starting with the United States, have no intention of playing by the trade rules and strictures they foist on poorer, weaker countries as a "single sustainable model." We practice free trade selectively, which is to say not at all, and, when it suites our commercial purposes, we actively prevent poor countries from exploiting their few advantages on the world market. (3)

Here we have an extreme departure between rhetoric and practice presented to the public as a split between theory and empirical evidence. Conditions are ripe for the promulgation of lies and ideal for complacent public acceptance of them.

A spate of writers in the 2000s, insiders who quit, is exposing the tendency toward groundlessness of the neo-liberal theorists and the institutions that make and execute neo-liberal policies. Joseph Stiglitz, a former chief economist at the World Bank, demonstrates the failure of International Monetary Fund (IMF) programs for developing countries, but also deplores the methodology by which the IMF arrived at its recommendations. In *Globalization and Its Discontents*, Stiglitz describes how the IMF prepared its conclusions before doing research:

> The standard IMF procedure before visiting a client country is to write a draft report first. The visit is only intended to fine-tune the report and its recommendations and to catch any glaring mistakes. In practice, the draft report is often what is known as boilerplate, with whole paragraphs being borrowed from the report of one country and inserted into another. Word processing makes this easier. (47)

Paul O'Neill, a devoted empiricist and Treasury Secretary in George W. Bush's second cabinet, left the administration early. Interviewed by Ron Suskind about his experiences, O'Neill complained that top administration officials, the President included, made policy at whim, in isolation from advice. The President in particular could not listen to associates that did not agree with him (Suskind, 40). John Perkins in *Confessions of an Economic Hit Man* detailed practices by which "corporatocracy" (corporations, banks and governments acting in concert "to advance global empire") deploy self-described Economic Hit Men (EHMs) around the world. This was Perkins' career, in the employ of a secretive international consulting firm, Charles T. Main, Inc.,

starting in 1971. He continued at his own firm, Independent Power Systems Inc., until his long-suffering conscience prompted him to quit the profession and look for more socially responsible work. He describes EHMs as an "elite group of men and women [who] utilize international financial organizations to foment conditions that make other nations subservient to the corporatocracy" (xx). They are well compensated but they also do their work out of belief in the ideology of empire building. "They encourage world leaders to become part of a vast network that promotes U.S. commercial interests" (xiv). EHMs are agents of an infiltration system that, through manipulation of aid and debt, persuades and forces Third World elites to discard national needs and fit national development into the neo-liberal model. The results for people in Third World nations can be disastrous. Before his apostasy in 1991, Perkins was active in Indonesia, Panama, Ecuador, Iran, and Colombia.

While Stiglitz, O'Neill, and Perkins eventually reevaluated their neo-liberal ideology, academic researcher Alejandro Canales and journalist Susan Ferris started out from less committed positions. They used empirical data and real-life anecdotes as they analyzed and documented the failures and "broken promises" of the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA), at its 10th anniversary (2004). Meanwhile, unfazed, the Bush administration launched a massive campaign for a second free trade agreement that would include all of Latin America. I will visit O'Neill again (Chapter 4) and Steiglitz and Canales and Ferris (Chapter 1), as well.

For now I am turning to my main project: to foreground and feature another voice, a counter argument or balance to the official theorizers of globalization. That voice belongs to the maquiladora workers. "Maquiladora" refers to factories erected in Mexico as early as the 1960s, but rapidly after 1994, by U.S. and other investors foreign to Mexico. Offered incentives such as tariff and tax waivers, the factories came to Mexico to employ Mexican labor to assemble products for export back to the United States and its lucrative markets. Maquiladoras were intended as the centerpiece of a mutually beneficial system for participating countries. They were successful in macroeconomic terms (they generated higher total Mexican revenues from manufacturing, for example), but, in coordination with other NAFTA programs, they impoverished Mexican communities. Absolutely, and in relation to living costs, salaries

have dramatically worsened in Mexico, particularly at the border, since NAFTA, and life has become desperate.

Taking advantage of my proximity to Mexico, I began, in 1999, a project of listening to the voice of the maquiladora worker. In the places that I listen, this is the voice of a woman who is coming to consciousness, beginning to hew and hone an analysis of her political and economic situation—often a predicament that life circumstances force upon her. She bases her analysis on the evidence of her daily life, which may include her inability to properly feed and clothe her children despite working a 60-hour week. It may also include her daily association with managers who execute personnel control policies that degrade human dignity and her witness of production systems that pollute and destroy the natural environment and her own health. She speaks from the gut, though often with wit and elegant understatement, and for me her words have purchase.

Already I have sketched a provocative split in kinds of knowledge about the globalized world and in sources of information. Globalization, in its neo-liberal version, is a theoretical argument that avoids reality checks and ignores its critics. It privileges and manipulates theory as it pursues a material agenda. Its proponents are powerful enough to exclude skeptical voices. This dissertation is my antidote—a bit of writerly activism, a written space that, through learning to listen, retrieves missing data from the field. My epistemology searches out the "grassroots" and the everyday to counter and contrast the "top down" theory. Incidentally, my politics mirrors my epistemology. I am looking for the knowledge and analysis of the grassroots on which to build an activist practice.

I have had access to some unusual and precious archives because of my relationship with the Comité Fronterizo de Obreras, a group of maquiladora workers of northern Mexico, centered in Piedras Negras, Coahuila. That relationship sensitized me to other sources of information, other voices, and led me to listen differently to friends and neighbors at home. So many voices may disconcert some readers. I have given equal value to bits of biography—of the maquiladora workers, of a restless, dissatisfied strata of the U.S. middle class—to academic theories of knowledge and language, to an archive of Mexican newspapers reports on labor, to historic documents like the Mexican

Constitution, and to researchers and commentators on the history of the Revolution and on Mexican labor. In addition I have sifted and included my eyewitness reports of the workers' speech and action, and relevant parts of my own autobiography. In the latter category, I reflect on my own experience as a worker, geographically and socially distant from the Mexicans' workplace, yet with some surprising correspondences. My bias is that lives and relationships constitute history. The degree of detail and diversity may strike you as cacophonous but each kind of information, and each source of evidence, persuaded me of its relevance to the project—or I would have excluded it.

While one aim is to make an opening for an alternative voice on the subject of globalization, another is to build a context for that voice. There is no question that the maquiladora worker can speak. The problem has been our listening. Even when her words are pithy, incisive, and refreshingly reasonable, our reception has failed. I have undertaken to build a context around the workers' spoken, written, and acted texts, so that readers who are culturally distant can appreciate them. In the process I am liable to the accusation that I am getting in the way. That was the criticism of Gayatri Spivak whose question, "Can the Subaltern Speak?" I am echoing. I offer two defenses. The first, already hinted, is that the knowledge structures and information distribution channels that separate us from the maquiladora worker are so clogged that intervention is warranted. The second is that my interference is exemplary, part of the story. I admit that I entered the world of the maquiladora worker with pre-conceptions; some reflected my sense of superiority, others stemmed from my desperation to ally myself with a movement for social change that was internally democratic. I had a tendency to romanticize the revolutionary potential of the Mexican working class and an impulse to leap to the barricades. I learned. In completely new and untoward situations with which I had no knowledge of how to cope, I managed not to run away or have a nervous break down. Instead, I changed. The workers' struggle for dignity and justice touched and reshaped my identity. What more exemplary story can be lived and told in the 21st century in which "globalization" puts in contact people from vast differences who have nothing more important to do than to learn to speak and listen together and finally to value each other. So this is a conversion narrative, but not only.

It is also a cautionary tale. As part of being entrapped in relative (or extreme) wealth, comfort, and privilege, most of us are also bound to inadequate, worn out languages, concepts that don't fit, and epistemologies that don't work anymore. History is moving quickly. We are seeing more clearly our place in a globalized world but we are not making much progress in dealing with it. That would require, I believe, new identities and relationships. Like the proverbial fish, we can't see the water we're swimming in –the language we're are speaking in, the ideas we are thinking in—until we have a reference point. The workers were my reference point.

What does this have to do with Rhetoric? Rhetoric here is a collection of tools that are indispensable to the project of learning to speak and to listen across historically charged boundaries. Rather than entering into conversations with rhetorical theory, I am taking every skill I can identify from my formal education, which includes training in the reading of images, inculcated by a BA in Art History, and the reading of language, speech, and texts, developed by my Masters in Literature, and familiarity with the tools of Rhetoric, garnered in doctoral course work, to read the diverse texts that I have collected and assembled here.

Tom Smith, a revered literature professor at the State University of New York at Albany, liked to describe *The Good Soldier* by Ford Maddox Ford as an epistemological quest. This strange novel set at the outset of the First World War—at the brink of modernity and at the edge of a sense of crisis—offers the reader only a thin plot. Not much happens and no one goes anywhere. Nevertheless, Ford and the main characters, and therefore the reader, embark on a quest. We search for sources of knowledge about our reality. We seek ways to read our predicament. We are fish swimming in new waters and struggling to see. Only those who are prepared to read analytically and with attention to patterns, as well as to explicit pronouncements, will find their way in a new world.

While this is the intellectual disposition that led to this dissertation, life circumstances determined the focus. I had lived in New York City and New York State all of my life. In 1997 I finished my Masters at Albany and moved to Austin. I was 54 and already set in my ways. I had a lot of work to do to find a cultural and social niche here in Texas. My only preparation was that I had learned to pronounce "maquiladora"

from an Amy Goodman radio program on the "maquiladora murders" in Juárez and I had caged tutoring on the pronunciation of Gloria Anzaldúa's last name. Both phonetic acquisitions proved important.

The Rhetoric of Globalization:
Can the Maquiladora Worker Speak?

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Judith Rosenberg, Ph.D.
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Supervisor: Linda Ferreira-Buckley

Too often discourses of globalization fall into simplistic pro-and-con positions. Universally omitted is the voice of maquiladora workers who are specially qualified to speak; they work in foreign-owned assembly plants or factories that produce in Mexico for export to the United States. Governments and transnational bodies created these factories expressly to answer Mexico's development needs and U.S. corporations' desire for low cost labor. The maquiladoras embody free trade ideologies, a pillar of globalization, and mirror transnational investment and manufacturing in other parts of the world—but they're close to Austin, share culture and history with us, and are, thus, easier to access for study.

The dissertation offers activists and students access to the voice of Mexican maquiladora workers directly, rather than through representatives, and makes available a unique archive of worker-generated documents, eyewitness accounts and anecdotes of worker speech and actions, Mexican press, and U.S. corporate materials. Historical research provides context. Analysis of rhetorical politics and practices explores the dynamic by which elites circulate a monolithic account of globalization and how, nevertheless, myriad voices tell a different story. We must listen to them and use tools of textual analysis if we are to break out of epistemological straight jackets, hear and recognize oppression, and create new relationships for social change.

Chapters explore relations of the maquiladora workers internally and with the Comité Fronterizo de Obreras (CFO or Border Committee of Women Workers), the American Friends Service Committee, Alcoa, a Fortune 100 corporation and Duro, a

small privately owned company; both manufacture in Mexico at the border. Through analysis of symbols, narrative styles, and language choices, the chapters look at the grassroots' struggle for democratic process, legacies of the Mexican Revolution, the gender component of labor exploitation, and consciousness as a basis for labor organizing. The narrative of my own relationship with the workers since 1999 weaves through the chapters. I offer it as a model of a privileged person's voyage of discovery and quest for consciousness, the issue being: how to understand solidarity across myriad borders and the crucial, yet elusive, difference between solidarity and charity.

Table of Contents

Chapter 1: What Is Globalization? It Depends Where You Stand **1**
- Introductions 1
- Cast of Characters 2
- A Definition of Globalization 8
- The Workers' Language: *Manos Vacías* (Empty Hands) 11
- Globalization: The Official Pronouncements 17
- The Tradition of a Middle Position and a New History 20
- Kairos of This Dissertation: One Last Argument 27

Chapter 2: Ghosts of History Walk the Border **30**

Chapter 3: The Press Searches for "Foreign Agitators" and "Bad Mexicans" **74**

- Part I: Arguments, Piedras Negras, Coahuila, Mexico 74

- Part II: On the Ground, Río, Bravo, Tamaulipas, Mexico 104

Chapter 4: Speaking Truth to Power: Workers and CEOs Converse **130**

Chapter 5: Finally, A Great White Father and an After Word, or Two **167**

Bibliography **186**

Vita **197**

Chapter 1
What is Globalization?
It Depends on Where You Stand

Introductions

First I had an undeniable need to make my dissertation part of my political activism; then I had to turn my activism into dissertation writing. Both urges came from another undeniable need: to put my energy *where* and *when* I am. Where am I? This would seem to be the simpler of the two questions, but like the question of time, it too is concatenated in my perception of history. I am in Austin, Texas, and three-and-a-half hours away by car from the border with Mexico at its closest point. For me to be here is unusual, so no wonder it has turned my worldview upside down. I had lived in New York City and State all my life until 1997, when, at the age of 54, I made the big move to Austin. As for the question about time, I don't know about you, but I am living in a period of history characterized by intense ideological conflict—ingenuously called "globalization"—over the present and future of the Americas. I direct my attention to the Americas rather than the globe because of my preference for the near-by. As I see it, people-driven and people-centered coalitions of the South, or of the "Third World" within the "First World," are challenging conservative, neo-liberal programs, based in U.S. transnational corporations, supported by U.S. policy and many, but not all, Latin American elites[1].

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[1] I use the terms "First World" and "Third World" as short hand, despite the connotative problems. According to the on-line Oxford English Dictionary, they originated during the Cold War, in the 1950s, and referred to nations that were not aligned with either side in the East-West schism between demonized Communist nations, led by the Soviet Union, and U.S.-led Western-style democracies. Perhaps they were too poor to be aligned. The separation of the world into two warring camps left out colonies or former colonies, the non-aligned. As the terms Third World and First World came into wider circulation, usage lumped together "under developed" nations and whole continents

In short, we live at a time when the people (or in Spanish, *el pueblo,* or *la gente*, a more middle class reference, or *la base*, the base), attempting to constitute themselves democratically, are confronting the power of wealth and of market thinking masquerading under the mantle of Democracy. My new geographical location and my past experience no doubt influence my view. Just to complicate the opposition that I have sketched between the people and the elites, I would like to quote George W. Bush, a frequently implied interlocutor of this dissertation, who said at a Republican campaign fundraising dinner: "This is an impressive crowd—the haves and the have-mores. Some call you the elites; I call you my base."

Cast of Characters

The author is a graduate student at the University of Texas, an ally and observer, since 1999, of maquiladora workers in Mexico at the border with Texas. Since 2001 I have coordinated, as a volunteer, an American Friends Service Committee project called *Austin Tan Cerca de la Frontera* (ATCF) or Austin So Close to the Border. The Mexican maquiladora workers, working for the US corporations that have moved to Mexico, are producing the rhetoric that I'm studying. I am looking at the oral, written, and strategy or action texts that they produce as they seek change in the maquiladora system that controls their workplaces and communities. I am documenting and studying this rhetoric through anecdote, narrative, background and theoretical research, analysis, and analogy. My visits to the border, my sojourns there, my personal relationships with workers, and my witness of actions are the source of the material. I also have an archive of documents the workers produce and of border newspapers reacting to their initiatives. Ultimately, I want to see if the analysis of narrative and metaphor can reveal new meanings and stakes in what is called globalization.

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inhabited by people of color, as opposed to "industrial nations," dominated by Caucasians. (Keyword: Third World) Because of their etymologies, the terms perpetuate the world structure of colonialism and have racist overtones. As a substitute "over-developed" and "over-exploited" nations have been suggested, or the Global South and the Global North. For brevity I am retaining the First and Third World designations, with the above qualifications.

Maquiladora workers at the border are a heteroclite group. They come from all over Mexico. When the first maquiladoras opened in 1964 under the Border Industrial Program, they mostly did what's called "light" work, such as textiles. Ninety percent of workers were women. They labored manually; men did supervisory work. Today there is more heavy industry and a more even gender distribution. The word "maquiladora," developed from maquila, which meant a tax in kind that flourmills used to charge wheat farmers. The Border Industrial Program allowed foreign-owned factories to bring raw materials into Mexico, use Mexican labor for assembly, then export finished goods back to the U.S. or other foreign market, paying only nominal border tariffs. The rate of exchange between the peso and the dollar at first favored both employer and employee. But the meaning of the word, maquiladora, eventually migrated away from questions of tariff or taxation and pointed to conditions which eventually prevailed in these factories. Maquiladora became synonymous with sweatshop. It was an employer's market; business owners were in a position to increase productivity by reducing salaries. At the same time, they paid no local taxes in Mexico, and community infrastructures sank under the weight of Mexicans who flocked to the border in search of work. In 1994 NAFTA opened the Mexican interior to the maquiladora system previously limited to a zone 20-miles deep along the northern border.

I would not have had opportunity to know and listen to the maquiladora workers were it not for Austin Tan Cerca de la Frontera (ATCF), which is allied with and committed to the *Comité Fronterizo de Obreras/os* (CFO) or Border Committee of Workers. A grassroots Mexican civic association, the CFO is composed exclusively of current or former maquiladora workers; women lead it. The CFO has organized workers at the border for more than 20 years. Like other Mexican workers' groups they have an unusual tool available to them: the Mexican Federal Labor Law (*La Ley Federal del Trabajo* or LFT) which they study and apply in all kinds of self-advocacy situations, including, but not limited to, the factory floor and the courts. With this venerable, 1,200-page labor document, based on the much shorter Constitution of 1935, itself hailed at the time as the most progressive in the world, workers learn their historic rights, legacy of the Mexican Revolution; develop community and alliances; struggle for and gain improvements in working and living conditions. They don't always achieve material

improvement, but they do always gain a different sense of themselves, a higher consciousness, and some modicum of solidarity with each other, all of which confirms their humanity and forms an important bulwark against globalization, which *disconfirms* their humanity.

We cannot understand CFO culture and methods without a foray into the Latin American idiom of popular education and of Paolo Freire, which describe and explain the experience of the workers in the confirmation of their humanity. The workers are engaging a process of ***conscientización (****concientisaçao* in Portuguese), a concept that is not easy to translate in to English and that introduces a little semantic history. Most simply this phrase could be translated "consciousness raising." It refers, however, to a specific scenario, a three-step process of problem solving that groups of adults undertake while they are literally and figuratively sitting in a circle; that is, meetings and the whole process, are non-hierarchical. Sometimes the majority of adults are illiterate (or, in Spanish, *analfabeto* – "non-alphabetic"). A leader or facilitator may have picked up the method from literate sources. More than an educational method, *conscientización* is a way that communities can bring to light for themselves, and share, the knowledge they already have.

The three steps are: Identify the problem; figure out its cause or sources; take action. (Observe the second step, attention to causation, a move that many people on this side of the border are too much in a hurry to bother with.) I have observed at the border that this is a very natural way for people of a certain class, who are not infected with Yankee can-do mania, to deliberate. Once they get going, they can continue for hours and months. The result can be "empowerment," a middle-class English word that has been imported into Spanish and doesn't quite match *conscientización.* Empowerment*, empoderamiento,* is a giving-receiving proposition. People without power are helped to get it. A next step is "self-empowerment"—they help themselves to get it. *Conscientizacion*, by contrast, is a birthing process. People already have power and have been using it. They become of aware of it; then they can use it more consciously, and that makes all the difference. Marta Benavides, a Salvadoran feminist, a one-time colleague of Monsignor Romero, and expert practitioner of popular education

methodologies, made this distinction in conversation and it sums up an important difference in concepts and cultures.

The audience for my dissertation has been an important question; a quite specific choice has helped me differentiate what this dissertation needs to argue, what it can take for granted, and what are its goals. The choice has thrust the dissertation into the real world and placed it on the continuum between the discourse of "expert" but distant power, neo-liberal and theoretical in its orientation, and people on the ground who know the impact of neo-liberalism and globalization in their daily lives, in immediate experience—hence, another kind of expertise. Since this dissertation tries to capture the experience of maquiladora workers and relate it to U.S. citizens, I must choose to write for certain U.S. citizens. I started out writing for U.S. progressive, academic *rhetoricians*, specifically the voices that I hear on the Rhetoricians for Peace list serve (RFP) which I joined during the May 2004 conference of the Rhetoric Society of America[2].
There, among discussions, debates, and one-liners, I hear sophisticated, engaged, progressive and often-passionate folk, clearly troubled by the politics and rhetoric of arrogance that pervade the empire in which we live. It is less clear, but nevertheless true, I argue—and this is a crucial—that these are people who see themselves as privileged producers of a knowledge and discourse of opposition and alternatives. They consider themselves leaders in so far as they are educators and have access to a superior site of knowledge production, the academy, to networks of professionals and to captive student audiences. Since they value democratic process, they value education and have hopes for their role in social change. Yet they are an elite, isolated from and unaware of a vital center of political energy and knowledge—people at the margins in this country and in Mexico, hidden in plain sight.

[2] Though I started with Rhetoricians for Peace as my audience, and they continue to inspire me, I have begun to think of this dissertation as a book project that would find a cross over audience that is within and without the academy. The academic segment itself might be diversified and find readers among high-school writing/rhetoric students as well as higher level academics in diverse disciplines, reading as citizens rather than for professional reasons.

I have plenty of common ground with my audience; however, in some ways, a chasm gapes between us that motivates my struggle to demonstrate what I think is the unique significance of the Mexican workers' movement. My audience's place in the academy is precisely what creates the chasm. Their culture and class make it hard for them to understand what the maquila workers say and do or even know that the discourse of the maquiladora worker exists. My audience writes books, advances theory, and argues with other theoreticians. Their privileged academic position ultimately entraps them in affirming the status quo. Their careers, their passions, and their identities depend on it. If they are leaders, their inherent attachment to the status quo may lead their constituencies nowhere. The tension between their conservationism and their progressive theory doesn't belie their conscious commitments; but, the tension is an unavoidable result of living in the confines of Western academia, caught in a time warp where they cannot yet comprehend how globalization, in its gory and surprising glory, has shifted the ground under them so that they don't quite know where they are.

For me, the philosopher Kenneth Burke explains the predicament of progressive intellectuals who, despite themselves, hold class-limited views. I will turn to him for help because I think globalization poses a profound problem of cognition and a crucial disconnection between classes in their "reading of the world," as Freire would say, or their "knowledge of reality" as Burke and Lakoff would say.

We inhabit a world where basic cognition is agonizing. First of all, there's too much reality, too much world—it's worldwide!— and it is not, as the most distracted among us must intuit, just an extension of the United States. Second of all, our sources of information—media—are not trustworthy. The total problem is cataclysmic. Some people don't care—they're busy—but for others the problem creates an unquenchable hunger for the world that they sometimes satisfy by running screaming from their lives and casting themselves upon the world, symbol systems shoved aside and hearts wide open. An example is a former Austin school councilor Gael Sherman whose website begins

> Where the hell is Gael? Stories are swirling - Gael is doing what? Going around the world . . . for a whole year??? She retired?? She got divorced too?? They sold the house and she gave John all the stuff? Someone said she buzzed her curls and is solid gray. Can you say that girl got hit with a mid-life hormonal crisis or what?

(Sherman).

Gael took off in fall 2004 and her itinerary covered Hawaii, Southeast Asia—she was there during the Tsunami—New Zealand, Australia, South Africa, Peru and Brazil.

What drove her to it? What created the envelope that she had to break through? If explanation is any solace, help is on the way. Burke asks, on page 48 of *Language as Symbolic Action*,

> [C]an we bring ourselves to realize just how overwhelmingly much of what we mean by "reality" has been built up for us through nothing but our symbol systems? Take away our books, and what little do we know about history, biography, even something so "down to earth" as the relative position of seas and continents? What is our "reality" for today (beyond the paper-thin line of our own particular lives) but all this clutter of symbols about the past, combined with whatever things we know mainly through maps, magazines, newspapers, and the like about the present? In school, as they go from class to class, students turn from one idiom to another. The various courses in the curriculum are in effect but so many different terminologies. And however important to us is the tiny sliver of reality each of us has experienced firsthand, the whole overall "picture" is but a construct of our symbol systems. To mediate on this fact until one sees its full implications is much like peering over the edge of things into an ultimate abyss. And doubtless that's one reason why, though man is typically the symbol-using animal, he clings to a kind of *naïve verbal realism that refuses to let him realize the full extent of the role played by symbolicity in his notions of reality.* (48)

I have emphasized the last idea in the Burke passage because it helps us understand not only the plight of the academics but also of that other brotherhood of thinkers—neo-liberal policy makers in government and business who also figure prominently in my dissertation and speak from a different reality, one that directly denies the maquiladora worker's.

The problem of cognition and of epistemology provides the context for the dissertation's title. Can the maquiladora workers speak? Well, I reckon. Can we listen? That's the question. Maquiladora workers can't avoid knowing where they are or knowing how globalization affects them. It has degraded and reconstructed the landscape that they look at every day. The more conscious or more mobilized among them can straighten us out on this question of globalization. What's more, they're nearby; threads of culture, history and economy connect them to us. Those with the highest consciousness have found ways to become subjects of their own lives and fend off the

way “globalization” objectifies them. They occupy a unique historic position because they face and negotiate power in a globalized world order at its most naked and undiluted point—the workplace; more over, not just any workplace, but one expressly devised by the global economy, by ideologies of comparative advantage, production for export, and ideal combinations of labor and capital that aim to increase wealth rather than distribute it. The maquiladora workers operate in a workplace that is highly charged, as a symbol of the economic order and as a point of real power.

We, by contrast, assume there is no alternative at the workplace than to fit ourselves as neatly as we can into jobs and careers and life plans as they are presented to us. We are docile and averse to risk, despite our superior material resources and safety nets. We have, though, a disadvantage, because of the value we place on individuality, defined by achievement and success. It makes us afraid to risk “failure,” a mark of divine disfavor threatening us from our Calvinist roots. In this way our culture makes us see each case individually. It deprives us of the possibility of joining with others in solidarity and finding safety in numbers. Maquiladora workers can help academics better equip their ideological and philosophical positions and give academics tools to connect their theory to a practice.

A Definition of Globalization

A note on *globalization* is in order—since it is a central concern for my dissertation, a complex of issues and ambiguous, heavily loaded words that I will want to negotiate with my readers. I understand globalization to refer to a world political order that orchestrates economic roles for various countries and regions and their people. Accordingly, some countries figure more as producers; their role is to provide low-wage labor to the world economy; other countries provide skilled labor or act more as consumers, and still others as the source of capital or of raw materials, and so on. The system, overseen by transnational institutions like the World Bank and the World Trade Organization, claims to make “*winners*” of all countries thanks to “*free trade*,” “*integration of national economies*,” and “*comparative advantage*,” though it is not clear whether these phrases denote slogans or actual market mechanisms or whether they tell

us anything structurally new about global economic arrangements. As the ghost of anarchist E.B. Schnaubelt (1855-1913), brother of the famous Haymarket bomber, said, while sharing a bottle of wine with the writer John Ross in the latter's fictionalized "Memoir," *Murdered by Capitalism*, which chronicles and sometimes invents "150 Years of Life & Death on the American Left," "This *globalization*—where did they get such a fancy name for *imperialism*?" (70)

All the above italicized terms will be grist for analysis as metaphor with help from Lise-Lotte Holmgreen's "Setting the Neo-Liberal Agenda", as frames—George Lakoff's concept in, espeically, *Don't Think of an Elephant; Know Your Values and Frame the Debate; terministic screens,* which Burke explains in *Language as Symbolic Action*; and Donaldo Macedo's understanding of how indoctrination works through epistemological specialization, and how instrumentalist and functionalist approaches to literacy produce "stupidification" in *Literacies of Power; What Americans Are Not Allowed to Know.*

"Comparative advantage**,**" a key constituent of the neo-liberal language, my be an auspicious place to start deconstructing this jargon. It refers to that slot in the global economic system into which Third World workers might fit themselves. The phrase jumped out of the first paragraph of an *Austin American Statesman* article when, in a deft journalistic turn, Mexico reporter Susan Ferris metaphorically confronted a Mexican peasant with this term and went on to show he didn't have any:

> San Gabriel Chilac, Puebla -- In this tiny southern Mexican town that seems a million miles from nowhere, Ponciano Garmendia is searching for what economists call his comparative advantage in the global economy. With oxen and wooden plow, Garmendia cultivates a native strain of corn he once sold easily to Mexico City markets because of its distinctive taste. But sales have soured. Garmendia can't compete with cheaper hybrid corn flooding the market from bigger northern Mexican growers. They, in turn, are challenged by U.S. imports.

As Ferris continues, she suggests that, if Garmendia thought he had a "comparative advantage," he was deceived, the butt of some cruel verbiage. Clearly the idea of "comparative advantage" was not created for him. Then for whom was it invented? It would seem to represent the case of the poor and powerless and what they have to gain in the scheme put together by the wealthy and the powerful, a way to balance things out, some hope or a bone for a dog. Ferris' article was one in a series that *The Statesmen*,

Austin's premier daily, published around the time of NAFTA's 10th anniversary. Titled "Broken Promises," the reports detailed the failure of NAFTA for the people of Mexico and suggested the absence of a peoples' role in neo-liberal economics.

Like all neo-liberal jargon, the phrase "comparative advantage" incorporates ambiguities and contradictions. (UT journalism professor Robert Jensen once made the case that NAFTA, or the North American Free Trade Agreement, is *not* an agreement, *not* about free trade, and not even about trade, and that the almost legitimate "North American," places Mexicans into the North, along with the United States and Canada, a place they are not likely to want to be, unless it tickles their pretensions to being a modern consumer society with a big GDP, investment rolling in, and bad food abounding.) Like all terminology it aims to invest old words with new and limited meanings, intelligible to a specialized discourse community. It monopolizes the meaning of the new combination, "comparative advantage," and gives it, as a package, a new cachet. Wide and frequent circulation in good company, like in major media, gives slogans reality and authority. In the process of learning the meanings, the ordinary reader buys into the reality they refer to. So congratulations to Susan Ferris for exposing a hoax.

Meanwhile, for those who have not read Ferris, Holmgreen and Lakoff alert us to the rhetorical as well as cognitive functions of neo-liberal and conservative lingo. "Comparative advantage" is an odd but instructive example. Both researchers examine the role of metaphors as language helps us with cognition by making the abstract real, recasting it in terms of the concrete—what Burke would call the "scientistic" function (naming, defining). Inevitably, in the process, another dimension creeps in, rhetorical or (Burke again) "dramatistic" (hortatory or attitudinal). We all know that anytime language says something more abstract than 'Give me the salt,' metaphor enters and, consequently, the possibility of spin. *Comparative advantage*, the example in question, however, creates a term and an argument for the reality of the term, by combining words redundantly and, at the same time, cleaving to the abstract, a double-whammy of amplification without clarification. Ultimately, by refusing to get grounded, the lingo avoids or negates grounds, or evidence. This possibly suspicious move is usual in terminology meant for a specialized community. But, at the same time, neo-liberal economics is a very public language that describes the world we all live in. Economics is

an abstract science but also “where” we live, in our daily lives. We’d better find out about it. By adding “comparative” to “ advantage” the semantic package assists cognition only by repetition, as if it would assert its legitimacy by wearing us down until we believe. It is a cross between mathematical formulas and philosophy: all advantages are comparative, and only exist relatively. Why not say “relative advantage?” The repetitiveness is really a clue that, in this little morsel of economists’ signification, everything is very much in order. The common denominator for this jargon is the fundamentalist belief in competition. It brings to humanity all goods and Good. Per usual, we butt heads with the idolatry of the market. We don’t need Susan Ferris to tell us that this language and way of thinking is alienated from an important reality—the evidence of peoples’ lives. What kind of values are the subtext of this language and the culture it comes from? Are the values of the market compatible with a concern for the family, the other conservative shibboleth?

Rather than add my answer to yours, I’d like to turn to an examination, for comparison, of a key term from the other end of the totem pole—the culture of the Comité Fronterizo de Obreras. By evoking a spatial metaphor with the totem pole, I intend to place the culture of the CFO at the bottom end, not to devalue it, but to move closer to the earth, to the human body, and to a daily reality. By comparison, a business culture is abstract, in the head, and tends to give physical human reality a wide berth. CFO language is full of concrete metaphor.

The Workers’ Language: *Manos Vacías* (Empty Hands)

In the fall of 2004, Austin Tan Cerca and the AFSC began to give special attention to a particular CFO metaphor that seemed to sum up differences between Austin and Mexican activism, between cultures. ATCF volunteer Greg Norman wrote an article in the AFSC-Austin newsletter entitled “Arriving with *Manos Vacías*. The AFSC also published the article on the CFO website in Spanish and English. Everyone realized that *Manos Vacías* pointed to something essential about the CFO that we were having difficulty understanding.

Literally translated *manos vacías* means empty hands. It appears underlined in the CFO document "*Metodos exitsos de Concientización y Organización de Movimenietos entre Las Obreras de Maquiladoras*" (literally, "Successful Methods of Consciousness Raising and Organizing among the Maquiladoras Workers." I have already discussed, above, some difficulties in translating *Conscientización*.) The full context, in which the document prompts organizers going door to door to speak to the workers, is:

> *Llegar [encontrando a la gente] con las manos vacías: sin programas, nada para ofrecer; escoger un perfil bajo; tener cuidado con distribuit volantes. Empezar con humildad puede resultar en un moveimento poderoso.* (Comité Fronterizo de Obreras)
>
> Literal translation: Go [to meet the people] with empty hands: without programs/an agenda, nothing to offer; keep/choose a low profile; be careful with the distribution of fliers/literature. To start with humility can result in a powerful movement.

At first encounter it would appear that the Spanish meaning of "empty hands" is an asymmetrical opposite of the English. In his article, Norman notes that the CFO uses the phrase to describe their "solidarity model… based on women-led, non-hierarchical, mutual empowerment"(4). The phrase "literally translates as 'empty hands' but carries," he says, "the meaning of "open minds." From the beginning our Austin group gravitated to this phrase as a way of understanding how the CFO built solidarity among themselves and as guidance, as we built solidarity with them. As northerners, with all our privileges, it was hard for us to cross the border with empty hands and open minds. Greg wrote,

> [I]f our solidarity reproduces the model of northerners as the 'wealthy experts' and southerners as the 'needy exploited,' this not only undermines our mutual goal of progressive change in the maquila system, but it also establishes a relationship based on inequality. (4)

We visualized this talismanic solidarity image as cupped hands, a sign of receptivity, gesture of humility, as when the mendicant proffers cupped hands and acknowledges that she has nothing but what the spirit gives through the gifts of strangers. The empty hand, or the open hand, contrasts with the fist. It may precede a handshake, which a fist does not. It identifies one as friend rather than foe, hiding nothing, transparent.

The CFO's logo renders five hands grasping wrists, contained by a circle, another amplification of the empty hand—an image of the synergistic strength of working together, solidarity. The five-handed symbol departs from the more fetishized configuration of clasped hands—two hands shaking, used for example by the McAllen, Texas Chamber of Commerce. In the latter case, one hand is white, the other brown and the Chamber signals, always with an awareness of race, its interest in cross-border deals with its sister city, across the Rio Grande, Reynosa. Five hands can't make a deal. They are more likely to come together through negotiation, governed by principles. They can't enter a transactional relationship, and so they symbolize "non-transactional relationship," or "strategic relationships." Jason Wallach, formerly Coordinator of the Portland Central America Solidarity Committee, and I "invented" this second term. It refers to people who are separated by borders of power, history, wealth, culture, etc., and yet come together and make commitments, not to trade favors, but to get to know each other and see what develops. For us the implication is that certainly something important will develop, and when it does, we will be ready. Not only do such relationships cross borders, they also break unspoken rules, violate hyperstatic stereotypes, and smash icons. That's why they're strategic. The system doesn't expect them. My experience in 2001 when I spent five weeks at the border, volunteering for the CFO, supports this last contention. In the course of my stay, I frequently drove across the border, sometimes just to accompany CFO volunteer Juany Lopez Torres, as she traveled 25 miles from Piedras Negras to Ciudad Acuña. We chose to travel on the U.S. side where the roads were better and faster. I was accustomed to the INS's questions as I left Mexico: "What were you doing in Mexico?" "Where are you going now and what is your citizenship?" The first time I crossed with Juany, an agent added to the list, "What is the relationship between the two of you?" "Friends," we answered, brightly. It was the wrong thing to say. He then submitted Lopez to a long and humiliating process in which she had to produce documents and undergo searches. Next time the INS asked, we gave an answer that kept stereotypes in place and hid our "strategic relationship." In this version, I was an English teacher at a school for workers. Lopez was an administrator. We were collaborating in a routine project of cultural imperialism. It worked fine.

"Empty hands," as we discovered it in CFO usage, appeared to have a radically different meaning in Spanish than in English, in which it betokens a lack of material goods, a negative emptiness where there should be fullness. Woe to the husband, renowned in cliché, who comes home on payday empty-handed. We thought the CFO slogan revealed a profound cultural difference between the U.S. and Mexico.

But to the contrary, a little research revealed that the CFO watchword is the site of a bold cultural move where the CFO parts company with both Mexican and English semantic culture—with everyone, and significantly. As far as I can ascertain, the CFO are the only group in Mexico to use *manos vacías* with this meaning of openness and humility[3]. For everyone else it has the same pathetic, pejorative meaning as it has in English. One slight cultural difference, of degree rather than kind, is that the image is very popular in Mexico, a commonplace, and the Catholic Church has amplified it to the point of owning. In Church use, the image warns and wakes up sinners. If you go to see your Maker with this kind of emptiness, you are guilty of having done nothing in your life—empty hands, equivalent to an empty life! With this meaning, gossip might dwell on the empty hands of wealthy and corrupt politicians, as well as homebodies and slackers; all, leveled, must finally feel shame and humiliation, rather than humility.

The earliest secular reference I have found is a 1950's movie of the same title starring Arturo de Cordoba as a righteous padre, with full hands, presumably. (I'll wager the idea is much older, perhaps part of the rhetorical panoply of early Jesuit missions. The images' currency in Spain would support that hunch.) References (on the internet) abound. A poem by Mario Garrido Lecona, *Oración Con Las Manos Vacías*, or "Prayer with Empty Hands," addresses God with customary colonial innuendo, "Señor." The speaker dwells on his self-abasing smallness in His Presence. The time has come for the speaker to render his accounts. The worst thing he has done is to turn up without the works or deeds (*las obras*) that God expected of him, an absence that is conspicuous because of the emptiness of his hands. The speaker only brings to this reckoning "*mi abismo*," *my abyss,* meaning perhaps an intensification of emptiness with the added fillip

[3] "Empty hands" figures in Quaker imagery as a metaphor with the same meaning. Julia Quiñonez who participated in the CFO at its inception remembers the Quaker influence on the Mexican usage. This meaning remains unique in Mexico, however.

of deep darkness and hell. In a final burst of self-condemnation, the speaker invidiously compares his empty hands to Jesucristo's bleeding wounds because of which el Señor pardons reprobates like the speaker who comes with *las manos vacías*. With the painfully accusing repetition of these three words, the poem ends.

It is easy to find a secular counter part to this judgment-day lament, in songs of lost love that leave the singer "empty-handed," an image preferred to just plain empty. A lyric by "Palominos" (Lyricsbox) bemoans

> a "pile of broken dreams/ a new song that speaks of my pain./ I gave you all my being, little by little/and you told me goodbye/ and it is for this that I am once again/with empty hands…You left me without your love/with empty hands… /with a new failure…./ What is left for even the devil to say/about this love…etc.

The devil makes an appearance here, like *the abyss* in the religious poem, to mark the intensity, the horror, of empty-handedness.

The Spanish singer, renowned in Mexico, Miguel Bose recorded a version of "Manos Vacías" in which, as in the religious poem and in Los Palominos' song, the *manos vacías* signifiers keep returning, this time, however, without the guilt. This is the resentful song of an unrepentant reprobate. He has freely chosen to walk out on 'her,' because of who she is and because that's the way he lives his life. Now he is alone again, in the streets, talking to the devil, and discovering how cheap his soul is. "I am not accustomed to being a looser/ I play the game [of love] for pleasure and the game is what gives me life;" but, and this is the refrain that he hurls over and over again at his former love: "don't think my hands are empty because of you!" The poor macho protesteth too much and the metaphorical device of empty hands helps him maintain the ambiguity (El Mariachi).

These typical appearances of a cultural icon make it clear that the CFO's use of *manos vacías* is maverick and iconoclastic. In the Mexican context, they have stolen a sacred cow, stripped away the obeisance and masochism, and created a new image of humility and dignity, a new structure of power relationships. Rhetorically it is completely original and daring— new language with which to pursue a democratic idea and escape the habits of corruption and hierarchy that plague labor organizing. Unlike the language of neo-liberalism, which remains abstract and bottled up in a narrow range

of business formulae, this language of imagery and of the body connects to a world of social and human values, even to religious values (Buddhist and mystical, I mean, rather than Catholic.) In this instance at least, this language rebukes the Catholic Church, its imposition of hierarchy, and its confusion of humiliation with humility.

The CFO's coordinator, Julia Quiñones, recalls that they used the *manos vacías* slogan in the very first years of their organizing, in the 1980s, that is. That would place it contemporaneously with the only precedent I have found that resembles their use of it: the publication in Barcelona of a novella*, Con Las Manos Vacías,* written by Antonio Ferres[4]. We can be sure that Ferres was anti-clerical and did not reproduce the Catholic usage. He was active in postwar Europe and, until the 1950s, as a resistance fighter against Franco and Fascism, a writer and a Communist Party member in Spain. A passionate report from a November 2002 meeting of the Spanish Communist Party remembered him, as part of the clandestine and heroic resistance to Franco and fascism. The report reclaims and defends fighters of the period against charges of ineffectiveness, reminding today's generations of his suffering in the "repugnant swamp of Franco's dictatorship," in confrontation with "the pestilent hodgepodge of the Fascist 'belts' (*correajes*)," and in the shadow of "Masses said for the deceased who fell fighting *for God and for Spain"* (Polo). The italics are in the original, expressing, I believe, sarcasm and outrage at the idea that the loyalists fell for God and Spain. The novel itself, based on an actual legal case of 1910 and a reversed ruling in 1926, relates how the town elders of the tiny village of Osmilla—the doctor, the mayor, and the priest—framed two simple laborers for a murder. The provincial legal system extracted their confessions by torture and imprisoned them for 15 years. Then the court released them, declaring a "judicial error" had occurred. The nation followed events with horror. Meanwhile, the laborers lost everything they had, which was not very much to begin with. Ferres criticizes the Church doctrine of *manos vacías* by contrasting the materially empty hands of the laborers with the moral emptiness of the provincial elite.

Is it possible that in its Mexican origins, CFO usage of *manos vacías* caught the tail end of a leftist thread that goes back to Europe and the fight against Fascism? One

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[4] Thanks to Isabel Chavez for reading the novel in Spanish and discussing it with me, in English.

can imagine a new Communist scenario for a peasant tenant farmer in Franco's Spain, or a Mexican maquiladora worker today, who in the end faces God with empty hands. She worked hard all her life, to the breaking point, and has nothing to show for it. She says, as CFO leaders say all the time, "We are the ones that create wealth by our *work*[5]. Without us there is nothing. What we are asking is a fair compensation. Nothing less[6]."

Globalization: Official Pronouncements

Ironic observers could construe empty hands, understood as poverty or as moral vacuity, as comparative advantage. Like most neo-liberal terms, which provide the conceptual pillars of globalization today, 18th century economists and philosophers, known at the time as "liberal," invented it. Adam Smith's *Inquiry into the Nature and Causes of the Wealth of Nations* (1776) developed the logic of free trade. A subset of ideas featured "absolute advantage" between nations. In contrast to this formulation, early 19th century economists articulated "comparative advantage," David Ricardo most prominently (1817) (Suranovic). However, the argument for political-economic globalization claims newness—affinity with the present and the future in a Manifest Destiny way. In this move, it enthusiastically cites advanced technical and technological infrastructure that allow new connections and patterns in the movement of goods, capital, and people. Nevertheless, on many counts, 18th century ideas are poor guides for the present. In trying to apply them, like shoeing a foot with a glove, policy makers miss that fact, or intentionally ignore it. They lose sight of what is actually happening and that it doesn't necessarily conform to the plans and policies of corporate, government, and other trans-national bodies that are leading official globalization. Official sources don't and can't always account for what's going on. Having constructed a reality on loose

[5] The workers uses *obra*, the same word for *work*, as the religious poem used for *deeds*.

[6] This hypothetical quote parallels, for example, what Amparo Reyes said at an Alcoa press conference in Pittsburgh and what José Luis Rodriquez said to a delegation in Piedras Negras.

signifiers they may be operating blind, having lost control, as one fairly typical example may persuade you.

Let's return to Garmendia and other corn farmers to round out the picture. George Bush, Sr. negotiated NAFTA, Bill Clinton signed it, and G.W. Bush heralded its successes, as he began the campaign in 2000 for a next free trade agreement, FTAA. NAFTA was already 6 years old and Bush ignored the indications that the first agreement had pushed Mexico (back) into economic crisis and done serious damage to culture and ways of survival. NAFTA and ancillary negotiations thus produced some unintended and unimagined results. Preparatory to treaty, the senior Bush persuaded the Salinas administration to compromise article 27 of the Mexican Constitution, the basis of the ejido system, communal land tenure. For the first time since 1910, communal land could be put up for sale; private interests moved in. At the same time, maize farmers began to fail since they couldn't compete with the subsidized U.S. corn produced by agribusiness that began to flood their markets when NAFTA removed tariffs. As a result of these two factors—damage to communal land tenure and the incursion of foreign corn—migration within Mexico, has steadily increased. As of January 2004, NAFTA's 10-year anniversary, one million people had lost land, livelihood, and culture in southern Mexico and chose to migrate rather than starve. In 1994, 18 percent of Mexicans lived on *milpas*, small plots of land, mostly in the South, where they produced food for subsistence and a little extra corn for local markets. The disappearance of *milpas*, where incidentally Mayan people first domesticated maize 2000 years ago and today cultivate over 4,000 varieties, means that people lose their relation to the land and to each other since their religious and social systems are rooted to place (Boyce).

The worst is yet to come. Foreseeing how NAFTA would hurt Mexican corn farmers, the Salinas administration decided to remove protections on the commodity slowly, in increments, over 15 years. By 2009 all the protections will be gone; then, as Tom Hansen of the Mexico Solidarity Network (MSN) estimates, 15 million people, out of Mexico's total population of 105 million, will be set adrift. Already, as of 2000, many Mexican border cities had doubled in size. Many of the uprooted cross over (Hansen, 2003).

A concomitant effect is immigration to the United States, mostly undocumented, which has steadily climbed, despite post-9/11 border controls. Since this immigration is undocumented, it's hard to measure. Tom Hansen claims there are over 12 million undocumented workers in the United States—about 10% of our entire workforce. The Word Bank, which Hansen quotes, however, can measure a related phenomenon, the increase of remittances from the U.S. to Mexico. This is the money that Mexicans, working at minimum wage and less in the U.S., manage to send home to support the families they left behind. The amount has exploded and its significance to the Mexican economy increased correspondingly. Remittances moved from fifth place among Mexico's top sources of income in the 1990s—after oil, agriculture, tourism, and manufacturing. Today (2004) remittances rank as Mexico's *second* greatest source of income (Hansen, 2004)[7]. A November 2004 news release indicated that "[f]amily remittances from Mexicans working in the US swelled to US$12.42 billion in the first nine months of the year [2004] and are expected to surpass US$17 billion this year, a new record" (Mexico Solidarity Network Nov 2004)

Could this be what economic planners envisioned—emigrants shoring up the Mexican economy and providing sustenance for the poorest whom the local economy has failed? In the process, Mexican immigrants, who have seen economic opportunity dry up at home, pursue a harsh "comparative advantage" as they work in the United States at hard labor for wages lower than most U.S. citizens will countenance—and occasionally *no* wages—without citizenship or human rights, in horrible living conditions, and under constant threat of deportation—not the American dream or the good life by anyone's definition, but a survival strategy on a mass scale.

Maybe this state of affairs does have a function in the broader picture of U.S. political economics. In a perverse scenario, but one that suggests itself by revelations of

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[7] These figures of course don't include Mexico's income from drugs, which probably exceeds oil and has naturally an impact on the economy. It is one industry from which wealth does trickle down. Drug money, widely disseminated in small amounts, pervades many communities, at the border in particular, reaching even to the poorest levels. In effect, Mexican poverty creates a large labor pool for odd jobs for drug traffickers.

corporate and government secrecy and contradictions enough to justify any suspicion, perhaps this is what planners intended. Whom does this migration dynamic benefit? It creates a class of low-salaried, low-overhead, *silenced* labor in the U.S. to perform work that cannot be "outsourced" and at the same time props up Mexico's poorest, while privatization redirects natural resources to benefit corporations.

This side of globalization, pockmarked and ugly, goes hand and hand with social mayhem and human suffering; it is not, of course, what policy makers or people in the street mean when they use the term globalization, the signature of our era, a fact of life and history which, like Manifest Destiny of yore, no one can stop. But this is the reality about which marginalized people, subalterns, to use Spivak and Gramsci's term, are expert. And these people, both within our borders and within our hemisphere, are producing knowledge about this reality at a great rate—knowledge and strategies to deal with it.

The Tradition of a Middle Position and a New History

Among these disparate views of globalization, my dissertation—and my activism—aims to be a *bridge* where my relatively insular audience can begin to understand the maquila workers' knowledge and whet its appetite for alternative theory and practice that lurks all around, even under the most unsuspecting noses of academics. Several prophetic writers have explored the role of intellectuals who make bridges between class positions. Relevant examples are Italian political theorist and activist Antonio Gramsci ("problems of Hisotry…"), Chicana Lesbian feminist, internationally recognized teacher, writer, and cultural theorist Gloria Anzaldúa, and Liberation Theologians like the Brazilian Leonardo Boff , who was particularly influential in Mexico and wrote *The Theology of Captivity and Liberation* in 1976. Inspired by their precedence, that's what I am searching to do. Their words for this mediating function are "organic intellectuals," "bridge figures," and people who have made an "option for the poor." That last sounds a little different in Spanish, *han hecho un opción por los pobres*,

suggesting people who have made a voluntary choice of commitment to the poor, but acknowledge that they are not the poor and seek to understand the relationship[8]. Debatably Vladimir Lenin has a role here too, if we understand his idea of the "vanguard" as an intellectual class, serving workers. They provide a theoretical perspective that enables the workers to seek revolution, or structural change, and escape the futility of reform in capitalism in which no battle ever stays won (Lenin 53-176).

Originally it was not the main point, but it became central to this dissertation project: in creating a dialog between the maquiladora workers and the academic, I had to relate some autobiography—that is, replay and reflect on the experience by which I, a progressive U.S. academic/pedagogue, a nice Jewish girl from New York, learned to enter the workers' space with *manos vacías.* I had to examine my education, formal and informal, and put much of it aside. I had to relinquish my idealism. But my hope of finding a genuine, democratic peoples movement was not disappointed, though it is not always the an energized Left and the revolutionary tradition I was looking for. It is a peoples' struggle that makes painfully slow progress in the long term; nevertheless, I have committed to it and appreciate the integrity of the movement. Still, in reflecting on this material, I have had to confront my romantic images of the Mexican workers. This process of self-examination, coupled with a search for viable politics, became important to the whole story. I hope it is a point that others can identify with. Politics, as a constructive social activity, are, by nature, collective. As reward or consolation, in return for this difficult mental work, my sense of who I am changed; I suffered inner conflict. For allowing that to happen, I count myself as courageous. Am I in danger of sounding like a convert? I'm only saying that new knowledge changes identity.

I aim to tell a new history, 1983 to the present, restricted to the border, in the vein of Howard Zinn's *A People's History of the United States* and Devon Peña's *The Terror*

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[8] I have developed these ideas in conversation with Josefina Castillo who is a Mexican national, a member of my dissertation committee, Coordinator of the American Friends Service Committee office in Austin, a major collaborator in the Austin Tan Cerca de la Frontera project, and has a depth of experience working in Mexico with poor and indigenous women through a Mexico City NGO, Mujeres Para Diálogo. Our discussions sought to understand what solidarity can mean across the divides of class, race, culture and history.

of the Machine: Technology, Work, Gender, and Ecology. Also pertinent is the latter's Master's thesis, *Lucha Obrera en Las Maquiladoras Fronterizas: Mexican Women and Class Struggles in the Border Industry Program*. These works not only feature working class people and take their point of view but also show their agency in historical events. Peña writes about women's organizing in Reynosa, a city I am visiting 20 years later, where I am seeing the footprints of the earlier struggle.

Like those models, my history will foreground the workers, their stories, their strategies, and their agency and will also examine the background and implications of their struggle. This is a history in which the people/the workers find ways to drive the engine that drives events; they put industry and corporations in the reactive position. I want to reclaim and renew the language that McCarthyism and Stalinism discredited and to re-examine positions which the "old Left" discredited or obscured by their doctrinaire Marxist orthodoxies. I want to invite speculation on the implications this picture has for us, in the First World. Recently and increasingly, in our search for a point of political leverage in this country, we look to electoral expression. It is clear that voting for public officials has for us the high symbolic power that the struggle in the workplace has for the Mexican workers; but does it really have the leverage? I don't think so, and I would argue that for us, as for the maquiladora workers, real leverage lies somewhere in the politics of work, if we could just figure out where.

In summary, the reasons to study the Mexican maquiladora workers' movement as a peoples' movement—one of many in the Third World, but with its own unique and exemplary features—are:

- The 2000-mile line between the U.S. and Mexico is the only international border of such length in the world where so-called first and third worlds abut. It's close to Austin (3 and a half hours away by car at its closest point, Piedras Negras, Coahuila) and in many ways accessible.
- Furthermore a cross border relationship—between, on the one hand, the American Friends Service Committee (AFSC), centered in Philadelphia and operating through an Austin field office and, on the other hand, a Mexican civil association,

the Comité Fronterizo de Obrer@s, centered in Piedras Negras and active in 5 additional border cities—already exists and has for 20 years. Only since 1999, has the AFSC Austin office hatched and given shelter to a project dedicated to building solidarity with the CFO and learning from the workers in "solidarity delegations," Austin Tan Cerca de la Frontera (ATCF or Austin So Close to the Border). The ATCF-CFO relationship reveals a complex dynamic, not always or entirely rosy, but an extraordinary entry into the maquiladora workers' world and the basis for an on going, human, non-transactional relationship based on some people listening—us—and others speaking—them. This is an exciting place to study how the language of Mexicans and Anglo's creates the border, using, for example, Burke's idea of terministic screens that can either put things together or move things apart, to find in the roiling mass of reality either continuity or discontinuity; and to apply Lakoff's findings on the frames foreign policy uses for rich and poor countries.

- All of us in the First World have a structural relation to maquiladora workers, in two ways: U.S. corporations—owned and run by our countrypersons—form the context of the maquiladora workers' struggle—for rights, for better living and working conditions, for respect, and for survival. What's more we are bound to the workers in the consumer-producer cycle. Our standard of living is predicated on the availability of their labor, inexpensive enough to produce consumer items—like electronics and clothing, but also industrial products, like car parts—at low prices that contribute to making the U.S. standard of living the highest in the world. At the same time the Mexican's low salaries enable corporate employers to make windfall profits. One study estimates that companies that relocate manufacturing from the U.S. to Mexico save $20,000 per year per worker (Bernhardt 4). While there's nothing wrong with profits, even windfall profits, there is something wrong with achieving them through ruthless exploitation that destroys the well being of employees and their communities and then looks the other way.
- Finally we are neighbors, which is not just a Christian concept, though it is that, and would bid us see others as different from us in degree, not in kind. It suggests

we are keepers of each other, and also indicates similarity and continuity of culture. This continuity is one implication of what Mexican- and Native-Americans in Arizona, New Mexico, and Texas like to say: "We didn't cross the border, the border crossed us." Not only is there continuity of ethnic culture, but also of class culture and enmity: the same middle-class determination on both sides of the border, for example, to discredit workers and their rights. The terms in which Mexican border newspapers take sides against workers as they report struggles in Piedras Negras, Ciudad Acuña, and Rio Bravo to form independent unions demonstrates this well. The language parallels anti-union discourse in U.S. "right to work" states.

But watch out! If we, author and audience, enter into dialog with the workers with commitment—not just to do charity work in the colonias or leftist tourism in the industrial parks—like it or not, we will have to make with the workers relationships of equality and reorganize ourselves by democratic principles that match theirs. We will encounter the epistemological or cognitive problem. That can shake up our identities, confuse us, and make us suffer because we thought they live in a more authoritarian society and that we carry the torch of democracy, or are more worldly, more strategically placed and smarter, or possess a more informed analysis or ideology. We generally don't like to tamper with our identities.

Once we enter the relationship, there's no going back. Listen to the reflections of a 25-year-old law student in Albuquerque, Brooke Nowack-Neeley, who grew up in El Paso and traveled with Austin Tan Cerca on a solidarity delegation to visit the workers in Juarez in October 2004. I asked her how her social justice consciousness got born and she answered by describing her experience with the Juárez shantytowns or *colonias*, as she has known them for 15 years.

"My grandfather was a Methodist minister (he was also a chaplain during the Korean War). He knew of my situation growing up [physically and emotionally violent, alcoholic stepfather] and he himself didn't have the money to relieve the situation. But he literally gave much more to me than money could give. When I was 11 years old, he and his wife drove to El Paso (where I lived) from Augusta, GA. He was about 65 at the time. He took me across the border into Juarez and showed me the *Juarez beyond the Mercado that I had not seen*. He took me

> through the Colonias in Anapra, which was a Juárez city landfill before the colonias were established. It had an *unspeakable effect on me and changed me greatly whether I knew it or not, whether I wanted it or not.* It helped me to keep things in perspective; I think that is what my grandfather wanted. Though I have found myself lost in my life at times (in my own little bubble), I cannot escape the realities of injustice toward people throughout the world and in our own country.
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> Because of that experience [13 years ago], when faced [today] with a biography of The Rolling Stones or Che Guevara**,** *I have to choose Che*. When faced with the choice between Vogue and Z Magazine, I have to choose Z. So for my lack of fashion sense, I have my grandfather to thank! *I find myself in this strange parallel life where I am trying to be a "normal American" while still struggling to understand what it means to be an American in the dynamics of the role America plays in the injustices of the world***.** This second reflection is deemed antithetical to "normal America" and even "dangerous" to America's livelihood. When I sit down and really think about it all, I want nothing more than to open my eyes and say it's all just a nightmare and it's not true. But the sad reality remains and I am left with the images, from when I was a child, of other children confined to Anapra, juxtaposed with images of children [still] confined to Anapra, now that I am an adult.
>
> My concern does not rest on the poverty—as many people in Anapra have rich lives and beautiful families independent of monetary success. My concern is in the limits placed upon their lives and the fact that conditions haven't improved in 15 years. [Emphasis mine, JR] (Nowack-Neeley)

I was struck by the overall wisdom of Brooke's reflections and by her cleverness in calling attention to consumer choices—how they contribute to our identities, which we think of as individual and individualistic—and how they relate us collectively to those who inhabit other, invisible parts of the world—the producers. Such are the wages of exposure to "reality" and of commitment. Another related hazard is what I call the epistemological problem.

Whose assessment of the impact of NAFTA holds more weight for you—Robert Zoelleck's, former-U.S. Trade Secretary, or Juan Tovar's, a currently self-employed car mechanic in Ciudad Acuña? Tovar worked on an Alcoa assembly line, in automotive electronics, for 9 years until the U.S.-based Fortune 100 aluminum giant fired him in 2001—because he helped organize and lead workers' protests. Tovar was subsequently blacklisted in the Acuña employment market; the Chamber of Commerce, maquiladora association, and government officials smeared him in the local press. Who has the more

compelling evidence on the merits of free trade or the legality and sustainability of salaries paid in the maquiladora sector or on Alcoa's compliance with Mexican Federal Labor Law? Are you more persuaded by the evidence of peoples' lives, their illnesses, their survival strategies, their testimony and their reading of the Mexican Federal Labor Law, or by the theories of macro-economists? True, I have to examine also the liabilities of an epistemology that depends too much on the view of people who are directly affected. One expects that they don't have the bigger picture. This is not true in this case, mysteriously rather the opposite, I believe, and a good case for the Freirians; that is, they are the ones who really know how to read—"read the world."

I understand the epistemological or cognitive question as the necessity to explore the difference between versions of the issue from people who speak from the effects on their lives versus professional experts or plain theorists who are physically/ geographically and socially distant from the effects and whose profession and social position may push their ideology and class interests to get in the way of evidence and consistency. The U.S. Freirian Donaldo Macedo, today a leading authority on language education, as an immigrant from Cape Verde in West Africa struggled though a U.S. high school education. He dissects professionalized, de-contextualized, expert knowledge and explains the limits to its usefulness, despite its dominance among policy designers. Former World Bank chief economist and 2001 Nobel laureate Joseph Steiglitz exposes from inside the World Bank what Macedo's 1994 book explains as culture-wide biases of learning and knowledge (Macedo 9-36).

From divergent disciplines and life experiences, Steiglitz and Macedo make a neat pair to frame the importance of the maquiladora workers' version of the free trade story. Despite his skepticism and Noble Laureate, Steiglitz demonstrate how elitism leads to naiveté. A real contrast to elite epistemology and a validation of experiential knowledge, extended by empirical research, is the workers' 20-page document "Six Years of NAFTA: the View from Inside the Maquiladoras." The CFO wrote it in collaboration with the AFSC. Though eloquent and definitive, this study has been neglected; the authors lack credentials for most readers. Julia Quiñonez, national coordinator (Mexico) of the CFO understands the importance of ethos but understands it differently than many U.S. readers. In a press release announcing the report in October 1999, she said:

"Virtually none of the phenomena described by us in this report are to be found in the academic literature or the official printed evaluations of NAFTA. All, however, are central to the actual experience of life in the shadow of NAFTA, and that is the uniqueness of the report" (Comite´Fronterizo de Obreras 1999)

Another Mexican authority, a researcher attached to Universities in Monterrey and Guadalajara, Dr. Alejandro Canales, uses a macro methodology drawn from economics and demographics but also takes an interest in peoples' lives. He bridges modes of knowledge and, in an essay on "Industrialization, Urbanization, and Population Growth on the Border," (1999) concludes that "the growth spurred by the maquiladora boom would not appear to be an appropriate strategy for facing and overcoming the problems of poverty and marginalization that have historically plagued the cities of Mexico's northern border." He thus demonstrates the viability of expert opinion when it maintains the human context and arrives at conclusions independently of policy makers.

Kairos of This Dissertation: One Last Argument

From the U.S. point of view, globalization is a system that goes to other countries to produce things for us to consume. In the process, globalization silences the person who produces things. Her transnational employers, as well as happy consumers, imagine that she does not exist. But she does and the system literally threatens to snuff her out: her culture, her social well-being and physical survival. For her it is salutary and strategic to fight for herself under the banner of workers' rights. One reason though that this strategy hasn't worked as well as it might is that many people in the First World are hostile to workers' rights. Human resources directors don't like them. Some people who themselves *need* workers' rights don't know about them. If they do, they suspect them or surmise that such things don't apply to them. They ask themselves, 'Am I a worker?' They answer, 'No! I am a graduate student or untenured professor or medical technician or dental office administrator.'

Everybody works, but most people don't know they have, or should have, workers' rights. Especially in right-to-work states, the idea sounds seditious. With that misinformed opinion, skeptics slit their own throats. Regardless of whether salaries slide up or down, regardless of perks like air-conditioning, a chair to sit in, or free

Thanksgiving turkeys, working conditions in most jobs in the U.S. have deteriorated since the 80s, if, that is, you value buying power, job security, benefits, pensions, contracts, hours—and any other element of the worker-employer relationship. A remedial strategy at the border, and in this country's past has been to band together and fight for workers' rights. It has always been a long-term struggle. In the U.S. today, a focus on workers' rights and an interest in gaining them or protecting them could be a platform for serious social change and would necessarily entail long-term vision—much more significant that defeating Republicans at the poles which only leaves us with the Democrats.

Worldwide demographics suggest the frivolousness of electoral activism and point to the workplace crisis.

> Since 1945 the world population has *almost* tripled, growing from 2 to 5.7 billion… Its greatest growth was in Southeast Asia, Africa and Arab countries, where populations have *more* than tripled and countries are flooded with children. Over half the population in some of these countries is under the age of fifteen… In countries that were already poor, the sheer weight of numbers overwhelms the resources at hand. Without work and with increasing fear as resources diminish, people become desperate and life becomes cheap. (Bales, 12)

One effect has been to create a world labor glut and a safety valve for employers engaged in beating down their overhead. Unless we believe in absolute material determinism, in which case we can give up right now, we need a strategy by which to assert a more community-minded principle against the "race to the bottom."

In Mexico, the Constitution and Federal Labor Law back up workers with detailed protections and rights. They are early 20th century documents, legacies of the Mexican Revolution and influenced by Marxist thinking. In Mexico law has cultural power that crosses class lines and gives the workers leverage when they study and apply it. Unfortunately, law doesn't have in practice much legal power and can become a quagmire of technicalities, easily manipulated. Nevertheless it is a starting place for the workers. They use it to build solidarity among themselves and to confront local management. It functions as a common ground, which we don't have and so we need different approaches to workers' rights.

The logic of the problem suggests that, in globalization, human beings have become either producers or consumers—identities that serve markets. We in the U.S. obviously can't make a living as consumers. Can we compete ultimately with people who will work for almost nothing, and indeed for nothing, in parts of the world where life is desperate and cheap? Of course we are not absolute material determinists and look to ideals to assure us that we have a future. William Greider, my favorite revolutionary theorist of the white-collar middle class, warns of a dead end along that route too. He remarks

> One of the striking qualities of post-Cold War globalization is how easily business and government in the capitalist democracies have abandoned the values they putatively espoused forty years ago during the struggle against communism—individual liberties and political legitimacy based on free elections. Concern for human rights, including freedom of assembly for workers wishing to speak for themselves, has been pushed aside by commercial opportunity. Multinationals plunge confidently into new markets, from Vietnam to China, where governments routinely control and abuse their own citizens. (Bales 13-14)

There appears to be a problem in the workplace and it is coming at us fast. One sign is the ominous attack on labor rights all over the world, including here. Another and even more ominous sign is the explosion of modern day slavery, keeping pace with the world-wide poverty explosion (again, since the 1980s) and the concomitant rise of able bodied populations that are desperate for livelihood.

Bales pinpoints their role in "our global economy:

> [O]ne of the standard explanations that multinational corporations give for closing factories in the "first world" and opening them in the "third world" is the lower labor cost. Slavery can constitute a significant part of these savings. No paid workers, no matter how efficient, can compete economically with unpaid workers—slaves (9-10).

Chapter 2
Ghosts of History Walk the Border

"It is better to die on your feet than live on your knees."
--Emiliano Zapata[9]

"It is better to die fighting than to die of dysentery."
--Subcomandante Marcos[10]

"We wonder whether it is better to die all at once, as they have in Iraq, or to die slowly, as the workers are." --Julia Quiñones[11]

May 24, 2002, Nuevo Laredo, Mexico

Austin Tan Cerca de la Frontera is taking its first trip to Nuevo Laredo, Mexico. The *Comité Fronterizo de Obreras* (CFO or Border Committee of Women Workers) has been organizing there only since January of 2002, when two organizers, both men as it happens, left the CFO's home turf in Piedras Negras to begin to build the movement here. Nuevo Laredo has a population of 310,915 of which 41% are immigrants—mostly from

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[9] This popular saying is universally attributed to Zapata. Sandos, however, maintains these words were actually the brainchild of an anarchist associated with Ricardo Flores Magón. Praxedis Guerrero often devised aphorisms in the form of what he called *Puntos Rojos*, literally "red dots," figuratively "bullets" or "tracers." Workers and campesinos passed these nuggets around in an oral culture. (13 note 41)

[10] La Botz quotes this in the context of the extreme poverty and dearth of health services among the Mayan people who named themselves Zapatistas and took up arms in the southern state of Chiapas on January 1, 1994, to rebuke NAFTA and protest the government neglect and betrayal that the treaty represents to them (23).

[11] The coordinator of the Border Committee of Women Workers, Quiñonez was speaking at the Women and War Conference, San Marcos, Texas, June 2003. (Rosenberg and Castillo 5)

other Mexican states, but 4%, from other countries (*Republicano*). The large proportion of newcomers reflects the influx of industry and jobs under NAFTA, but does not, despite the hike in Mexican exports, measure development that benefits people. Josefina Castillo and I are leading the delegation, she as translator, I as general facilitator. Our plans with the CFO, cobbled together by email, which they have infrequent access to, and their cell phone, which doesn't always work, call for a rendezvous between the CFO local organizers, Juan Pablo and Jorge, and ourselves on a given street corner in the southward flow of traffic as it leaves the international bridge. We are a little late and Juan Pablo and Jorge are not in sight. Now our cell phones don't work either. This difficulty in meeting is typical for delegations. We explain it by reference to cross cultural differences in communication styles and technology but also, half joking, suspect that border ghosts are at work, sabotaging the coming together of Anglos and Mexicans. We park the rented minivan on a side street—Tom West has been driving—and Josefina and I hop out to get closer to the main thoroughfare and see if we can find our Mexican colleagues in the hurley-burley of street life. Congested and aggressive Saturday afternoon car traffic pushes two ways in two lanes, past fearless Mennonites, in their traditional garb, speaking Spanish and hawking their famous cheeses. Determined pedestrians wrestle their way by small shops, services, and restaurants. The simplest logistics are difficult.

As Josefina and I are approaching a set of pay phones, Juan Pablo, also known as Paola, makes his way towards us, smiling from a distance; we don't recognize him at first. Last we saw him, in Piedras, where he owned and operated an *estética* or beauty salon, he sported long, swirling, red-bronze hair and a turquoise jump suit. Now his hair is dyed black and combed in a conservative but stylish cut; his clothes follow suit.

"What happened to your *cabellos rojos*?" we exclaim. He raises his right hand, thumb and forefinger forming a circle, pinky finger extended, and gives an intentionally reticent account.

"*Un cambio*" ("a change").

He grins and arches an eyebrow. Further explanation he does not give. Paola has apparently accommodated a new environment where he wants to blend in, in contrast to Piedras Negras, the CFO's home city, where he can be himself. There, a touch of

notoriety and a formidable reputation as an organizer and as a gay man to reckon with give him an advantage. For the CFO, quite a few things are new in Nuevo Laredo.

Usually on delegations we eat in workers' homes. It's friendlier than eating out, more opportune for getting to know the workers' families, friends, and neighborhoods, and it is less costly. We reimburse the cook for her expenses and time and still economize. The saved money circles back to the CFO in the monthly donation we make to them. Though Paola and Jorge have already earned trust and made strong relationships with workers, they have not, apparently, found households willing to host us. Thus it is that we find ourselves eating out.

Our first night, Paola and Jorge have introduced us to new CFO volunteers Paula M. and Olga Alicia; we all go together to a restaurant in downtown Nuevo Laredo, a fairly inexpensive, somewhat anonymous looking place with fake wood paneling. We push tables together and corral chairs to accommodate our large Mexican and Anglo group, and in a shy pause before the conversation gets going—most of us are monolingual in Spanish or English—Elvia Arriola from Austin, who is bilingual—sighs with pleasure and casts an eye at large, framed photographs on the wall. Elvia is a lawyer with a JD from UC Berkeley and currently teaches law at Northern Illinois University, though she maintains a home in Austin and previously taught at the University of Texas Law School. On an early 2000 Austin Tan Cerca (ATCF) delegation, she reconnected with the border. It had been part of her early life and significant memories. Elvia was born and raised in Los Angeles. When she was a child her parents frequently took the large family to Tijuana, a place to stretch their dollars and buy food, medicines and dental work services. These were good times, the family piled into a station wagon, eating taquitos and singing Mexican songs, so the children could practice their Spanish. Elvia also remembers street beggars and houses made of cardboard on the hillsides overlooking the border checkpoint. Her mother worked in some of the first garment factories in L.A. in the early 1960's. Those establishments quickly took the opportunity to move to Mexico at the onset of the Border Industrial Program in 1965. A maquiladora in Mexicali recruited Elvia's mother to train and supervise workers, which she did for about a year "at a tremendous emotional cost for our family… working during the week and returning to L.A. on the weekends." Though the money was good she had to leave

quickly because “she sided too much with the workers;” investors were displeased (Arriola).

Elvia’s reunion with the border as part of an ATCF delegation had a big impact on her. The border became her passion and the focus of her research. Elvia lives in many overlapping worlds, a life of many threads and tensions. At the moment though she is jovial and relaxed.

“¡Híjole—mi querido tío!” she says to Pancho Villa’s image, which stares down from the wall next to our table. (“Gosh—it’s my dear uncle.”)

The revolutionary guerilla fighter, scourge of the north and the only military general ever to invade the United States—in 1916 he killed 16 people in Santa Isabela, New Mexico and also attacked Columbus—perches on horse back, wearing the typical sombrero and the cross of bullet-filled *bandoliers* over his chest. The waxed tips of his handlebar mustache point straight up.

“*Qué milagro*,” Elvia continues. “*¡Eres tú, mi cuñado!*” (“What a miracle. It’s you, my brother-in-law!”) Now she is greeting the stern visage and deep, dark eyes of Emiliano Zapata, most beloved of the 1910 Revolutionaries, who recruited an army of indigenous from the villages and haciendas of the state of Morelos and led a struggle for land reform, which he formulated as the Plan of Ayala and pursued with the immortal rallying cry “*Tierra y libertad,*” Land and liberty.

Finally Elvia comes to a statesmen-like figure exuding reserve and quiet.

“*No me digas*” she exclaims. “*¡Mi abuelito!* (“Don’t tell me! My little granpa!”) It is Benito Juárez, the orphaned Indian from Oaxaca, who earned a law degree in 1831, became presiding Supreme Court judge in 1857 and, after a tussle with conservatives, won the presidency in 1861. He also became the first, on a short list of Mexican presidents, to stand up to the economic imperialism of foreign powers, in contrast to the majority, like the 19th-century president Porfirio Díaz, whose idea of *development* led him to promote foreigners’ interests within Mexico and suppress the indigenous. Ruler for 36 years, Díaz was so successful in attracting foreign capital that, on the eve of the revolution that deposed him, more than two thirds of all Mexican investment came from outside the country (Hellman 45-46). In contrast, Juárez, who was president just previously, had suspended payment on foreign debts that already weighed heavily on the

Mexican economy. In response, Spain, Britain, and France sent troops, which landed, like Cortez, in Veracruz. The French were more ambitious than the other Europeans in their clique and made their way to Mexico City where they went so far as to install Archduke Maximilian of Austria on the "Mexican thrown." Benito Juárez and the Mexican government had to flee into exile. They went to Paseo del Norte—a border city facing El Paso at the western edge of Texas. Eight years later Juárez was vindicated and returned as president to the capitol city. Paseo del Norte was renamed Ciudad Juárez to honor him posthumously in 1888. (Hellman 44)

Elvia's greetings of the forefathers, all in Spanish, drew laughter from the Mexicans and set a pleasant tone. I was in on the joke and her witty claim to family relationships reverberated deeply with me. I later became an admirer of the Mexican Revolution as one that, to an extent, changed the distribution of power and wealth among social classes and I began to wonder whether these honored heroes represented a secret Mexican identity that rebukes foreign imperialists and their Mexican minions and fortifies descendents engaged in the same battles, almost one hundred years later. I was under the spell of my own romantic notions about the Revolution. Innocent of the nuances, I decide the next night to try Elvia's gambit as we were seated for dinner at another restaurant where, remarkably, the same heroes in different photos looked down on us. Turning to Paula M., who was seated on my right, I pointed one by one to the images on the wall, claiming in my simple Spanish each as a relative and therefore adding, as seemed proper to the etiquette I had learned, diminutives and endearments.

"Look, Paula, there's my dear little uncle, and, oh, my sweet brother-in-law, and my beloved little grandfather."

I'll wager I was the first North American with whom Paula had dined. With even more certainty I'd wager that I was the first to address the forefathers familiarly. She was not offended by my presumption, it seemed to me, though I may be blind to offenses I commit cross-culturally. In retrospect I wonder if she was merely embarrassed by my behavior. People don't like to talk about the Revolution. She began to giggle; the giggles deepened into the kind of laughter that borders on hysteria. Later, all returned to sobriety and, tired after a long, hot day and a heavy meal, as our group was breaking up and arranging transportation to go separate ways, we stood in the street outside the

restaurant, quite formally shaking hands and pecking cheeks. When I said goodnight to Paula, we both giggled again. At the time it seemed I had made a special and peculiar border crossing. Just when the Mexican heroes had made me more aware of the painful historical barriers between Mexico and the U.S., Elvia's greeting and evocation ritual helped me break the spell of irrevocable difference. I was relieved to able to cross the border, temporarily erasing it and consequently feeling disoriented but also a sense of freedom. This then seemed to be another in a series of lessons on the dynamics of border-crossings (See also Chapter 1) as well as an introduction to the Revolution.

In retrospect I see this first contact with the Revolution differently. I wanted to believe in the Mexican Revolution; moved by a fairly typical northern idealism, I wanted to believe that real revolution, one that makes systemic changes in class relations, was possible and that Mexico's was an example, close to home. It was trying to assuage my disappointment with the "War of Independence" that my generation studied in high school as the "American Revolution." Also in retrospect, I have come to believe that for Mexican workers the Revolution's greatest legacy is the sense of crushing defeat and painful loss and that possibly the references made Paula uncomfortable. For Elvia it is a different matter. As a bi-national person she has more distance and can enjoy the historic figures as colorful forefathers.

Despite the complexity of attitudes about the old heroes, it still seems to me that they are present from time to time and particularly during those nights in May 2002, making themselves heard and felt, inserting difficult questions into conviviality. Though Juárez, Zapata, and Villa died in 1872, 1919, and 1923, the way Elvia designed the family tree put them as close as the generation of our parents and grandparents. I wondered if the Revolutionaries had a special affinity for the border. After all, the border is Mexico's frontier, far from the federal seat of power and center of control in Mexico City, a good place to speak and act freely and start trouble.

In Nuevo Laredo eateries I had stumbled into a nest of symbols, threads leading in some complicated way to the myth of modern Mexican identity and directly to the source of legendary institutions that imprint Mexico and make it different from all other countries in Latin America. Further research told me that the Revolution bequeathed complex, sometimes contradictory symbols, which remain as a resource to some and an

obstacle to others. As is so often the case, the meanings change according to the class or political perspective of the speaker, and, no doubt, the era.

I will now explore some of those symbols and codes and how they operate in and influence the discourse of border labor battles and the strategies of the CFO. I am not a sociologist and this is not a definitive survey. My training is in the reading of literary and expository texts, expressive and symbolic images, and speech. But I do notice patterns—when they persist and expand, when they break down. I am attempting to interpret here the text of stories that I read, or heard told, and of the mini-narratives that I witnessed in the contexts that I observed. What peaked my curiosity was a discrepancy that became more glaring and more intriguing as I thought about it. On the one hand, I discovered, through reading, how important the Revolution of 1910 is to modern Mexico. Philip Russell calls it the "big bang of Mexican politics [today]" (Russell vii), Dillon and Preston speculate that it is what "set [Mexico] on a different course in the twentieth century from its Latin neighbors" (ix). Hellman finds the Revolution is "central… to all that makes Mexicans feel Mexican" (43). On the other hand, if it is so important why does no one talk about it? The silence about the Revolution adds another dimension to the mystery of this cultural symbol. Josefina Castillo, a Mexican national and one of my committee members, doubts any mystery here. She speculates that, in one more stunning defeat for the people, the Revolution has been thoroughly co-opted by the PRI or Institutional Revolutionary Party, which dominated Mexican politics for 71 years (until 2000), and claimed, as the name says, to have institutionalized The Revolution. The gap between the Revolutionary ideals and the PRI agenda is so wide and mendacious, many people are nauseated by the slightest whisper of Revolutionary rhetoric. The words inspire immediate distrust and the expectation that a politician will suddenly turn up and start mugging people.

Former President Carlos Salinas excelled in this kind of oratory. He observed the 63rd anniversary of the PRI with a speech that simultaneously claimed ownership of the Revolution and gutted from it whatever had been revolutionary. Brazen and sly, magician-like, he turns the glorious Revolution into glorious Reform—a feat of indifference to the meaning of words, but perhaps appropriate deference to the high regard with which Mexicans hold the period of Reform that Benito Juarez initiated.

Salinas introduces himself as President of the Republic in which office he governs "for all Mexicans" and, "as militant," he proudly participates in the PRI or Institutional Revolutionary Party. That's as close as he gets to the Revolution, though the PRI is named for it, while helping to efface it from history. One more mention in this speech helps him make the transition from Revolution to his real and beloved theme, *nuestra liberalismo social*, "our social liberalism," thus:

> Friends and comrades (*compañeros*): today we arrive at the beginning of the reform of the Revolution. This reform is guarantee of its permanence and vitality. Different from other revolutions, today abandoned and devalued, ours continues its existence in the people, in the party, and in the principle political actors of our country. Its enormous vital force is rooted in accepting the principles that have been the axis of all our history, projected on the new realities and on the strengthening of Mexico. (Hale 182)

After this mention in Salinas' speech, the Revolution takes second place to "the 19th-century liberal reform." He refers here to President Benito Juárez—though Salinas never mentions him by name—and such principles as "the demand for equal consideration for all" and reform, undertaken "in order to realize… justice, liberty and democracy." Then suddenly, without preparing us, he slips in a conclusion, neglecting to following any particular logic, but having at least waited a decent interval of time measured by quantity of words elapsed. Accordingly he jumps to an equation between liberalism, as he has just defined it (buoyed by the standbys—justice, liberty and democracy), and neo-liberalism, which to the contrary means delivery of national resources, including labor, to private development and exploitation, frequently ending in export. "The continuity of the revolution finds expression today in neo-liberalism."

Salinas is particularly scurrilous in this passage because at this time he was negotiating the neo-liberal agreement, NAFTA, (secretly in Mexico), with President George H.W. Bush and the United States, and he was proposing to cede Article 27 of the Constitution in order to open more land to development by private, often foreign investors. Article 27 was the basis of land redistribution in the 1930s, a direct and concrete expression of the Zapatista cry for land. President Lázaro Cárdenas made it the legal basis for land reform. He broke up the sprawling haciendas of the wealthy and turned them over to the Indian villagers and landless peasants who had worked on them.

He thus redistributed land (in all, 20 million hectares) —and redistributed wealth—clearly a revolutionary act. He affirmed the communal land tenure that peasants had always practiced (Hellman 45 and La Botz 54).

Article 27, which Salinas compromised, also promoted the concept of public interest, or a public good, and of state regulation on its behalf. It asserted the "nation's ownership of all products of nature." Here are a few of the words, emphasis mine.

> *The Nation* shall at all times have the right to impose on private property such limitations as *the public interest may demand*, as well as the right to regulate the utilization of natural resources which are susceptible of appropriation, in order to conserve them and to *ensure a more equitable distribution of public wealth*. (Mexico)

Article 27 was a central institution of revolutionary Mexico and it was precisely this legislation that Salinas was abolishing as he celebrated the PRI's anniversary. That destruction of a peoples' treasure was one of the sparks that ignited the January 1, 1994, armed uprising of the contemporary Zapatista movement. As Zapatista commander major Rolando said, "When the government cancelled article 27, they put another bullet in Zapata's heart and in our heart too." (Ross *Rebellion…* 293).

In his anniversary speech, Salinas associates and conflates revolution and reform. This allows him to do away with the former, yet siphon off its glory for the latter:

> The revolution today is reforming. It does so in the only manner in which it may be consistent with itself and with those light-bringers of the past: by accepting the commitments that are more than circumstantial solutions, and by starting from the realities of the country and of the world, coming fully into the future (188).

For my ear, the words on the page are enough to bring to life the unctuous timbre of presidential speechmaking. The content of the speech, with wanton equations and wandering signifiers, resembles U.S. presidential rhetoric, for example, "Free trade is freedom!" (The press caught this remark by the President as he left the Montreal FTAA summit and tip-toed past protesters.)

During my travels with the CFO I never (with one brief, interesting exception, to be discussed) heard the word "revolution" spoken. But I did begin to suspect, or the idealist in me imagined, that people spoke about the revolution in code—always oblique

references or none at all, but opening a little gap in reasoning or narrative that became possible for me to fill in. As I began to look for a code, I began to hear references frequently. Then I was motivated to do research. An obvious starting place was the Mexican Federal Labor Law. The actual book is very much in evidence, the CFO's primary organizing tool. It enumerates and explains a vast body of workers' rights. It is the workers' shield in battle.

Here is an oblique reference to the revolution by means of a reference to that book of laws. In the film that Heather Courtney, a UT student at the time, shot and edited of the first Austin Tan Cerca delegation in 1999, Arturo is a supervisor whom management labeled a troublemaker, or *persona problemática.* He describes how he was standing in the street in front of one of the maquiladoras, leafleting. Guards were eyeing him and talking to each other on walkie-talkies. They told him to move on. He knows that they want to stop his leafleting. He tells the delegation from Austin, they did stop him: they fired him from his job on trumped up charges. Arturo's emotion is building as he tells the story and he breaks into a paratactic style that pushes past any need to spell out the connections between these two statements, "I have a right to organize. I am a Mexican." There the two ideas sit, side by side, deeply connected for Arturo, not so much for us—at first. I saw the film perhaps ten times before the juxtaposition began to ring in my ears and I began to wonder at the fuse that connected these two ideas for him. I am coming to the conclusion that the revolution is glaringly visible to all Mexicans and exerts a powerful influence, though no one speaks about it directly, especially to outsiders. Elvia gave the secret away—by naming the heroes (Courtney).

One strand of the legacy of the Revolution is the sheer violence of the time and the traumatic social memory of so much blood spilled. Both Zapata and Villa were ferocious military leaders; both, in turn, died at the hands of assassins. John Ross, a chronicler of recent histories of the left in the U.S. and Mexico, says that

> [t]o Mexicans, all Latin Americans, indeed the whole world, [Zapata] is a symbol of the incorruptible revolutionary, a powerful voice for revolutionary morality. But what his countrymen and women most remember about the legend of Emiliano Zapata is not so much his nobility but how [he] was betrayed and assassinated by the government (*Rebellion…*205).

Josefina Castillo points out that John Ross, like many U.S. enthusiasts of the revolution, romanticize Zapata and the heartbreak of his betrayal. She adds "we assume corruption as a part of our daily lives." Nevertheless, and without contradicting Josefina's observation, betrayal and fear of betrayal are frequent themes in Mexican history and even in current personal relations among workers who organize for a better life under the pressure of too many personal responsibilities and not enough resources.

As evident as the tragic death of heroes is the suffering of ordinary people who died as a direct cause of the revolution.

> The revolution ravaged the Mexican countryside for more than a decade. Even today [1994], it stands as the bloodiest conflict ever witnessed in the Western Hemisphere, and until the recent years of carnage in Cambodia, it was the most violent revolutionary struggle ever fought in terms of the proportion of population lost: in 1910 Mexico counted a population of only 14.5 million people, and as many as 1.5 million Mexicans lost their lives over the next decade… Moreover, for nearly a million noncombatants the revolution brought death by starvation, disease, exposure, or execution. Villages were burned or flooded by government troops, crops were destroyed and peasants taken hostages or summarily shot as examples to their fellow villagers… When the 1920 census appeared, a total of eight thousand villages had completely disappeared… as a direct result of the Revolution" (Hellman 48-49).

What's that add up to? What do these events and symbols mean for the present? These are the strands of influence, or revolutionary legacies, that I will explore as the background of the workers' struggle for their rights: 1. Fatalism, an expectation of predestined suffering that achieves nothing, 2. A web of relationships poisoned by betrayal. One expects that one will be betrayed or suspects that unwittingly one already has been. 3. Also, the opposite—a manic determination to die for a cause, a desire to sacrifice and to finally make one's efforts count. 4. A sense of imminent conflagration, anticipation that a spark could set off an explosion at any time. If workers fester with grievances or confront management, management fears an explosion; workers fear a provocation or a sudden, wild application of brutal force. Sometimes both sides confirm the others' nightmares, giving each ground to confirm what they suspected all along. In the worse case scenario, the cycle continues, dragging each side down into their paranoia until no one can change the tide and disconfirm the expectations. Into this nightmare

scenario sometimes steps someone with access to media that purposefully manipulates these symbols to spread libel and mistrust. We will see examples in Chapter 3, the press clippings from border newspapers in Piedras Negras and Río Bravo, and my eyewitness account.

Behind the scenes, CFO leaders give evidence that they understand the dynamic of violence begetting violence. One CFO organizer, María Elena Robles of Ciudad Acuña, uses a CFO saying to elucidate what happens in confrontations on the factory floor: "The one who gets angry first loses." During a tense and very public dispute over electoral democracy in a union that historically by-passes elections and hand-picks representatives, at a time when the issue mobilized a thousand workers in Piedras Negras, Julia Quiñonez warned, "Any one who resorts to violence is no longer with us." In the same mobilization, just after an independent CFO-supported slate won, through free balloting, all five seats on the union committee that represents workers, Javier Carmona, one of the newly elected, assessed the achievement thus: "We defeated them [the corrupt union] three times. First we led the rank and file to demand a free election of representatives; second we won the balloting; and third we withstood their attempts to provoke us when they injured 10 or 11 workers before the vote."

El Zócalo, a chain that publishes a daily paper in Piedras Negras, keeps file photos of workers scuffling or defending themselves and reruns old photos with new captions that describe workers rioting. They build a picture that assassinates character and feeds the notion that workingmen lack self control. They omit the corresponding provocations that issue from unions or other company representatives. Thus they affirm stereotypes about Mexican working-class men and omit provocative union tactics. Media representation becomes more complex and devious in regard to the plight and role of women and violence. The media hides the willingness and ability of working women to fight back, to withstand or repel goon and police attacks. This affirms the stereotype of working women's docility and worse, protects with invisibility those who perpetrate violence against women as a particularly obscene labor control tactic. An attack by police or goons will target women, sometimes pregnant women, thus claiming three victims with one blow—the woman who is attacked; the men who witness the attack and are unable to perform their protective duty; and other women who bear witness, are under

attack in their private lives, and feel traumatized to see the same threat materialize publicly (Peña 1980, 14). I have heard the stories and seen the scars, on the normally smiling face of former CFO organizer Margarita Ramirez, for example. (Chapter Three instantiates these claims.)

U.S. managers sometimes fear Mexican workers. For this reason they may refuse to visit their Mexican facilities. Occasionally they hire bodyguards when they meet with Mexican workers in the U.S., near the border. The workers exaggerate too in their reports of management violence. Mark Horowitz, an Anglo who sympathized with the workers and spent time with strikers (more of him, also in Chapter 3) was caught in a police raid in Río Bravo and jailed. Later, speaking to the press, he was careful not to exaggerate the extent of his injuries. In private conversation he agreed that Mexican police are scary, as well as violent, but that those who suffer attacks may overstate. A violent shove can be so shocking to someone who is standing up for her rights under the Constitution that her testimony may later turn the incident into "a beating." Chances are she has already experienced violence at home or in a public space which makes threats or feints that much more intolerable[12].

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[12] Mexican women suffer extremely high levels of domestic violence. In a special thematic edition of *Mexico Labor News* on women, editor Dan La Botz wrote that

> Mexican government authorities report that twenty percent of Mexican women suffer sexual, physical, or economic violence from their spouse or partner. Mexico's government also reports that fourteen women die each day from domestic violence. However the United Nations reports 46 percent of Mexican women have suffered such domestic violence, while in other Latin American nations about one-third of women suffer such violence.
>
> Mexican women are also victims of rising levels of social violence. The unsolved murders of hundreds of women in Juárez over the last 10 years now appears to have expanded to several other border cities and to the interior. Women are also frequent victims of crime: burglary, robbery, and rape.
>
> Mexican women live in a very precarious situation, a result of changing social institutions, government policies, and values. Today women make up over 40 percent of the workforce, and women head 20 percent of all Mexican households or 6.7 million. Yet over 90 percent of working women must also do housework: clean, wash, prepare meals, and care for children. The double duty of work inside and outside the home takes a heavy toll, and stress contributes to emotional and psychological problems.

The Revolution had an affinity for the border and it is easy to stumble on traditions hiding under stones there. The Revolution also had a special affinity for labor struggles. Even though the loudest cry of 1910-1919 was the peasants hungering for land, and the world best remembers "*Tierra y Libertad*," labor's call for dignity and rights has a special place in the annals. Mexican schools teach young students that the first shot of the revolution was fired at the *huelga de Cananea,* strike at Cananea, also just as frequently called "the massacre of Cananea," an expression of a more numerous loss of life than was the case and an example of the tendency to exaggerate these matters. This is understandable. Cananea is not just a symbol of bloodshed as much as it is a story of violence perpetrated against the spirit and pride of Mexican workers. What first mobilized workers at Cananea was the use of the "Mexican wage," materially inadequate and, worse, an offense to national pride and to the dignity of labor, all rolled into one, intolerably (Bacon "Mexican Miners…). It seems to me the Mexicans will go to war as often for human dignity as because they are hunger.

Events in Cananea, a copper mining town in the Mexican state of Sonora that abuts Arizona, unfolded in 1905-1906. William C. Greene, a U.S. citizen, managed and partially owned the Cananea Consolidated Copper Company, a mining operation. Greene followed the standard practice of paying U.S. workers two to four times more than Mexicans, frequently for the same work. He also gave the northerners superior housing and working conditions. Increasingly, this rankled the Mexicans who constituted 70% of the work force of 4,400. In 1905 workers began communicating with anarchists in exile in St. Louis—the PLM or Mexican Liberal Party of Ricardo Flores Magón. In May of 1906 handbills began to circulate. One nailed to a fence read: "Curse the thought that a Mexican is worth less than a Yankee... Mexicans Awaken! The Country and our dignity demand it" (Sandos 11). By June 1, the Copper Company had a strike on its hands. When confrontations led to violence and seven men—Mexican and U.S.—lost their lives,

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While the Mexican Federal Labor Law calls upon employers to create childcare centers for the children of working mothers, few do so. Public childcare centers take care of only one-fifth of all children between infancy and six years old. Without adequate childcare women must leave their children with family and friends or, in some cases, leave children alone in the home.

Greene wired for help in all directions. The first to respond was an army of 270 volunteers from Bisbee, led by Arizona ranger Thomas Rynning. They arrived by train on the morning of June 2, made a show of force, and withdrew. Their mere appearance, however, affronted the Mexicans. The next day Mexican units finally arrived, a hodge-podge including rural police, gendarmes, and federal troops, amounting to a force of 1,500. They imposed martial law, and shot more workers. The battle was over, but not the war. According to Sandos, part of the power in history of the Cananea incident is that it revealed to Mexicans everywhere their President in an act of betrayal.

> Díaz tried to minimize the significance of Americans invading Mexican territory to protect their investments and to break a Mexican strike, but his position was untenable. However he couched it, his opponents could see evidence that he… favor[ed] foreigners over Mexicans. Protection of the national patrimony came second to securing foreign-owned property (11).

The anarchists, through *Regeneración*, the newspaper they published, in exile from St. Louis, capitalized on Díaz's disloyalty and fortified opposition against the dictator with hyperbolic stories. In this way the myth of massacre was launched. One story "described the strikers numbering ten thousand, a figure more than double the actual labor force, and claimed that hundreds of miners had been 'massacred in cold blood upon the streets'" (Sandos 12). I have noted this pattern of exaggerated atrocity. It seems to me to correspond then and now to emotional truth so that the numbers of fatalities increase in the retelling to express the speaker's outrage. This kind of journalism persists, though the press today is more often in the hands of people who would justify Díaz—like *El Zócalo in* Piedras Negras—and are anxious to protect foreign investment. Greene, as well as Díaz, attempted to resurrect his reputation and took the familiar tack of blaming outside agitators. He suspected that the Western Federation of Miners (WFM), a U.S. union based in Denver, along with the Mexican Liberal Party in exile, had instigated the strike. In literal terms he was proven wrong, but he did find evidence that the WFM supported the strike and did indeed channel funds and propaganda through Bisbee to "agitators" in Cananea. The difference between Greene's surmise and the moment and manner in which the match of violence was finally struck is nuanced, but nonetheless important,

especially for those of us who have never seen from inside the momentum for a strike grow, the organic life of solidarity among workers, and the balance in roles between their spontaneous action and the preparation for a showdown, either by leaders at a distance, or right inside the body of a movement.

Resonant as is the parable of Cananea, a more scholarly account of the beginning of the revolution, while still based at the border, stresses the multi-class participation in the gathering of the storm. That coming together constitutes another legacy—unity, the coalescence of diverse interests, set on throwing out the dictator and his elite. In addition to peasants, who owned no land but made up the vast majority of the population, and workers, this version of the story counts middle and upper class liberals and the army as acting participants:

> The earliest years of the 20th century were marked by small-scale peasant revolts, violent labor struggles… But the actual outbreak of hostilities did not come until 1910—groups of northern landowners, resentful of their long exclusion from power under the Díaz dictatorship and frustrated that the dictatorship provided them no institutional means by which to gain a share of political and economic power, allied themselves with the radical intellectuals who were calling for revolution, and rode into battle with their own ranch hands and peons as troops.
>
> Looked at in a certain way the revolution was a terrible defeat of the people who gave the most: peasants and workers who lost… everything. But while the peasants and workers derived very little immediate benefit from the revolution, they later received immensely important benefits in the form of legislative guarantees." (Hellman 46)

The new constitution of 1917 incorporated these popular goals, which became enduring legacy. Article 123, "the most progressive piece of labor legislation anywhere in the world in 1917," in addition to Article 27, "provided legal underpinnings for the radical transformation of the status and condition of the working class and peasantry"(Hellman 50-52).

Mexicans of all classes seem to know that justice and truth were at stake. Those that struggle today for justice stand on the shoulders of the past and are taller for that reason. Their voices carry further. The Constitution and the Federal Labor Law are tangible legacies and still carry prestige. When a worker cites chapter and verse of either, or even invokes the good books by name, her argument automatically carries more clout. The CFO builds strategies that take this into account. Mana transfers from Zapata to the

Constitution to the worker, as she stands on the factory floor and faces a threatening supervisor.

Article 123 of the Constitution establishes a mechanism by which the state can intervene in labor relations on the workers' behalf. It guarantees the right to organize and strike, for public employees as well as for workers in private enterprise. Section VI of Article 123 is both tragic, given the discrepancy today between salaries and the cost of living, and inspirational when you realize the intent of its authors. It says:

> The general minimum wage must be sufficient to satisfy the normal material, social, and cultural needs of the head of a family and to provide for the compulsory education of his children. The occupational minimum wage shall be fixed by also taking into consideration the conditions of different industrial and commercial activities. (Mexico)

Providing detail, the 1,200-page Mexican Federal Labor Law picks up where the Constitution leaves off. It covers, for example, the amount and payment of salaries and bonuses, vacation time, profit sharing, gender equality, maternity rights and benefits—not forgetting to calculate the effect of seniority on maternity leave, prevention of job discrimination, access to labor arbitration, days off, individual and collective contracts, overtime, new owners, employment stability, and more. Article 170 has been important to organizing in recent years. It begins:

> Women workers will have the following rights. I. During pregnancy, they will not do work that demands considerable force and significant danger for their health in relation to pregnancy, such as lifting, pulling or pushing heavy weights, such as work that produces vibration, or requires them to stand for long periods of time, or do work that can alter their physical or mental state. (My translation) (Mexico)

CFO organizers carry the paper back edition in their purses like Jehovah's Witnesses carry the Bible.

The Constitution promoted a liberalized atmosphere. Articles 3 and 130 stripped the Catholic Church of its political and economic power… and are responsible for "many of the characteristics that make modern Mexico distinctive among Latin American countries" (Hellman 51). Among other effects, these laws rid education of the Church's influence. In the post-revolutionary period, idealistic teachers entered where nuns and

brothers had trod before. The new generation of *maestras* and *maestros* “carried the revolutionary message to the most remote corners of the country”(51). Public education at the village level became another channel through which the Revolution lived on, and became a resource as succeeding generation came of age and noticed the struggle was not yet finished.

From the Mexican Federal Labor Law we know that the revolutionary period generated a progressive concern for women’s labor rights, and wrote laws that are more advanced than anything comparable in the U.S. today. Is there a tradition of revolutionary women that supports women’s activism today? The Revolution provides various images and examples of revolutionary women. Some stepped out of traditional roles of subservience and invisibility and helped build justice and the nation. Others fell deeper and more abjectly into roles that served male soldiers. The material is not easy to study and it requires digging and sorting through ambiguities in the language to discover these women. Spanish noun endings often make gender clear; but sometimes they don’t, e.g. *trabajador* or *obrero* indicates a male worker, *trabajadora* or *obrera* a female; however, all poets are *poetas*, and all dentists are *dentistas*. *Soldado* is “soldier” for a man or woman, according to *Webster’s Spanish-English Dictionary*, and denotes both genders, without inflecting. This dictionary entirely omits a listing for *soldaderas*, a nominative that does appear in *Harper Collins* and translates the word as “camp follower,” not a female soldier or warrior. However, writers don’t agree. Miriam Louie, a feminist U.S. labor historian, looking at Mexican antecedents, is generally sensitive to cultural and gender nuance, and translates *soldadera* as soldier (63). Sociologist Shirlene Soto attaches both meanings—camp follower and warrior—to the word. She does however document the separate realities. As camp followers she describes the *soldaderas* as

> Indians or poor *mestizas* (women of mixed European and American Indian ancestry). When their men were conscripted or kidnapped by the army, these women took their children and joined the march. *Soldaderas* endured miserable living conditions, malnutrition, and even childbearing in inhospitable surroundings. Traveling constantly, they often bore their babies in the fields and then returned immediately to their work. (44)

Without acknowledging the very different social positions of warriors, compared to camp followers, Soto describes these women—these *soldaderas*—as anonymous also. When a few individuals distinguished themselves enough to pass their names down to posterity, myth and fact combine to create a new reality. Such is the case of Margarita Neri, "[S]upposedly a Dutch-Maya from Quintana Roo…" "She was noted for her dancing as well as her fighting" and "became a high ranking revolutionary officer… She was alleged to have been the mistress of a member of the Díaz cabinet. In 1910, Neri led one thousand men north through Tabasco and Chiapas, vowing to decapitate Díaz with her own hands," and so on. Soto also discusses the careers and reputations of Valentina Gatica and others known only by their nicknames (44-45).

UT grad student Diane Goetz made a comparative study, 1997, of women's roles in the Mexican revolution and in the 1994 armed Zapatista uprising in Chiapas. At variance with Soto, Goetz concludes that in the earlier generation, women sometimes fought in combat "but no names and no details remain." In conclusion, the language lacks consistency and may indicate cultural conflicts about the reality versus the prescriptions for gender identities (Goetz)

Another way to fill gaps in information is to check the photographic record. Augustín Victor Casasola was a renowned photographer of the revolution. First as a journalist, then as an historian conscious of the importance of his subject, he documented the period starting in 1900. He has left many images but not all of them achieved icon status. Generally the ones that portrayed a simpler, more conventional, or masculinest version of gender fared better in the public domain. One hypercognated image shows Villa and Zapata in full field regalia, having ceremoniously entered the National Palace on December 6, 1914. The government is in flux. Authority, control, and the whole arena of political relations are ambiguous. The president of the moment, Eulalio Gutiérrez, receives the peasant warriors. Ingratiating, he invites them to feel the power of Mexico's symbolic center and to sit in the thrown-like Presidential Chair. Villa accepts. Zapata refuses. The photo shows the apostate seated humbly to Villa's left, dismayed or distracted. The contrast in their personalities rises to the surface: Villa—firmly in the moment, ready for battle or a good time; Zapata – on guard and reflective (Casasola).

Casasola documents the two guises of the *soldadera.* Under the more iconic version, a caption reads, “Peasant women serve the revolutionary insurgency.” These women are faceless subordinates to the troops. The baskets that they carry on their heads overshadow their identities. They carry the means to reproduce life as they travel by foot at the side of mounted, uniformed soldiers. They are a deeply exploited, resigned, and haggard lineage in women’s history.

Hypercognated history has made Casasola’s photos of male warriors and female helpmeets iconic and omitted the women warriors. Digging deeper in the Casasola archive quickly complicates concepts of revolutionary gender. His oeuvre, partially accessible in *Historia grafica de la Revolución*, contains, some startling imagery that may provoke the need for cognitive adjustment. “La Destroyer,” says the caption under one photograph in the English language edition of the *Historia*, “was famous for helping those who had fallen in battle to die a more rapid and less painful death.” Apparently she shot the wounded and put them out of their misery, mercifully, as a rancher shoots a lame horse. She half kneels and half sits on the ground in this street scene. Swathed in long skirts, she holds one of her victims, as if cradling him, at the same time resembling a bird with talons that grip its prey. She looks up toward the camera—but not at it. Her eyes do not focus; her mouth is open (73)[13].

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[13] Hypercognition [over cogitated] and hypocognition [under cogitated] are terms barrowed from Lakoff (23-24). He uses them to discuss strategic political discourse in which conservatives, for example, frame issues in a way that comes to dominate language and becomes the only succinct or recognizable way of talking about a topic. Through spokespersons and sympathetic media they circulate the new verbal formulation. Any other way of talking about it becomes defensive, wordy, and hard to receive.

The example he uses is the Republican invention of *tax relief* to replace t*ax cuts* and the successful floating of the verbal package so that it dominates discourse on a given issue. Applying the concept to Casasola’s imagery, I’m not suggesting anyone mounted a campaign to dominate revolutionary imagery. Rather, I believe, a complex cultural process prefers, in effect, some images to others and hyper-circulates them. Thus more widely circulated images, or icons, reflect cultural biases. All this may be obvious, but for me, Lakoff’s terms—hypercognition and hypocognition—are useful for making a distinction between images and meanings that are close to the surface and those that are buried.

A contrast to this disturbing image is the serene figure titled "*Soldadera* – warrior and woman" taken about 1915. The subject in this full body studio portrait has dressed very carefully. Her sombrero and head are tilted at an angle to reveal an earring dangling from her right ear. It matches or echoes her string tie and the ribbons that, like insignia or honors, decorate the cover flaps of the pockets of her long sleeve shirt. She wears soft suede pants and leather boots. She carries a pistol, stuck in her pants, held in place by the belt. She is posed carefully, presumably by Casasola, so that the angle of her head accents the earring, and the turn of her hips reveals the gun. She perches on a low stool, her long legs akimbo in the foreground. She is both relaxed and ready to get up and go. It is as if Casasola has created a design that teaches us one of the lessons of the time: he shows us a natural combination of woman and warrior, two phonemes that some cultural teachings would keep apart. He reveals to us a woman that belongs primarily to her self and to her country—not to any man. She is helpful to comrades but not a helpmeet. Her head faces off to our right, but the gaze of her gunshot eyes meets us directly (Casasola 186).

These galleries of women's images hint at the unresolved issue of gender equality. Though Goetz doesn't examine it, a commitment to egalitarianism seems to connect the revolutionary women with the contemporary Zapatista women. Both generations struggled, with varying success, to incorporate egalitarian values. Emiliano Zapata spoke for and acted on principles that enfranchised women, all women, including the peasant class. For Goetz, who divides the women of the revolution into four categories—camp followers, warriors, intellectuals, and victims—only the middle-class intellectual is enfranchised, which she demonstrates as she provides biographical sketches of this more privileged class of school teachers, writers, and journalists whose names and contributions survive.

A schoolteacher Dolores Jiménez y Muro led women's groups, one called *Hijas of Cuauhtémuc*, daughters of Cuauhtémuc that actively opposed Díaz[14]. Many of the

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[14] Cuauhtémuc was the last Aztec emperor, executed by Cortés in 1525. Use of the name is anti-colonialist, by extension anti-imperialist, and patriotic in a special way.

group's members, including Jiménez y Muro, were arrested during a large but peaceful march in Mexico City. *Las Hijas* called for the "political enfranchisement of Mexican women in their economic, physical, intellectual and moral struggles." Emiliano Zapata invited Jiménez to join him at his base, in the state of Morelos, because he liked so much her Political and Social Plan. She called for social and economic reforms, including restitution of usurped lands, a demand dear to Zapata. Another woman who became a Zapata supporter—in this case also a combatant in his army—was Juana Belén Gutiérrez de Mendoza. She founded a newspaper, "the bitingly sarcastic, anti-Díaz" *Vésper: Justicia y Libertad*, and passionately opposed social injustice (Soto 22). While living in Guanajuato, one of the most religiously conservative states in Mexico, and, incidentally, the home of President Vicente Fox, she also attacked the clergy and the roles traditionally assigned to women (Goetz).

The women of the revolution, while not high profile, offer to the inquirer of today a rich cast of characters who lived according to an array of values. Despite this resource, and despite its frequent interconnections with the border, I have never heard workers make reference to Revolutionary women's roles, even though the women of the CFO are, in their own way, revolutionaries.

Certainly it is easy to observe the importance of women in the culture of the CFO and their strength and clarity as leaders. Is this the result of their methodology of slow, patient organizing that brings to the fore individual consciousness, one person at a time, and joins people in the support of solidarity? Or is there another element in the culture giving them a head start—some trace indigenous influence that provides patterns of communal consensus deliberation. I was struck by how comfortable and in control the women were in running the first meeting of dissidents, mostly men, in the Alcoa mobilization that started in 2000. No one knew at the time that this was the beginning of a campaign that would eventually include thousands of workers in Ciudad Acuña. The CFO invited members of an Austin Tan Cerca delegation to attend that first gathering—twenty or so workers sitting in an unfinished, concrete block addition to a house: no floor, empty openings for doors and windows, no barriers to the neighbors or to the music

blaring from a parked car. It was my first trip to Mexico with Austin Tan Cerca. I had preconceptions of how gender relationships would play out and was surprised.

Julia Quiñonez and Maria Elena Robles ran the meeting. Their reading of the workers' energy and the timing of their interventions were masterful. They knew when and how to elicit grievances but also when and how to change the pace. Before workers got lost in griping and self-pity, Julia and Maria Elena would switch tack and guide the meeting toward analysis and then to learning about rights and law. They expertly devised icebreakers to bring the Anglo and Mexican participants together. We saw these two women orchestrate the situation; workers, many of them suffering the disorientation of immigration from the south, took first steps to deal with insults to their dignity and violation of rights they didn't know they had. We saw grown men begin to shake off habits of hopelessness and intellectual deference to authority and start to define and analyze problems. We saw light bulbs going off in heads and register on faces—all this under the skillful leadership of women. It was *manos vacías*, the philosophy of empty hands, in action. They controlled the proceedings like conductors, finely connected to their orchestra. Those of us from the U.S. came out of the meeting before its conclusion and stood on the street next to our minivan smoking cigarettes at high speed and speechless with excitement. We recognized the power of what we had witnessed.

A few years later, on another delegation, Quent, a young man from Austin with strong feminist views, asked Maria Elena why women were in the forefront of CFO organizing. She answered with a twinkle in her eye, "We have more courage." This was partly a joke, but not entirely; however the conversation stopped there. Quent didn't follow up and Maria Elena didn't volunteer more. Courage is an issue though; fear and apathy among the abused is wide spread and an obstacle to organizing that the CFO often articulates.

Pilar Marentes demonstrated another style of organizing, quite different than Julia's and Maria Elena's, precisely in relation to gender roles. Maybe her style appeared different only because I saw her in action under peculiar duress. Formerly a full-time CFO organizer, in Ciudad Acuña like Maria Elena, Pilar was, in the summer of 2002, working a job and a half at a social service agency and supporting her elderly and ailing mother. The U.S. recession was spreading towards the maquila sector at the border;

factories were closing. Employers often took off like *golondrinas* (swallows) in the middle of the night, without paying earned salaries or the generous severance stipulated by Mexican federal labor law. Distress and shock reigned—a ripe organizing moment.

Despite her other commitments, Pilar somehow got involved in bringing the CFO message to workers who found themselves out of a job, angry, baffled, and with no where to go. Some of them just remained in the quieted factories. They knew that under Mexican law, workers might hold factories and their contents—raw material, production machines, left over inventory—as collateral against companies' debts to them. This legal strategy doesn't work when employers not only absent themselves and their bankrolls nocturnally, but also truck assets to warehouses a mile or two away on the other side of the river. This was the act of gross betrayal that U.S.-owned Gecamex, a maquiladora that made covers for baby car seats, perpetrated under cover of the U.S. recession. The factory that the workers repossessed was, except for a little office furniture, an empty shell. There the workers sat or stood, Mexican management staff as well as assembly line workers. Pilar talked her way in. She still had her copy of the Labor Law. She attracted a few to a circle and addressed everyone as *compañeros* and *compañeras*, a language of labor pride and struggle, worlds away from the vocabulary of empty flattery and cooptation, like "associates," that prevails in Mexican management lingo as in the U.S.

Her first job was to explain who and what the CFO is, not an easy task. Here, I was curious to note, she resorted to a helpmeet metaphor to explain a division of labor between women and men and between organizers, mostly women, and activists within the factory, men or women—but since her audience, at that moment, was predominantly male, she cast the factory activists as male. She seemed to take care to explain gender relations in a reassuring way to men new to the movement. This, more or less, was her narrative: CFO organizers (female, easy to denote with a Spanish ending, *promotoras*) go door to door in the workers' *colonias* (neighborhoods), to meet the workers in the safety and comfort of their own homes. As questions and answers begin to flow between the organizer and the workers, together they search for a collective response to mutual issues. Mind you, all the organizers are current or former maquiladora workers. Leadership, which later transfers to the factory floor, begins to develop among the

workers. Collaboration evolves in which "organizers support activists*, just like a woman/wife* (*una mujer*) *supports her husband/man* (*su hombre*). Support (*apoyo*) is broad enough in Spanish, as it is in English, to include anything from a helpmeet to a full partner. Pilar was canny, leaving room for her audience to interpret not only her audacious presence, but also her words, however they needed to.

Her work bore fruit. A week later, about 40 workers, including the plant manager and other Mexican members of the supervisory staff, attended a meeting with the CFO and a friendly labor lawyer. I have listened to the CFO for hours and Pilar is the only one I have ever heard specify gender roles. The CFO is a woman-led organization. Its mission gives special importance to women's issues. Even the men are explicit about fighting for women's rights. What is the background of their gender concepts? What is the origin and genesis of their commitment to internal democratic and consensus process and relations? The Revolution is not the only era in which I am looking for an answer.

Several women of the CFO have talked about certain ancestors who inspired their activism—their mothers. Maria Elena García (not to be confused with Maria Elena Robles of Ciudad Acuña) was a full-time CFO organizer in Reynosa for about 7 years. A rather taciturn person, she nevertheless emphatically expressed loyalty to and pride in her mother and the activism of her mother and of other women elders in the Reynosa worker community. What I didn't suspect was how important Maria Elena's mom and her *compañeras* were to other workers, not just in Reynosa, but as far away as Juárez at the far western corner of the Mexico-Texas border. The experiences of one generation had passed to another and the news had traveled 600 miles, as I discovered on a delegation to that city.

In October of 2004, Austin Tan Cerca was making its first visit to Ciudad Juárez, when by chance we stumbled on the Reynosa legacy. It was our first trip to visit the CFO in this city of 1.3 million across the border from El Paso, where maquiladoras employed 300,000 at the industry's peak in spring 2001. Recently the city has become infamous in Mexico, as well as in the Northern press, for the unabated wave, since the early 1990s, of horrific crimes against women[15]. After attempts, beginning in January 2002, to establish

[15] Writing in a special issue on women of Mexico Labor News (already cited), John Ross

a presence in Juárez, the CFO was just beginning to make progress thanks to Gustavo de la Rosa, a dedicated labor lawyer. A rare breed of attorney, de la Rosa has been pursuing his practice for years, assisting workers to fight for their rights in court, but had recently begun to do it under the CFO name and with a volunteer committee to offer further support and promote legal education among workers. Because of the predominance of men, and because they were not current or former maquiladora workers—but rather self-employed artists, merchants or small business owners—the committee departed from the carefully worked out principles of the CFO organizing model. CFO philosophy maintains that a movement lead by workers insures grounding in respect and the practice of *manos vacías, or* "empty hands*.*" The variation in Juárez was partly experimental and partly expeditious, since previous efforts had failed. This middle-class incarnation had, though, been able to make some difficult first steps. They had found workers willing to stand up for their rights and persist against intimidation and their own "labor panic." This allowed de la Rosa to build and pursue legal cases that benefited the individual and could stand as an example to others. One such encouraged worker, José (changed name), was fighting a maquiladora company for severance pay after an extraordinary series of dirty tricks. We asked him where he got his courage. "I come from Veracruz; I know how

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begins an essay on the Juarez murders: "On the frigid morning of Jan. 5 a stone's throw from the US border, the battered, still-breathing body of an approximately 25-year old woman was retrieved from a back-alley garbage container in downtown Ciudad Juarez--the victim died en route to the hospital. She measured 65 centimeters and had long black hair and a scar from a recent Caesarian across her abdomen. She carried no identification and had no name. She was the first *muerta* ("dead girl") found in Juarez in 2005. The battered woman retrieved from the garbage Jan. 5 joins a roster of 417 women murdered in Ciudad Juarez since 1993" (Ross, "World Terror…") .

Everything about Juárez overwhelms, a factor also in CFO organizing there. As background to the murders, Amnesty International reported in 2004 that Juárez's maquiladora workforce grew from 35,000 in 1982 to 300,000 at its peak in 2001. Since then Juárez has lost 100,000 jobs from maquiladoras and support industries. Today only 60% of the work force is women. Of them 80% have migrated from other parts of Mexico and Latin America. Despite the "collapse" of the industry, Juárez still attracts immigrants. "Around 300 people arrive daily and there is a floating population comprised of about 250,000 people. It is a gateway city for many Mexicans and other Latin Americans that migrate to Mexico's Northern border and obtain a Maquila job... It is a place with an almost inexistent sense of belonging and there are very few places that reflect real social cohesion" (Amnesty).

things should be because I worked there in a union that represented workers," he answered, revealing geographic links between workers in the South and at the border, and implying his understanding that unions do not always represent workers.

Even more instructive, in more ways than one, was the delegation's trip to an outlying neighborhood and the story of Ramiro Gutiérrez (his name and others' changed) whom we met there. Our delegation had dinner with him, his wife Rosita, (an immigrant from Oaxaca), and some neighbors, in their home in Colonia Estrella del Poniente in the hills overlooking Juárez. Downtown monuments not visible, from there we gained an impression of the city's sprawling dimension—a huge population in one story architecture. One of the neighbors, Martha—she was wearing a t-shirt with the logo of a neighborhood watch group—was an integral part of the family and the neighborhood. For a small fee, she cared for the Guttiérez's young son and for other children whose parents worked in the maquiladoras. She was home a lot during the day and earned livelihood from a variety of jobs within the informal economy. For example, she was engaged in clothing import and retail sales. In other words, she sold secondhand clothing from home. She was a very small entrepreneur, with a tiny bit of liquid capital and no overhead, who bought wholesale from "rag dealers" on the other side, for distribution in the colonias. The wholesalers are themselves part of a global business that brings tons of used clothing, in bales, from thrift stores around the U.S. to warehouses at the border and accomplishes very efficient cross-border recycling, channeling apparel from the wealthy to the poor, who, ironically, may have made the clothes originally[16]. More than an entrepreneur who invented employments for herself, Martha was a type of community activist that the colonias breed. Her fulltime location in the community and her contacts, through childcare and retailing, put her in a position to organize, and she did.
She represents the people in negotiations with the city and with utilities in regard to

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[16] Thanks to Sarah Bird for sharing her knowledge of this worldwide "rag" business. She is an Austin mother, wife, recycler, entrepreneur, and creator of original line of felt clothing that she makes from used wool garments, which she buys at the border. She finds the biggest, and therefore the best, merchants in Hidalgo, south of McAllen and across from Reynosa. She has also lived and traveled in Africa and noted European designer labels supplying the second hand clothing trade.

electricity, water, and roads. The neighborhood has no running water. One of Martha's achievements was to persuade the city to donate sanitary, multi-gallon drums with spigots in which people could store the water they purchase from a delivery service. These appliances replaced scavenged containers that were often toxic. She had also organized a citizens' neighborhood watch as protection against crime in the colonia. Martha is a self-selected and trusted community leader, the kind of person that the CFO in other locations would immediately recognize, train and, if possible, employ. To Gustavo, however, she was invisible and this was a significant flaw in the CFO's Juárez foothold. While the delegation dinned and conversed in the Guttiérez home, the lawyer made himself absent, first mentally, then physically. He explained later that he had intentionally removed his influence, so that we could have an unbiased impression of our experience. But it seemed that he wasn't interested. For him Ramiro was a case, not a person. His manner of relating to the worker teetered between jovial and insulting familiarity. He would refer to Ramiro as *pareja* (a noun which means couple, or pair, or, in a domestic sense, partner) as if this were a joke. I tried, but I could not find anyone who got the joke.

Despite the lawyer's attitudes, Ramiro's testimony became the highlight of the evening. Part of it de la Rosa had, no doubt, heard many times. But a new audience inspired Ramiro and he began to draw on other experiences. We learned that he had been laid-off. The employer had offered him illegally low severance pay. Ramiro risked getting none and took the case to Gustavo. The risk was worth it: they won in court and Ramiro was in the process of using the money to add a cement-block room to the one-room, recycled plywood house in which his family of three dwelled. Now he had a new job and new problems. He spoke to us about his current employer, a Korean company that doesn't provide basic safety equipment, like back braces and protective work shoes. Someone in our U.S. group asked, "Why don't you all get together and demand the equipment?"

Ramiro had already thought of that. He estimated that 15 or 20 other workers would stand with him, "but that's not enough. It has to be everyone, everyone on my shift. There are 800." To give us an idea of what he meant he told the story of Zenith workers

in Reynosa and their strike in 1983 of which he had been part. As I listened, I realized I had heard this story before, from a slightly different perspective.

Ramiro explained that trouble had started in Reynosa when Zenith workers discovered the electronics company paid employees in Matamoros higher salaries for the same work. "We demanded the same pay," Ramiro said. "The union didn't want to help us but we workers got together. We called for a stoppage for one week—closed the plant. The union leader kept saying 'everything will be OK, go back to work,' but we wanted something in writing from Zenith... The union leader came to talk to us one time. We locked him in the factory. His wife and daughter had to bring him food."

The moral of the story was that Ramiro had learned the power of solidarity, how it works, how it comes about, and what it can do. He made our bi-national gathering there on the hills of Estrella del Poniente sound like a CFO training session. He and José from Veracruz made clear another factor in the lives of the Mexican proletariat. People are mobile in Mexico. They have to be; they move to find livelihood. As they travel, so too travels the news.

María Elena García in Reynosa, was the first person I had heard speak of the Zenith strike. She had been 12 at the time; her mother was a worker and activist and one of the "ancestors" who influenced the current generation. Now in her early thirties, María Elena credits her mother's activism as her inspiration and the Zenith strike as the moment of her awakening. María Elena remembers preparing food and bringing it to the picket line. Where did she buy groceries? Maybe she prepared food that local business donated, "free," to anyone who worked for Zenith and could prove it by showing a pay stub. Ramiro had told us about this form of community support.

Twenty-one years later the workers are mounting new challenges in Reynosa. María Elena is leading them as a CFO organizer. After 2 years of confronting the prerogatives of power—delays and denials and backroom maneuvering—María Elena guided fourteen women to a legal victory against Delphi, a GM spin-off and, after Wal-Mart, Mexico's largest foreign employer. The deposition made history, since the women became the first workers ever to win against the giant auto parts maker. Twenty women had started the case; six of them gave up along the way. María Elena had shepherded the remainder through all the obstacles, including the most difficult—their own self-doubt.

Of the survivors, each won the equivalent of $8,000. The only other honest lawyers on the border (besides de la Rosa), Fonseca and Zepeda, helped out in court; but María Elena, daughter of a Zenith activist, had created and executed with her *compañeras* the strategy that made it possible. After I heard Ramiro's version of the story, my shaky Spanish rose to the occasion and I told the story as I had heard it from María Elena. As Austin Tan Cerca's most frequent border traveler, note taker, and dedicated listener, I saw a chance to be part of the network that keeps history alive, that reminds the workers that they have a history, and that the CFO is part of it.

The lesson for me in the Gutiérrez household was more complex than that, though. It was a vantage point from which to see the whole spectrum of the labor drama unfolding at the border. On the one hand, we saw lawyers and dedicated middle-class professionals, allying with workers and pursuing court decisions; on the other hand we knew that in other CFO locations, workers use the law themselves, directly. They fight for, and with, the laws that are their patrimony. Sometimes they win, sometimes they don't, and the costs to individuals can be very great; but on some level, it seems to me, they win either way because material losses are reversible, while personal gains in consciousness are permanent and they contribute to a larger movement. Or so I thought. When I had an opportunity to talk with Maria Elena's mother, however, I had to revise some of my ideas.

Josefina Castillo and I were paying a social call in Reynosa. It was Mother's Day, a reverent and symbolic holiday in Mexico, less abjectly commercial than U.S. observances, though employers vie to out-do each other in gestures of respect for women workers. We asked María Elena if her mother was in town and if she might share with us her memories of the glorious Zenith strike and solidarity's heyday. It happened that Doña Vicki, who chafed at retirement due to ill health, was in town rather than in Monterrey where she went for medical services. María Elena took us to the house that her mother shared with one unmarried son. Because of the holiday, several energetic and restless adult children were free from work and visiting, as were grandchildren and neighborhood children. María Elena left us alone with Doña Vicki and we sat outside, on the shady side of the house. It was quiet there. Her recollections did not match what I had anticipated.

Nineteen eighty-four seemed like a long time ago to Doña Vicki. In some ways they were 'the good old days,' since, in her view, living and working conditions had worsened since then, especially the worker-employer relationship. In her story, more detailed than Ramiro's, the strength of the action had been in the solidarity of women. She seems to have had a leadership role. She would tell others: "If we don't start, when will it stop," and "It is necessary to sacrifice, so others reap benefits in the future." The strike started for salaries, she said, which were too low. They would receive a 3-5% raise but that was only extra pay for extra time, not really a raise. The first struggle was to unite the first shift that was composed equally of men and women. The women started with signs and conversations in the rest room. At first the representative of the official union, a woman and privy to the conversations in the privy, had supported them. The next step was to gain the support of the second shift, which came in at 3PM and which, at first, gave no support. Later the second shift joined the first, but management offered the union representative money and she turned her back on all of them. When the company contracted new workers (scabs) "everyone lost the right to strike because the lawyers had manipulated everything." Doña Vicki recalled that the strike went on for a long time, a year. "A lot of the women were pregnant and they delivered right there." Since there was no dialog between workers and the management, they used a petition but they "got nothing for it." "In the end," she said, "We needed to work, so we had to go on with what there was." She worked for Zenith for six years, seven days a week, to make ends meet. In her 50s, Vicki was probably the same age as Ramiro, or a little older, but she was tired. She had raised nine children, mostly as a single parent, and now they were her main form of social security. It went against her grain, but she relied on them. Ramiro, on the other hand, had a young wife, a small child, and energy for the future. He was drawing lessons from Reynosa and applying them to Juárez. I pressed Vicki to find a lesson in the Zenith events and she replied: "I learned that not everyone thinks as you do. I'd like it that people side as I do," she said, implying that they do not and acknowledging the reality—a lack of solidarity.

While Ramiro's story demonstrated solidarity spanning time and place, we also saw in Juárez some class divisions. Gustavo de la Rosa, who is known, and rightly admired by activists all over the bi-national area of Juárez, El Paso, Texas, and Las

Crucas and Albuquerque, New Mexico, harbors some class and gender blind spots. Some of us could see gaps in his sensitivity or consciousness and found them particularly unfortunate in a place like Juárez—which has been called "the laboratory of our future" (Bowden) and where social problems are particularly acute. The city, which is the third biggest in Mexico, contains a volatile mixture of exploitative employment, out-of-control drug cartels, and the notorious string of murders of poor and young women, all under the aegis of government that is ineffectual and seemingly complicit. In addition to the international attention at high levels (Amnesty International, the UN, the Organization of American States) local and regional groups, many of them from the grassroots, have sprung up in response to the murders. For example, the mothers of the murdered have organized themselves in various cohorts, some of them competitive with each other. De la Rosa has worked with many of the local and bi-national groups. While no one would hold him responsible for solving the problems, or even providing leadership, it is fair and necessary to hold him responsible for sexist and classist attitudes he may bring to this arena of struggle. Accusations fly and stories abound of activist groups crashing and splintering, rejecting and suspecting each other. Large and small amounts of money are at stake. Intolerably painful losses are being grieved or denied. Therefore, we must be clear and truthful[17]. Despite his politics and commitments, Gustavo is not, as he says himself, a worker. Actually, he is a part of the generation that was politicized by the "massacre" of students in Tlatelolco Square, Mexico City, October 2, 1968. This is a case where the word "massacre" is properly applied. Finding a student demonstration for democratic reforms inconvenient to the image of modern Mexico that president Díaz Ordaz wanted to project, while the global press was swarming the capitol, during the 1968 Olympics, the Mexican president called out the troops. They fired for hours on unarmed students. Tallies of the dead and disappeared range from the 100s to the 1,000s

[17] I have tested my observations and conclusions as conscientiously as I have been able to in conversations, for example, with Yvonne Montejano who co-led the delegation to Juárez, Josefina Castillo who was the main contact with de la Rosa in preparing the delegation, Lenore Palladino, national staff of United Students Against Sweat Shops and a CFO summer intern, with whom I worked in the summer 2002 in the Juárez-El Paso area.

(Dillon 63-94). Gustavo is one of many, who are currently in their 50s, whose life was changed by that spectacle. His decision to go to law school and the kind of practice he pursues date from that moment. Despite this influence on his consciousness, those of us leading the ATCF delegation to Juárez, who had had more contact with the CFO and knew more of their philosophies, were disappointed by Gustavo's class and gender attitudes. He only saw the workers as recipients of his legal help. He offered them paternalism not solidarity. The difference is at the core of cross-border organizing and, as we learned, essential to cross-class efforts. Gustavo missed seeing the full range of who the workers are—including their strength and initiative. His frames of reference (or "terministic frames") apparently did not encompass grassroots movements, even if they were growing under his nose, as they seemed to be in Ramiro's neighborhood in Colonia Estrella del Poniente, Martha being an example. We were dismayed by his apparent disdain, complicated by his expression of machismo, toward working class or poor people's culture and therefore toward their persons and their political traditions.

In addition to dinner in the Gutiérrez household, a revealing instance developed on the day that Gustavo had arranged for us to visit Ejido San Isidro on the outskirts of Juárez. The local government was appropriating this huge tract of land (three thousand hectares or 7,413 acres), which had belonged to *compesinos* as an ejido, or communal property, once protected by Article 27 of the Constitution. They were putting it at the disposal of the Electrolux Corporation. As an inducement to the Swedish company, once famous for the manufacture of domestic vacuum cleaners, the government was also installing infrastructure—roads, water, a water treatment plant, workers' housing, electrical service—at no charge and preparing to provide electricity that would amount to 10% of Juárez's supply. The government was not going to reimburse the *ejiditarious* (or communal owners of the *ejido*) for their land and they were going to use taxpayers' money for all the gifts. The rationale behind this largess was the perennial one: the people of Juárez, conceived anonymously and as a whole—that is, as an abstraction—would benefit from the creation of jobs. (Pleases see Chapter 3 for how this "argument" can become an unreasoned, unexamined pre-ordained assertion, without cause or consequences, and rigidify as an intellectual fetish.) Gustavo had a critical analysis of the plans for San Isidro and we were grateful to him for arranging this field trip for us. We

anticipated learning more about the complex human, institutional, and cultural relationships that play out in a deal like this, so fundamental to the dance of globalization.

In the early planning stages of the delegation, while we were still in Austin, we noticed that Gustavo's itinerary suggestions were weighted toward lawyerly expositions of legal cases. We knew that de la Rosa also teaches law at the local university. Though six law students from the University of New Mexico were on board, we were anxious to prevent the delegation from becoming a lecture hall. We requested more time in conversation with directly affected people—like Ramiro. The *ejidatarios* of San Isidro also seemed important to us. In the clashes of globalization, they were a constituency that we had not yet met—communal landowners and indigenous people confronting a major corporation and its governmental allies. As we were heading out to the desert on the city's San Isidro outskirts we began to realize that the plans with the ejido owners had fallen through. De la Rosa talked *around* the circumstances. First he said it was the fault of his assistant Alejandro. Then his explanations got colorful. He tried to cajole us into accepting this disappointment. We had to understand that the *ejidatarios* are busy; they have jobs—not like us (most of us were students, as if that were not a job). Besides we didn't have an appointment. Now he was making it out to be their fault: "There is no point in making an appointment with them. They have a different logic of time. If they say at noon that they'll be here in one minute, it might be 8 o'clock before they come." Then he confessed, he had failed to make the appointment, but meanwhile he had, in his jocular manner, slipped in a racially tinged aspersion, a variation on 'colored people's time.' I believe that stereotypes are never just humorous—and that they always encapsulate and pass off under jocular guise, an element of unexamined prejudice that has social significance. Yvonne Montejano, co-leader of the delegation, and I persisted awhile in trying to salvage the plan. De la Rosa gestured toward the featureless and sparse shrubs and grasses of the desert and said, "They're out there somewhere." If we wanted to look for those nomads, it would take all day. He wouldn't go himself but he would be willing to send Alejandro with us. Still playful, he then resorted to the electoral model and asked the delegates to vote on the question. They decided against it. Case closed. A portly fellow, de la Rosa then clambered up on to the hood of his early model car and lounged there, leaning against the windshield and surveying the barren landscape,

an amusing podium for his lecture, quite interesting actually, on the history and politics of this piece of land. He started with the German owners, the Katzelson family, who abandoned it during the Revolution.

Back in Nuevo Laredo, my dinner companion Paula M., with whom I tried to share my communion with the old Revolutionaries, turned out to be, like Maria Elena, a daughter of an activist mother**.** Her family, from Torreón, was indirectly connected to movements on the Mexican Left in the 1970s and 80s, another political heritage and an ambiguous line of political theory and practice built on authoritarian elements, while purporting liberation and populist agendas.

Paula grew up in the rural outskirts of Torreón, a large urban area about 300 miles south of the border. She spent her early years in an ejido, learning from the example of her mom, a land reform activist. When Paula explained to the whole delegation the issue her mother fought for, we were traveling in our van. Paula was acting as tour guide, and we were using a karaoke machining to amplify her voice, so everyone could hear over the road noise. Trouble had started with a *cacique* or small-time, local political boss. This man was a member of the ejido and dominated it. He ran it as if it were his private property and as if the others had agreed to work for him. In these years, before Salinas compromised Article 27, he used threats and manipulations to chip away at communal ownership and install his own, private, hacienda-style estate. To escape this petty tyrant, the community devised a two-part strategy: they declared communal land ownership valid. Once they were secure in their ownership, they had the authority they needed and decided to dissolve the ejido— break it into small, but equal, private plots, The trouble maker received his share, but no more. Paula's mother was a leader in this maneuver. As she ended her story, Paula grew militant and emotional. She declared, "Because of what I have seen, I will never again allow abuses and I will fight for justice." Everyone on the van cheered and applauded.

Being a little literal minded, I was the only one who was dismayed. I thought Paula's mom was fighting on the wrong side; she had helped abolish an ejido, a sacred icon of the revolution. But as I learned more, I came to appreciate the strategy and to imagine more accurately what they were up against. First of all the *ejidatarios* were confronting a type of authority figure who is common at every level of the Mexican

political system—the cacique or boss. He enters a power vacuum and thrives if he finds a popular culture that teaches submission and an automatic, blind respect for "the boss." The cacique, or literally "chief," is an institution that rests on pillars of paternalism, machismo, personal charisma, and a disregard for democratic values. The boss operates a network in which he trades favors (sometimes quite trivial) and protection (sometimes illusory), in exchange for obedience and support[18].

Additionally, my research revealed another political influence that may have complicated the situation in Torreón. After the 1968 massacre of students in Tlatelolco Square, Mexico City, after, that is, the oppressive state revealed its ruthlessness against youth demonstrating for democracy, a generation was both disaffected and politicized. Gustavo de la Rosa is an example. Many like him left Mexico City, the capitol, where the machinery of Mexico's dominant political party the PRI, Party of the Institutional Revolution was strongest. (The PRI held the presidency from 1929 to 2000 and never lost a gubernatorial election until the 1980s; see more on the PRI in Chapter Three). The youth "no longer believed [that the PRI] had anything to do with revolution." In the 1970s and 80s many of them turned toward Maoism as a theory and practice through which to work for social change, if not revolution. Orive Belinguer had studied Mao in Paris and brought his teachings back to Mexico. "[T]hey spread through Mexico building an organizational base among common people… successful particularly in the north." Many of them migrated to Torreón (La Botz 32-37).

The Mexican Maoists' program defined the proletariat as "the poor" or "the people" and they proposed to organize among them in the countryside and in urban slums. "The… strategy generally involved an alternation of confrontation and negotiation with the PRI, gradually winning concessions from the state-party" (La Botz 31). Both the grassroots base and the geographical location in the north make the Maoist ethos a possible influence on the CFO. I like to note that many CFO leaders, in addition to Paula originally come from Torreón including Julia Quiñones in Piedras Negras, and Juan

[18] Thanks to UT professor Hector Dominquez Ruvalcaba for helping me clarify these ideas; in particular special thanks to Hector's untitled book, still in manuscript, a cultural history, focusing on Mexican machismo and homosexuality, particularly the chapter, "Inferiority and Rancor: The Colonial Roots of Machismo.")

Tovar, Maria Elena Robles, and Angelica Morales in Acuña. Another thread of connection between the Maoists and the CFO is the focus on populist democracy and the search for forms in which the people can speak. "The Maoist model of organizing called for the creation of community assemblies and encouraged the participation of the masses." This is a CFO feature, too, with some significant differences in language. Here, though, CFO and the Maoist practices encounter crucial difference: the opportunity to speak is not the same as the opportunity to lead. Mexican labor reporter and historian Dan La Botz writes of the Maoists that

> participation and consultation did not necessarily mean participatory democracy, or democracy of any kind. The Maoist leaders generally kept control of the movement in the hands of selected cadres who made the key decisions and carried out negotiations with the PRI [which was in power everywhere—locally, federally, and at the state level]… They attempted to establish their own strict control over a particular *colonia*, peasant organization or labor union." (33).

La Botz adds, "Maoist groups fought for the needs of the poor, but the poor themselves generally had little political control over the organization" (33). In other words, the Mexican Maoists, despite their use of theory, had no way of preventing themselves from falling into the Mexican cacique tradition which has no theory but expediency and personal power. They could easily use populist slogans while exerting top down control. The CFO opposes this operational style and it is an issue for which they have gone to the barricades. They have worked hard over the years for direct democracy rather than representative democracy that can end up in the pocket of an unaccountable representative. I am examining the possibility of a Maoist background as a distant influence on the CFO or as a counter example, a bad experience against which the CFO reacted and against which the CFO defined their own path. There is no point in applying a label to the CFO but the history is relevant to show how the Left saw its options during the 1980s, the decade when the CFO originated. Paula's testimony suggests a strong counter example. The Maoists furthermore seem to have been a seedbed from which another Mexican movement grew, one that eventually, despite their original character, aligned with a more indigenous and more democratic stream in popula social movements.

> In the early 1970s, the Maoists students established one of their bases in the city of Torreón in Coahuila. Working in the slums and shanty-towns, Maoist activists established a community movement they called "Tierra y Libertad (Land and Liberty)… The Maoists' community organizing efforts among the poor won the support of the Roman Catholic Bishop of Torreón, Fernando Romo. In 1976 he brought his friend Samuel Ruíz, the Bishop of Chiapas, to Torreón to see the Maoists' work. Impressed by the Maoists, Ruíz reportedly invited them to engage in community organizing in Chiapas… Subcomandate Marcos of the EZLN [Zapatista Army of National Liberation] was reportedly one of the *Torreonistas* who carried Maoism into the Chiapas jungle." (La Botz 33-34)

These conjunctions may have been one origin of the modern Zapatista movement that declared itself by means of an armed uprising in January 1994. In John Ross's account the Southern jungle changed the Maoists and forced them to re-examine their practices. Their superficial grassroots forms and surface rhetoric of democracy didn't survive in the culture of the indigenous and among the liberation theologians. When the Maoists arrived in Chiapas they were "carrying the banner of the Proletarian Line'…" However

> the interlopers' arrogance disaffected local priests… For the Jesuits and Dominicans who preached liberation… the conflict was an ethical one—the padres' commitment was to 'accompany' the poor, the big city radicals wanted to 'direct' them. [T]he assemblies made all the decisions. (Ross 1995 276)

And though the Maoists ostensibly installed democratic forms, one of the Chiapas Jesuits accused the newcomers of "manipulating the assemblies and of utilizing the church to enforce assembly decisions." The south overwhelmed the Maoists and changed their way of operating. Most, according to Ross, didn't even survive in the mountains. Meanwhile, back in Torreón, Paula's mother and other members of the *ejido* were fighting for an egalitarian form of land ownership—not just rhetorically, but in fact. My hypothesis is that this slice of history in Torreón in the 1980s sets the stage for the CFO, for the philosophy of *manos vacías* or "empty hands," which is a corrective to authoritarian systems—Maoist or traditional cacique. This historic confluence of ideas and activism also demonstrates the need for women's leadership, not for essentialist reasons, but because poor women constitute a class that has been subject to multiple forms of oppression and therefore have great potential to unleash social change when it mobilizes. The practice of *manos vacías* is a symbolic and actual safeguard against Maoist or cacique top down control. Quaker-like, it opts for the hard, slow road of consensus

building and, in the CFO case, of waiting for consciousness, avoiding expedient solutions, and finding strategies that satisfy these goals. *Manos vacías* constitutes the unique CFO difference; this methodology indicates their purity in regard to their internal democracy, a non-negotiable condition[19].

In a workers' organization, democracy means that, first of all, the people lead and, second of all, power is transparent. The CFO is one of a very few groups in Mexico and perhaps in the world that is struggling for this possibility. Unionism in Mexico and the U.S. often does not follow these two guidelines. Accordingly, the CFO has tried to work out relations with unions that allow them to preserve and pursue their democratic vision. Relations with NGOs have also tested the CFO model. I understand their painful break in 2000 with the Coalition for Justice in the Maquiladoras (or CJM), a tri-national coalition, based in San Antonio Texas, as evidence of their insistence on transparence and bottom-up leadership. The Coalition was composed, at the time, of over 80 institutional and individual members from Mexico, the United States, and Canada and from labor, faith, women's, and worker's communities. When a rupture occurred between the CFO and the CJM, it appeared to bystanders so dramatic that it was hard for us to understand its cause, even though the CFO explained and enumerated their reasons for withdrawal from the Coalition in a letter that coordinator Julia Quiñonez read at the CJM's annual meeting.

Tom West, an Austin Tan Cerca founder, and I were at the meeting, held in Tijuana that year, and were especially confused since we were new to the border, undecided in our commitment to the CFO, and a little lost in the sea of Spanish speaking NGOs. I feared we had fallen into a dense den of politicking. For months after this moment, Tom and another Austin Tan Cerca founder Doug Zachary would regale any available listener with their interpretation—that the rift between the CFO and the CJM was a personal conflict between two very strong personalities, Julia Quiñonez, and the

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[19] I use the word "purity" with care, mindful of my own tendency to romanticize the CFO. I am always vigilant in looking for signs of their deviation from their declared principles of internal democracy and of workers' leadership. I have not yet found a deviation—or, I should say, one that they don't know about and are not trying hard to correct.

CJM's director Martha Ojeda, a Mexican national and a former maquiladora worker now living in San Antonio. Tom and Doug have, since that time in 2000, modified their views, but in those days, they would frequently and gleefully add to the story a colorful psychological twist by which they claimed to explain the animosity between the two women—Martha was butch and Julia was femme, so no wonder they couldn't get along. Tom and Doug both have long histories of marital changes. At the time, one was in the middle of a divorce, the other in the middle of a marriage. Both were trying to figure out how to get along with women and share leadership with us in Austin Tan Cerca. Perhaps their gendered interpretation of the dispute projected some confusion within their own psychologies. Whatever the source, the effect of the supposedly humorous butch-femme interpretation obscured the issue at stake. In retrospect it appears to me that their invention of a "cat fight" was a serious condescension to women and therefore a resistance to women's leadership. The letter that Julia read at the assembly sets their differences on a different level. It outlines the philosophical and methodological incompatibility between the CFO and the CJM in a style that is perhaps overly diplomatic by our standards, but is, nevertheless, clear.

It begins with background, starting in early 1980 (translation is mine as is the emphasis throughout):

> The CFO was one of the first organizations that initiated the work of education, training and organization of the maquiladora workers... During this decade US and Canadian groups became interested in aiding the work to improve the conditions of life of the workers. Thus it was that we met representatives of the Benedictine Sisters, the ICCR [Interfaith Center for Corporate Responsibility], the AFL-CIO and other *compañeros* (or companions) of many tendencies at the border…
>
> Thus it was among these and other groups—like the American Friends Service Committee and the *Comité de Apoyo* [Committee of Support] with whom we have had a relation for many years, and also from the CFO itself that the idea arose to form a net work of support that was the Coalition For Justice in the Maquiladoras. In some form, the CFO was a part of the inspiration to form the CJM.
>
> …[T]he CFO has continued working with groups of workers… Our mission says that *we encourage the workers themselves to confront the injustice and problems that the maquiladoras cause. Our style of working always seeks the power of the grassroots workers and the respect for her self-determination, without imposing any pressure on them in any way.*

In cadences laden with transitional phrases, the letter slowly begins to build an outline of differences that the CFO perceives between its own modus and that of the CJM, culminating in the fairly understated assertion:

> Especially in the last year, we frankly expressed in the executive committee certain concerns over the daily functioning of the CJM and the style of work of the executive director. *The CFO sees problems in the CJM in hearing the proposals of the grassroots workers and responding to the real, true necessities that we have had at the CFO. Various times, we expressed in the executive committee that the CJM should not make decisions for the people nor determine what the workers need in the judgment of its executive directors.*

Careful to take responsibility for its own failures to communicate as a member of the coalition and careful also to express respect for coalition members, groups and individuals, the CFO letter marches on, leveling these criticisms:

> *But each time, the separation between our work with the base (or grassroots) as CFO and the discussions and projects as a member of the CJM were clearer for us… We have not been in agreement with the CJM staff's role as intermediaries, because we do not believe that the coalition should be top-down or attempt to represent all the members of the coalition. We were hoping that the CJM would give the groups of workers in the maquiladoras more help and give it directly…* We have also not been happy that in recent days in the CJM there have formed different groups and factions and that a real climate of understanding and mutual support (*compañerismo*) has not been maintained.

In this, above, I have maintained the passive of the original to give a flavor of the diplomacy of the voice in Spanish; however, Julia's voice when she read the letter was loud, full of emotion, some of that perhaps stemming from the conflict inherent in trying to sever some relationships and keep others. It sounded painful but it sounded bold—like a manifesto.

> And on various occasions we felt there was a lack of respect for the CFO. We have also expressed on different occasions that we are totally against the idea of establishing relationships between powerful groups in the United States and Mexico, due to the hope and the needs that we, the Mexican groups, have of obtaining donations in order to continue our work. *We have made a collective evaluation, sharing with our compañeros and compañeras from different cities [at the border] and have decided that the changes that we see in the CJM no longer respond to our expectations.*

The last sentence, above, is getting close to enunciating the resignation, which the letter delays, while it affirms relationships between the CFO and member organizations and makes recommendations such as

> *We sincerely hope that the new directors and executive committee* [elections were part of the meeting's agenda] *can include more workers without losing participants that were once very active and are no longer part of the directors. The new directors should eliminate the barriers that make the CJM bureaucratic and not very functional, and respond better to the base workers, and not just to the activists who dedicate ourselves (maybe too much) to debate about the workers.*

In the letter's last paragraph, below, starting with the conclusive "therefore," it comes as close as it ever does to actually announcing the withdrawal of the CFO, though everyone understood, as if through a double take, or hindsight of a few second, that this was finally it—the resignation.

> Therefore, most involved people of the CFO who are part of the CJM have decided to promote the collaboration among affinity groups that struggle to help maquiladora workers *but outside the framework of the CJM.*

Though I was disappointed in my quest for a Revolutionary tradition with which to ally, I found a group that is struggling to realize democratic principles internally as it resists oppression and seeks changes in the outer world. The legacies of the Left in Mexico are complicated and present both destructive and useful strands to the student from the north. I have become a permanent student, and supporter, of the CFO. I cannot leave the subject of the Revolution, or my dream that Mexicans have a particular capacity for peoples' movements, without mentioning Octavio Paz. A little dated and a little essentialist, Paz created images in the *Labyrinth of Solitude* that suggest another layer of meaning in the Revolution of 1910. First he contrasts the Revolution with liberalism and The Reform of the 19th century that began building the Mexican state, independent of Spanish political power, but still beholden to European positivist theories. Ideologically, he says, the Reform

> offered an abstract postulate: that all men are equal before the law. Freedom and equality were—and are—empty concepts, ideas with no other concrete historical content than that given them by social relationships, as Marx has demonstrated. We are aware, by now, of the forms into which that abstract equality can change

> itself, and of the true meaning of that empty freedom. Also, the founding of Mexico on a general notion of man, rather than on the actual situation of our people, sacrificed reality to words and delivered us up to the ravenous appetites of the strong (128).

The speech of Carlos Salinas, his anniversary eulogy of the party that institutionalized revolution, comes to mind as an example in this context. Paz continues,

> The revival of the liberal plan [after the Revolution and in its wake], with its classical division of powers (nonexistent in Mexico), its theoretical federalism and its blindness to our realities, opened the door once again to lies and pretenses. It is scarcely very strange that a good portion of our political ideas are still nothing but words intended to hide and restrict our true selves. (146)

In contrast to the liberal revival, "The Revolution," Paz writes, "without any doctrines (whether imposed or its own) to guide it, was an explosion of reality and a groping search for the universal doctrine that would justify it and give it a place in the history of America and the world" (140). He ends this chapter in *The Labyrinth of Solitude* articulating a national psychology in search of itself and connecting the Revolution to the theme of his book:

> [T]he character of the movement is both desperate and redemptive… [T]he people refuse all outside help, every imported scheme, every idea lacking some profound relationship to their intimate feelings, and instead they turn to themselves… [This is] characteristic of the person who rejects all consolation and shuts himself up in his private world: he is alone. At the same moment, however, his solitude becomes an effort at communion. Once again, despair and solitude, redemption and communion are equivalent terms" (147).

I am attracted to the impulse, as Paz describes it, to find identity within, by reference to an authentic inner standard. His naming of something explosive in the Mexican culture, while not as appealing, rings true. Critics have certainly accused Paz of essentialism. I would defend him in principle. Many observers look back to the conquest to explain Mexican culture. The contemporary Zapatista movement quickly cites its 500-year-old origins in the first sentence of their Declaration of War: "We are a product of 500 years of struggle… but today we say ENOUGH!" (Quoted in La Botz 2) If deep history shapes culture it must affect character too. That consideration breaks down the line for me between an essentialist and an historical theory of national psychology. Paz's

image of the labyrinthine Mexican solitude has a poetic truth. I thought of it one day, when I was sitting in a circle listening to reflections of the bi-national group at the end of a delegation (may 2005). Suddenly, and for the first time, I found myself listening to a worker claim the Revolution.

Juan Carlos (changed name) was one of the 186 workers in Acuña whom Alcoa fired in August 2001 after years of building trust, years of negotiations, and several worker victories. The firings came in a period when the workers were demanding a committee that could act as their voice in the absence of any kind of union. Alcoa seemed to be negotiating in good faith. Then suddenly everything changed. The targets of Alcoa's ire were shocked. Many, like Juan Carlos, were blacklisted. He would find maquiladora employment. Then the employer would find his name on a list and let him go. For a long time he, his wife, and children lived on her earnings. Rarely did Austin delegations see him during those years. When we did, he was silent, indifferently dressed, apologetic, and depressed. Sometime between May of 2004 and May of 2005, he found a job and managed to keep it. Things were looking up. With a transformed mood, he accompanied the May delegation in 2005. During the time for reflections, he couldn't keep still. I was the only Austinite present who knew him since 2001 and could recognize his references to events of that time. He burst out, apropos of nothing I could discern:

> We have a history of fighting, but the fighting never stops. *We have the same revolutionary spirit* but what we see is government manipulations in the press, to scare us. The city, state, and federal government try to stop us. For example, everyone in Alcoa is feeling together. They try to break us up. It's not their business, not the business of public opinion or the public police. We are doing collective bargaining between the workers and the company—but the company goes to the police. If you speak up for your rights, they say you're being negative…" (Emphasis mine)

Chapter 3
The Press Searches for “Foreign Agitators” and “Bad Mexicans”

There are North American groups or cells that use bad Mexicans, like señora Julia Quiñones, that are not interested in the workers because they are offering them a mirage and the present conditions today are not conducive to such.

--CTM director Leocadio Hernández, *el Zócalo*, Piedras Negras, Coahuila, March 15, 2002.

The workers… are not going to fall into games or provocations; what they must do is succeed in controlling the cacique-style of certain local leaders; the workers have developed to the point where they are ready to face this situation.

--Julia Quiñones, *el Zócalo*, (no Piedras Negras, Coahuila, June 27, 2003

Part I: Arguments, Piedras Negras, Coahuila, Mexico

Jack Hoffman (changed name) brought his own brand of machismo to the border. A fine specimen of gringo in his early 50’s, he’s broad-shouldered, muscular, usually dressed in jeans and a tight, black t-shirt, which set off his physique, his white-blond hair and his ruddy complexion. He’s been married once and is frequently in love. With his own hands he can fix, drive, or race any two- or four-wheeled vehicle. He earns his living in the competitive pursuit of freelance writing, mostly about technology for the trade press with circulation sometimes reaching a million. He has a sweet tooth too for poetry and a soft spot for growing things like houseplants and flowers, influence, he says, of his childhood on a farm in Bucks Country, Pennsylvania. Jack joined ATCF’s May 2005 delegation—to follow a love interest but also out of semi-professional curiosity

about the border—and, seated in a circle in the CFO office in Piedras Negras, encountered for the first time a grassroots, Mexican, feminist politics. Jack donned his reporters' hat and brought forth his skill for asking challenging, even aggressive, questions. The effect within the Austin-Mexican circle of solidarity was jarring; it was also productive.

After CFO coordinator Julia Quiñones, and Patricia de Luna, a smart and resourceful worker, pursuing a legal case contesting her recent dismissal from Alcoa, had given an overview of the situation at the border, Jack framed a question: "The CFO has been organizing for 22 years. Currently we see, even among workers who are organized, harsh poverty and only a tenuous hold on their labor rights. In this context what would you say is your greatest achievement?" Julia replied:

> Our greatest achievement is that we raise consciousness and overcome apathy and defeatism. Without that we can do nothing in the maquiladoras… For example, if a woman is yelled at at work she can start to learn her rights and then she can become forceful. She can look her boss in the eye and say 'don't yell at me' and then tell her husband 'don't hit me.' That is our greatest achievement. We build on that.

Over the years I've witnessed her responses to friendly and hostile questions. Her mind moves easily between the big picture and workers' daily lives. This is the life she is immersed in and informs with a worldly analysis. Like Paula Moran in Nuevo Laredo (Chapter 2), like Juan Tovar (Chapter 4) and Angelica Morales in Ciudad Acuña, Julia was born in Torreón, affirming my notion that the industrial urban area, south of Piedras Negras, is the source, since 1968, of Mexican social change. Her parents brought her north when she was eight. From the ages of 15 to 20 she worked in a maquiladora owned by Johnson & Johnson, studying social work at night. Then she became began to work with the CFO, eventually becoming national coordinator. Since then she has spoken at the Copenhagen Social Summit, the Beijing Women's Conference, and at other forums in Guatemala, Mexico City, and countless places in the U.S. Most recently (June, 2005) she presented a major report to a health conference at the University of Oregon, visited San Francisco and addressed the Central Labor Council, as well as an audience assembled by Global Exchange and, in Berkeley, spoke to the UC Labor Center. For most audiences her conviction and her grounding make her persuasive. She can be

animated and excited, self-disciplined, ceding the floor to other workers, anxious and quietly agitated, comforting and personable. I know her best as an outspoken leader with a tone that urges reason and reminds us of compassion. A mass of dark hair frames her face and falls past her shoulders like a thick mane but, since former maquila workers like Juan Pablo Hernández, Norma Gasca, and Paty de Luna are going, or have gone, into the hairdressing business, and because Julia has style, she sometimes turns up with flat-straight hair and blond or magenta streaks. What's more she's ready to party when the work can be put aside. She likes to tease, she likes to sing, and she's an irresistible leader of social icebreakers or games. She understands group dynamics in the auditorium, in the most humble home, and in history. Natural talent—a calling—plus preparation have made her a leader who can put others in the foreground and build a movement in which "demagoguery is absent… [The CFO's] decency and the way they make everyone feel included win them respect" (Hernández 1998).

That day in Piedras Negras, Jack's reporter's pose and a bit of devil's advocacy launched an argument based on a reductive standard—achievement or lack thereof, success or failure. Jack is capable of pounding his subjects into confusion or reversal. Julia didn't take the bait; she chose and stuck with her terms—the context of the workers' lives.

Julia could have pointed, however, as she has at other times, to the achievements the CFO lists on its website:

> Substantial wage hikes; Improvements in working conditions; Election of rank and-file activists to local union executive committees; Severance packages for laid-off workers that meet the requirements of Mexico's labor code; Restoration of benefits that have been withdrawn by maquiladora firms. (CFO Maquiladoras "What Is the CFO?")

Or Julia could have given a more complicated answer, thus opening holes for debate, by citing examples of recent historic victories, such as: 1. The 33% increase in total compensation that workers in Ciudad Acuña won (October, 2000) after a seven-year struggle with Alcoa, a feat of sustained solidarity and strategies. 2. The legal case that 14 women won after a Delphi factory in Reynosa illegally fired them (October, 2003). A young CFO organizer, Maria Elena Garcia, with the assistance of scarce pro-labor lawyer

help, was the brains and the encouragement behind this unlikely victory. Each woman thus garnered an average award of $8,000, a high-profile first against Delphi, the second largest foreign employer in Mexico, and a huge sum for women who had been hard pressed to bring home more than $40 a week. 3. The March 2005 decision by 89% of union members in Alcoa's Piedras Negras plants (or 2,479 workers out of 2,785) to reject the company's offer to exchange a 4% wage increase for the supposedly temporary suspension of important employee benefits. If they rejected Alcoa's offer, voters had to chose "Option 2" which stated: "I disagree [with Option 1] — and I'm aware that the company may make economic decisions that could affect its continuation. I prefer to risk loss of our jobs over a temporary modification of our benefits." Everyone knew that "economic decisions" referred to Alcoa's threat of moving its Piedras Negras operations to Honduras. After the balloting, workers commented that they didn't want to lose jobs but preferred to let them go rather than "endure more abuse" (CFO UPDATER "We'd Rather See…").

In her June, 2005, trip to California, when Julia addressed the San Francisco Central Labor Council, she told the story of the eighty-nine percent who said no. The story elicited a standing ovation, testifying to universal pressure on labor for givebacks, to the appreciation of U.S. workers for the Mexicans' stance, and to the historic timing of their courage (Comité Fronterizo de Obreras, Annual Report 2005, Hernández Interview). Local papers covered the Alcoa vote poorly or not at all. For example, according to the CFO, coverage of the initial event in February, a work stoppage that responded to Alcoa's first offer of the two untenable options, ranged from no mention (*El Zócolo*) to, after it had already occurred, "Work Stoppage Threatened…" (*La Voz*). Media then launched a campaign of rumors to warn of the "threat of Honduras," in order, the CFO speculated, "to scare, threaten and pressure the rank-and-file into accepting the changes proposed by management, the business sector, local and state government leaders, and the [official but corrupt] union." Thus the CFO named the unified power structure that defends and promotes the maquiladoras and has historically sought to control labor and deliver it in a helpless state to foreign investors (CFO UPDATER "One-Day Work…").

To their credit, Julia and the CFO seem to regard "achievements" circumspectly. All outcomes change, the fight is never over. Having followed them through ups and

downs since 1999 I have seen them put victories in perspective and move past defeats as quickly as possible, while taking care not to minimize the hurt that individuals sustain. I have learned to look for and foreground the subjective aspect, the worker's consciousness of personal power and her experience of solidarity.

A prime example of permanent gain—or growth—was there before us on the May 2005 delegation, acting as our guide. As we drove in the privacy of our rented van from Piedras to Acuña, I asked Juany Lopez Torres how she first got started with the CFO. She responded with the aid of the translator and a PA system, so everyone could hear:

> I worked sewing in several factories, such as Carrizo. The supervisor yelled at us a lot. Whenever he yelled, I cried. I was the only one who cried. Then I met the CFO and started to learn my rights and I stopped crying. No one noticed that. But then I started to talk to my coworkers about their rights and then I started to speak out. Everyone was shocked. They wanted to know 'what happened to you?

During another delegation (October, 2003, Nuevo Laredo) Juani told about a horrendous interview with management. In the recitation, she mixed a narrative past tense (past perfect) with a "repeating present," indicating that this is typical or repeating treatment that a worker can expect. Juani prefaced the story with a declaration: "If I don't insist on being respected, no one will respect me." Note also her conclusion, which puts the whole story in the context of her "rights," and what they mean to her.

Juani's story starts the day that factory managers told her to report for a "physical exam:"

> They say "Take your blouse off." They turn you around. Touch you here, touch you there, touch you all over.
>
> He said, "My turn to check. Lie down."
>
> I got up.
>
> He said, "No, no, lie down. Pull up your blouse. Pull down your skirt."
>
> I said to him, "What's this for?"
>
> He said, "Do what I tell you."
>
> "But I'm asking you why? What is this for? Explain what this is for?" I told him, "No, you're not going to do that to me."

> He said, "They're going to throw you out of the factory."
>
> I said, "I don't care. I am a woman and I have to defend my dignity, and you are violating my rights." (Brandi Perkins)

When I first met Juani she was, at about 30 years of age, already a conscious woman, precociously seeing through the multiple systems that she lived in and that taught her that women were to be obedient. However, since she is often quiet and can be shy, I had no idea of her personal story and could only infer. For instance she made her own clothes, in a classic, somewhat conservative style and was obviously skilled and proud of her handiwork. She knew her worth on the job market and felt free to quit a job, confident that she could find another, even though she, like so many others, had been fired at least once for demanding her rights and could be vulnerable to blacklisting. From among her siblings, she was the one who took responsibility for caring for her aging mother with whom she lived until the older woman died in 2005. Though not married or, as far as I know engaged, Juani hinted at an active social life. Certainly I found out she loved to dance, especially when she got out of town—to Ciudad Acuña, for example—where, free to come home at any hour without questions, she perhaps felt freer (see Chapter 4). At some point during her trips to Acuña—we often drove together in the summer of 2001—she would whip out and apply lipstick. An attractive man, a worker more or less her age, was sweet on her but he was married. She kept him at the distance of a friend. In 2004 she had the courage to become a founding member of the Dignity & Justice Maquiladora Company, a women's sewing collective, endeavoring to show the world an alternative business model and create a fair trade work place and hope for the future.

The CFO's focus on individual consciousness (or empowerment), their belief in personal growth, and their understanding of how to build on it, through the philosophy and methodology of, for example, *manos vacías* or "empty hands," or a readiness to listen without agendas to impose, (Chapter 1) are the most precious and irreducible products of the CFO workers' movement. This however is precisely the part that local press omits and denies—not by coincidence or oversight, but in accord with their political position. Although most of the local press is capable of some balance in its coverage, it

does not take the grassroots worker seriously and instead, while covering the workers' movement, creates spokespersons, Julia Quiñones being the main one, and plays them off against credentialed authorities, creating a spectacle in which larger than life personalities contend, cacique-style, meanwhile fostering suspicion and promoting a stereotype of the workers as a class. Aside from character manipulation, the worst fault of the newspaper coverage is that it serves and reflects a misinformed, unsupported, sometimes naive, and sometimes mendacious point of view about economics and politics, subjects that border residents of all classes anxiously regard as vital to their well being and survival. A key feature of this newspaper slant is that Mexican workers who demand their rights are dupes of U.S. labor unionists, who are infiltrating across the border in order to "destabilize" the maquiladora sector for the purpose of repatriating lost jobs. In other words, this story, which is a conspiracy theory, maintains that professional agitators from the U.S. labor movement come to Mexico, at the border, to spread unrest and scare U.S. corporations into bringing their operations—and the jobs—back into the United States.

Embroiled in this conspiracy theory, and possibly the authors of it, are two, colluded, bedrocks of national institutional power in Mexico: the PRI and CTM. The former is the political party that held the presidency for 71 years, until the 2000 election, the *Partido Revolucionario Institucional* (or Institutional Revolutionary Party). Despite its auspicious beginnings in 1929 in the wake of the 1910 revolution and despite its democratic veneer of electoral process, it became a continuation of dictatorship centered in the party rather than a person but sometimes dominated by certain personalities beyond their six-year presidential term. For seven decades the PRI held the presidency and a network of state and local positions through many devices, including gross electoral fraud. Long fed up with electoral manipulation, the electorate finally succeeded in divesting the PRI of control over the national election commission. Vicente Fox and his conservative Catholic party the PAN were the first beneficiaries, the first to unseat the PRI at the level of the presidency. But the old party machine retained control over their national network, including key posts in the CTM or *Confederacion de Trajabadores de México* (Confederation of Mexican Workers). In the early 20th century, The post-Revolutionary government had instituted the CTM as a national, official union which, along with the CNC or Confederation of Mexican Compesinos (farm workers), worked

with government to represent the interests of working people and counter balance other national interests and structures. However, since the 1940's, the CTM had become a pillar of support for the PRI and a way to control labor rather than represent it. The CTM made labor conform to the needs of employers and of foreign capital, the perennial Mexican panacea. The CTM is the dominant, but not the only, labor confederation in Mexico. It is analogous in size to the AFL-CIO in the United States. Protection contracts became standard, an arrangement in which employers paid union representatives to maintain "labor peace." Together the CTM and the PRI subscribe to neo-liberal "modernization" and "free trade" polices that you can find enunciated all the way from presidential speeches to comments on the street at the border. The CTM has a loud voice in many border towns and interprets this ideology for laborers, making neo-liberalism seem necessary and realistic to them. My border press archive, which I feature below, makes these connections easy to see (Bacon 2004, Hellman 1994, Kamel 2000, LaBotz 1995).

Independent U.S. journalist David Bacon highlighted this CTM/PRI conspiracy theory as it surfaced, in 2000, in Río Bravo, Tamaulipas, during the battle for union democracy in a factory owned by the Duro Manufacturing Company of Ludlow, KY. Bacon writes that

> [t]he possibilities opened by a successful independent union effort at Duro were… threatening to those CTM/PRI leaders who stood to lose their protected status. They accused Duro workers of being pawns manipulated by U.S. unions… The Río Bravo newspaper, *El Bravo*, acted as their voice, referring to Marta Ojeda[20] as a professional agitator and accusing [Eliud] Almaguer[21] of being paid to organize a work stoppage… [A] CTM labor leader accused Ojeda of mounting a "dirty war" against the CTM, to "destabilize the maquiladoras and scare companies into relocating jobs to the US… [T]he president of the local maquiladoras employers association… alleged that a campaign was being directed from Texas to undermine maquiladora development. (Bacon *The Children…* 197-98)

Bacon cites the reaction of Rick de la Cruz, who is vice-president of a Texas local of the union that represents workers in Duro's U.S. factories. De la Cruz visited Mexico

[20] A Mexican national and former maquiladora worker, Ojeda is currently the director of the San Antonio-based Coalition for Justice in the Maquiladoras.

[21] Duro employee and popularly elected leader.

to support the independent union movement at Duro and "called the charges ridiculous. 'If the work leaves Río Bravo, it's not coming back to the U.S.—it's going somewhere workers have even fewer rights…'"[22] De la Cruz's analysis seems like common sense to us. The CTM/PRI point of view on the threat from U.S. labor unions, however, is plausible for many border residence. It explains why the maquiladora system is not delivering the prosperity promised and who is to blame for upsetting the goose that was to lay the golden egg of employment. The Spanish for "the source of employment" is "*la fuente de empleo*." (*fuente de trabajo,* source of *work*, is actually more common). As in English, the language refers to an abstract social process or an abstract location, through which jobs are produced, or from which they appear, as the "source." The word itself, as in English, can also mean "fountain." A metaphorical element slips in and connotes a natural origin of employment in a natural order. The discourse always pulls the phrase out of context, as if "the source of employment" exists separately from employers or from enterprises that have any object other than come to the border to employ workers. Faith, wishful-ness, or de-contextualized language holds the concept of the beneficent maquiladora in place and protects it from too much prying or analysis. Employment, under any conditions, is the maquiladora product that all border dwellers can agree, across class lines, is good for all; it is a very coded, surreptitious way of stating foreign investment as an unassailable common good. As we shall see, through an examination of periodicals from Piedras Negras, the media reflects the middle classes' obsession with factory flight and their conviction that labor can prevent it by always giving in. Thus they hope to gain their own security by labors' concessions, even when the workers, at the edge of survival, have very little or nothing left to concede.

The myth of foreign agitators seeking to repatriate jobs accomplishes various, related, rhetorical goals for the middle class Mexican: 1. It deprives activist workers of credit for their activism; they lose their agency. 2. It gives an alibi for an economic and

[22] De la Cruz's spoke in the spring of 2000. Jobs in fact began to leave the border: from the 18 months starting spring 2001, Mexico's maquila sector lost 200,000 jobs. It would be safe to assume that none went back to the U.S. where, in the same period, the manufacturing sector also lost jobs. (*Mexico Labor News and Analysis,* Social Statistics, 15 Sept 2002)

political system (the neo-liberal ensemble of programs, free trade, etc.) that is not doing well and protects it from criticism or adjustment. Potential critics wear blinders that, in turn, accomplish for them, first, that they stay in the good graces of the transnational planners and accrue status; second, that everyone accepts the neo-liberal modus operandi and can avoid seeing their own impotence, should they want to make changes. 3. It keeps the Mexican middle class caught between the Mexican workers and elites of both Mexico and the U.S. and gives them an illusion of agency—that they can achieve stability for themselves, for their families, and for their living standard, by keeping the workers in line. In sum, it gives the Mexican middle class a scapegoat: In this narrative the Mexican workers are, on one hand, rowdy, even violent, and, on the other hand, easily duped. Thus the middle class argues "ad hominem" about a whole class, wrenches their situation out of history, and justifies themselves as friends and servants of foreign investment. One further subterfuge that the scapegoat accomplishes: it helps hide the source of profit—increasingly intense exploitation of labor.

A CFO article in *LaJornada*, Mexico City's leading progressive daily, attributes the invention of the theory of the "Gringo conspiracy" (*la conjura Gringa*) directly to the CTM.

> For years, the CTM has been promoting certain views about workers' organizing in the maquiladoras…[W]henever maquiladora workers stand up to union leadership or to management to demand their rights, the CTM starts blaming US unions who are "using the Mexicans who don't care about their country to scare away jobs by stirring things up..." (Comité Fronterizo de Oberas "Charros…")

The article also notes a corollary to the conspiracy theory—the claim that those who participate in the workers' movement are "bad Mexicans" (*mexicanos malos*). This aspersion is yet another strategy to discredit the workers and their self-advocacy. The charge sets up a series of equivalencies that are contradictory to say the least. It implies that good Mexicans serve foreign capital and bad ones serve foreign labor. It attaches Mexican national identity to the transnationals, never bothering to articulate the trickle down theory that any and all investment capital, producing employment under any conditions, is a primary social good and will automatically spread benefits locally. It incites the perennial question of Mexican identity as one more anxiety and assuages it as it throws support toward capital. Another line of reasoning could conclude that this

charge of national disloyalty is backwards or oddly misplaced. One could argue that Mexican authorities, the PRI and the CTM, for example, are bad Mexicans who betray the people. They deliver workers to foreign-owned factories, stripped of legal protection, deprived of their history and autonomy. The CTM theory violates logic on several counts and could be understood as a blind self-projection.

Scandalized and sarcastic, the CFO article also reports that the "CTM started spreading the rumor that Julia Quiñonez was not even a Mexican." Apparently something called "The Worker-Management Committee in Defense of Job Creation" had, in the spring of 2000, taken out a full page ad in *El Zócolo*, the Piedras Negras daily, naming Julia Quiñonez and accusing her of "fronting US organizations" and further speculating that "if she were not a gringa herself she must be Chilean or maybe Cuban."[23] *El Zócolo* is the main paper and only daily in Piedras Negras.. Francisco Juaristi Septien owns the paper and writes a column in it. He also owns the Airport Industrial Park—a relatively new project, which notoriously prepared the building site by bulldozing squatter homes[24]. The business community did not notice the disappearance of homes, but only the appearance of their favorite commercial development, a new source of jobs

Founded in 1966, *El Zócalo* presents a professional tone and layout. It covers social news, entertainment, and crime—all the usual—as well as highlighting business on the front page, especially the maquiladora sector. The importance of business news to the city, including labor issues, justifies the front-page placement. To its credit, *El Zócolo* gave space to a variety of viewpoints in 2002, though headlines were more inflammatory than text. As if doing its best to evoke a kind of *lucha libre* of giants[25], the headlines

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[23] Another Piedras Negras paper, one with a vociferous Leftist slant, *¡Basta!* railed against this Worker-Management Committee as a transparent fake.

[24] The squatter colony soon rebuilt itself and an ATCF delegation ate dinner there one night. We were guests in the home of Leticia Ramírez who, due to unemployment, had lost her home in another part of the city. She built another out of the debris from other peoples' houses, as construction began on the Airport Industrial Park

[25] *Lucha libre,* literally "free for all," is a professional wrestling event, possibly choreographed, that resembles a crude morality play and is very popular among Mexican workers. According to Marisela Chapin, competitors adopt dramatic personalities identified with competing value systems. The hothead or man of heart pitted against the technocrat is a typical contest.

inflated and baited the confrontation between Julia Quiñonez and Leocadio Hernández, the local CTM leader.

Provocations for controversy were two. First of all, the recession in the U.S. that began the previous year (before 9/11), was either forcing maquiladoras to close or giving them a pretext to break contracts and commitments and move south to less educated and less organized, more "docile," labor climates. Jobs disappeared with them, of course, causing some panic among all classes. Second of all, and related, this was the year that labor unrest came to a head in Macoelmex, Alcoa's Piedras Negras operations, in two factories in which Alcoa assembles automotive electric "harnesses"—the package of wires that connects electrical functions throughout the vehicle to the engine and to the controls at the dashboard. Alcoa customizes these bundles of wires for sale to manufacturers such as Ford, Subaru, and Harley Davidson. Short term, the issue in Macoelmex was union democracy. The CTM was entrenched in the factories and represented more than 2,000 workers in Piedras Negras. Many were dissatisfied with that representation.

In February of 2002 workers were anticipating the meeting of the union's general assembly in March, the yearly meeting they regard as a key mechanism of democratic governance. The meeting would choose union representation within the CTM for each plant. Especially in Plant 2, workers were dissatisfied with Ricardo de los Reyes, their general secretary. Long past experience told them that Leocadio Hernández, the CTM boss of the northern parts of Coahuila state, would by pass democratic process and hand pick de los Reyes' successor and the whole union committee. Disgruntled workers knew that it would be difficult even to gain the floor at the meeting and voice their concerns. This time, with CFO help, they were prepared. They organized and succeeded in speaking, more or less by interrupting, persisting, and refusing to shut up. They rehearsed it in a socio drama or role-play and, as one worker said later," it happened pretty much as we planned it." After they gained the floor, they put together a petition of all assembled and demanded democratic balloting. In response, Leocadio Hernández walked out in disgust, but only 14, of the approximately 800 people at the meeting, followed him. Some of the workers, with CFO organizing help, then mounted the "Unity" slate; they put a rank-and-file worker, Carlos Briones, at its head. After the

meeting, outside on the street, “thugs” physically attacked two CFO volunteers and tried to wrest away cameras they were using for documentation. In *El Zócalo,* Briones later reported this incident as a “beating” by CTM operatives. So did ¡*Basta!, El Zócalo’s* leftist twice-weekly competitor. The avidly pro-worker tabloid described the incident as a confrontation and called the CTM henchmen *Grupo de “Choque,”* or shock troops[26]. Nevertheless, on March 4, by secret ballot, Briones and his slate defeated the CTM slate by solid margins, 834 to 534. It was a democratic coup.

The *Zócalo* coverage did not contradict the above version, which is the workers’; but the reporting lacked detail, narrative, and especially evidence. Instead the paper concentrated on finding authorized or plausible speakers to give rationales for and interpretations of events. ATCF heard and saw the workers version of what happened in the general assembly when CFO volunteers jubilantly reenacted it in a “socio-drama.” It was cathartic for all of us to yell, “Throw him out!” (“*Sácalo!”)* at the actor playing Leocadio Hernández. Margarita Ramírez, a full-time CFO organizer and one of those physically attacked by the CTM—she bore a scar on her forehead—played the part of a floozy who sashayed out the door on the arm of Leocadio Hernández, hoping, she ad-libbed, to win favors from him and score some drugs. Stepping out of character, she said, “This time I don’t want to get hit on the head.” Thanks to Margarita’s spontaneity, this version contained details we were not likely to ever read in print.

El Zócalo’s worried editors gave a lot of space to economic news—usually bad—in March of 2002 and to the CTM leader’s reaction[27]. On January 3, 2002, a month before the workers rebelled in the general meeting and Leocadio walked out, the CTM leader advised readers that workers in Macoelmex (Alcoa’s operating name in Piedras Negras) faced a simple choice: they would either have to sacrifice salary raises or put at

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[26] This clipping doesn’t include a date, but since it refers to the February General Assembly, I have placed it chronologically.)

[27] I am drawing here on an archive of newspaper clippings that I copied from the CFO’s files in late 2002 and another batch that I barrowed and copied in October of 2005. Their files were carefully kept, but sometimes lacked dates. Almost all *El Zócalo* articles lack bylines. Some of the files were organized as “Interviews with Julia” and “Interviews with Leocadio.” Evidently, the CFO office staff participated in reading local media as a spectacle in which two super powers vied.

risk the source of their work. The second time in the same article that the paper attributed this idea to Leocadio, he framed it this way:

> "The great challenge and principle problem in Macoelmex… is that for the first time workers will not see customary raises of other years…" [H]e established that in this moment, without any doubt, a salary increment would be very important, but still much more important, however, is preservation of the labor floor. (*El Zócalo* 3 Jan. 2002)

The redundancy of adverbs and connective phrases is part of the original, a way of creating emphasis. On February 28, Hernández warns of "Infiltrators in Maceolmex," a claim that he in no way substantiates. Presumably he doesn't need to, so familiar is the idea. Further,

> [t]he presence of *infiltrated* people for *foreign* organization is seeking to *destabilize* the *labor harmony* in the Macoelmex company which is struggling to maintain itself at the border… The worker director [Hernández] named the group that Julia Quiñonez heads as responsible for putting at risk the employment of more than four thousand employees of the Alcoa group.

I have emphasized with italics the code words in this brief passage that clog the discourse of the business community and lose potency and even simple denotative meaning. The same article gives Julia, reached by telephone, an opportunity to make a response[28]. She challenges the usual system of meanings: "Leocadio is the one who encourages conflict in Macoelmex, with abuses and vexations (*abusos y vejaciones*) of the workers" (*El Zócalo* 28 Feb. 2002 "Infiltrados…").

In the same issue of the paper Hernández announces that the "secret balloting," which the rebellion of February 28 demanded and won, is set for March 4. Incidentally "secret balloting," or votes cast in privacy, is the only legal procedure and contrasts with a different and frequent custom in CTM elections in which workers, one by one, march up to a board of election supervisors and verbally declare their votes. If those choices do not please the supervising board, the worker may be in trouble[29]. Perhaps because of the importance of the secret, or private, ballot, and a sign of the growing insistence in Mexico

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[28] *El Zócalo* frequently mentions that they have reached Julia Quiñonez by phone. They never mention how they reached Leocadio Hernández, which consequently gives the impression that Leocadio has a hot line to the *Zócalo* office.

[29] For a chilling account of this running the gauntlet, see David Bacon's chapter on the "vote" at Duro, in which a large national union crushed an independent upstart, 502 to 4. (*The Children*… 199-201)

for electoral democracy, Hernández goes on to affirm and proclaim, rather gratuitously, his respect for the Mexican Federal Labor Law and for the voters' decision making.

> He declared that as leader of the regional [labor] federation he must respect the statutes and the Federal Labor Law through which direction of the union will be renovated through the medium of secret vote at the door of the factory… He affirmed that the decision of the majority of the Macoelmex workers will prevail and not of third parties who wish to destabilize the labor harmony…

This is his repetitive style. He adds nothing except a new set of platitudes, referring to the labor law, which is only interesting if we know that he is bluffing and that his customary practice is to choose the candidates and then press the rank and file to approve. Suddenly, now, Leocadio is taking credit for The Federal Labor Law, associating himself with it and accumulating patriotic glory by association. Machine politics are stealing the mantle of democracy and its fetishized sign, the vote. The article concludes with a re-statement of the theory of foreign infiltrators, who this time have even provoked armed conflict inside the plant (*han logrado convencer a oberros para que armen conflictos internos)*, another expression of concern for the source of employment, and a re-assertion of the relative unimportance of raises. (28 Feb. 2002 "Voto secreto…")

As the election approaches *El Zócalo* gives Hernández space to voice his fears of violence and feed the publics expectations of mayhem. In addition, headlines build a case for crisis and thus for Hernández's policy of favoring companies' concerns over workers'. March 1 declares, "Instability will Curb the Maquiladora Industry." The subhead adds, "the source of employment will suffer." (1 Mar. 2002 "Inestabilidad…") On the same day, Carlos Briones, leader of the workers' Unity slate, demands in print the end of "abuses" in Alcoa and accuses Leocadio Hernández's people of beating the workers physically (Aguilar, "Exigen…") One day closer to the election, March 2, another banner headline reports that "The CTM Calls for Closing the Ranks." A war is on. The article frames the coming contest as a personal one between Generals—Leocadio and Julia. The subhead says the CTM sees every gain for Julia Quiñones as an increased danger to jobs. The newspaper treatment harps tiresomely on a few reductive formulas: the inverse ratio between Julia and jobs, the equivalence between labor peace and jobs that, in turn, flatly constitute the common good. The troops are taking sides. A

photo shows general secretaries of the CTM out on the street in their winter jackets and scarves, campaigning against Julia and "urging workers not to be caught up by Julia Quiñonez's group which is financed by Americans in order that factories will take off from Piedras Negras." Another photo pictures two women managers from Littlefuse and Arat maquiladoras. They testify that they "do not favor Julia and her attempts against our employment for which we are ready to declare war" (1 March 2002 "Llama CTM…").

On March 5, the balloting is finally over; Briones has beaten the CTM candidate 834 to 534. The headline notes the manner of the voting, but not the outcome**:** "Vote in Macoelmex Appears Tranquil." *El Zócalo* intersperses the reporting with hints that Hernández, whose candidate lost, is in control and that his presence confers legitimacy. (Aguilar 5 March 2002).

The election passed, the press's business coverage returns to worrying about the economy and the crisis, which appears increasingly ominous because of a lackadaisical interest in its cause. New figures released by the respected federal government research institute, INEGI[30] indicate that, overall, the Mexican economy contracted 2% in January 2002 as compared to January of 2001 (27 March 2002 "Baja 2%..."). Further, INEGI reports that employment in the maquiladoras fell 18.2% and that this percentage translates to a million fewer people employed in January 2002 than in January 2001 (2 April 2002 "Cae 18%..."). A new personality emerges in the discourse. Norma Alvardo Martínez, directs locally a national Chamber of Commerce-like organization, CANACINTRA,[31] and has chaired a meeting for business leaders in neighboring Ciudad Acuña. She interprets the INEGI findings for the business community and for *El Zócalo* readers. The headline of the article featuring her speaks to and possibly foments panic: "Maquiladoras Ask for an Emergency Plan" (Jiménez Peña). One can recognize the foreboding of border communities that have sacrificed so much for the maquiladoras and had so many expectations of them. A middle class Mexican newspaper reader, caught up in border hopes and fears, perhaps having lived through the failure of economic plans and two peso devaluations since 1983, might be in a pessimistic frame of mind. That reader

[30] INEGI stands for El Instituto Nacional de Estadística, Geografía e Informática, The National Institute of Statistics, Geography and Informatics

might not notice Alvarado's failure to deal with causes of the current negative indicators, her omission of context and analysis, and might be willing to accept that crisis just is. It's natural.

Alvarado says,

> The outlook for today and for the year 2002 for the maquiladora industry is very difficult if the circumstance that changed the United States and the world, with the terrorist acts of 9/11, keeps going; a clear symptom [at the border] of this situation is that there is no hiring.

Her thinking moves so quickly from a global panorama to a local indicator, without explaining the connections, that a careful reading, if the reader were prone to be one, must raise objections. That first paragraph sentence is the only attempt to grapple with "Why?" From this tenuous starting point, Alvarado's thinking, if the article is accurately reporting it, proceeds downward; everything becoming worse—in three stages which are actually all the same stage, only it is hard to tell because the language doesn't serve the meaning with any precision. First we learn, "[t]here are no new contracts nor occupations for 4,500 unemployed." Then comes "an even more worrisome" factor: "we do not glimpse anything that indicates relief from this crisis." Finally Alvarado "pinpoints" an "even worse result… that the 4,500 unemployed will have to go into the informal economy" (*tengan que subemplearse*). She must be supplying the business community with truths that everyone accepts and no one examines[32]. Her one suggestion

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[31]CANACINRTA stands for *Cámara National de la Industria de Transformacion* or The National Board of Industrial Transformation.

[32] During my visits to the border in 2002 I too was distressed by news of the failing maquiladora sector and felt the premonition of doom. I imagined the fragile houses that cling to the ravines of eroded hills in the outskirts of Ciudad Acuña, no longer able to hold on, sliding into an abyss. In retrospect, it is helpful to have the confidence that this is part of a business cycle or a way the investment has of pushing labor for more concessions. I think the CFO has been able to gain some perspective in this manner. They did not quit organizing and demanding legally mandated concessions from industry. They did not coddle the source of employment. Today it is easier to see 2002 as a period of adjustment in which factories reorganized themselves with quite a lot of control over the business environment. Four and half years later, this news release from the U.S. gives the overview. "Maquiladora Employment Reaches New High: Maquiladoras employed 1.2 million workers at the end of 2005, and those numbers are expected to increase this year to 1.4 million. While employment in the clothing sector decreased by

in the article is that the federal government must step in and somehow fix an undefined problem. Underlying this idea for remedy might be the implication of border specialism; that is, the border is so closely connected to the United States that, despite poverty and other urgent conditions in other parts of the country, the border deserves special attention. Perhaps the rationale is that the border leads the country in attracting investment, as if the whole country depends on the border cities for in-flows of capital. In the head-and-shoulders photo, Alvarado smiles, wears a suit, and looks professional.

At the same time as Alvarado is wondering what is to be done, the CTM launches a structured new campaign of attacks against Julia Quiñonez. The first salvo comes from Saltillo, the Coahuila state capitol, and the office of Tereso Medina Ramírez, CTM director for the state. Leocadio Hernández has traveled to his superior's side to partake in the first release of new information against Quiñonez. "*With documents* that he will guarantee…", the paper reports, "Tereso announced and warned of the existence of a plan by foreign organizations to destabilize labor peace, which through cells and clandestine networks try to make the source of employment flee." These are all the same old signifiers, but one thing is new. The CTM has proof; a document exists (my emphasis with italics). In the same article Tereso has details that he releases warily though they don't seem to add up or make any point, but, as a semblance of evidence, they make innuendos more powerfully. For example, he reveals that the conspiratorial "strategy was initiated in December and there is an agreement to apply it for the first six months of 2002 in Piedras and Acuña and then continue in the north and central regions of Coahuila." What is the strategy? Passive sentences keep the revelations anonymous (14 March 2002 "Insiste…"**).**

The next day, according to *El Zócalo*, Leocadio Hernández is still in Saltillo by Tereso's side, gathering stature though association with state-level CTM power and through his presence at the release of evidence. The March 15th headline does not at first

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25% in 2005, employment in automotive parts and electronics grew by 15% and 11% respectively. At the end of last year, 2,890 maquiladoras, located mainly along the US border, produced mainly consumer goods valued at US$113 billion. Direct foreign investment is expected to reach US$3 billion this year... " (MSN News and Analysis 31 Jan. 2006)

promise anything new: "They Seek to Destabilize Labor Peace in Coahuila." The bomb is in the subhead: "Leader of the CTM Reveals Names and Groups Who Stir up Maquiladoras in P[iedras] N[egras], Monclova and Acuña." The suspense is over; Tereso names the names—and here they are: Gerry Fernández, Ed Keyser, Jeff Hermanson, Ana Elsa Avilés, Ben Davis, Stan Gacek and Julia Quiñonez—seemingly a mixture of "Anglo infiltrators" and "bad Mexicans." But who are they (aside from Quiñonez) and what did they do? Readers of *El Zócalo* will have to rely on the judgment of Tereso who has reserved the incriminating details for himself and the federal government to whom he has delivered the dossier so that they may investigate and prosecute (15 March 2002 "Buscan…").

The next article, on March 16, is almost identical to the first; however, Leocadio is now the mouthpiece. He is back in Piedras Negras and ready to fight. The power of the word—of naming names— has passed to him from Tereso. He reiterates the conspiracy theory—I think that the intended audience, who are susceptible to the fear-mongering, must not notice the repetitiousness and how tiresome it is when it lacks content and plausibility—and reveals the names once again, the same names. The headline states: "There are Cells of the United States and Bad Mexicans Who Do Harm." The subhead bolsters Leocadio's authority and position and shows him rising to the occasion, savior-like: "[He] affirms that the work [employment] must be cared for; this is not the time to scare it away" (Aguilar 16 March 2002)

March 16, the date of the above article, was also the Friday when an Austin Tan Cerca de la Frontera delegation arrived in Piedras Negras. Despite the likelihood that we would be taken as foreign infiltrators if hostile parties noticed us, the CFO had decided to receive us, and their hospitality made us extra aware of their commitment to cross-border solidarity. Despite the "bad Mexican" epithet, Julia wore a tourist t-shirt from Cuba. And despite the CFO's hospitable warmth that weekend, some individuals seemed to be feeling the wounds of constant attack. At the end of the delegation, during the time we customarily reserve to share personal reflections, several of us teared up, others sobbed openly. Those of us from the U.S. had just left a world of sword rattling as the Bush Administration prepared to invade Afghanistan. Some of us were believers in non-violence and abhorred the pre-emptive aggression being proposed and sure to come. We

were ashamed, helpless, and morally fearful. One of us was pregnant and extra fearful of the world her child would enter. Our Mexican colleagues expressed pain at being so universally attacked in their own city. Then too, some had been physically attacked by the CTM and fired by their employer, Macoelmex, in a manner that was humiliating and shamed them in front of their peers. We understood that sharing our tears strengthened our relationship.

The March 16 article that named names completed the CTM's phased attack. How are we to understand it? It never marshals evidence; it continues to depend on innuendo and the unquestioned, unsubstantiated ethos of key players. It suffers from *El Zocalo's* reporting which blends balanced reporting with bias and delivers the package under inflammatory headlines. As public speech and the expression of a culture perhaps it qualifies as, what one commentator in another time and place, Richard M. Weaver, called "the spaciousness of old rhetoric." Writing in 1965, about the public speech of mid-19th century America, Weaver meant by "spaciousness" the distance between what is said—very general verbiage, full of code words or signs that are fairly empty on their own and do not signify—and the enthusiastic reception of this speech, the audience's sense of the speaker's clarity and force. This rhetoric is only possible if the speaker thinks he or she addresses an audience that is so ideologically unified with him, and with each other, in one happy stew, that everyone derives the same message, and powerfully, from the same weak words. Oblique references, windy generalizations, and opaque phrases satisfy. God- and devil-terms connote whole universes and epics of struggle, but do not denote—not one single bit. Weaver's "modern sensibility" (in 1965), looking with horror at 19th-century American ("old") oratory, transfers easily, I believe, as a guide to how we might regard the middle class rhetoric of the border and the journalistic standards involved in reporting it. Weaver writes,

> The chief offender against modern sensibility…[is] *the uncontested term*. By this we mean the term which seems to invite contest, but which is apparently not so regarded in its own context… No experienced speaker interlards his discourse with terms which are themselves controversial. He may build his case on one or two such terms, after giving them *ad hoc* definitions, but to multiply them is to create a force of resistance which almost no speech can overcome… Yet the old orator who employed these terms of sweeping generality knew something of his audience's

state of mind and was confident of his effect[33]. (166)

Research shows that members of AFL-CIO and United Steel Workers of America international labor solidarity organizations—plus Julia—comprise the CTM list. Jeff Hermanson and Ana Elisa Aviles, stationed in Mexico City, and Ben Davis, based in Washington, DC, were members of the AFL-CIO's Solidarity Center or international affairs office. The AFL-CIO does a lot of public relations but it is difficult to get hard information about their employees and the organization's history, even as recent as 2002. Trying to find out who these people are and what they might have been doing involves us in a labyrinth of acronyms, name changes, money transfers, behind-the-scenes collaborations, and ambiguous purposes. Starting with the AFL-CIO website, we learn that The Solidarity Center's mission was, and is, "to help build a global labor movement by strengthening the economic and political power of workers around the world through effective, independent, and democratic unions," a laudable or suspicious goal, depending on your opinion of independence and democracy (Solidarity Center).

Stan Gacek is currently (2006) the AFL-CIO International Affairs Assistant Director. In 2002 he was in charge of the labor group's "Americas program." Critics of the AFL-CIO object to what this arm of international labor solidarity meant by independence and democracy. President Kennedy's labor secretary Arthur Goldberg collaborated with the AFL-CIO to form the American Institute for Free Labor Development (AIFLD) during the Cold War, in the wake of the Cuban Revolution, and in the face of increasing poverty in Latin America. Critics allege, and are pretty sure, that in the 1970's this entity participated in the heartbreaking overthrow of Salvador Allende's democratic government in Chile. Judy Ancel believes "it was always a CIA operation" and Barry & Preusch (quoted by Ancel) have written, "When it came to funding, [AIFLD] was little more than a branch of the U.S. government." That involvement earned the parent union federation the nickname AFL-*CIA*. Under the pressure of

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[33] Thanks to Professor Patricia Roberts-Miller who brought this essay to my attention during discussions of "god-terms," or how rhetors, speaking to nation-wide audiences today in the U.S., get away without saying what they mean—and yet are convinced of enthusiastic reception by a homogeneous audience in United States and around the world.

negative reactions to activities like that, and when John Sweeney replaced George Meany, the Kennedy-era American Institute for Free Labor Development changed its name in 1996 to the American Center for International Labor Solidarity (ACILS), and continued to receive 90% of its funding, according to Preusch & Barry, from U.S. tax payers through USAID and USIA among others. It became active in over thirty countries in the Caribbean and Latin America, including Venezuela (Ancel).

With a new name, and under Stan Gacek's direction, ACILS funneled money from U.S. taxpayers into the National Endowment for Democracy (NED) and United States Agency for International Development, thence, for a recent special project in Venezuela, to the Confederation of Venezuelan Workers or the CTV[34]. The CTV is the CTM's counter part in Venezuela. The confederation has dominated Venezuelan labor for 40 years, about 20 years less than the CTM has dominated Mexican labor, with "an undemocratic structure," according to Diana Barahona, writing in *Political Affairs*. Throughout its history, "union bureaucrats collaborated with management to quash the struggles of rank-and-file workers." In 2002, about the same time that workers in Piedras Negras were fighting for a democratic union election, the Solidarity Center helped relay some U.S. taxpayer money to assist Pedro Carmona Estanga's bid for the Venezuelan presidency. The latter held the top post of the Venezuelan Federation of Chambers of Commerce (*Fedecamera*) until he became president of the Venezuelan Republic. His administration only lasted 47 hours, April 11–12, 2002, just a month after, as it happens, the CTM in Mexico was waving its accusatory list at Julia. Carmona owed his brief presidency to a military and business junta that staged a coup and equally briefly threw out president Hugo Chavez. Chavez had been democratically elected in 1998 and was popular with the poor and the working class. He acted without the support of the business-allied unions of the CTV. After the coup, he returned to power in a helicopter and on the wings of what some call a popular uprising. There he remains as of this writing (Barahona 7, Hoyt). It is a complicated history to touch on in a brief space and not everyone feels that Mr. Chavez's government is good for Venezuela or the world, or that it is as democratic as it claims, but I attempt the story to make the point that one does

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not know what to expect when the Solidarity Center speaks of "democracy" and "independence" and one might be suspicious when the Solidarity Center takes action. Furthermore, Stan Gacek seems not to have returned enough phone calls, to one reporter at least (Katherine Hoyt of Z-magazine), to satisfactorily explain the AFL-CIO's role in the 2002 Venezuelan coup. That has further aroused suspicion about him and his employer. His name on the CTM list raises a slew of ironies and contradictions. If the accusations are true, he is supporting a union in Venezuela that is a mirror image of the CTM in Mexico. The effect of his actions are to meddle and destabilize; yet, again, that trouble making serves a business coalition, against a populist, and might be considered salutary by the CTM since they are allied with business too. Neo-liberalism has made this possible, that is, the "corporatocracy" (or coalition of business, governments, and transnational bodies) have eroded the identity and function of big labor. When it tries to act internationally, it ends up indistinguishable from international capital.

Gerry Fernandez, another name on the list, directed International Relations for the United Steel Workers of America and spoke at an international USWA educational forum in Seattle on November 29, 1999, giving perspective to the fight against the WTO. The Steel Workers represent Alcoa employees in the United States and have shown, over the years, varying degrees of interest and ambivalence in connecting their struggle with that of Alcoa workers in Mexico who have been close to the CFO (Labornet). Ed Keyser is also a Steel Worker. In summary, the CTM list raises questions about organized labor in the Untied States and its cross-border solidarity. It seems, however, from the evidence that big unions in the United States pursue "business unionism," in a similar manner to the CTM's activities in Mexico and that the Mexican confederation would have more to gain than to fear from the presence of these particular foreigners. Judy Ancel, who is both an academic and an activist (whom I cited above), defines and counterpoises the useful terms "global business unionism," as practiced by AFL-CIO, and "social movement unionism," which would describe the work of the CFO and other grassroots groups on both sides of the border nurturing transnational *cooperation*. These useful terms help clarify the major differences between union purposes and methods.

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[34] *Confederación de Trabajadores de Venezuela*

It's not clear what Leocadio and Tereso really knew about the people on their list. Julia Quiñonez, however, knew a lot and *El Zócalo* gave her space, 19 paragraphs, to respond to the CTM's attack. She took the opportunity to include a somewhat shocking revelation, but the editors played it down. They focused away from it and instead treated the article as one more installment in the Julia-Leocadio boxing match. Judging from how the contest between the two leaders disappeared from the news afterwards, Julia scored a knockout here, although she was not looking for it and her presentation soft-pedaled it.

Julia openly revealed in the March 16 article (under Hilda Aguilar's byline) that, in fact, she was cognizant of foreign operatives from the U.S., allied with Mexican unionism. What's more, these foreigners had signed an international joint declaration—and Julia had a copy—with a Mexican group. That group was not the CFO. Only tangentially did the agreement have anything to do with her or the CFO. The agreement had been signed publicly or semi-publicly or in a combination of secrecy and ceremony, typical of the way these organizations seem to do things, on November 10, 1998 by no less than John Sweeney, president of the AFL-CIO and Leonardo Rodriquez Alcaine. This is shocking because the latter is the national head of the CTM and at 83 years old a fixture that only death would remove two years later. The signing took place in Washington, DC. It pertained to Julia only because she had been invited to attend the public/secret ceremony. Leocadio and Tereso apparently were not. Though the implications are startling as well as confusing, reporter Hilda Aguilar's article places the information about the joint document in paragraph 13 of her article. It's buried in the text. However, in the accompanying, photo Julia is holding it up for view. One hand holding a cassette tape recorder and another holding a Channel 9 microphone are also visible. It was a press conference, well attended. The caption however remains silent about the newsworthy document, saying only: "The CTM wants to blame its mistakes on the Border Committee of Workers, says Julia Quiñones." The whole ensemble of headlines also avoids the hot topic. Supra-headline: "Julia Quiñones Denies She Wants to Destabilize Piedras Negras." Main headline, one inch tall: "'CTM Seeks Culprits'" (or CTM Seeks Someone to Blame,'" "*'CTM busca culpables*.'") Sub-head: "We Want a Just Agreement for the Workers, Female Leader (*Lideresa*) Says." This article is an

outstanding example of disparities between headline and text writing, characteristic of this paper. The two functions express wholly divergent editorial viewpoints.

The whole article is devoted to Julia words, quoted or attributed. Finally she has captured the floor, unobstructed. Finally, the maquiladora worker is speaking. She is not particularly interested, though, in using the opportunity to expose an adversary. Instead she sticks to business; she says in the first paragraph: "It is important that the community of Piedras Negras know the true function of the Border Committee of Workers, that it is to support and defend the workers, by means of a just and dignified labor agreement, but never to take advantage of them…" While she doesn't personalize attacks against Leocadio and the CTM, she does, throughout, make comparisons between her mission and theirs, between bottom-up and top-down leadership, democratic or authoritarian, a difference that is ultimately ideological and decisive for her. Her tone is advisory, not bitter. Here are some examples:

Paragraph 2:

> The president of the Border Committee of Workers said that rather than focusing on the labor problems at hand and the factors that destabilize Piedras Negras, the CTM "looks for culprits on which to blame its mistakes."

Paragraph 3:

> She indicated that the most recent case of Leocadio Hernández's failure was the result of an intra-union election in a Macoelmex plant in which the workers decided for themselves whether they wish to continue being manipulated by a union that lives at their expense.

` Paragraph 11:

> She affirmed that what the CTM had to do was give more attention to grassroots workers because they will not always cover their eyes in order to avoid realizing that they are being exploited by an organization that calls itself defender of their rights as workers.

Paragraph 17:

> Julia Quinones said that Leocadio Hernández didn't have to be questioning how The Border Committee of Workers lives [where it gets its money]; what should be questioned is what the CTM does—that it is an organization that truly lives off the workers, off their union dues, and does not represent them." (Aguilar "CTM Busca…")

Julia and the CFO never say publicly how they finance their office, their overhead, and how they fund salaries for Julia, an office administrator, and for professional organizers in several cities. *El Zócalo* picked up information on this interesting subject from another newspaper, El Siglo de Torreón. The article, using a Saltillo dateline, includes a photo caption that places Julia in the more southerly city and quotes her saying:

> I acknowledge that the CFO received economic aid from persons and civil society organizations in the United States, from churches and foundations, but not from the government and not from workers unions, from neighboring countries but not for destabilization of the maquiladora sector. (16 March 2002 *"Niega…"*)[35]

In paragraph 8 of the original *El Zócalo* article, using a paratactic style of sentence construction that does not explain the connection between ideas and that forces readers to either figure it out or miss it, she embeds an argument about what causes that demon "destabilization,:" "[T]he leader of the Border Committee of Workers said that she had never wished to encourage destabilization, but to the contrary was seeking better agreements for the workers." This casts worker unrest in a wholly new light. Bad agreements, that is, bad labor contracts, cause unrest and therefore destabilization. Conversely, it would follow, better agreements would cause stability and that is what the CFO is seeking. Finally it follows, too, that the CTM and its bad agreements cause unrest.

Ultimately Quiñonez took the opportunity of the *El Zócalo* interview to respond to the CTM charges against her and the workers, but always surpassed the original accusations to carry the dialog further—as in paragraph 4.

> I consider that the Macoelmex election was a clean process because there were people available from both parties. As a CFO representative, I was not present; while, by comparison, it was Leocadio Hernández who was coordinating it and still was not able to win.

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[35] This news clipping takes in several geographic locations: A newspaper in Torreón for the source of the quote; Saltillo as Julia Quiñonez's location when she is quoted, and Piedras Negras for the *El Zócalo's* main office. I include this information, which may only be trivia without significance, because it is odd, it makes me curious, it looks like a little dance of confusion and discomfort that the news media is performing around information it can't understand.

She uses the article as an opportunity to bring the debate to substance and that means never letting go of the endless comparison of her differences with Leocadio. By giving short shrift to her CTM-AFL-CIO revelation, she allowed Leocadio to save face. He was not part of the strange proceedings in Washington and thus lost an opportunity to gain the prestige of hobnobbing at the national and international level. Maybe she was not motivated by kindness to her adversary and *El Zócalo's* editing protected him. This is what she says (paragraph 13) about how the CTM national organization excluded its Coahuila officials from border business and the Washington event: "She said that unfortunately (*lamentablemente*) the state and regional leaders [of the CTM] do not have this information [about the joint declaration] which she has as CFO representative because she was invited to participate in the signing…" The interest of this statement hinges on *lamentablemente,* which means "unfortunately" but also secondarily "pathetically" or "pitifully" which in this context I hear as incredulousness, meaning it is incredible that the CTM included her and excluded them. (*Dijo que lamentablemente los líderes estatales y regionales no tienen esa información porque ella como representante de la CFO fue invitada a participar en la firma de declarción conjunta…"*)

In one sense, I find Julia's treatment of the CTM and AFL-CIO joint declaration and the relationship between the two labor organizations disappointing. Once again meaningful details are missing. True, she may not have them. Usually we can rely on Julia for logic, and for me this gives the impression of truth and meaningful revelation. But without certain details, the sense of reality is missing. In fact the CTM-AFL-CIO collaboration and the declaration announcing it may have lacked reality. There are, after all, preposterous elements. The signatories may not have wanted to reveal their purpose. The whole thing may have been ceremonial. If this were the case, why did Julia participate by going to Washington? Both union groups have ambiguous reputations in regards to their respect for democratic process. On the other hand, why would she not go to Washington to meet with them? Julia's participation in their cross-border labor summit may reflect her confidence in the CFO and its commitment to democratic process. Association with the unions is not collusion; corruption is not contagious.

Julia's report in the *Zócalo* article covers some of the same ground as a November 16, 1998 electronic report by the Mexico Labor News and Analysis which is also brief,

suggesting that no one had much information—probably only what they are announcing through this press release. The MLN&A also leaves questions unanswered, but has the virtue of providing more context and helpful speculation. Here are excerpts that add to what I have already quoted from *El Zócalo*:

> **AFL-CIO AND CTM MAKE ALLIANCE TO PROTECT MEXICAN WORKERS IN THE U.S.**
>
> …Leonardo Rodriguez Alcaine… and John Sweeney agreed to work together to protect Mexican migratory workers in the United States… and workers' right to free association which has been systematically violated by employers and the government in the U.S. The two federations will create a joint commission made up of three representatives from each to analyze the problems existing on the border.
>
> In addition, they will study the effects of the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA) in order to come up with proposals to modify it and protect Mexican workers' basic rights. *The two federations pledged to remain in constant communication, while respecting each other's autonomy, and the sovereignty of each country*. [This last sentence appears in Spanish in Julia's version almost verbatim.] Both groups also stated their opposition to illegal firings and to "protection contracts," agreements to protect employers from real union organizations.
>
> [W]hile any attempt to protect exploited and maltreated migrant Mexicans workers has to be welcomed, this particular agreement will come as a disappointment to those who had hoped that Sweeney and the AFL-CIO were turning away from the state-controlled CTM. The CTM has been notorious since the 1940s as a state-controlled labor federation, riddled with corruption, and often employing violence against independent unions and its own members. Sweeney's agreement with Rodriguez Alcaine can only help to strengthen the latter in its contest with the new independent National Union of Workers (UNT) [in Mexico].
>
> If Sweeney and the AFL-CIO want to help migrant workers, they should consider an alliance with the independent campesino or farmworker unions in Mexico, or perhaps with the Party of the Democratic Revolution which has built up a network of branches in the United States. The CTM has no commitment to defend workers and their autonomous organization in its own country, much less in another. (Mexico Labor News and Analysis vol. 3 no. 20)

Julia won the public relations battle in the pages of *El Zócalo*; but it was not a victory that interested her much. She complained around this time that the press was taking too much of her time. She was impatient with that aspect of the struggle and

didn't give it that much importance. Her communication and organizing style flourishes in face-to-face contacts, which she really enjoys. She said she wanted to spend time with the workers and with organizing. For this aspect of struggle, her patience is impressive. I realized this after I pieced together, once, the feat of patience that she exercised in relation to the CFO organizer in Ciudad Juárez. A CFO annual assembly had decided to try to create a foothold in that beleaguered city. They were prepared to channel the precious resource of a salary to support an organizer there. They found Ariel (changed name), a former maquiladora worker, who also had organizing experience, to take the job. They felt an urgency to do something in the face of the murders of young women in a city that has one of the biggest (if not the biggest) maquiladora populations in the country. However, after a year Ariel wasn't getting much organizing done. He seemed to be a bundle of personal problems, covered over by wisecracks and excuses. Or so it seemed to us outsiders. Some of us from Austin, observing the drama of Julia's patience play out in Juárez, chafed at the way she handled the fumbling organizer. But she always held out the possibility that he could catch fire. After two years he left of his own accord. In retrospect I believe Julia's patience was a product of unwavering respect. She explained that Ariel was a loner, couldn't fit into the CFO's collective way of doing things, and had to go his own way.

As the Juárez dilemma underscored, the CFO is sensitive to urgency, but is not in a hurry. This is a hallmark of their style and philosophy. I encountered this form of epic, disciplined patience on my first delegation to the border in March 1999. At the end of the trip, as we gathered for personal reflections, and in a fit of impatience, after I had seen the abuses and the travesties of justice, I tried to put what I felt into the question: "How can we change this?" Unruffled Julia answered, "*Poco a poco,* little by little. These are practically CFO watchwords. They turn up in the discourse of volunteers and organizers all over the border, from Río Bravo to Ciudad Juárez. There are no short cuts. The CFO organizes deeply. Therefore it organizes slowly. The wisdom of *poco a poco* has both short-term and long-term impact. It sounds simple but it is not. I for one spent a long time trying to understand it. Part II of this Chapter, which follows, presents "the battle of Río Bravo" or the labor struggle at Duro factory, in its Spring 2000 phase. It was a time and place in which to develop understanding of the CFO philosophy—by a contrary

example. It also offers a case study through which to compare the press version of labor actions—with all their myths and fantastic narratives—and an eye witness account, which, unfortunately, is not definitive either, though still instructive.

Part II: On the Ground, Río Bravo, Tamaulipas, Mexico.

The battle in Río Bravo over union democracy at the Duro manufacturing plant debuted in the local press on June 20, 2000. With the story, *La Mañana,* the local news chain, ran two photos, stacked one over the other on the page. Perhaps the configuration expressed social hierarchy. The top photo illustrates authority, control. It shows three men in shirtsleeves, all of them *licenciados,* literally "the licensed ones.[36]" The caption gives their names and positions. State and federal government offices, dealing with labor and with social forecasting, employ two. The third is Alejandro de la Rosa, here described as "legal representation of the Duro factory," but elsewhere referred to as the Human Resources director and known as a fellow with a nasty personality, not averse to using psychological and physical violence to keep workers in line. Low light in a patch of sky indicates evening or early morning in this picture.

In the second photo, the photographer has succeeded in catching red-handed, it would appear, foreign agitators, two women and a man. No fan-fare is made of this scoop. The caption reads: "Below, North American activists of which one, the gentleman, (*el varon*), was detained; the women fled." (*Abajo activistas norteamericanos de los que está detenido el varón; las mujeres huyeron.*) Mexican readers, like Martha Ojeda, Josefina Castillo, and Maria Luisa Bautista, attuned to the nuances of language and culture, find this caption very funny. Apparently it combines an overly objective business/newspaper style (for example in the diction: the gentleman, *el varón*) with melodrama in attributing flight to the women, adding up to the gravely pompous tone of Mexican officialdom. The three caught in the camera flash do, indeed, look like North Americans. It is hard to tell whether they are activists or to have any inkling what they are doing in a dark section of Río Bravo, late on June 18 or early on the 19. This is, however, one instance of "foreign infiltration" at the border where it is possible to know a lot about who the interlopers are, what they were doing, and what their motives and goals were. That is because I am one of them. The other woman is Diane Kramer, also from Austin, and the gentleman is Mark Horowitz, who was living, at the time, in McAllen, just across the border from Río Bravo. Maria Luisa Bautista, a Mexican national from Monterrey, living in Austin, and coordinating an immigrants' NGO, gave particularly good feedback on her reading of the humor in the photo and caption. Knowing me as a harmless, law-abiding person, it amused her to see me through the eyes of the police, as dangerous. The news presentation immediately sparked in her mind a slapstick spy drama with bumbling and paranoiac authorities aided by Keystone Cops running around in the dark looking for terrorists.

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[36] The title *licenciado* usually refers to a lawyer, but may also mark respect or class, a credentialed, "licensed," or professional person.)

I will attempt to answer the questions about the North Americans—who we were, what we were doing, and what our goals and motives were. The answers get more complicated, rather than less, with access to my memory, my personal journal, and the accounts my reading of other observers. What especially complicates the picture is what I have learned since the battle of Río Bravo about the role of North Americans in the Mexican labor struggle who want to act in solidarity, but, lacking knowledge of, and ultimately respect for, the context, seriously run amok. Experience at the front lines of Río Bravo and subsequent learning have forced deep reflection on me about my own identity and my human and political relationships across borders of history, class, nationality, and national origin. The eyewitness account that follows mixes three points of view—my consciousness at the time and my consciousness now, after going to the school of the CFO. Thirdly my personal, social background, pre-Duro, conditions the whole thing and, to disclose my personal biases as well as to offer my readers points of identification, I have tried to put relevant parts on the table.

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I am at war. Since I am older and don't have children, I feel free to take risks. This is not true for the other women, the Mexican workers, who take risks; but they do it precisely because they have children and want a better life for them. Though I have allies and friends I am proceeding under my own recognizance. I am both scared and happy to walk in the company of my secret twin—my own judgment. This reunion with myself was a long time coming. It's as if a covert war has gone on around me all my life and now finally surfaced. I am no longer so enamored of my own judgment but at the time it was a thrilling and necessary partner—a way of being in the world, as if for the first time. For better or worse I learned to trust my own reading of new and fraught situations,

At the time I liked the war metaphor. The image put me in the footsteps of gringo adventurers who came to the border to join the Mexican Revolution and fight on the peoples' side. It put me in league with lots of North Americans who just plain go to Mexico to feel free and do what they want to do that they feel they can't do at home, be it drink, drugs, prostitution, or solidarity and revolution. Regardless of motives, this adventuring poses serious problems. First, those of us who have come to the border for an interlude can go home again. What's exciting, enlightening, or horrific for us is the on-

going condition of life for our Mexican friends. Our presence supposes that we have something to give and that assumption is always based on a misguided sense of our privileges. We overvalue our knowledge, experience, education, mobility, technology, wealth, and, most of all our point of view, our analysis. This is our vanity. In fact, when it comes to consciousness, the Mexicans are often ahead of us, even when they have very little formal education. Second our intervention always and of necessity short-circuits the initiative of local people who take real risks and most need to find their own initiative and solidarity and build them into power relations. The story of Theresa (Chapter Five) graphically illustrates this: how the CFO lost a precious moment—an opportunity to broach organizing in a voiceless community—because a university professor on a research tour stepped in to help.

While I was pretty inchoate when I stepped into the Duro imbroglio, naïve and sophisticated at the same time, several things actually had prepared me to face Mexican guns. Perverse as it sounds, one was working for ten years, in the 70s, for a multinational corporation, Olivetti Corporation of America, wholly-owned subsidiary of an Italian company best known in the U.S. as typewriter makers. They finally entered the computer market and tried to compete with IBM, before withdrawing the Olivetti name altogether from the U.S. That was before the rise of Apple and Microsoft.

Towards the end of my tenure at Olivetti's New York headquarters, I occupied a small, private office with a floor-to-ceiling window overlooking Park Avenue. I had worked my way up from one of many secretarial positions with different names to another poorly paid but interesting job in corporate communications. There, without any status, but with a reputation as the company historian, I fraternized with top executives from the U.S. and abroad and was privy to all kinds of information. And so it was that I formed a theory of men in suits—a variant of my theory of men with guns. It concerns how men, or anyone, relate to the symbols of their own authority. If they cling blindly to the symbols and identify with them, they get a little stupid. They think other people see them the way they see themselves and are thrown off track if expected reactions don't materialize.

The analogy between suits and guns came to me one night as I was walking with a male friend on a deserted street in Brooklyn where I lived at the time. Two black men

who wanted our money approached us. One had a gun. First they grabbed my friend by the front of his shirt, mussed him up a little and said, "Hand over your wallet." He did. Then they turned to me with the gun. I was accustomed to facing authority and felt oddly at ease, enough to try negotiation. When they demanded my wallet, I asked, "How about if I just give you the cash?"

The man with the gun said, "OK. Hurry up."

Transaction accomplished, he pointed to the direction from which we had come and said, "Go that way and walk fast. Don't look back."

We did as we were told, but I felt respected and figured that, by surprising them with a counter demand, I had gained a slight advantage. At least I saved my credit cards.

But this is the Mexican border, Río Bravo, in the year 2000. I don't know if I can count on gentleman adversaries or how my white skin and U.S. citizenship will play. Women and children camp in the dust next to the Duro factory. They scrounge food and water, endure nighttime gnats and daytime verbal mockery from the factory's top management who taunt them and call them *cows*. Feeling I have cracked the code on authority, I don't believe that these women and children are anything less than the flying wedge of history in the process of cracking the code themselves on a grand social scale and with a lot more at stake than I. They are poor. They don't have a penny in the bank. They don't have a bank. Sometimes they get fired and blacklisted and they have no prospects for other jobs. They are striking for their right to an independent union that will represent them, independently from the CTM. Their adversaries have more power, break the law and prosper on threats and bribes. In effect, these Mexican workers—who earn about $35 a week for 40 hours—are demanding that Mexican authorities honor the Mexican Constitution and Federal Labor Law and quit prostituting law and human rights to foreign investment.

Duro Manufacturing is a private company. Charles Shor of Ludlow Kentucky is sole owner. His facility in Río Bravo makes labor-intensive, ornamented gift bags for Hallmark, Neiman Marcus, and Victoria's Secret, to name the most visible customers. In the U.S., Duro's more automated operations make plain brown grocery bags. Meanwhile their Mexican factory, which employs 900, out of the company's total workforce of 1,400, is notorious for dangerous working conditions, forced over time, threats, fierce

emotional abuse, and acts of violence and sexual harassment that make life hell for workers. At the same time, Duro is the biggest employer in Río Bravo and the situation is ideal for them. Not only do they reap the benefits of NAFTA, but also, since they are the biggest employer in town, they can act as if they own the place. They control or count on the collaboration of local police and also carry weight with state and federal authorities that like to accommodate to foreign investment. Local media, like the *El Mañana* chain of newspapers, act as their public relations arm, smearing opposition and spreading fear[37].

This power structure controls the major food retailers and can interfere with a worker's credit. Thus, if workers step out of line, Duro can fire and starve them too.

Duro orchestrates a total system. Judy Ancel, the academic and activist who has written about global business unionism in contrast to social movement unionism has been exploring this part of the border for a long time. She likened the middle classes' consolidation of control at the border to Jim Crow in Mississippi in the 1960's, a comparison which helped foster my memories of the 1964 lynching and my pondering of the theory of outsider activist intervention (Ancel 2000). At least at the border, as in Mississippi, a civil rights movement is on the horizon. Many people are wondering what Charles Shor dreams about at night and the state of his soul. The workers' U.S. allies, during months of intense protest, attempt to reach him by phone, fax, email, and union delegation. He has not bothered to respond. The ruthlessness of his local managers speaks for him.

In this mid-June moment, about 100 Duro workers in Río Bravo have been on strike for one week. They are facing their first Friday, June 16, without pay. CFO organizers in the area are aware of this action but not involved. It has not been a focus of

[37] Things change. Today *El Mañana's* owner, Ninfa Deander, is a member of the Coalition for Justice in the Maquiladora and serves on its board of directors. In February, 2006, drug traffickers attacked her newspaper offices in Nuevo Laredo and seriously injured a reporter who covered drug activities. CJM's appealed for help to Coalition friends and members and described the paper's "reputation for honest reporting, the courage to cover narcotics and the maquiladoras, and for giving a voice to workers and the poor in Nuevo Laredo." (Ancel 8 Feb 2006)

their organizing. In Austin we have been receiving news by email from San Antonio, from the Coalition for Justice in the Maquiladoras (CJM), which seems to be the Duro workers' chief voice in the U.S., allies who are trying to gain Charles Shor's attention. Austin Tan Cerca de la Frontera is a new organization at this time. We have not yet understood our role at the border or defined our relationship to the world of Mexican workers' organizations, nor yet made our commitment to the CFO. We feel the urgency in this instance to bring aid and to support families and the strike, but how? Three of us, in communication with the CJM, are trying to figure it out among ourselves—Tom West, Doug Zachary, and myself. We quickly gather $1,070 in emergency funds. I contribute a large share; I have just received an inheritance from my stepfather's estate, money that trickled down to me from my mother's family and their men's clothing business, which flourished in Rochester, N.Y., from the mid-1800s until the 1970s. My family was part of a group of early, German Jewish immigrants who founded the Rochester clothing industry and exploited later waves of Jewish immigrants, among them, incidentally, Russian anarchist Emma Goldman who wrote bitterly of her experience in an upstate New York "maquiladora." As I go to the bank to get the cash for the Mexican workers, I mentally engage grandpa Henry M. Stern (d.1949) in ironic repartee about what I am going to do with his money. I have my own ghosts.

Among the three of us in ATCF, our conversations soon come to the idea that rather than wiring the money, we would like to deliver it and show solidarity. We poll our email list serves and make phone calls on short notice. Only one other person, beside myself, is able or willing to go, and that is Diane Kramer. We have never met but we both have witnessed border conditions through ATCF delegations with the CFO. At first Diane hesitates. She is concerned for our safety. I am prepared to go alone—at any cost; I cannot restrain myself. I feel overwhelmingly drawn by something I cannot articulate. But I definitely prefer company and try to persuade Diane. Perhaps my own feminism speaks to hers. For humanitarian reasons, I want to bring relief. For political reasons I want to help develop the leadership of women both among Austin activists and in the Mexican movement. For historical reasons, I want to support democratic unionism. Diane decides to go.

We call Martha Ojeda in San Antonio to get her thoughts. The Coalition for Justice in the Maquiladoras' executive director since 1996, Martha is a Mexican citizen, a lawyer, and a former maquiladora worker. She supports our plan and reminds us that Mark Horowitz lives and works in the border city of McAllen, Texas, near the international bridge that goes to Río Bravo; he can help us meet up with the Duro workers. I have known Mark since the previous year when, in Austin, he recruited me to the Texas State Employees Union. (Because I teach at the University of Texas, I am a state employee.) TSEU has since relocated him south. From his new location, he has followed and supported developments at Duro.

It's the eve of our trip, Saturday, June 17. By phone Martha notes that the political timing is good and should work in our favor. She notes that the PRI government and the party that has controlled the Mexican presidency for 71 years, is likely, on July 2, to lose the top post of the nation for the first time. Local electoral contests in the State of Tamaulipas, where Río Bravo is located, will also likely go against the PRI. Therefore, she thinks that political powers will be sensitive to popular pressure. I don't quite understand her analysis—what do political parties have to do with labor rights—and am embarrassed to ask. In retrospect I wonder whether, as a pragmatist, Martha engages partisan politics as she looks for ways to help the workers. If that is the case, I wonder if she is caught up in the game of trading favors, the essence of politics, and a system that creates bosses, who protect the less powerful—if it is convenient. This is different from an approach that adheres to democratic process.

Martha cautions that there is likely to be violence at Duro when the workers close the factory. She advises Diane and me to absent ourselves at that moment and join the bus to Victoria, the state capitol of Tamaulipas, where the workers plan to go as a group and register their independent union and where our presence, as international observers to this constitutionally guaranteed process, will be helpful. Diane and I like the prospect of joining the Victoria contingent and accompanying people who are following the law. In this we are naïve.

The Coalition for Justice in the Maquiladoras or CJM, which was founded in 1989, is tri-national—including the other NAFTA country, Canada—and brings together member organizations representing labor, religious groups, and solidarity workers, eighty

of them in 2000. Austin Tan Cerca has not yet talked about joining. As a worker in 1995, Martha led a 2,500-worker wildcat strike at Sony in Nuevo Laredo and then had to flee the country. She is a charismatic leader, always intense, often charming; she can be manic. During the worst of the Duro crisis, she worked 24 hours a day, chained to communication headquarters in San Antonio. In general demeanor, she has reminded me of a teddy bear, a bookish talk show guest, and the supreme commander in chief, at one time or another. I don't know if she does solos, but when she has her arms around her compañeros and compañeras she can sing to wake heaven. I believe that she cares ferociously about both the daily, human lives of workers and their historic, revolutionary lives. At the time, that was enough to make her trustworthy to me, someone from whom I want to learn. In retrospect, however, since I no longer feel comfortable with the war metaphor, a tiger-hearted leader does not win my trust. What good are democratic principles if we sacrifice them in wartime?

So, in the spring of 2000, with the cozy feeling that we are backed by the best possible advice, and inspired by the prospect of solidarity work, our two-person delegation is set to leave Austin at 6AM, Sunday, June 18. Over the phone Diane and I agree to bring bedrolls and bug repellent in case we have to camp out. We will carrry the money in 50s and 20s; $1070 is not too much for a pair of bargain hunters to carry over the border and spend on early Christmas shopping. Partly a joke, we are mindful of the necessity of giving the INS explanations, if demanded, that will satisfy their stereotypical notions of U.S.-Mexican relations and the behavior of American women. My traveling companion is a tall, sturdy woman just about to turn 50. She is leaving at home a 12-year-old daughter and a husband who works on environmental issues. Diane is a social worker, employed in community education with a special interest in the community enfranchisement theories of Paolo Freire. Her feminism, more practical than theoretical, is intense. All this and more I discover as we chat happily for six hours on our way south to McAllen. We stop for breakfast somewhere off old route 281 and Diane introduces me to grits, which she knows and loves from her native Oklahoma, and to which I am a stranger.

We arrive in McAllen at the predicted hour, 12:30PM. Mark has spent the night camping with the Duro workers next to the factory and has just arrived home himself.

Mark is fluent in Spanish, very gregarious, talks with his hands and his body, and lives on Coca-Cola. He is an accomplished juggler—he can handle fire torches and five balls—and is a pretty good pool player, requisite social skills, he once explained, for a labor organizer. His apartment is mostly unfurnished, but a large poster of Karl Marx dominates one wall; Indian weavings decorate another. He is just over 30 and his life and work seem devoted at the time to the liberatory possibilities of unionism, the social movement kind. He is actually a protégé of Judy Ancel who, as Director of the Institute for Labor Studies, is faculty at the University of Missouri/Kansas City, where Mark has put on hold a PhD dissertation in sociology.

We set off in Mark's car for Mexico and Duro, stopping at a drive-thru so Mark can pick up a coke. I can't bear the delay any more and scream. Back on the road, Mark, who is in constant contact with Martha at command center, describes how all plans have changed. Duro management has learned of the workers' intention to "close" the plant on Monday morning. I wonder how Martha knows this given the difficulties of the simplest communications. And I wonder what is the CJM's role in the workers' planning. At any rate, Martha says it is certain that the police will be waiting on Monday morning and will prevent the factory closing. As a remedy, the workers' elected leader Eliud Almaguer will propose at a meeting this evening—at 5 PM—that the workers close the factory tonight instead of tomorrow. Antonio Villalba, a lawyer from Mexico City, representing a coalition of independent unions, the *Frente Authentico de Trabajadores,* (the Authentic Labor Front or FAT) is on hand to advise the complicated petition process for registering an independent union in the state capitol. Diane and I still don't know what it means to "close" the factory but we are bound to find out.

Duro is located in a half-deserted, half-industrial, unpaved area near the railroad tracks at the edge of town. As we arrive, the main impression is of dust. A chain link fence surrounds the factory. Next to it, at the rear of an unpaved parking lot, the workers have set their camp. As a sunscreen, they have erected a large blue tarp, on makeshift poles, anchored by rope to boulders and shrubs. There are cooking areas, water supplies, bedrolls, and mattresses. I imagine improvised toilets among the bushes and trees at a slight distance.

Despite the organization and provisions, the impression, beyond dust, is of people stranded by war, a refugee camp. Now the war metaphor fits. I am shocked. I sense the workers' dread and, beneath that, the depression that comes from waiting too long and beneath that the rage that made them want to act in the first place. I have no way of telling if I am reading the mood of the moment correctly or if such a thing is possible. I am drawing on my experience of incarcerated women, from when I worked at a prison facility in New York and maybe I'm making it up. I am out of my depth. My Spanish is not functional at this point and, in compensation, my antennae are peaked to read body language, faces, and tones.

Mark knows everyone; everyone knows him. He introduces Diane and me and our good intentions. The workers, about 40 people at that moment, do not acknowledge us. My impulse is to try to communicate but the mood and language prohibit me. The best thing is to get busy. I am carrying the cash and it is burning a hole in my knap sack. The first order of business then is to figure out to whom to give it. Martha had suggested Chela Sandoval (I have changed her name) whom I had met in passing at the eventful CJM annual meeting a month earlier (when the CFO had withdrawn from the Coalition and Julia read a statement). Mark favors Ricardo Sosa (also a changed name). Both he and Chela seem to be trained veterans of union battles at other border sites and are endeavoring to support local Duro leadership, while coordinating tri-national aid. I wonder whether tri-national aid is code for the CJM. Somewhere behind the scenes, strategists were deciding on the workers' behalf and subsequently eliciting their agreement. No one ever really identified that driving force, but it was easy to see Martha in the role. Though the workers were taking the risks, they did not seem to be making the decisions. The question of who decides and who makes strategy is complicated. The Leninist model calls for trained operatives, from outside the workers' ranks, but including workers, and identified with their interests. Actually Lenin recommends this "vanguard" only in certain historical situations, like that of Czarist Russia. A vanguard is necessary where an aggressive intelligence operation, combined with military force, constantly hounds and attacks the workers' movement with the intention of eradicating it. It is interesting to compare that configuration of forces and intentions with the widespread opposition to labor today.

On the ground in Río Bravo, I'm still looking to turn over the cash. Chela speaks some English, is present, and has the virtue of being a woman. Ricardo is expected; however, he isn't present yet. In fact, there is some anxiety about his whereabouts. I feel that giving Chela the money would contribute to her experience of leadership. I am uncomfortable having to make this decision, but don't know who should. On some level I feel that having the money in my pocket entitles me to overrule Mark and Martha, which feels right, but at the same time arrogant, since I am such a rank outsider. In addition, my interest in women's leadership is obviously important to me. I've been thinking about it for a long time, since the 70s to be exact, when my own work experience posed questions of gender and justice. That makes me more of an insider.

Olivetti, my multinational employer, had an interesting 20th-century story in regard to women and labor. When I worked there, the New York headquarters filled three stories of a small, but elegant, glass and steel building at 500 Park Avenue. Among the employees there, perhaps 70 were managers, and, among them, two were women: Anita Hecht in Personnel, as it was called then; and Marion Baker, director of a very profitable sales division. Not counting them, strict office heterosexuality prevailed. It required that male managers be paired with female secretaries or helpmeets. Personnel did not have high status. Anita Hecht had no personal helpmeet; she had to share one. Marion Baker's secretary was a black woman, which maintained the hierarchy, in this instance based on race, rather than gender. Baker was an unusual person. Direct, with a twinkle in her eye, she seemed alert to constructions of corporate power. She acted on strong loyalty toward the people in her division and was otherwise independent. She had been in the armed services and probably knew how to take the symbols of power with a grain of salt. She wielded her own, which included blond hair, blue eyes, a collection of suits with short hemlines and of shoes with fairly high heels. Actually her sales force made such a strong contribution to corporate productivity and profit she didn't need too many symbols.

This was the end of an era that the typewriter had helped create. First the introduction of word processors and PCs of all kinds phased out the typewriter; then a new managerial philosophy phased out the office wife. Never again would business

organize so many personnel on this binary pattern. Never again would so much salary pour into middle management.

In addition to teaching me about the office gender hierarchy, Olivetti also educated me to the historical uses to which industry put gender. Around the turn of the 20th century, founder, engineer, and entrepreneur Camillo Olivetti pioneered a typewriter design, a manufacturing process, and public acceptance of the new technology in the commercial centers of northern Italy. When he died in the 1940s, his son had already been in charge of the company for several years. Adriano was a poet who flirted with socialism and modern art. He attracted all the great modern Italian visual artists of the post-war period to his advertising department. He invented and developed ideas of employee benefits and corporate image that made Olivetti unique and progressive at the time. Father and son carved out a mass market for typewriters and the son spread it all over Europe. The key to their success was their creation of the female secretary as she flourished, with a modern, sexualized gender, in the industrial west, indispensable to marketing the machine to which she was attached. Her low salary was the key, in turn, to her indispensability, since it enabled the employer to recuperate his capital investment in the hardware more quickly. The female operator in offices, as in textile mills in 18th century New England and as in 20th century maquiladoras, made mass production profitable and mass markets possible. In the early 20th century office, cost effective typewriters helped shift budgets from higher to lower salaries while the cost of the machines depreciated.

There's one more element in the economics of gender that pertains both to office work and the maquiladoras. In return for her services to the employer and to the machine, female workers received a new identity. Olivetti, with all its design flair, created a glamorous and modern image for this low-paid position. The secretary rode to work on the wave of technology that was ushering in modernity and helping build post-war Europe. She was entitled to an implied flirtation with power, the boss. She had to dress the part. Finally, a salary, any kind at all, represented independence to a woman, even if it was so low that part of its value was symbolic. She did not have many other ways of earning. It was a total identity, if she wanted it.

This was how I pieced together the historic marketing strategy. Meanwhile, I saw and respected the managerial strengths and achievements of the secretaries that I saw all around me. I deplored that they—or we—didn't find opportunities and if we did, we didn't get the recognition or, especially, the pay. At that time a rationale circulated that made adequate salaries doubly hard for women to attain. It maintained the stereotype that single women worked for spending money while they looked for a husband; or that married women were only looking for a secondary income to supplement their spouse's. In many ways I liked working for Olivetti—the European element, the culture (Olivetti sponsored Italian opera at the Met), the interesting people the company attracted, and the opportunities they gave me—to travel for example and to write—even though these opportunities were under compensated. I experienced a rude awakening, when, still in my twenties, I put the puzzle together. One day I found the courage to confront a skinny-suited executive from the Italian headquarters. Yes, Olivetti consciously shaped the secretarial position as one that would be underpaid. As compensation they craftily glamorized the work, giving it the patina of power and the excitement of a sexualized role. And yes, historically they capitalized on the lack of opportunities for women, particularly in post-war Europe.

Analogously, in contemporary Mexico, under the pressures of globalization, employers construct genders when they search for "docile" employees or for that matter, as at Duro, jeer at women workers and call them cows. The problem with employer-made gender identities is that they hook women (and men too) into tailoring their personalities to fit a labor role that may not really serve their own interests, for example, their health. Such a manipulation is successful in times of high unemployment or when new industries open their doors to a new demographic of worker and she is not sure how to comport herself, or, as the CFO says, doesn't know her rights. Today one may watch the movements of migrants to the border, women who have walked out of Mexico's southern jungle, hung up their traditional huaraches and rebozos, wiggled into tight skirts and stacked heals to hobble off to work in modernity. They go for survival and they go with zest, until they find out what it will cost them—in terms of health, or of family life, and then they're stuck—or need a new strategy. Ángela Fernández, for example, moved her family from Veracruz to Ciudad Acuña. She went to work in a factory and raised the

children who, now grown, move back and forth between the border, where there's work, and Veracruz where life is better. As Ángela says, "If you buy a chicken there, you know where it came from." She means you know its fresh because you probably saw it running around a few minutes ago. In Chiapas, maquiladoras have come to the jungle and to people who need livelihood, but as one woman, Celerina Ruiz, said, "We do not have it in our minds to work in a place like that. It goes against our natures." She has her own idea of modernity and of gender and was not willing to change herself to fit into the factory. Celerina is the first woman in her family to leave home in a tiny community, move to the city, and live alone. She is the first to speak Spanish in addition to Totzil. At 23 she is president of an indigenous women's weaving collective in San Cristóbal de las Casas, Chiapas.

In 1975, acting as a "fifth column," I discretely assisted the National Organization of Women as they organized to picket my employer, calling public attention to an offensive ad campaign that proposed that if you type on an Olivetti you will be cuter and sexier. Market research had demonstrated that the public perceived women who typed on the Olivetti product as more fun than the lady who used IBM, the market leader. The advertising strategy designed a brash new American glamour for the women behind the Olivetti keyboard. Further, research showed, operators influenced purchasing decisions. If they were clamoring for an Olivetti typewriter, employers would want to keep them happy.

So I gave the money to Chela in the Duro parking lot; it was my vote for better jobs and women's leadership, and she stashed it somewhere in her modish corduroy knickers.

The next order of business was to go to the biggest supermarket in Río Bravo—comparable in size to a U.S. Wal-Mart—and buy locks. Mark had already bought chains. Someone had designated Chela to use this equipment to lock the gates and thus "close" the factory when the time came.

"Chela," I said, "If you lock the gates, the police will come. What will you do then?"

Chela said, "If the police come they will look for leaders."

"And what will you do?"

“We’ll all stand together.”

“But what if they start arresting?” I asked.

The women are prepared. They are all prepared to go to jail,” she said. “They have said that.”

“And what if the police are violent?” I asked.

“Then we’ll pray to God,” she replied and smiled her soft smile.

This however was hypothetical for the moment. There would be no chains on the gates this night unless the workers voted for it. The meeting was set for 5PM.

We returned from shopping with our secret strike equipment. Ricardo was still missing. The chains that Mark had bought were in Ricardo’s car, as was another piece of equipment, even more essential to closing the plant, as I was about to learn—red and black banners, symbolizing struggle and suffering that Mexican labor traditionally hangs to declare a strike and to tell sympathetic workers to stay away. Eliud didn’t want to hold the meeting unless they had the chains and banners on hand, ready to implement a decision. All this attention was being paid to decision and to the workers making it. Chela and Eliud were saying the words of leaders who serve the workers. Were the workers speaking?

Still no Ricardo. Private cars and diminutive, rickety buses, driven by volunteers, were turning up with workers coming to the meeting. The worst heat of the day had passed. Eliud, the local leader, and Antonio, the Mexico City lawyer, were circulating in the growing crowd. Antonio looked like a big-city dweller, someone used to handling paper. He had a clipped beard and carried a huge, soft-leather brief case on a shoulder strap. Sure enough, he commandeered the hood of a car to use as a desk and was going over the forms and signatures they would take to Victoria for the *registro*, the registration of the independent union.

Eliud was completely focused on the workers—connected and communicating, touching people, talking, listening.

Finally, despite the absence of Ricardo, they started the meeting. It was 7:00. Eliud and sometimes Antonio stood at the center of a tightly packed circle in the parking lot. No speech making. No harangues. Just advice, explanations, and descriptions of

alternatives in a serious tone—requests for decisions. Decisions were made by voice vote. Yes and no, always unanimous and always solemn.

Chela said, "The workers are fed up. They are at the boiling point." She must have heard hem differently than I did.

Antonio advised us three gringos, Diane, Mark, and me, to tell the police, if we met them, that we were international observers. Mark was ready to stay all night, regardless of what happened. Diane and I were not so sure. We made a safety plan. Mark would give us the keys to his car and leave the car parked in an easy, get-away place, unless it was in use. Still no sign of Ricardo. Diane and I took Mark's car, and with Araceli Torres (another changed name) as a guide, went to look for him. Reportedly he was 12 miles away at Chela's house in Reynosa, on the phone with Martha.

Araceli spoke less English than we spoke Spanish, yet we made it to Chela's house. En route, we learned the cause of her limp—it looked like a frozen knee. It was an injury personally inflicted by Alejandro de la Rosa, Duro's Human Resources Director, before he fired her for being a troublemaker. Araceli and her children were just getting by on her husband's salary. She was pursuing medical claims through an unresponsive bureaucracy and remained devoted to the Duro workers.

At Chela's house we learned Ricardo had been there but had just left. He had gone back to Duro. We turned around. We couldn't manage any more conversation. Araceli found the tape cassettes in the car. We listened to Maná, a small slice of a vast Latin American culture of liberation.

Back at Duro night had fallen. A peace of sorts had come. The workers had shifted their camp out of the parking lot to the front gate. They had hung the black and red banners. They had taken possession, symbolically, of their work place; and somehow they had taken possession of their own souls. It was quiet, an intimate neighborhood night, like summers in Brooklyn when something unknown, maybe a phase of the moon, brings people out to belong to the street and each other and to mind the children, connected by the rustle of soft talking and the work of living.

I am learning that Mexican workers, in the most abusive U.S.-owned factories, demand wages but they demand dignity too. At the edge of disaster they fight for a voice and a rightful place in history. Dignity is not a word we use much in the United States.

We hardly know what it means. But I am learning that without it, one cannot live. What Chela had meant by the boiling point, which had looked to me like fear and depression, had passed. People smiled, gave thumbs up, invited photos, faced the camera, made eye contact, and joined together to mark a small but unmistakable moment of triumph that needs to be preserved and celebrated.

As it turned out, Chela had not used the chains. The guard, a friendly fellow, informed her that he would call the police if she did. The workers had decided to hang the banners only. They were satisfied since the banners are a ritual, part of the many techniques and technologies of strikes, of resistance. People teach each other and pass it down. Now children were bringing the guard cold sodas. It was time for a meal. Mark reclaimed the keys to his car and drove off to the residential neighborhoods, to gather more signatures for the petition in Victoria. Diane and I went food shopping with Chela, in her car. Two other women came along for the ride. Since I hade not slept since Friday, and it was late Sunday, my plan was to take a nap in the back seat, which I did, until Chela parked outside the super market. She and Diane got out to shop. Next to me in the back seat then was Fleur, a 17-year-old from a nearby town on the U.S. side. She was on vacation, visiting her 20-year-old friend Duro worker Isabel, who sat in the front. Fleur had a terrible cold and kept jumping out the car to clear her postnasal drip. She was bilingual and translated an exchange between Isabel and me. Isabel wore shoulder-length, permed hair; long, polished fingernails, a short skirt, and a dramatic, peasant-style blouse—much flashier than the other women—hardly strike gear. Turning around from the front seat, Isabel kept waking me. I was surprised by the attention and wondered what was up. First she wanted to know my name. I told her. Then she said, "You're beautiful." I said, "Thank you." Then with Fleur translating, she launched a litany against her father. The man had forbid her to continue her relationship with her *novio* or boyfriend. Apparently a really nice fellow, her boyfriend was from the U.S. side. Then her father quit his job and decided to stay home and live off Isabel and his wife.   Both worked at Duro. To top it all off, he was a wife-beater.

"Please help my mother," Isabel said.

"How?" I asked. "What can I do?"

"Tell her to leave my father," she said.

"I can't do that," I said.

"Please," she said.

I suggested she tell her mom how much she loved her and would stick by her.

"Oh, I love her so much. She knows I love her so much!"

I believe I caught Fleur's cold. A few days later, back in Austin, I had bronchitis. Nevertheless, I marveled at Fleur's idea of a vacation and at the way Chela was taking care of Isabel and her many problems. This too was the work of the organizer.

We returned to the factory with the food, which the women laid out with great efficiency. I sampled some ham salad and spongy white bread. Diane and I talked with Ricardo who had finally arrived and whose English was idiomatic and expressive enough to articulate all kinds of psychological and political ideas. He was from Mexico City. His father had owned a small business which went broke in 1982 because of the devaluation of the peso. Ricardo was 11. Unable to find work in Mexico City the family had moved to Nuevo Laredo at the border. Ricardo had finished preparatory school, equivalent to high school, and wanted to attend university—he liked math and physics—but that was not financially possible. He tried to study while he worked in a maquiladora but it was too exhausting. In his late 20's, he did, however, have energy for volunteer work and organizing. He told us about a community center for delinquent boys and the workers association he had affiliated with in Nuevo Laredo. The evening was passing quickly. We were settling in, letting our defenses down.

Mark returned at midnight and the police arrived half an hour later. First came the sound of tires on gravel and the bouncing of headlights on the bumpy road. They came in fast and in tight formation. Their convoy included marked and unmarked cars, and, inexplicably, two tow trucks, a total of perhaps eight to ten vehicles. It was quite a display. They stopped. About fifteen policemen jumped out and ran to the thick of the crowd, which amassed in front of the gates. They made a big show of guns, including automatic rifles. Diane and I hung back in the parking lot to the side. Police cars loosely blocked the road out, but it would still be possible to squeeze by them. We still had a possible exit if we wanted it, but I looked around and couldn't see Mark's car. Diane was gravitating toward the crowd. I looked at her back and hesitated. It was hard not to follow her. There was commotion in the crowd. The police had disappeared into it. I

drifted toward Diane. I wasn't aware of time. At some point, Mark came out of the crowd and approached Diane and me. Part of the crowd detached and followed him. He was shaking with fear, but he was excited too. He said the police were telling the workers that what they were doing was illegal. He had stood up to the police, on the workers' behalf, and answered that they were acting on the Constitution. Heightening the confrontation and dramatizing the situation, he had even looked around and asked, "Does anyone have a copy of the Constitution?" Plainclothes men followed Mark. He had led them straight to Diane and me. Now they wanted to know who we were. We said we were human rights observers. One man asked in Spanish, "Where are your papers?" He showed no credentials himself. I asked him who he was. He gestured toward the plant and said he was here to insure safety, or maybe he meant security, quite another matter. The word in Spanish was *seguridad*. "Whose safety?" I asked. No answer.

In English, another man asked if we would mind answering some questions or filling out some forms. If we were international observers, we must have some papers. I decided that my affiliation with the University of Texas at Austin, where I was a graduate student and taught rhetoric and composition, should be enough to assure anyone concerned with safety. I went on to say, in as officious manner as I could, that I would be glad to tell him my name. First, though, I wanted it entered in the record that I am from the University of Texas at Austin, the biggest university in the United States, and I would be glad to show my identification. I way pursing this tack impulsively and had just a glimmer that I wasn't making sense. I was fishing, trying to find out what symbols carried authority and whether I had any. My plastic ID card, replete with photo and ID number, was in Mark's car, and having by now laid eyes on that vehicle, I proposed to fetch it. I attempted indignation, hoping for the advantage of surprise. Next, we three gringos, with police escort, marched over to Mark's car. Diane whispered en route, "What about me? I only work for Austin Community College!" "Don't worry," I whispered back, "The University of Texas is big enough to protect us all."

I rifled through my possessions in the trunk of the car, found my ID card, and handed it over with a flourish. I sensed my performance was losing its audience. The police were not impressed. Besides, they really just wanted Mark. They were moving in on him like wolves circling their prey. Still, they were at a stand off, like a hunting

animal that can't attack, until its prey counter-attacks, or runs. Mark, amiable and urbane, was showing neither fear nor aggression.

The police brought up next to us a white, unmarked station wagon and opened the back door. Then they started tightening the net. A plainclothesman invited Mark, "Why don't you get in the car and come with us?"

Mark demurred, "No, I don't think I want to do that."

Then someone laid a hand on his arm. He pulled away. More hands were laid on him. By then the crowd from in font of the factory discovered the tug of war shaping up. They moved as one to Mark's defense and roared as one, "No! Let him go! Araceli was in the first line of their attack, using her fists to pound on the back of a policeman. Then she withdrew, ran around to the other side of the station wagon, opened the door, jumped in, and started pushing Mark *out*. Ricardo managed to get close enough to the fray to ask Mark for his car keys. Mark dipped his hand in his jeans and pulled them out. I hung there wondering how to move forward and at the same time sensing an escape route in the trees in back of me. I moved back. A woman was kneeling on the ground, watching and sobbing and shaking. I knelt next to her and put my hand on her shoulder. I thought, "Does this mean this is the end of everything?" I felt a world come crashing down. I couldn't think of any words in Spanish. I moved further toward the trees. Though I was thoroughly caught in the disaster, I was also aware that I had many escape routes as the woman kneeling in the dust did not. As soon as I turned my back on the melee, I saw Diane beckoning me to come with her. She climbed into the back seat of a car. I followed. Ricardo was driving. A young woman named Maria was next to him in front. At first I was dazed. Then, little by little, I realized that we were in Mark's car and that we were following the police station wagon in which Mark was captive.

Mark's car has no shocks. We crashed over rutted roads. Once on paved and lit streets, Ricardo drove in left and right lanes of the two-lane road, dodging traffic, anything to keep up.

"Why are we following?" I asked.

"We are following the car to make sure where they are taking him," Ricardo said and added something about for once in his life, "doing it right."

We screeched into the courtyard of the Río Bravo police ministry just behind the police car. Two men pulled Mark from the car and escorted him forcibly. His body language said, ‘Hands off. I’ll go on my own steam.’

From behind the wheel, Ricardo called out in English, “Mark, are you all right?”

Mark answered with a smile and thumbs-up.

A man with a rifle approached us. Ricardo backed out fast. I looked back. I couldn’t see any pursuers. Ricardo had communicated to the police and to their captive that we were looking out for their detainee.

When the four of us entered Antonio Villalba’s room in the Mansion Hotel in central Río Bravo, he had no notion of what had transpired. He was preparing for the trip to Victoria. He had spread the petition papers on a bed and was consternated because the signatures and addresses on one set of forms didn’t match the other. “It’s always this way,” he muttered. He didn’t want to give the authorities any excuse to disqualify the petition. He was preparing to face the states’ red tape.

Ricardo explained and Antonio realized the gravity of the situation. He prepared to go to the police ministry. Ricardo was going back to Duro. Diane had had enough. She wanted to leave Río Bravo immediately. She wanted to leave Mexico immediately. It was 1:30AM. The closest international bridge was closed. Antonio promised to find someone to take us to the next bridge, at Reynosa, and then to Mark’s apartment in McAllen. Then the two men left. Maria went with them.

It was an ugly and, at the same time, luxurious room, with all the amenities, plus gold sconces and textured wall paint. We imagined police wiretaps everywhere and the door being bashed in. When a knock came, it was Ricardo, with Maria in tow. He was ready to drive us to Mark’s apartment himself.

“Only thing is,” he said, “I don’t know where it is.”

I did. At least I knew the major cross streets. That was not enough. We didn’t arrive until 4:30. We had been lost in McAllen for hours. At least we felt safer on the U.S. side, but we were worried about Mark and wanted to be ready to make phone calls and find help as soon as morning came.

I asked Ricardo if the police tortured prisoners. He said yes, eighty percent of the time. "My country is shit," he said. "It's not always your country's fault. It's our fault. We don't stand up."

I said, "You stand up more than we do."

Maria was so silent. I wondered if she were in shock.

Finally Ricardo pulled up to Mark's apartment house. He came up to the second floor with us to make sure we could get in. Then he was ready to go back to Río Bravo.

At 6AM, the police visited Duro again. They arrested nine workers, including Ricardo. Amnesty International reported that

> …strikers were threatened with guns by the police and told to leave the area. When they refused, the police attacked them, hitting one woman in the abdomen with the butt of a gun, and slapping another across the face. Those who attempted to flee were pursued and beaten with sticks. A police officer told one woman, "If you don't shut your mouth, I'll kill you." (*Si no te callas la boca te mato*.) One of the injured was reportedly eight months pregnant and had to be hospitalized. The police also tore up strike banners. The only person on the scene taking photos [Ricardo?] was beaten and arrested, and had his camera smashed by police. (Amnesty International)

By then it was Monday morning. The first shift declined to go to work.

# # #

There are many epilogues to this story—ways in which the workers continued the struggle, made new alliances, defended Constitutional principles, suffered losses, and made some gains. I cannot provide a ledger of the net gain or loss. On one hand my eyewitness sense of the environment and my reading of other accounts, suggest trauma. On the other hand, I know people are resilient and I'm sure there were hopeful outcomes. For example, the CJM never abandoned the Duro workers. Using the Austin money, Chela managed to charter a bus and take workers to Victoria, soon after the debacle at the plant gates[38]. The state denied the petition for registration of a new union. When they

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[38] Chela was absent when the police beat and arrested people. I don't think she is cowardly but I wonder if she gave that impression. I also wonder if she followed guidelines of a Leninist vanguard that required her to preserve her own safety. Since she avoided capture, she was, then, it is true, able to lead the delegation to Victoria for the

finally did grant it, on August 11, they did it out of munificence, they said, and ducked the constitutional implications. According to a CJM press release, the state Director of Labor told Eliud Almaguer, “We are not giving you the registration because of international pressure, but rather because the governor wants to help the workers” (Coalition for Justice in the Maquiladoras “Tamaullipas…”). Part of the international pressure was a Forum on Freedom of Association in Reynosa on August 14. Thanks to Martha’s endless energy, the CJM organized a kind of rally for the Duro workers with the participation of the National Workers Union (UNT), Mexico’s largest independent labor federation—independent of both the PRI and the CTM. The purpose was to publicize the Duro struggle and declare the importance, for all Mexicans, of the principles involved.

The meeting was a political success and a time for personal reunions. A delegation from Austin attended and even escorted Martha over the border. Afterwards the CJM hosted a festive meal, a band played, and Martha dedicated love songs to the workers. It was good to reunite with friends in happier times, free of the shadow of police guns. Only later, I realized the police were there, but in plain clothes. Rosemary Hennessy, a member of the CJM executive committee and a friend of mine (and former professor) from New York State wrote to me, by email, that the planners of the forum had expected the plain-clothes police and done quite a bit of planning to deal with them.

> [V]arious designated escorts knew about them and were maneuvering around them during the forum, arranging safe exits and a waiting car should Martha need to be moved out of the room quickly… Pedro [a worker and organizer] was detained in Valle Hermoso that same night and questioned for four hours by these same “FBI”… police. It is perhaps more alarming or perhaps simply predictable to know they were there clandestinely.

She reflected,

> It is daunting at times… working with the knowledge that sometimes the worst enemies are those among us who we can’t see as enemies, who pass for other than the enemy we thought we knew… I suppose this dance with deception has always been the case even in the most successful struggles in our historical memory… (Hennessey “History”)

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registration, while others were still in jail. While Duro workers were taking a beating on one front, the movement was still forging ahead on another.

What Rosemary says about deception is a powerfully sobering thought. When you've bonded at the barricades, ruptured or deceitful personal relationships are as painful as any other losses in the struggle. Though this part always falls out of the history accounts, its crucial when solidarity is so important. Solidarity depends on human relationships.

At the reunion Ricardo told a disturbing story about Maria. That night when he left Diane and me at Mark's apartment and went back to the strike, he had given his agenda (his address and appointment book) to Maria for safekeeping. She had not kept it safe, though. Who could know what was inside her head or, for that matter, why Ricardo trusted her? Maria made a copy of his agenda and, at her first opportunity, handed it over to Alejandro de la Rosa, the Duro human resources director. Reportedly she spoke with him voluntarily for six hours and in return received "a lot of money." Probably Maria didn't give de la Rosa any information that he couldn't get from his police friends, but de la Rosa gained another kind of bonus from Maria's betrayal. He made sure everyone heard about it and felt the pain.

A little later Mark said he had found out that Ricardo had, in effect, stolen his camera. He was using it to document the police attack. Amnesty International reported it smashed, but Mark had reason to believe that Ricardo appropriated it for his own personal use. Thus a rift opened between them. Mark was in the hot seat. Martha was angry with him for the way he went about supporting the workers, putting himself too much in the forefront. News of her anger came as a surprise, since she had earlier praised him for being so close to the workers, even camping out with them in the dust, among the gnats. Now she repudiated him for his high profile on the night of June 18, in an atmosphere rife with accusations of meddling by U.S. unionists. Beginning to look like everyone's scapegoat, Mark was pressured to terminate his employment with the Texas State Employees Union. His boss didn't like the appearance that he was acting as their agent in Mexico. Mark moved to Reynosa and prepared to complete the research he had let lapse for his dissertation in sociology.

I got angry at Mark too and in a fit of and passive aggression—there is no other way to describe it—let fly some sarcastic remark about him in a public email. I can't even remember now what it was, but do recall it was based on a misunderstanding. Even when the misunderstanding was explained, I did not allow myself to be soothed. It felt

like a delayed reaction. The fear that I felt at Duro, and had put aside, now came to me in a rush. Even though I had prided myself on being an independent agent, following my own judgment, I blamed Mark for not taking care of Diane and me, for compromising our safety, at the same time as his own. I was also angry at him for the same reason Martha was. I could see now his error in standing up to the guns over the constitutional issue and in speaking for the workers. The important thing was not the truth, but who spoke it. We had given confirmation to the myth of gringo meddling and it was true, though the myth does not portray our motivations and goals. Several essential issues rest on the workers speaking for themselves: their self-empowerment, the authority and responsibility of people in the front lines, who take the risks, democratic process, the historic necessity of labor to act on its own interests and check capital's roughshod riding, and, finally, ways to build a cross-border movement that attends to the long term, as well as the short term.

Chela and Eliud were absent from the confrontation in front of the gates. They knew police had identified them as leaders and would target them. Chela was not there for the other women to stand with her, as they had said they would. She had not stood with them. So, in a sense, the workers were abandoned, or in another framing of the situation, the opportunity befell the rank and file to bring their consciousness to the surface and lead themselves. It was time for the grassroots to speak, if it could, and if the gringos and other outside helpers would just keep quiet. Probably, even without the short-circuiting effecting of Mark's misplaced courage, the grassroots were not ready to speak. We'll never know. I would compare the relatively chaotic and painfully insecure position of the Duro workers at this moment in Río Bravo with the position of workers whom the CFO has organized. The difference shows how the CFO organizes, slowly and deeply, "with empty hands," and with the philosophy of building an organization that rests on the consciousness and solidarity of the many and the local who can stand on their own without professional outsiders. Organizers in Duro brought a confrontation to a head before the workers were ready, before clarity had spread to a broad base. The CFO loses battles, but not so chaotically and that does something to mitigate the pain in the moment. It also helps them learn from mistakes and build a movement in the long term.

This issue of the outsider's role almost scared me out of a commitment to the CFO. The CFO was angry with me for the same reason that Martha Ojeda was angry with

Mark. Several months after my experience at Duro, Austin Tan Cerca and the CFO scheduled our first *encuentro,* or meeting together. We had organized several delegations together by this time, but this was our first meeting for the purpose of reviewing, defining, and planning our relationship in general. The word, *encuentro*, in addition to denoting a meeting or congress, evokes the image of participants sitting in a circle. Each person speaks for herself or himself or for his or her constituency. Several planners have devised a structure for the meeting and several facilitators bring it to life. The word and the concept are typical and common in Latin America. The flavor is very different from a meeting. In the culture, even very large groups of people can, for long periods of time, encounter each other productively in this form—the encuentro. For our mixed U.S.-Mexican group this was a first. A central focus was the question, what can solidarity mean among us, considering the many borders and stereotypes that separate us? At a certain point the contingent from Reynosa, Río Bravo's neighbor, took the floor. At the time, the CFO had two full-time, paid organizers there—Maria Elena García, and another woman, Verónica Quiroz. In the context of this story, Verónica made the point. She took the *La Mañana* photograph of Diane, Mark, and me from a folder of clippings. Unlike Martha Ojeda, Josefina Castillo, and Maria Luisa Bautista, she did not find it funny. She was angry. In her witty and outspoken way she accused the three of us of "too much solidarity," *demasiada solidaridad*. I was flustered; I was upset. My adventurism and idealism had come back to confront me. Ultimately Veronica's words educated me. I thought about them. Accepting them, finally, helped me along the road to a deep commitment to the workers and the CFO, to the point where I can't back out and wouldn't want to.

Chapter 4
Speaking Truth to Power:
Workers and CEOs Converse

> The search for better, for more competent men… was never more vigorous than it is now… [However] it is only when we fully realize that our duty, as well as our opportunity, lies in systematically cooperating to train and to make this competent man… that we shall be on the road to national efficiency.
>
> –Frederick Winslow Taylor (6)

> Where have all these icons of… femininity come from? If no one else has been able to find them in the Juarez streets, how have the Panoptimex managers done so? The answer… lies in reformulating the question. These paragons have not been found, they have been made. As Panoptimex workers respond to managerial descriptions of how they always were, they come to incarnate these images in the here and now.
>
> -Leslie Salzinger (51)

> *Quisiera presentarte a una persona de una clase mundial,* "I would like to introduce you to a world class person."
>
> –Irma Salvador

I remember when I first met Irma Salvador. She stands out in a crowd. It was a Saturday in July, riptide for hot weather at the border. Workers from Alcoa factories in Ciudad Acuña were gathering for a meeting in one of the cooler places downtown—in the shade under the international bridge on the banks of the Rio Grande, always fanned by a breeze. The workers regarded their meeting in this public, but out-of-the-way, space as secret, safe from company spies.

The riverbank is about a half a mile from the plaza of Acuña, the heart of the old city before everything boomed. The population doubled in the 1990s, growing faster than other border cities whose populations only increased, on average, by two thirds.

Acuña sprawled outward from the river, leaving the old town still quaint enough to attract tourists crossing the international bridge to dine and shop in the market for crafts[39]. The factories and the new residential neighborhoods lie in the burgeoning outskirts, magnet for so many people from the south looking for jobs, but failing to provide places to live. The result has become emblematic. The new neighborhoods lack basic infrastructure—roads, potable water, sewage, and electricity—in addition to adequate houses[40]. Transportation is always an issue too. This day people jammed into cars—four in the back and two in the front passenger seat of my Toyota Corolla. Amador Tovar, a lithe and wily man in his late twenties, arrived by bicycle, a rare mode of transportation in these parts. We parked on high ground and took a dirt path down the riverbank. Wind kicked up the powdery dust for which Acuña is famous and we covered our eyes. I searched for "dust" in Spanish, *polvo*. Irma was walking next to me. "La tierra" she said laughing and making eye contact between gusts. That was the unusual thing about her—so quickly relating. We had never met before and right away she was looking for conversation. Most of the workers took their time to warm up to visitors from the other side.

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[39] Acuña's population grew from 53,000 to 108,000 between 1990 and 2000. Named Villa Acuña in 1912, after Manuel Acuña, the town had grown sufficiently to earn the title Ciudad or city by 1951 (Caminando Sin Rumbo). "When the foreign corporations began arriving in the 1970s, Acuña was a sleepy Río Grande settlement of 40,000 residents… By the 1990s, Acuña was growing faster than any other city in northern Mexico… [It had an estimated] population in the range of 150 to 180,000. The city now [2001] has 60 plants." (Dillon "Profits…")

[40] Migrants often start neighborhoods as squatters and build their first homes out of scavenged materials such as cardboard boxes or wooden shipping pallets, cast off from the factories. The use of these materials became so widespread that factories began charging would be homebuilders who wanted them. The use of cardboard is so wide spread that "Casas de Cartón" ("Houses of Cardboard"), a Venezuelan song, well known in Acuña, has become an anthem of the poor throughout Latin America: "*Que triste se oye la lluvia/ En los techos de carton./ Que triste vive mi gente/ En las cases de carton."* (How sad is the sound of the rain/ On the roofs of cardboard/ How sad are the lives of my people/ In the houses of cardboard." (My translation.)

About 20 Alcoa employees had assembled under the bridge so far. As we waited for others, we lounged in the grass on the slope. Someone passed around a giant Pepsi bottle and plastic cups.

I was visiting Acuña with Juanita (Juany) Lopez, a CFO organizer from Piedras Negras. We had arrived the night before and were staying at the Motel Tarasco. Word was circulating that the two of us had stayed out late, drinking and dancing at La Cabaña, a world class night spot, my favorite, with live music and a dance floor the size of a roller rink, where patrons always dance counter clockwise. Irma was delighted with this bit of gossip. She announced to everyone that I was *resacosa.* I didn't know what it meant; it seemed to make me out to be a heavy drinker. Everyone laughed and it broke the ice at a moment when the maquiladora workers' could easily have been suspicious of me. I was the only foreigner in the crowd and may have looked like a company spy at this private meeting.

Alcoa, a Fortune 100 company which deals in aluminum and manufacture of aluminum products, operates in Mexico through its business unit Alcoa Fujikura, Limited (AFL)[41]. Offices in San Antonio and Del Rio Texas administer the partnership, but official headquarters were in Brentwood, Tennessee, near Nashville, where lived Robert Hughes. He was, at the time, the long-distance Chairman, President and CEO, of that Alcoa unit. The parent company is headquartered in Pittsburgh and New York. AFL had 10 plants and 11,000 employees in Acuña. Originally called the Aluminum Company of America, they used aluminum in this facility to assemble "harnesses" for cars; the package of electrical wiring that connects the dashboard with the engine and electronic components throughout the chassis. The factories produce for Ford, Subaru, Volkswagen, and Harley Davidson.

I was discovering that this meeting under the bridge was one step in a thousand through which Alcoa's Acuña employees built community with each other. It was a time

[41] According to the 2004 Annual report, Alcoa dissolved the partnership. Alcoa took over automotive section, Fujikura took over telecommunications, thus Alcoa had more direct control of the automotive division, which was profitable, but "unstable."

to get to know each other outside of the isolation of the assembly line, share grievances, and generally compare notes. They had already been through a lot together. In fact they had won an impressive, historic victory—a 30 percent increase in compensation for the total Alcoa workforce in Acuña. Now they had another goal. They were working towards the establishment of a workers' committee, a voice and a presence with which to talk to management on an on-going basis.

A lineage of Acuña mayors had banned unions from Acuña to please foreign investors and cater to their explicit wishes. The current mayor Jesus Maria Ramon Valdez has said: "I've always managed the situation so that there are zero unions[42]." As a consequence, Alcoa paid lower salaries in Acuña than their unionized employees earned in Piedras Negras for the same work. The national, government-affiliated union, the CTM, dominates the field in Piedras and, historically, represents management. Nevertheless, under CTM representation workers in Piedras made some gains. In Acuña, freedom from this union's meddling—control and false representation—was a mixed blessing. It meant one less obstacle for workers seeking to represent themselves. Thanks to the CFO, groups from both cities had been able to compare pay stubs and discover the salary discrepancies.

Workers in Acuña already had a long and dramatic history of negotiation and struggle with Alcoa. Their organizing began in 1995; some of this background was beginning to surface in the series of outdoor meetings I was starting to attend. CFO organizers from Piedras Negras, Margarita Ramirez and Amparo Reyes, as well as Juany, were visiting every weekend, assisting on the sidelines. They carried copies of the Federal Labor Law and consulted with individuals on issues, such as changes in work assignments and shifts, salary discrepancies, work assignments for pregnant women, lateness and vacation policies—all basic questions that the Labor Law adjudicates.

Before the main business of this outdoor meeting, Juany, my drinking partner of the night before, (who incidentally had returned to the motel room almost five hours after

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[42] (Jesus Maria Ramon Valdez has been mayor since 1980. He is the son of a politician who has been dominant since the 1960s and told a reporter: "'They [foreign corporations] said they didn't want to deal with Mexico as far as labor unions…' [T]o allay these fears, he said, he gave a financial stake in the industrial parks to a top local labor official. That has kept union organizers away from Acuña's plants ever since" (Dillon "Profits…")

me, at 4:30AM) introduced me as a member of an Austin, Texas group that supports Mexican workers and their rights. I was visiting for a month, to listen and learn. In the U.S. this might have seemed like a dubious purpose, since my language ability was so minimal. But at the border, among these particular people, it was different. No one listens to maquiladora workers, and they have an anguished desire to be heard. My listening project potentially made more sense to them. They tended to ignore my difficulties with the language and were more curious about my sympathies and politics.

In Piedras Negras I was staying in Amparo Reyes's home. My hope was to also stay awhile in Acuña. Juany asked on my behalf for offers of hospitality. At first no one came forth, then Irma stood up, all smiles, and volunteered her home.

The meeting began and continued for several hours. We were under the northbound part of the bridge and could hear car traffic passing briskly—Saturday shoppers, no doubt. Food and clothing are cheaper on the U.S. side and it was still possible then for Mexican citizens to cross easily for an afternoon outing. They didn't need a visa if they could show a recent pay stub and prove they had a job in Mexico to return to.

The sound of NAFTA faded out into white noise for me, as I struggled to follow the conversation. One man named Gerardo was upset, near tears, as he described a situation at length. A supervisor had found him outside the plant holding trash bags bearing the company logo. The supervisor accused him of theft. Gerardo was using the bags to clean up the grounds outside the plant. It was part of his job. The supervisor would grab a bag out of his hand and make accusations. Gerardo would explain to no avail. It was driving him crazy.

Women, and men too, spoke of regimented and infrequent bathroom breaks. Someone said kidney infections were common. A woman shared that on her assembly line, if someone needed to go to the bathroom, she would have to wear a big sign that could be seen from a distance. All the men stared at the women going to the bathroom. It was humiliating.

During a break, Irma and I chatted at the sidelines. She told me she had two children in their teens that were in "*sillas de ruedas*." I didn't get it. About 100 feet away from where we sat, as it happened, a man, unrelated to our party, whom I hadn't

noticed before, lay sleeping in the grass next to his wheelchair. Irma pointed, indicating the chair, "*silla*," with wheels.

That was my introduction to Irma's children, Oswaldo and Lizeth. They were 16 and 20 at the time. Typical of families that have children to care for, Irma and her husband Oswaldo senior worked split shifts, she at night, and he during the day, to minimize the time when the children would have to be alone. Both worked for Alcoa. Unlike other families, these two parents could not look forward to a time when their children would fend for themselves. Oswaldo and Lizeth had spina bifida and had severe physical disabilities. Their minds however were sharp. The Salvadors had a third child, Ilse, six years old and free of disabilities. Like many mothers and daughters, Irma and her eldest were becoming friends. As Lizeth matured, Irma relied on her. Oswaldo was the only son and the family was very proud of him. The Salvadors had achieved a precarious balance in their lives and work. They proved to be resilient, too, as the labor market in Acuña dealt them shocks.

My month-long sojourn at the border was in July 2001. I had stumbled into a series of meetings that had started in October of the previous year and were about to reach a climax. In August the workers led stoppages in support of *derechos de las mujeres,* "women's rights, " as Amador Tovar described it, and Alcoa fired 186 men and women. The corporate decision felt punitive to the workers—and like a betrayal. It grossly contradicted corporate values—slogans in Spanish with which Alcoa sprinkled the workplace: "We work in an inclusive environment that embraces change, new ideas, respect for the individual and equal opportunity to succeed" (Alcoa "Vision…"). The firings seemed the wrong response to one of Alcoa's "best," highly profitable, divisions. The workers felt they deserved credit and that they produced the wealth for Alcoa with the work of their hands. Irma lost her job. Oswaldo senior, who never went to meetings—he was home caring for the children—did not. Maybe a company spy had attended the meetings and assembled the list that included the wife, but not the husband.

Some time after this explosion of corporate fury, I visited the Salvadors as they were throwing a birthday party for Oswaldo junior. It was November. Family and friends had taken over the unpaved street in front of their pink cement-block house on calle Zacatecas for a piñata, a rite so sacrosanct that through-traffic, albeit infrequent, backed

out of the street and looked for an alternate route without complaint. In Brooklyn there would have been horn honking and a driver descending from his vehicle to yell.

Oswaldo lacked the strength to hold the piñata stick. His aunts helped him and he tapped the piñata, a Disney-like figure of a pink girl with huge eyes in a white party dress, stuffed with familiar U.S. brands of candy. He wasn't able to break it open. That job remained for a brawny ten-year-old cousin. Inside, Irma and her *comadres* served two cakes, a total of perhaps 18 square feet of confection, both decorated with a blue cross on a white field—perhaps provided by the Cruz Azúl (Blue Cross) football club and community organization. When a balloon fight broke out, missiles hit the icing and spread the sweet stuff all over the guests packed in the living room, especially the grinning Oswaldo, flush from the piñata. A cousin had wheeled him back into the house and he was a sitting target—the most popular. Ilse, the baby, wore a pink and white nylon running suit and lipped sync'd a cumbia, frowning all the while. Irma was elegant and sophisticated in a brown and white dress, especially irrepressible.

As the winter sun began to set, adults set chairs out in the street. I felt at home, as if stooping-sitting on a cool Brooklyn evening. Still in high spirits despite the growing quiet, Irma introduced me to one of her friends. *"Te presento a Ignacio, una Persona de la Clase Mundial*." "This is Ignacio, a World Class Person." She paused to see if I got the joke. I didn't, nor did Ignacio. He looked surprised, as if the joke might be on him. I reflected; then it hit me. "World Class People" is what Alcoa Fujikura Limited calls its employees. I laughed in surprise. Irma laughed too. We both loved the joke. She repeated it a few times that night with other of her friends.

Ignacio, like Oswaldo senior, still worked for Alcoa. He had survived the purge of 2001 in which Alcoa had shown its disdain, or fear, of workers' voices and rights and began to slowly and methodically dismember the workers' movement[43]. Irma had a new job, cleaning front offices in another maquiladora. She earned, less but liked it better.

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[43] First the Alcoa attack on the workers' movement meant a roll back in salary and benefits and closing plant five, a center for activists. It continued to mean lay-offs and, recently, removal of some functions to Honduras. Acuña employees were invited there to train their replacements.

This was a company that employed people with disabilities. Irma applauded them. Her disgust with Alcoa never abated, but as long as she had a job, it didn't cloud her spirit.

Irma is a simple woman. She doesn't read or write; Lizeth does that for her. But Irma knows what's right and she also knows what's real and possible and takes care of her family and her community as best she can. The first time I visited the house and met the family, she showed me her photo album that chronicled their tragedy in pictures. The decline of Lizeth and Oswaldo... They had been able to walk at one time. Surgery had not helped. Hand-me-down wheelchairs from Houston didn't fit the idiosyncrasies of the young bodies and probably hurt them. Irma going through it all… for many years never smiling. Her friendship with an Alcoa manager from North Carolina, since departed, a blond woman who, in Irma's account, liked to smoke, drink, and dance, and spoke Spanish worse that I did, maybe my predecessor in Irma's heart. I remember the photo album as a window into Irma's personal struggle. Her showing it was more intimate than she knew, or I saw it differently than she intended. At any rate, it helped our connection grow.

Irma's ironic attack on Alcoa, the world-class company, on Oswaldo's birthday night, made poignant the gap between, on one hand, the corporation's values and, on the other hand, the realities in the lives of their Mexican workers. What could the multinational corporation have hoped to accomplish by calling their Mexican employees world-class people? Mexicans want to be called Mexicans. The employer apparently realized value in constructing not only electrical harnesses, but also workers' identities[44]. What strategies was Alcoa using to manage 140,000 employees in their multi-cultural endeavor extending to 36 countries around the world? How were they understanding the

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[44] Sociologist Leslie Salzinger's research in factories in Juarez documents how different companies, following different production methods, create pressures and cultures in their factories that tend to produce employee gender identities that conform to production needs and to management's need for control. Salzinger also investigates the holes in the system, that is, where, unbeknownst to management, workers do not conform to the identity mold. She also exposes the discrepancies between gender stereotypes and shows how different the stereotypes are from each other, thus exploding, by her comparative method, the myths of normality, naturalness, and inevitability attributed to various stereotypes (Salzinger "Genders…").

management task? And, in August of 2001, how did this employer rationalize firing World-Class People who were fighting for their voice, for their identities as workers, and, proudly, as Mexicans?

Somewhere in the Alcoa chain of command someone had realized, once upon a time, the cultural problem. Alcoa had at one time hired Martin Hall whose Values Technology consulting firm studied and advised Alcoa's Brazilian division. Hall proposes that multinational corporations must translate values from one cultural context to another. Only then, he says, does information become meaningful. "Values are the filter that puts information in context to become knowledge." Despite the techno-language, his Brazilian study for Alcoa made the point clearly. Hall knew that safety was the paramount Alcoa value. But in Brazil workers were not responding to the rigid safety codes and warnings.

> We found that safety was a concept not really understood the way Americans think of safety. But human dignity—dignifying the human being—was very important. So we were able to reframe the concept of safety as respect for other human beings… It totally flipped things around from 'follow the rules so you won't get hurt' to 'support other human beings.' Then… [Alcoa] could do safety initiatives. (Barth).

Paul O'Neill was the driving force behind Alcoa's safety program. A man of unusual character, O'Neill had become Alcoa's Chairman and Chief Executive Officer in 1987. He came to Alcoa from a career in public service, in the U.S. Office of Management and the Budget, where he had worked his way up to deputy director. In 1999, after only 12 years at Alcoa, he had already left his mark on the company and he retired from the CEO position. At the end of 2000, he resigned from the chairmanship to become the U.S. Secretary of the Treasury in Bush's first term, January 2001. From his cabinet post, O'Neill resigned, or was forced to resign, on December 6, 2002, leaving clues that he didn't get along with the President George Bush and giving insight into his own character as much as the President's. He collaborated with former *Wall Street Journal* reporter Ron Suskind in a candid and copiously documented exposé of low level deliberation at high levels of the administration—*The Price of Loyalty; George W. Bush,*

the White House, and the Education of Paul O'Neill (Suskind). About the book, CBS reporter Lesley Stahl writes:

> "O'Neill says that the president did not make decisions in a methodical way: there was no free-flow of ideas or open debate… At cabinet meetings, he says the president was 'like a blind man in a roomful of deaf people. There is no discernible connection,' forcing top officials to act 'on little more than hunches about what the president might think.' …[O'Neill] also says that President Bush was disengaged, at least on domestic issues, and that disturbed him. And he says that wasn't his experience when he worked as a top official under Presidents Nixon and Ford, or the way he ran things when he was chairman of Alcoa.

On the lecture circuit in December of 2002, just before he left Treasury, O'Neill spoke about values to a student audience at the Harvard School of Business. His topic was "greatness," one that has an imperial ring in Acuña—my vantage point at the moment—but that in Harvard Square, no doubt, had a different sound, perhaps inspirational. The Harvard newsletter reports him saying:

> If you want to know whether you are part of an organization that has the potential for greatness, ask yourself three questions. 1. Am I treated every day with dignity and respect by everyone I encounter?" He clarified the question: "Not 'some people' and 'not by the people who work for me,' but by everyone I encounter." 2. Am I given the knowledge tools, and support that I need to make a contribution to my organization—and this is the important part—that gives meaning to my life. 3. Did somebody notice? [meaning is my contribution acknowledged]? (Lagace)

Did Paul O'Neill's guidelines apply to the Mexican workforce too? O'Neill's litmus test for "greatness" sounds, to me, like lip service to the American values of individuality and individual worth; in a later remark, though, during the same presentation, he became more persuasive.

> In every organization—public, private, non-profit—their written statements all say the same thing; 'Our most important asset is our people.'… There's damn little evidence that it's true in most organizations. It's just syrupy sentiment everybody feels compelled to make. (Lagace)

O'Neill likes evidence. From himself he demanded action, as evidence of his values. Early in his Alcoa career, he had found a strategy by which the employer could move the dignity and respect due each employee into the realm of actualities rather than the realm of mere words. The system may have broken down in Mexico. Lack of accountability in

third world operations is built into the global system; historically lack of accountability has allowed managers to take licenses with labor forces who toil out of sight from consumers, reporters, and shareholders. As it turned in out, in 1996, the workers of Acuña quite brilliantly brought O'Neill and his values to a test; O'Neill met the test with equal brilliance. The collaboration between chief executive and maquiladora workers sowed benefits for all and showed the Alcoa executive boldly acting on his philosophy.

O'Neill was admittedly maniacal in his determination to develop an outstanding health and safety environment, especially in manufacturing divisions. And he was just as clear that his purpose was not bottom-line driven, but to create an environment of respect. "I went to Alcoa with a burning fire… to demonstrate that it is possible for a truly great organization to be value-based without any reservations" (Potier).

Values translated into measurable results. In 1987 Alcoa figured its safety record as an average of 1.86 lost workday incidents. This formula refers to 1.86 accidents per 100 employees that led to days lost from work. By 2000 O'Neill's program had pushed the figure down to 0.02 lost workday incidents. Of this he was very proud[45]. Moreover, he maintained, cost saving was not the point—the principle was: "If financial staff ever [forgot this point and instead] calculated how much money we were saving being safe, they were fired…"

O'Neill told the Harvard audience the story of how he acted on principle in Acuña. News had reached him that Robert Barton, president of Alcoa Fujikura at the time, had covered up an accident in Mexico that had hospitalized over 100 workers. O'Neill fired him. O'Neill explained:

> "Alcoa's best division president found out the hard way [that I was serious about safety]… In Mexico, one hundred and fifty people on the division's president's watch succumbed to carbon monoxide fumes and had to be treated in an emergency clinic. The incident was never reported, so others at Alcoa were not informed nor able to learn from the accident… Even though no one was permanently hurt, there was no question about what should happen to this person [the division president]." (Legace)

[45] In 2001, the most recent year for which a figure is available, and since O'Neill's departure, lost workday incidents had crept up a little, to 0.16, according to the *2002 Annual Report* (3).

On September 9, 1994, 179 workers at Plant #4 were overcome by carbon monoxide. The city's only hospital lacked space and faced severe difficulties tending to the workers. Local management tried to cover up and diminish the importance of the events. On October 18, twenty-two workers from Plant #1 were sent to the hospital, also for inhalation of carbon monoxide. The next day 5, workers from Plant# 2 were medically evaluated for butane gas poisoning (Hernández "Chronology…").
O'Neill discovered the carbon Monoxide accidents 20 months after the fact, but not from Barton. The latter's cover up was successful, until 1996, when a workers' delegation from Acuña brought revelations to the shareholders meeting in Pittsbrugh. The visitors that day from Mexico were a fired Alcoa worker, Irma Valadez (not to be confused with Irma Salvador), and another worker from Acuna, Juan Tovar, older brother of Amador, the cyclist. The party also included Julia Quiñonez, coordinator of the Comité Fronterizo de Obreras, and Ricardo Hernández acting as translator. An important ally from Texas joined the party. This was Sister Susan Mika, based in San Antonio and a founder of the Coalition for Justice in the Maquiladoras. She manages the investments of her Benedictine order, including 50 Alcoa shares[46].

In Pittsburgh, Juan Tovar broke the news of the cover-up. That it was Juan, a worker, that it came from outside the closed circuit of corporate communicating, had consequences for everyone—especially Barton in the short term, but for the workers and for the entire Mexican operation in the long term. Repercussions are still felt in the lives and spirits of the workers. The workers were the victors, but in this case they did not write the history. The people who control the writing wrote it. Some hints of the reversal that had occurred, thanks to Juan, seeped into the press. But mostly the business community closed ranks around this chapter of the story and perpetuated a version that omits Juan Tovar and erases the possibility of revelation.

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[46] Sister Susan extends her clout through her activism with the Interfaith Center on Corporate Responsibility, a shareholders group based in NYC. While Mika was a CJM founder, Martha Ojeda was the director and also took part in the workers' delegation to Pittsburgh.

A Harvard Business School case study of safety at Alcoa begins with the 1996 shareholders meeting and illustrates the omission. Harvard's case studies are renowned and considered authoritative. Attention from this quarter may become a staple of a company's public relations program, even when, as in this instance, the writer's intention is to produce a study "as the basis for class discussion, rather than to illustrate either effective or ineffective handling of an administrative situation" (Spear). Most of the 8-page document, titled "Workplace Safety at Alcoa," adheres to an "objective" tone and a text book-like presentation. But in a few passages author Assistant Professor Stephen J. Spear breaks his own guidelines and enters into an interpretive mode. For instance, he seems slightly at a loss to understand the degree of O'Neill's adamancy on the safety issue. Moreover, Spear's account perpetuates a central distortion: The voice and the role of the maquiladora worker, Juan Tovar, is erased. Sister Susan Mika has also disappeared. The only proactive and credible protagonists hail from Alcoa headquarters. This prestigious Harvard document, combining academic and business cultures, writes the workers out of the script. As a consequence, a painful lacuna opens up, a wound in history's tender side. Casualties of the logic, values, and epistemology of the dominating institutions, the workers have gone missing. The erasure of their voices answers to the question of whether the maquiladora workers can speak and definitively substitutes the question, who is listening? Perhaps Professor Spear could not help delete Juan Tovar and his companions. His omission was a necessary result of his methodology, sources, and objectives, and of the resulting collection of stereotypes that guided him. In this quintessential business and academic script, only managers remain. Though a survivor, O'Neill has lost his character. Spear has transformed him into a slightly neurotic emperor-hero.

This is Spear's narrative of the shareholders meeting in his study of workplace safety at Alcoa:

> [O'Neill] had been *pleased* to report continued improvement in Alcoa's safety measures, as well as record profits… O'Neill had additional *reason to be proud.* The company's safety and profitability had come even as Alcoa was incorporating newly acquired plants, many in countries with health and safety regulations far less stringent than those in the United States… *Ironically*, the *one deflating note* during the May shareholders meeting came when O'Neill was challenged on Alcoa's treatment of its employees. During the question-and-answer session Sister Mary

> Margaret, a Benedictine nun [Spear means Susan Mika—he has "disguised some of the names," in this case substituting an Irish Catholic sounding name, apparently ignorant of the Polish Catholics of Texas and their heroic faith, in 1854 when, as persecuted immigrants, they settled the town of Panna Maria and named it for the Virgin]… raised concerns about wage rates, working conditions, and the company's response to health and safety problems… She ended by saying that the company's behavior in Mexico was inconsistent with its widely publicized values. (Emphasis mine, to highlight Spear's interpretive insertions.)

This section of Spear's narrative is the only one where he editorializes and speculates on personality and motives. He may be trying to explain O'Neill's zealous response to the nun's supposedly baseless challenge: O'Neill dispatched an investigative team that left Pittsburgh four days later. He fired the division president, Barton, two months later. Spear was devising a psychological rationale, according to which ego, rather than principle, was at stake, recasting a maverick as an imperial personality. Steve Massey's scoop in the *Pittsburgh Post-Gazette,* reprinted in its entirety*,* restores the record on O'Neill's motivation.

> In an employee e-mail, Chairman Paul O'Neill said the response [firing Barton] might seem "unduly harsh" but was necessary "because of the effect of these matters on our values and the possible misperception that there can be tradeoffs" between safety and profits. O'Neill called his decision to replace the 41-year Alcoa veteran "painful." Under Barton, annual sales in Mexico grew from $ 100 million to $ 1.4 billion. (Massey)

Spear's account not only omits Juan Tovar but also devalues Sister Susan Mika. Giving her a more stereotypical nun's name is part of his pedagogical tactic to portray her as a bleeding heart that doesn't have her facts straight. "Word from the Mexican division's managers and Richard Green [Robert Barton]… indicated that the Sister's claims were overstated.' Moreover, Spear says,

> [a]t the end of the shareholders meeting, O'Neill met privately with Sister Mary Margaret and other members of her group. *O'Neill sought the facts but learned that none of CJM advocates had ever been in the Alcoa plants, so no one at the meeting had first-hand information [Emphasis mine].*

This is untrue on one hand and tricky on the other. While Mika probably never had been inside a plant, Juan Tovar and Irma Valadez certainly had. They had, however, disappeared from the record. Depending on how he did his research, Spear may never

have found out about these eyewitnesses; or more accurately, his sources may have intentionally or casually overlooked them. Given his reaction, it is unlikely that O'Neill forgot about Tovar. Maybe Spear knew about the workers, but discounted them.

Discounting and distrusting the people with personal first-hand evidence—the workers—is convenient for Spear, yet it contradicts his script. He said Alcoa was looking for eyewitnesses to factory conditions and discredited Mary Margaret/Susan Mika because of her second-hand information. The workers had what he said he was looking for; but passing over the workers as sources of information follows a time-honored methodology in business science. We can see the classic instance that set the mold, or reflected the standard practice, in 1911—Frederick Winslow Taylor's, *The Principles of Scientific Management*. The book still appears in business school curricula, probably for its argument that workers and employers have the same stake in the company's prosperity and to debunk the concept of opposed interests or of class war[47]. Taylor demonstrates the "scientific" management of manual laborers. By scientific he means human resources management by numbers. He shows how to extract four times more work (or 400 percent more) from pig-iron handlers at Bethlehem Steel in return for a 64 percent increase in salary, from $1.15 to $1.85 per day. Today's student readers may not see the classism and racism that saturate the book, most vividly expressed by the author's arrogance and illustrated in a hypothetical scene where Taylor, a superior man, bullies a worker named Schmidt, "a little Pennsylvania Dutchman," into taking the $1.85 bait and moving 48 tons of pig iron a day instead of 12. Taylor doesn't neglect to render the heavy accent and imperfect grammar in which Schmidt speaks. Condescension is not Taylor's only tool, only his left hook. His right hook is the complementary ploy of offering Schmidt the possibility of proving himself to be "a high-priced man" prefiguring today's version—"world-class person." The language today may no longer reflect masculine competition between classes, and world-class people is gender neutral, but the language does continue to construct gender and identity to fit what maquiladora human resource managers think

[47] Thanks to Professor Patricia Roberts-Miller for bringing this classic to my attention in the context of the construction of gender and identity and for encouraging me to read it. Assuming it was only a curious artifact of early century business culture, I imagined that it would be buried in obscure archives; but I easily found several copies in the UT undergraduate library, which had been frequently checked out.

they need.   Under the cover of "world class" values, bullying continues, as does sexual harassment of women workers.

As Taylor in the heuristic role of "boss" develops the scene with Schmidt, he uses the ideology of individualism to justify his ploys—both for the reader and the worker. Workers must be approached one at a time. He seeks to avoid '*the masses'* and instead give each individual the opportunity of his full potential.

> In dealing with workmen under this type of management [scientific], it is an *inflexible rule* to talk to and deal with *only one man at a time,* since each workman has his own special abilities and limitations, and since we are not dealing with men in *masses*, but are trying to develop each individual man to his highest state of efficiency and prosperity (43) (Emphasis mine).

Though his purpose is to disprove that the interests of capital and labor are opposing, the class war rages on, sneaking in to his "scientific" and authoritarian diction that tries to denies class inequalities. "Masses" is a word that connotes mightily in 1911. Not only was 1911 the year of Taylor's publication, but it was also the year of the fire that trapped and killed women workers in the Triangle Shirtwaist Factory in New York City. A horrified international reaction memorialized the tragedy as International Women's Day, which is still observed today. Organized labor was on the march. Left wing intellectuals in New York City, who took an interest in labor, founded *The Masses,* a magazine produced by a co-operative of writers and artists, some of them famous and prestigious, such as John Reed and Upton Sinclair. Capital needed its arguments—science and individualism were two. Taylor's *The Principles* is capitalism's fight back.

The tricky part of dismissing "Sister Mary Margaret" and the CFO/CJM group for their supposed lack of first-hand information is that getting first-hand information is harder than Spear, or headquarters managers, might imagine, especially as concerns "conditions" in the factories. To them the task no doubt seemed simple—no special methodology needed. Just go to the factories and look. As Spear says, O'Neill's team "interviewed Alcoa employees and managers, visited AFL plants, and examined records."   I have come to believe, though, that a Heisenberg principle interferes, especially for any researcher who is an outsider to the culture and to the unspoken rules of direct maquiladora management. That is, the act of looking changes the object of

study. The more they look in the factories, the more what they see will be falsified. The factories are not open or transparent, not even for the owners. The invisibility of what goes on inside is integral to the system—integral to the lack of accountability and a key to the extraordinary profits the system has produced. It is an epistemological impossibility. I have come to the conclusion that the only way to know what goes on in the factories is to ask the workers, ask them at a time and in a place where they are safe, and then don't doubt them, no matter how strange their stories are.

A brief tangent must suffice to instantiate the strangeness of the stories about management practices. One such story, that might fall roughly in the category of an attempt at cost savings and therefore qualify as consistent with managerial duty, was nevertheless "strange" as well as offensive and received wide press coverage and legal attention in the 1990's. This was the practice of discriminating against pregnant workers or women who might become pregnant. From a business point of view pregnancy is an added expense in Mexico because the Federal Labor Law requires companies to: protect pregnant women from work that would endanger their health and the fetus'; pay maternity leave six weeks before and six weeks after delivery; allow new mothers extra paid breaks for breast feeding, and so on (Mexico *Mexican Federal…).* Discriminating against pregnant workers (by not hiring them) allowed companies to follow the letter of the law in regard to maternity benefits, but desecrate its spirit. A Human Rights Watch report found that, "with few exceptions," border maquiladora employers forced applicants to submit to pregnancy tests—sometimes demanding urine samples, other times asking intrusive questions about a woman applicant's menses, sexual activity, and use of birth control. The urine test was the surest indicator but entailed an expense. As an economy, employers instituted the practice of requiring women to show a soiled sanitary napkin (Human Rights Watch 31-35).

Strange company practices also find ways to humiliate male employees. Black and Decker, originally the source in the U.S. of home-improvement power tools for the man of the house, is not so husband-friendly in Mexico, that is if a man works for the company's Reynosa factory. Black & Decker explained that they fired two of their Reynosa employees on May 30, 2005 because the workers "wanted to organize themselves." More specifically a supervisor explained that the company terminated one

worker for "holding meetings outside of the plant and for inciting other workers to do the same." This is management's most recent initiative in a battle over basic labor rights that began in Black and Decker's Plant # 2 in August 2004. The first skirmish began in the men's room. Workers had written negative sentiments on the walls. To stop this defacement of property and silence the negativity, management asked workers to spy on each other in the rest rooms and turn in the perpetrators. The workers refused, pointing out that "the use of the bathrooms was a personal and private matter." Management decided to halt this graphic form of expression by removing all the doors to stalls and the partitions between them. The CFO reports the manager stated, "This is the only way to teach people." The workers found this measure "humiliating and degrading." They organized a petition and presented it to Reynosa's secretary of health. A worker, then, was delighted to overhear and report that a health department official, while inspecting the situation, asked one of the managers, "Don't the bathrooms in your [home] have doors?" Health authorities ordered the company to restore privacy (CFO Maquiladoras "Black…" and "Don't…").

When Austin Tan Cerca first began meeting with the CFO and planning delegations, we asked the CFO about touring the factories. We learned how complicated and dubious the concept is—of outsiders entering the interior of the factory—and how difficult it is for outsiders to pin-down the "reality" within those international work spaces. At that time, in 2000, it was possible to schedule visits by going through management channels and making appointments. However, some workers objected. They had had the experience of being put on display. The factory would clean the workspace for lines that were designated part of the tour. At the appointed hour, managers would slow the pace of work. Visitors could not interview employees without a manager present and that was enough to skew testimony. Employees knew what they could or could not say. Everyone knew the threat of reprisals.

Gregoria Rodríguez, based on the border in the twin cities of Matamoros and Brownsville, consults for industry on toxic hazards in the workplace. She laughs at factory showmanship in presenting "safe" workers to inspectors. "They dress them up in space suits," she says, referring to the protective gear that management supplies for the occasion (Rodríguez). ATCF eventually gave up the idea. Such tours are humiliating

for workers and would hurt our relationship with them. We have operated on the principle that, if you want to know what someone's working conditions are, ask her. We don't observe the Taylorite or Spear taboo against conversation across class boundaries.

Returning to the Spear's narrative of O'Neill's safety showdown, we find that after establishing the problem—the possibility of safety infractions in Mexico—Spear is at pains to explain why O'Neill reacted so quickly, dispatching the investigative team on May 14. Spear's script gives no justification beyond O'Neill's pride and a neurotic inability to tolerate even an unsubstantiated suggestion (Mary Margaret's) that Alcoa's health and safety regimen in Mexico was not pristine. Spear's story then follows the investigators to Acuña. After summarizing their findings in four fairly positive bullet points, he constructs the story so that the cat comes out of the bag by chance: "… one set of events involving worker safety did come as a surprise to the investigating team because neither incidents, nor the subsequent reactions, had been reported to headquarters in Pittsburgh…" Only then does the case study unravel the cover-up, positioning it as a chance discovery, suppressing, forgetting, or ignorant of Juan Tovar and the workers' trip to Pittsburgh. Spear's ideology (or terministic frames, in Kenneth Burke's words) restricts him to research among closed-circuit sources. He only speaks to Alcoa management. Because of his bias, he not only refrains from talking to workers, he also eschews newspapers and workers' organization such as the Steelworkers (USWA) and the Labor Action Network in Pittsburgh who could have given him insight. He ends up with a case study of isolated business leaders, talking only to each other. The real story comes out as a surprise!

Sam Dillon of the *New York Times* did his research differently. He was working on a feature story that the *Times* printed on February 15, 2001 as "Profits Raise Pressure on US-owned Factories in Mexican Border Zone" (already cited). He spent time in Piedras Negras and Acuña with Julia Quiñonez and Juan Tovar. He even stayed overnight with Tovar, his wife Chela, and their three children in their two-room cinder block house in Acuña's outskirts. The house sat in the hills in the "new" part of town, above Tovar's auto repair shop, his second source of income and the key to his ability to support his family on a maquiladora worker's pay. Dillon wanted to know what the life of a maquiladora worker was like. The feature story reports on the maquiladora system

as a whole, seven years after NAFTA, and focuses on Acuña. In an early paragraph he introduces the workers' struggle by telling this version of the May 10, 1996 Alcoa shareholders meeting. Dillon puts Tovar at the microphone, speaking to shareholders and the Board of Directors:

> … Mr. Tovar, who was earning about $6 a day, described Alcoa managers so stingy that they stationed a janitor at bathroom doors to limit workers to just three pieces of toilet paper. He also recounted an incident in which more than 100 workers had been overcome by fumes from a gas leak and taken to hospitals.
>
> O'Neill, stunned by the descriptions, defended conditions in Ciudad Acuña. "Our plants in Mexico are so clean you can eat off the floor," he said.
>
> "That's a lie," Mr. Tovar shot back, speaking through an interpreter. And he produced news clipping describing the hospitalization of his co-workers from the gas weak.

Given his values, this was reason enough for O'Neill to be very concerned.

# # # #

We were sitting in the front of the rented van in which we transport delegates. We were staring out the dust-caked window. Most people were inside Soriana—the chain supermarket—getting breakfast to take on the road. A company sponsored soccer team passed by. "Juan," I asked, "do you like to play soccer?"

"No."

"Do you like to dance?"

"No, not much."

"What do you like to do?"

"I like to work." He jumped out of the van, opened the hood, and fixed the clogged window washing mechanism.

Like Irma Salvador, Juan was fired in August of 2001. He was a more visible person, an easily identifiable leader. He had worked for Alcoa for 10 years. The short-term cause of the firings was a work stoppage for which Bob Hughes, Alcoa Fujukura's CEO (Barton's replacement) held Tovar responsible. In a phone call to the CFO in Piedras, Hughes reached Ricardo Hernández. Hughes expressed being very "shocked and disappointed by Juan Tovar every time he does it. This is his third illegal stoppage.

Enough is enough." (Hernández "Chronology…" 8.) Five years on the job, Hughes claims to be exasperated and appropriates the language of protest and resistance. As an expression or cliché "Enough is enough" is close in meaning and in compressed verbal structure to the Latin American slogan, *ya basta*, "enough already." For indigenous people, the phrase, a variant of Hughes', is an understated, shorthand reference to 500 years of conquest. It gained currency during the Columbus quincentennial.

Hughes' precise words are a common exclamation in the U.S. labor movement where they are, also, an understatement. In one example out of a myriad possible, organized flight attendants reacted to a bankruptcy court's decision allowing United Airlines to "dump its pension plans and its obligations to employees," who had made "life-altering sacrifices" to help the airline. The airline had been floundering since 9/11; three months prior to declaring bankruptcy, United had sequestered a special $4.5 million trust for a chief executive. Thus the attack on employee pensions seemed particularly unfair. At a 2005 rally at the Capitol in support of legislation that would "stop companies from robbing employees retirement funds while preserving executive benefits," placards said "Executives Should Share the Pain," "Sacrifice Means Everyone," and, after 29 months of bankruptcy negotiations with United, "Enough is Enough" (*CWA News* 1, 6). Hughes' anguish pales by comparison. He is using a tone of false affect. Something did not ring true. Ricardo Hernández picked up on it and included this snippet of telephone conversation in his chronology of the "dialogue" between the workers and Alcoa to save for history a flavor of the executive's disquiet. Hernández implies that either Hughes just didn't have a sense of proportion or he manipulatively speaks in words of affective relationship. Hernández and the workers strove for dialogue with the CEO and felt they were always encountering, in return, empty words from Alcoa's U.S. management—a web of hypocrisy. Local Mexican management on the other hand could be just plain dictatorial—no sugar coated innuendos. In the end, for the workers, Hughes was a plain hypocrite. But there were also times, before the end, when he showed himself to be an interlocutor who struggled to hear what they were saying.

When Juan told me that he liked to work, he didn't mean he enjoyed the monotonous hours and repetitive motions assembling wire harnesses, sometimes without air conditioning, usually without adequate breaks, and under the pressure of production

quotas. Juan was excited to go to work and it was for another reason. It meant time with other workers. For him that inevitably meant, in some way, organizing. This was his natural talent and passion. He couldn't help seeing what was wrong and seeing how people could come together to help each other take charge of their lives and make changes. He was a master of solidarity. It was his one idea—the way safety was O'Neill's. He was a leader in the old Mexican style of someone the people trusted because they knew him; he was one of them. He had ability as well as the integrity of courage without ambition; he was richly and uniquely possessed of ethos[48]. It was not by chance that Juan Tovar was the one to face O'Neill at the shareholders meeting, and that his exposé led to Barton's demise. Hughes knew what had happened to his predecessor (though he may not have know Juan's role). That made him more respectful, or cautious. Because they had been instrumental in getting Barton fired, the workers of Acuña realized they had gained a position in which they could command a meeting with Barton's replacement that would be historic because it was on their terms, for once. They seized the moment and parleyed it for all it was worth, which was quite a lot.

# # #

In May 2000 Alcoa was preparing for its annual stockholders meeting. I had gone on my first Austin Tan Cerca delegation and had witnessed the beginning of the Alcoa workers' mobilization. It was gathering, unpredictably, around the issue of how Alcoa made weekly salary payments. Since 1984 when it commenced Mexican operations, Alcoa had delivered weekly compensation directly to workers, in envelopes containing cash. In December of 1998, the company had started experimenting with delivering Christmas bonuses through ATMs—the *Pagomático* system. They hoped eventually to deliver all weekly compensation electronically. Hughes had indicated that Alcoa Fujikura's collaborations with the "local" bank met the quadruple objectives of serving

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[48] "Courage without ambition" is exactly what makes someone like Juan Tovar trustworthy and effective. It is what he has in common with Mexican grassroots leaders who are loved rather than feared. The phrase is John Womack's, from his description of Emiliano Zapatata and of the politics and sociology of the tiny village in Morelos State that the revolutionary leader came (Womack 8).

the workers better and more safely, saving Alcoa the cost of administering payroll, and outsourcing this function to a bank that would charge workers a small fee and encourage them to save, while contributing generally to local economic development. All four parties—workers, company, bank, and city—would be winners in the scheme, Hughes thought[49]. The local bank he referred to was Banamex, a large national bank, that advertised "safety for your employees." There was that magic signifier, "safety," a special resonance for Alcoa. The Alcoa Fujikura CEO took the bait and working with a local Banamex branch, Alcoa had ATM cards (or Pagomático cards) issued to everyone who would agree to receive them[50].

The first problem for workers was that, while some chose to receive bonuses via the ATM, they had not understood that salary would be delivered that way too. In fact, they maintained, they had not authorized it, and it seemed to them Alcoa was surreptitiously phasing in the new system, piggy-backed on the Christmas bonuses. While the first problem was deceit, or at best, obfuscation, the second was technical, but of such gross magnitude, and reflecting such inadequate planning, that the workers construed it as an Alcoa trick to deprive them of their salary.

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[49] Hughes explained the rationale at the May 4, 2000, meeting with workers at the Crosby Restaurant—more information, below.

[50] Banamex has become a symbol in Mexico of submission to U.S. imperialism because of its history. The bank was founded in 1884 in the reign of the dictator Diaz's. For the next 30 years "the bank performed as both commercial bank and national bank, authorized by Mexico's government to print currency, collect taxes, and foster business in the country." In 2001, Citigroup purchased Banamex for $12.5 billion, "the largest-ever US-Mexico merger" (Citicorp). The acquisition is perhaps symbolically equivalent to a Chinese bank buying the U.S. Treasury. Today Banamex has 1,427 branches in Mexico and 4,492 ATMs—but only one in *Parque Amistad* or Friendship Industrial Park of Acuña where Alcoa factories are located. Banamex has no stake in the development of grassroots Acuña in a country experiencing "historically unprecedented redistribution of wealth" where "more than half the population lives below the official poverty level" and two dozen citizens have become billionaires. It is busy developing its market among the middle class and wealthy (Subcomandante Marcos). Banamex began offering ATMs in supermarkets in 1992 and in 1994 made bank accounts available for children (Citicorp). These are not for the workers' children, who have a hard time acquiring paper and pencil to go to school.

The industrial park had only two ATM machines—for 11,000 workers. Needless to say, lines were long after each Friday shift. Workers waited long hours, missing the bus ride home, only to find the machines had run out of money or crashed. In addition to the deceit and trickery, as the workers' saw it, and to the violation of Federal Labor Law (Article 108 stipulates that the method of delivering salaries must accord with workers' wishes), the *Pagomático* debacle left families hungry over the weekend. No one earned enough to accumulate cash reserves to tide them past payday, which they "anxiously awaited" (as Ricardo Hernández noted in a letter to Hughes, March 3, 2000). Workers were incensed. At first their reaction looked like a slow-motion explosion—quiet, uncertain, involving only a few dozen; eventually it touched thousands. All the while, as the protest gathered, the CFO was there, embedded in the community with strong relationships to individual workers, trusted, known, ready with their popular education methodology, ready to listen *con manos vacías*, a channel through which the energy for protest and change could move. The coordination between CFO structure, slowly and patiently built, and worker protest energy that unpredictably arose around the ATM issue, but had festered much longer, validates the CFO philosophy and model of local, embedded, democratic organizing. It set in play a mobilization toward social change that is well documented, deserves even more study, and merits comparison with models, as manifested in Duro, for example (Chapter 3).

The ATCF delegation of March 1999 had witnessed a slice of this history, the first meeting under the expert guidance of Maria Elena Robles, the full-time CFO organizer in Acuña, and Julia Quiñonez, the CFO's national coordinator from Piedras. The Austin Tan Cerca delegation was electrified. When we got home to Austin I called a stockbroker I knew in New York. He agreed to negotiate for me the purchase of one share of Alcoa stock. In April, Julia came to a party in Austin. When she learned I was now a shareholder, she invited me to attend, in the capacity of shareholder and as member of Austin Tan Cerca, a unusual meeting that would take place in Ciudad Acuña between the workers and Robert Hughes.

In 2000, four years after the Tovar-O'Neill exchange at the shareholders meeting, and because of it, the timing was right for a new dialogue between the workers and top management. Shareholder's meetings are inherently flawed as a workers' forum.

Speakers from the floor only get three minutes, half if they speak Spanish and use an interpreter. Stockholders are uncomfortable with the maquiladora workers and get tired of seeing them. What's more, U.S. labor allies may co-opt them; the press may infantilize or exoticize them. The treks north are only worthwhile when the timing is right. Now the workers had managed to change the balance. A rare occurrence, the CEO was crossing the river, coming to the workers who couldn't very well cross the other way to see him. That meant they would represent themselves directly rather than rely on a few individuals, as in Pittsburgh. The ratio of workers' voices to the dominant discourse of owners and management would be reversed. A new answer would emerge to the question of whether the maquiladora worker can speak.

Robert Hughes had not forgotten that the workers had exposed his predecessor Robert Barton and caused his demise. He knew the workers had grievances and as the shareholders meeting approached he looked for a way of keeping them in Mexico and preventing an embarrassment. An email from one of Martha Ojeda colleagues at the Coalition for Justice in the Maquiladoras, described Alcoa phone calls to the CJM office in San Antonio and Hughes' state of mind:

> "The CEO from Alcoa, a Mr. Hughes, is planning to come to the border… It seems he knows that the workers are planning to attend the annual meeting and would prefer to meet with them before that (or instead of seeing them in Pittsburgh)… In the meantime, one of the managers from Alcoa has been calling Martha to discuss the details of the workers' complaints-problems with… the form their pay is given (ATM or cash). He says he has done surveys of the workers' preferences and is honoring them. He also told her that the company had made an arrangement with the local grocery store to give workers an extra 10% [discount]. Martha told him it would be better if the company just paid the workers more, and when he said they didn't ask for more pay, she said, well, I am asking for it. When he said how about a 10% raise, she said, how about 12%...[51]" (Hennessey 16 April 2000)

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[51] So eloquent on the topic of "deception" in her email about the Forum on Freedom of Association (Chapter 3), Rosemary was writing on behalf of Martha Ojeda who was absent a few days from the CJM office, due to her mother's surgery. Hennessey was a member of the CJM executive committee and, by coincidence, my friend, mentor, and professor during my studies for a Master's degree at the State University of New York at Albany. I left Albany in 1997 and "discovered" the border. Rosemary "discovered" it a little later. It became the focus of her research and her activism.

Even in this second-hand report, Hughes' top-down approach is obvious and obviously out of tune. Hughes was well intended, as he showed himself at the meeting that eventually transpired, and honestly surprised, it seemed, to discover how poorly his projects met their goals. The CJM email reveals management's willingness to "survey" the workers but not listen to them. In a survey, management, of course, frames the questions and thus, to some degree, controls the workers' response. The whole procedure is inadequate. Surveys don't work in the workers' culture in which people think socially, that is, through dialogue and speech, with others who share their context. Outside of that, they don't understand what is being asked. Surveys are not a natural form of expression for them. Hughes could not be expected to know that. Typically U.S. managers were oblivious to their cultural differences with the workers. They depended on local Mexican management to correct them or translate for them. Mexican management, however, seems to function in yet another culture, different from the U.S. owners and from their fellow Mexicans of the working class. They serve their own agenda[52].

When Julia invited me to the meeting between the workers and the CEO Bob Hughes, I was scared to go. Josefina Castillo, a Mexican national, the American Friends Service Committee Coordinator for Austin, and a friend, was also at the party where Julia and I spoke. She said, "Go ahead. Everything will be all right." I got into my Toyota Corolla and went, nervously anticipating a rendezvous with history and ready to take notes.

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[52] (Footnote: See below, in this chapter, the workers' distrust, for example, of the Mexican human resources manager, "J.J", and assessments of the Maquila Solidarity Network (Toronto) as to local managements' unwillingness to mediate between rank and file and U.S. management:

> "In the absence of a union in those Alcoa plants, the workers committee was fulfilling the role of a real union, negotiating benefits for the rank and file and deterring abuses committed by supervisors, managers and foremen. Although some top executives encouraged their Acuña management to engage in dialogues with the workers committee, the local management never demonstrated a real desire to talk. Instead, they always tried to delay, to avoid honoring agreements made in meetings, to provoke members of workers committee, and finally to exasperate the rank and file." (Maquila Solidarity Network)

The meeting was scheduled for 6PM Thursday, May 4, 2000, in the back banquet room at the Crosby Restaurant, a tourist venue in downtown Acuña. Waiters wore black and spread white clothes on the tables, but served no food. I entered with Julia Quiñonez and Ricardo Hernández through a courtyard in the back directly into the meeting space. Hernández had came to translate and play his card as religious shareholder, since he works for a Quaker organization (the American Friends Service Committee.) Like Susan Mika, the Benedictine nun, he is also active in the New York-based Interfaith Center for Corporate Responsibility.

How do you dress for such an event? I wanted to be persuasive as a shareholder, as a CFO supporter, and as a graduate student at the biggest university in the United States. My wardrobe didn't give me that much choice. I wore white slacks from the GAP, a little frayed, and a sleeveless, black and white, acrylic blouse. The pattern looked like Morse code with *horror vacui*. I carried what I jokingly refer to as my power attaché, a flat, blue-and-white plaid bag woven out of nylon thread, with grip handles—a Mexican specialty available at town markets for a dollar. I tried to cover my trepidation with a cavalier attitude. As I anticipated meeting a CEO, my days at Olivetti—of hob-knobbing with corporate power and executive culture—came back to haunt me. From my knowledge of CEOs, however, Hughes was easy going and accommodating. Perhaps my share of Alcoa stock influenced him.

It was 5:30. Hughes and his retinue had arrived. Sister Susan Mika and her translator were there too. The question remained, would Julia be able to deliver worker attendees in sufficient numbers to constitute their voice and their ability to represent the total workforce? Restaurant staff rearranged furniture and set up a long table where managers and shareholders would sit facing rows of chairs for the workers, a more hierarchical arrangement than the CFO's customary circle. Some issue kept Julia dashing in and out of the door to the courtyard. I heard her say *Ya llegaron* "They've arrived," the workers. Her eyes danced like a collie's bringing in the herd, excited and proud; but there was a problem. They refused to come in the door.

Hughes reached out to me and I introduced myself as a shareholder concerned about the workers' issues. He said he hoped I would be satisfied with what I saw at the meeting. Then, chattier, or maybe testing, he asked me if I had bought Alcoa stock when

it was high, or when it was low. High, I said, recalling that it had been in the low $70s and, though I don't follow stock prices, I guessed that must be pretty high. I added that I had a bad habit of buying high and selling low. This was conversational, but not true, since I was not in the habit of buying any stocks at all. I was self-conscious about playing the part. Hughes rejoined that he hoped I would hold on to my Alcoa portfolio for a long time to come. He seemed to be addressing me simply and politely and obviously as a shareholder, as was his duty—nothing tricky to it. He was a tallish man in his mid-fifties, with bright silver hair, casual, in shirtsleeves. He had brought with him a translator from San Antonio, a communications manager—the only person from Pittsburgh, she didn't speak at all—and two Texas managers, Wayne Jenkins, an engineer, and Brett Blair, human resources manager, stationed in Del Rio and San Antonio, respectively. From Acuña operations was a Mexican human resources manager, nicknamed J. J. Tall, dark, and somber, he turned out to be the issue that Julia was negotiating.

The workers would not enter as long as he was present. Julia explained, with Ricardo translating, that they had frequently experienced reprisals from J. J. even when he promised to respect their right to speak freely[53]. Julia's tone was respectful of the

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[53] Here are some examples, all documented in Hernández's *Chronology,* in which Alcoa fired workers as reprisal: 1. In March 1995, noted in *Chronology* (1) Julia reported that Alcoa "is firing workers… for the only reason that they are protesting labor conditions and want to form a union…" 2. In Susan Mika's January 30, 1996 letter to Paul O'Neill, (*Chronology* 1-2), she reports a worker "fired because he called Alcoa management's attention" to "the difference between what Alcoa was paying and what was mandated by the government." 3. In 1996, after the settlement of a June 12 work stoppage, the company responded favorably to a demand concerning vacation time. At the same time, "management refused to recognize a Workers Committee that sought resolutions to labor conflicts through dialogue… and offered Martín Cordero [a worker] money to leave his job…" (3). 4. In December, 2000 Juan Carlos is "reportedly fired because he said to a manager that the new benefits in the compensation package were achieved thanks to the workers and not to the General Manager José Alvarado. Apparently, Juan Carlos was later reinstated." Juan Carlos (a changed name) was at the Hughes meeting and is the same worker who was fired in 2001, blacklisted in Acuña, and regained stable employment in 2005. He refers to the Revolutionary, above, at the end of Chapter 2. The habit of ending protest by dismissal, sometimes arbitrarily singling out targets, is an Alcoa policy that continues through the 2002 and 2005 conflicts in Piedras Negras.

workers and of Hughes but matter-of-factly stated that the workers' wouldn't risk entering as long as J.J. was present, regardless of any promises or assurances, even Hughes'. At this point Hughes didn't have a choice. It was go home empty-handed or concede. J.J. would have to go. Hughes tried to recuperate authority by exclaiming that his "staff would make a full report of the meeting to J.J. and other members of local management"—excluding, that is, workers' names. His determination to report to J.J. and his authoritarian tone contradicted the routine procedure he described.

With the deal struck and J.J. gone, Julia went out the backdoor to retrieve the troops. They entered silently, pokerfaced, but, as they came through the door in ones and twos, neatly groomed, dressed in t-shirts and shorts or jeans, carrying and leading children, and as they kept on coming and kept on coming, they were impressive in their own way. They appeared fearless, but also without expectation. When they were seated, Hughes stood to address them. He introduced himself, greeted them—all the formalities. Then he paused. He seemed to be trying to gage his audience, discern who they really were, respond more personally. Here were the workers—real people. Previously they had just been numbers.

Finally he said, "I didn't know you would be so young."

It was a little strange. Was this the evidence of his eyes or gleaned from his briefing on national differences? Mexico has a huge birthrate; half the population is under 25, not unusual for a third-world country[54]. The workers didn't look youthful to me. I would have said tired or worried. Standing before these men and women, 60 or 70 of them, and towering over them, Hughes could just as well have said 'I didn't know you would be so short,' or 'so dark,' or 'so indigenous.' Acuña, as noted, has a high proportion of migrants. About half the population is from somewhere else, precisely to work in the maquiladoras. Many of the workers came looking for work from southern states like Veracruz and Chiapas that have a high concentration of dark-skinned or

[54] A government agency, the Sistema Nacional Información en Salud, provides the basis of a calculation that, in 2006, 49.46% of the total population of 107,525,210 will be less than 25 years of age (Sistema).

indigenous people[55]. Perhaps, for the first time, Hughes had escaped the confines of the world of elites and was facing a very different culture. Let us savor the moment.

Then he declared that his main purpose that evening was to listen.

The workers had set the agenda and were prepared. As they spoke in turn, they would come up to the table and stand in the clearing between management's table and the rows of chairs, a sort of stage. They spoke in Spanish and the proceedings had to wait for translations.

Giving workplace safety a new meaning, the first worker to speak was Juan Tovar. He thanked Hughes for creating conditions in which he and his *compañeros* and *compañeras* could participate with out fear of reprisals. He said "I am a long-time employee. This is the source of my family's food… But the salaries are too low for basic necessities." He led the workers' presentation on compensation, which was long and complicated. They had prepared charts on butcher paper comparing pay stubs in Acuña and in Piedras, comparing the compensation of someone employed by Alcoa for three months or for ten years. "In Acuña, it's all the same. Seniority has no value."

Tovar compared Alcoa compensation with other companies. A particular contention revolved around profit sharing, which is mandated by the Mexican Constitution, which the workers study, along with the Federal Labor Law. "Why is it always the same—$40 per year? Why always the same, small, miserable, amount?" he wanted to know. He was gesticulating and moving closer to the managers' table. His energy was forceful, maybe intimidating. "Other plants," he said, "pay $300-400."

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[55] Estimates of Mexico's indigenous population range widely, complicated by the difficulty of defining who is indigenous. Rudolfo Stevanhagen a sociologist affiliated with Mexico City's Universidad Autonomía de Mexico and with the UN's Working Group on Indigenous Peoples writes: "Mexico has the largest indigenous population in Latin America, about ten million, but they represent only between 12 and 15% of the total population..." Due to various factors, "scholars estimate that the actual Indian population is at least 50% higher than that given by census figures." Journalist John Ross cites the 6 million indigenous counted by the government's *Instituto Nacional de Indigenas,* as well as the National Coordinating Body of Indian People's 20 million, but notes that the more "verifiable statistic" is the birth rate among indigenous, growing faster than the non-indigenous, so that a third of the nation's indigenous are under 18 (*Rebellion…* 58-59).

Wayne Jenkins, the engineer from Del Rio, ingenuously fielded this question. “Some companies sell in Mexico,” he said. “For example some companies sell as contractors to Delphi[56]. We do not. Therefore, Alcoa does not make any profit in Mexico… and no profit sharing.” Maquiladoras by definition produce for export. Their owners realize profits only on the other side of the border and are therefore exempt from Constitutional profit sharing. The loophole is part of the structure of the system, of both the Border Industrial Program and NAFTA. After the meeting, Brett Blair, the human resources manager based in San Antonio, privately expressed to me a very ambiguous interpretation of the issue. He leaned forward, lowered his voice, and acknowledged, with a nervous laugh, that, presumably without knowing it, the workers were correctly broaching a complaint that is legitimate in principle. Blair said that they are denied profits through “a trick of bookkeeping.” He seemed to assume that the workers didn’t understand the system and were merely naive in their invocation of a Constitutional provision. After all, NAFTA had superseded it. I went along with Blair’s interpretation at the time, but have since reflected that the workers were perhaps more strategic than naïve. On this and on many points, their approach has been to hammer away at a comparison between corporate/NAFTA/globalized procedures and the principles of the Constitution, between the corporate reality and “a higher law.” In other words, they were looking for moral leverage. Also in retrospect, I see how effective this rhetorical strategy is for unifying and inspiring their own ranks and perhaps reaching Mexicans of other classes. It poses a question of national loyalty to them. On the other hand, I see that neither the Constitution, nor the Revolution, nor a Mexican peoples’ identity necessarily carries any weight for U.S. managers. Those considerations are foreign to their values and concerns. Shareholders on the other hand may have the luxury of moral response, but managers, by law as well as by inclination, must put profit first. At best the workers’ identity is “a cultural thing” (see below where Brett Blair uses this explanation), and by implication, inessential.

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[56]Delphi is a General Motors spin-off and was, at the time, the largest foreign employer in Mexico. They make automotive parts.

The compensation package included 14 components. In addition to base salary and profit sharing, some components were food vouchers, transportation to and from work, attendance bonus, punctuality bonus, savings program, cafeteria subsidy, vacation, and Christmas bonus. When Hughes asked them to "prioritize" the elements in the compensation, Juan warned that they were not bargaining and didn't want to trade more compensation in one area for less in another. Hughes then noted that Alcoa is the biggest employer in Acuña and wants to pay the top dollar and does, according to their three-times-a-year studies. The workers' information contradicted that. They said that all other companies pay more. Hughes said, "You don't believe we are the highest payers." He was half way between making an observation and asking a question. Before the conversation detoured into an argument over this discrepancy of fact, or "belief," Julia suggested another review by a committee that would include at least one worker. Hughes praised the idea. "Getting feedback from you is the right way."

A woman named Amparo Reyes, who worked for Alcoa in Piedras Negras, raised the concept of a sustainable or adequate wage. This concept differed basically from Hughes' and from other CEOs', who talk about competitive wages—the market again. The workers maintain that none of the wages are sufficient and the comparison between what companies pay is irrelevant[57]. Amparo asserted, "We must provide for our families, not barely provide." She is a single parent of two sons and had already been fired from another company for organizing. When Alcoa later fired her, she quit high-

[57] The Constitution uses the concept of the *canasta basica*, or "basic market basket" of food and necessities, as a guide for salaries. In other words, the Constitution compares salaries, purchasing power, and need. Taking the cue, the workers make that comparison all the time themselves. As an educational and rhetorical device, they will price, compile, and graphically present the list of necessary purchases for a family of four on a monthly or weekly basis and compare that to pay stubs. The data confirms and details their felt sense that salaries are too low. Dr. Ruth Rosenbaum, executive director of the Center for Reflection, Education and Action (CREA), conducted an acclaimed and more technically and statistically sophisticated study of purchasing power in 15 Mexican border cities. With fan-fare, she reached the same conclusion. "The wages paid maquiladora workers for a full workweek do not enable them to meet basic human needs of their family for nutrition, housing, clothing and non-consumables," declared Rosenbaum in a June 28, 2001 press release (Rosenbaum).

pressure production work and instead found employment, like Irma Salvador, cleaning front offices. In her own development of consciousness, she was just starting to discover that management doesn't understand the basic connection between employment and child rearing the way the workers do. The connection is so fundamental it was hard for her to understand the need to say it, though Amparo was catching on. For her the family metaphor is basic too. She said to Hughes: "That you are here shows that you are interested in us. You have already listened to us more than the managers here. You are like a father." It is not so unusual to project a family model on to the work relationship of employee and employer or to see the boss as a father; however, one rarely hears the perception voiced. I got to know Amparo well enough that I can say that this remark came from a transitional period in her life in which she was still naïve, but developing sophistication and skepticism quickly.

Finally the flashpoint issue came up—the ATM or Pagomático. The workers were emotional and adamant about it. Hughes didn't understand. "We believed that ATMs are good for safety and efficient… despite the start-up trouble. If the ATMs worked well, would you like them?"

Sister Susan Mika who was sitting next to Hughes hypothesized the scenario for him. She evoked the difference between the neighborhood where he lived—where, in the evening after work, he can go for a stroll with his wife and his dog and drop by the ATM—and the workers' neighborhoods that often don't have electricity, much less ATMs, and where no pay on Friday means you go hungry.

Julia jumped in and added a new dimension. "It is a sensitive issue… Alcoa made an agreement with the bank without consulting the workers. That violates our labor rights. That's our interpretation of the law. Wages must be paid in local currency. No other way." She was referring to Chapter VII, Article 108, from the workers' touchstone and talisman—the Federal Labor Law[58]. This body of laws has cultural as well as legal significance and triggered the anxieties that revolve around the workers' voice that are, in

[58] Chapter VII covers "Protective norms and privileges of salary," and Article 108 states: "The payment of salary will be effected in the place where the workers offer their services."

turn, tied to the Constitution—their vindication and their link to the sacrifices of the Revolution. No wonder the Pagomático became the line in the sand. In addition, this law has tremendous practical significance and can determine whether or not workers go home on pay day with money in her hands. Hughes still wasn't getting it.

This is where Brett Blair piped up, saying, "It's a cultural thing."

Struggling to respond within his own frame of reference, Hughes supplied a piece of managerial wisdom to explain the sensitivity: "Yes, I know. It's a rule of thumb. Never do a bad job of delivering pay." But he couldn't let it go and came up with yet another argument for the ATMs. "OK—we did it wrong, but it's a good system. One robbery is one too many. We'll straighten it out and make it voluntary." The workers didn't get this safety angle. Robbery had not been an issue. They were safer leaving the factories on pay day en mass and getting transportation home on the company bus than lining up at the ATM, missing the bus, and trying to find a way home in isolated groups. Either way they were carrying cash.

One by one they stood up to testify:

"The ATMs don't have the denominations to cover exactly the amount of earnings."

"There's a charge. For every transaction, five pesos stay in the bank, more if you ask for your balance more than once a month."

"I must have money for my kids. If one ATM is out, I must go to another and I must pay a fee at the other one."

Hughes asked if it were risky to take your pay home as cash.

"No," they answered with one voice.

He was starting to get it and whispered to Susan Mika in an aside, "I use ATMs all over the world, but I know, if I can't get money out, I can still feed my family." He has credit cards, of course.

The meeting at Crosby's Restaurant showed not only whether the maquiladora workers could speak, or what they said and how they said it, but also how the CEO Robert Hughes struggled from inside his cognitive cage to hear them. He said, and seemed to believe, that his role was to listen to them and engage in dialogue, but the effort gave him so much difficulty that he may have been subverting it with another

objective: a desire to soothe and placate and ultimately deceive. As I saw it, his stated intention conflicted with his inability, or perhaps unwillingness, to comprehend or accept the workers' reality even when they spelled it out plainly and all manner of language and cultural translators were present to assist. Maybe he was serving too many masters, who guided him with too many incompatible values.

The workers, for their part, tried to meet the CEO halfway. They understood the necessity to speak to him in a business vernacular of facts and figures and anecdotal evidence. Around the question of competitive compensation, their data differed from his and he acknowledged that they didn't "believe" his data. They had sources of information too. He also excluded workers, per standard business procedures, from the committees and consultants that performed studies of compensation in Acuña and discredited their authority.

Hughes identified communication as the most important issue of the whole meeting and, underlying that, the issue of trust. Therefore he was receptive to the idea of an on-going workers committee to communicate with management locally and to analyze problems. He didn't want, however, to "force" the idea on his local managers. This reservation revealed that, in his estimation, they would be resistant. This was an ominous and significant revelation.

Beneath the surface of certain appearances and sounds, the meeting in Acuña resembled scores of meetings I had attended at Olivetti in the 1970s as reporter for the company's internal publications. In one regard, however, the workers' discourse differed from any public language I had ever heard in the U.S. What the Mexican workers said was permeated with their assumption that an employment relationship is a human relationship. They can't let the idea go. The employment relationship exists only in the context of other, more important, human relationships. And of course the family is their primary image. So there is no argument. If they can't feed their children, that trumps all. And the best manager is a leader in the image of a good father (or a good mother)[59]. In exchange for grueling work under harsh conditions, they demand not only

[59] In Mexico, the literature of village and campesino culture is full of metaphor and epithet that casts the leader as father. This family paradigm is not so different from what Lakoff says of Americans' tendency to think of their leaders as fathers. Speaking of

material compensation, but also human dignity and respect. That's why they demanded a permanent workers' committee to dialogue with local management, to be elected by workers under their own leadership, not appointed by management.

They demanded more rest time than the 55 minutes allotted in three breaks in a ten-hour day. As Amparo Reyes put it, "We object to a policy of production over health."

Since they were meeting with Hughes on a weekday evening after work, they came in their work clothes. Many brought children—toddlers and teenagers. They presented themselves simply as workers and families, always connecting work and the reason for it. They were not ashamed to present themselves as workers.

They had provided the agenda and had prepared a peroration. At the end there was a lull, then a little prompting, then Rosario, a woman who had not spoken before, rose near the back of the room and said,

> "We want to work with you as one team. We would like a good response from you; that response will be for us, but also for the next generation. Since they will witness this progress we must know that this is just. These jobs will be their inheritance."

Hughes responded enthusiastically to this closing. He especially picked up on the word "team," but connected it with his observation that "it's hard for managers to change." The logic of the connection, or his equation of change and respect, was not clear. Rosario had said "respect;' he had heard "change." The logic seemed to concede that respect is *not* part of the status quo. Maybe he was just at a loss for words then and therefore resorted to Alcoa's "Vision and Values" statement of which "managers' responsiveness to change" constitutes a pillar.

As all meetings in Mexico do, this one ended with promises. No one mistakes them for actions. However, this time, the workers felt they were in a position to make certain the promises were kept. It was not the word of the executive that gave them hope

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political rather than business figures, Lakoff's scenario, nevertheless, applies. He demonstrates how Americans conceive of politicians in one of two images: the good father, whose main goal is to protect his family; or the stern father, who sees the world rife with dangers and seeks to discipline everyone for their own good (Lakoff 2004 5-34).

but their own solidarity. The workers knew they had performed a feat of unity, clear-mindedness, and good organization. It's hard for most of us to understand how they had been able to do it. The truth is they had cultivated that unity very deliberately for months, if not years. As their solidarity built during 1999 and 2000, when together they faced police and tear gas and verbal newspaper attacks, and as their unity grew to a crescendo in the summer of 2001, Julia Quiñonez said, "Just when we found that everyone was against us, we discovered each other."

Chapter 5
A Great White Father
and an After Word, or Two

As the workers predicted, the meeting in Ciudad Acuña, where 70 compañeros and compañeras and their families spoke with their Alcoa CEO Robert Hughes, did not lead immediately to improvements—or to anything. Hughes took time to study the situation and promised to get back to them in five months. When he did not, the workers began to demand a response. They communicated first with local management and then with Hughes in Nashville, his home and office. The negotiation of agitation and control was a long and eventful process; eventually the workers were successful. According to their accounting, they achieved a 33.3% increase in total compensation for 11,000 Alcoa workers in their city. That was a huge total gain. But they had the capacity both to think ahead and to envision a permanent and more systemic change[60]. They set their sights on a next goal: a Worker's Committee, a recognized structure that would make communication between workers and management two-way, regular, and on going. This is when everything blew up. Recognition of the workers voice seems to have been a flash point for this corporation. As I have mentioned earlier in these pages, Paul O'Neill, as top CEO of the whole corporation (Hughes was chief only of the Mexican segment) seems to have been a sympathetic presence in the background. When O'Neill left Alcoa and went into the Bush cabinet, Alain Belda took his place. Belda cracked down on the workers. He played on stereotypes and prejudices to libel and discount their case before

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[60] The historic increase the workers had won turned out to be temporary. Alcoa began rolling back salaries after the "blow up." See below.)

the world and any interested stockholders. Ciudad Acuña felt the regime change on August 21, 2001 when Alcoa fired 186 workers. Although the workers protested and sought opportunities for negotiation, Alcoa was inflexible and non-communicative. The Workers' Committee, though not recognized, nevertheless held an "Acuña Summit" with José Antonio Alvarado, Alcoa's Acuña general manager. Others attending were Carlos Támez, a state labor official, the CFO's Julia Quiñonez, Fernando Fonseca, lawyer for the workers, Evaristo Pérez, former Acuña mayor, and Ricardo Hernández from the American Friends Service Committee (Hernández *Chronology…* 8). They were resourceful but nothing worked. It was a new world order. Belda, a Brazilian, felt comfortable cracking the whip in Latin America. He replaced Hughes and created a new and powerful position—a human resources manager for all Mexican facilities, operating out of San Antonio, Texas. Into this slot he inserted another Brazilian, Jocca Martín. Thus he created an appearance of political correctness and avoided suspicion of a cultural communication barrier. First world stockholders, not alert to class divisions, would not see the communication gap between upper class Brazilians and working-class Mexicans.

It looked like a rout in Acuña. All of the workers' leaders had been fired, including Juan Tovar. Many of them pursued legal cases against Alcoa, but, in the meantime, were out of work and blacklisted. Under the stress, some became ill; others left town temporarily and went south to visit family. A few snuck over the border. The legal cases were not successful. Austin Tan Cerca visited. We wondered how and if the workers would rise again—or, in less romanticized terms, if the movement would continue after this blow.

The movement did continue, and I will resume the thread of the story, but this is a good place to pause for first conclusions. The conclusion I would argue at this point, and the reason I undertook this project in the first place, does not deal with right and wrong, or winning and losing, but with history and history writing which have an ethics of their own. We have the spectacle all around us of unaccountable industries, not only manufacturing things, but also manufacturing "knowledge," and not only knowledge, but also versions of reality, subjective experience, and identity. In the process these

industries symbolically exterminate persons whose existence doesn't fit the story they are telling. The symbolic death bodes ill for the actual life. The old adage says to the victors belong the spoils and to them also the privilege of writing and publishing history and, we might add, the news. Even when labor wins battles, management writes the story—and changes it. That's the background of the rhetorical question in my title: Can the maquiladora worker speak? I have tried to capture her voice and a listening audience. She can speak. The real question is about listening and it seems that *not listening* is ingrained in the system.

I am hopeful, though, of contemporary movements in revisionist history. One direction, "people's history," of which Howard Zinn is a proponent, has class-consciousness and makes an effort to explain history, from the angle of its admitted and purposeful bias. *A People's History of the United States* is, of course, his masterwork. Kathy Ermery has taught American history since the 1980s. She eventually discovered and immediately adopted Zinn's work (first published in 1980). In the introduction to the 2003 teacher's edition of Zinn's book, she writes,

> Zinn provides what no other textbook does: the human impact, the human cost of decisions made by politicians and businessmen. With other texts, I had been asking my students to evaluate these decisions as a way to develop critical thinking. But such an exercise was only partially successful—students could not challenge generalizations made in standard texts without a significant range of data at their disposal… With the data that Zinn provides, however, the range of interpretations is wide enough for students to really have a *choice in what they believe and, then, in what they know.* (xii emphasis enthusiastically mine)

Zinn provides the tools for teachers and students to intervene in the standard narrative of American history that discards any concept of the public good, and, instead, substitutes the normalized decisions of politicians and businessmen. The people, their interests, and identity, disappeared early as "the nation, a symbol, a legal unity called the United States" subsumed them. By creating in the 1770s this inclusive and anonymously amalgamated symbol, the Founding Fathers, "created the most effective system of national control devised in modern times and showed future generations of leaders the advantages of combining paternalism with command" (47).

David Dorado Romo practices another contemporary historiography, "microhistory," which "ultimately focuses more on the mysterious and the poetic than on

the schematic" (14). A jazz musician as well as a scholar, Romo doesn't seek explanations in his book about El Paso and Juarez during the Revolution; rather he unearths and assembles raw facts, from forgotten or suppressed archives, and plays with them in the light, to see what images and insights they will reflect. An El Paso native who has traveled widely, he sides with history's underdog cities and exemplifies a micro historian with a loyalty to the working class, a preference for the culture of the streets, the curious by-ways, and his Mexican-American heritage. From my point of view he reclaims facticity from academic uses, like Harvard's Professor Spear's, whose Alcoa case study writes the worker out of history, and from dominant voices that disdain evidence (Bush: "Free trade is freedom"). But, also from my point of view, he doesn't go far enough with analysis. While he recaptures and circulates in public view provocative and colorful information, laden with implications that are meaningful to him because they intersect his personal history. But he doesn't guide us to a deeper meaning—or to explanations—among all the implications. "Microhistory at its best is more about small gestures and unexpected details than grand explanations." And furthermore, he writes,

> El Paso and Ciudad Juárez did more to spark the Revolution… Yet their stories are still untold. They have been considered marginal and unimportant by the cultural centers in both Mexico and the United States. This book is about a historical perspective driven underground, buried underneath racist mythologies found in those ubiquitous books about the so-called Wild West (11-14)[61].

One example may illustrate what drives my hunger for more meaning from Romo's provocative book. Growing up in El Paso he often heard stories from his great-aunt Adela Dorada who belonged to the generation that witnessed the Revolution. She was also part of a generation in which many lived in Juárez and crossed the border everyday to work in El Paso. Adela crossed frequently and, years later, complained that U.S. border authorities "regularly forced her and all other working-class Mexicans to take a bath and be sprayed with pesticides whenever they needed to cross into the United States." Working on his book, Romo's research elucidated a connection between the

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[61] Romo cites Luis Gonzálesy Gonzáles and Eric Gardel as his antecedents and as writers of microhistory.

"U.S. Customs disinfection facilities in El Paso-Juárez in the 20s and the… disinfection chambers in Nazi Germany." A 1938 German scientific article "specifically praised the El Paso fumigating of Mexican immigrants with Zyklon B." The Germans used the same chemical as "a fumigation agent at German borders and in concentration camps." Then they used it not just to kill lice, but also to exterminate human beings. These stories and connections are a fascinating and poignant finding. Romo presents them as background to the 1917 "bath riots" or the "revolt of the Mexican Amazons at the Santa Fe Bridge." Then he launches into the colorful story of how it all played out, without further examination of this conjunction of ideologies and technologies. What I want from the historian, though, is some reflection on the meaning of the conjunction of German and U.S. military and border technologies, science, and metaphors, in the execution of their racism. I hope my research contributes a valuable combination of "people's history," which has class-consciousness and tries to find and explain the connections, and "micro" history, which prizes politically inconvenient, and therefore pertinent and compensatory, information languishing in obscure archives. Romo's discoveries are tantalizing precisely because we intuit they can reveal more (225).

Yes, the workers' movement started again, but it has taken a long time in Acuña. The focus of the action quickly shifted to Piedras Negras. Like a weed that sends out underground roots, the movement popped up in Alcoa's Piedras Negras facilities. The CFO was making plans as early as January 2002. Their new initiative focused on democratic elections within the corrupt CTM union (Chapter 3) and an agenda based on the workers' needs.

In addition to labor organizing, Piedras became the site of a totally new development with consequences for workers and employers alike, and, this time, for consumers too. The new project began with a false start. In the summer of 2003 a U.S.-owned apparel company in Juárez went out of business. They sought to donate over 100 industrial sewing machines and other equipment to a tax-exempt organization, as a write-off. Someone suggested they check the Quakers as recipients; the offer wended its way finally to Ricardo Hernández, director of the Mexico-U.S. Border program of the

American Friends Service Committee in Philadelphia, and the CFO's close ally and colleague[62]. The prospect of donated equipment—a whole maquiladora, set to go—re-ignited a long held dream of the CFO. For years they had wanted to start their own enterprise and provide work for skilled women (and men) who had sewn for all the brand names that had once employed them in Piedras. Many of these companies had fired workers for their activism and left the northern border for more docile labor climates. The CFO already had five sewing machines and a business plan. All the resources of the CFO and their many friends within the Quaker-AFSC establishment, and beyond, went to work to figure out not only how to receive this offer of equipment, which was warehoused in El Paso more than 700 miles away, but also what to do with it. The summer of 2003 was taken up with planning, research, and assessment. In the end, though, they turned the gift down. It would cost $26,000 just to truck the equipment east to Piedras Negras, and then what? They had no physical space for storage, much less manufacturing. That was the capital problem. They also didn't have the business expertise and already Julia Quiñonez was seeing the project drain time and energy that she and the others preferred to devote to labor organizing.

That would have been the end of the idea except that word of the offer had already traveled to a governing entity within the complex structure of the AFSC—the Corporation. One of the 200 volunteers from across the U.S. who compose this body was Becky Flory, a schoolteacher from Minnesota. Back in the North Country after the Philadelphia meeting, she knew her husband John Flory would be very interested in hearing about the offer of equipment to the Mexican workers. John had played a key role in building Mercado Central, or Central Market, a cooperative of 36 Hispanic-owned

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[62] To clarify, at this late point, the relationship between the Quakers and the American Friends Service Committee, the former are a religious group, the Religious Society of Friends, that emerged in 17th-century England; the AFSC is the secular service arm of the Quakers and came into being in the United State during WWI, based on Quaker values and offering alternatives to war. The AFSC's first programs helped develop the legal status of conscientious objectors and rebuild Europe. Nationally and internationally today, AFSC programs work on peace building, immigration, economic justice, and much more. They often adopt a method that takes its cues from base communities.

businesses under one roof that opened in 1999 and eventually revitalized its deteriorating South Minneapolis neighborhood. Quickly recognized as its own little economic miracle, Mercado Central was built by three groups: a developer, a predominantly Latino group of entrepreneurs, and John Flory consulting as a "business incubator" and representing Whittier Community Development Corporation. John began consulting with the project in 1996. He recalls a meeting in which the entrepreneurial group agreed on which merchants might join; but they worried about the physical space of the market—they feared that the market would be "captive to a landlord." John recalls, "I listened to the discussion of the property ownership question, and after a while, I said 'what you're talking about is a co-op'" (Kenney).

John had served as a manager for two food cooperatives. He is also bi-lingual and comfortable in Latin culture, having grown up in Ecuador. Further he is conversant with a community-based model of business development (called asset- based management) that derives from the community organizing approach that Saul Alinsky developed in Chicago in the 1930s. The "asset-based community development" concept, or ABCD, worked well in Minneapolis's immigrant Latino community. John thought it might work in Piedras Negras too, if he could find among the Mexican entrepreneurs the vision and the passion of commitment. ABCD counts as usable and valuable several assets that the Mexican women seemed to have. An ABCD manual lists:

> Individuals –Skills, work experience, knowledge, culture, teaching ability, volunteer experience, life experience, technical know-how, hobbies, etc.
>
> Associations - Group energy, membership, knowledge based on group skills, professional and technical know-how, group trust, financial support, information, clout, etc. (*A Community Building…* 3)

After hearing the news from his wife, John called Ricardo Hernández to explore the possibility of applying the ABCD model in Piedras Negras. He believed that the workers' dream of their own business was realistic; however, the offer of equipment had immediately pushed the project into a large scale, demanding too much capital. No business can start big. Besides, people and their desires should be the impetus—not machines. If the women in Piedras Negras had the will and the passion to start a worker-

owned sewing collective and stick with it, John would help. He believed in the project. What is more, he knew of marketing studies that showed a greater demand for, than a supply of, "ethical alternatives" in purchasing—or fair trade. He also had ideas about combining organic fabric with "no sweat" labor to make a very appealing product for consumers with a conscience. The connection between John and Becky Flory and the Mexican workers turned out to be fortuitous.

Interstate 35 runs straight from Minneapolis to a point 25 miles south of San Antonio where the traveler takes County Road 57 for 99 miles to Eagle Pass. From there it's a jump over the river to Piedras. John used his vacation time and made numerous trips along this route in 2003 and 2004. Sometimes Becky, an activist in her own right, accompanied him. Often he would start late in the day, drive all night, take a nap by the side of the road and press on to Austin where he would get a real night's sleep before the final three-and-a-half-hour leg to the border. He worked very hard.

In April 2004, the Dignity and Justice Maquiladora, its owners, and its supporters in Piedras Negras held an open house for visitors from Minnesota, Austin, and Philadelphia. The factory inhabited a small two-storey, four-room house in a residential neighborhood. Five women had undertaken the venture and persisted through the bureaucratic trials of registering a business locally for international trade, under a name that raised eyebrows among bureaucrats. With John's facilitation, they had worked through the agony of collective decision-making and decided on a structure and a marketing plan. The Dignity and Justice Maquiladora (or D&J) is actually a collective and is owned by three entities. One is the workers themselves. The business plan values their contribution of start-up work (sweat equity) so that they own 40%. A separate entity, the CFO owns 30% and contributes support of many kinds, including guidance and oversight to assure that the women adhere to their founding principles of fairness and respect. North Country Fair Trade (John and Becky's distribution company that also handles products from a women's cooperative in Nicaragua) owns 30% and has raised, or invested out-of-pocket, all the capital. For technical reasons the collective is structured as a "maquiladora"—so as to enable manufacture in Mexico and sales in the United States. The housewarming party was a symbolic occasion and an expression of hope. There was much work yet to be done (and as of this writing, March 2006, the D&J is just

beginning to give signs that it can produce and sell enough to reach stability). There have been some discouraging times when it looked as if the D&J would have to close up before debts buried it.

We in Austin sensed the fledgling cooperative was hitting a low point in August 2005. Josefina Castillo and I and two volunteers from our Austin D&J support group, Ariel Passanisi and Nate Vagaan, went to visit to ask how we could help. Although they had plenty of concrete problems—with machinery, with orders, with pattern-making, with fabric, with customs, even with interpersonal relations—I believe the main problem, at that time, was that John Flory had suffered a heart attack in the early spring; neither he nor Becky knew in what role he would be able to continue. We were all searching without success for ways to fill in. We had to recognize how dependent the project was on him though John had not cultivated dependency. We knew him well enough at this point to believe in him and his ideal of serving the independence of the cooperative, the empowerment of the workers, and a market of ethical U.S. consumers. Though he was not bed-bound, he followed a reduced work schedule, at first not participating at all. I worried that the CFO had violated its principle of the workers' autonomy and now was going to pay with the collapse of this dearly held dream. When we visited we saw that the women seemed to have lost self-confidence. I suddenly saw John in his absence as the Great White Father who had abandoned them. He had not sought the father-rescuer role; but the image occurred to me because I saw the women, in their distress, became self-effacing and helpless. One of the founders, an exceptionally fiery and proud woman, was frequently absent; she gave our solidarity visit short shrift and dashed off. She seemed shaken—or angry—and too proud to admit it. The great white father image also occurred to me because around this time, John, who had worn a full white mustache, began to sport a full, white beard.

Our ad hoc delegation from Austin sat in the maquiladora gathered around the fan with the owner/workers, wilting in the August heat. We asked what we could do to help. There was a long silence, painful because it was clear, after awhile, that they were not going to break it. I got up to go to the bathroom. While I was gone, one of the women complained, Josefina later told me, about "time studies" that John had asked for, so that he (and they) would have a measure of the time it took to assemble a product, as a guide

to prices and salaries. It was Juany Lopez Torres speaking, usually an exemplar of self -possession. She said that she typically got so focused on her sewing that she would forget about time and couldn't keep the records that John asked for. This was the sweatshop worker speaking, the "docile" employee, not able, at the moment, to claim ownership.

The story of this D&J low point reprises a basic issue in the era of globalization, which affords and promotes contacts between actors who come together across boundaries of wide power differentials. In a world so constructed and mixed, how does self-leadership among "disempowered" workers compare to the leadership of outside experts? Does the help of outsiders hurt? Does it always repress the initiative and responsibility without which organizing is a sham? Is it necessarily an invitation to disaster or, at the least, a way to achieve unsustainable gains that eventually reverse and thus reinforce hardships and despair? Or must the workers selectively, and with control, import outside help? This is the praxis side of the theoretical question that has concerned me—what I have called the epistemological question. How do how we get knowledge, how do we know what we know, how do we construct "reality," and do those methods represent a bias or a politics?

Of course the praxis and the epistemological questions are directly connected to each other. We may know that theoretically, but not actually; that is, activists often do not reflect enough on what their underlying assumptions, unconscious theories, and automatic epistemologies are. We may not adequately examine our grounding and its implications. As a consequence we may say one thing and do another. This disjuncture or contradiction may have been a cause of conflict between the CFO and the Coalition for Justice in the Maquiladoras and the reason why Gustavo de la Rosa did not really fit the CFO organizing model or see the potential for worker power that existed under his nose in the Juárez colonia. Obviously I don't think John Flory is an example of the outside expert who oppresses the oppressed. He is in fact a skilled facilitator, worthy of the community-based tradition of Paolo Freire. He is a technical expert, endowed with a sense of kairos, putting himself at the disposal of a collective process. The politics of his professional personal relations with the D&J owners is impeccable, as I see them:

respectful, patient, and realistic—never paternalistic. Expertise does not always have to serve imperialism.

What guidance is there for bringing together actors of different locations in globalization? How can those disparate resources come together and bear on the workers' organization? At least in their handling of the first Duro strike (Chapter 3), the Coalition for Justice in the Maquiladoras took the role of outside experts who sparked a major action before there was a sufficient base of workers' consciousness to sustain it. From my vantage point, that of an eye witness observer, but not a CJM insider, it looks as if the mistakes of Duro teach us to suspect the model they were using and confirm the CFO model of slow, patient building of consciousness and of an organizational network that can strategically choose and sustain actions as well as support and guide spontaneous or "wild cat" actions that emanate from workers' solidarity. The comparison between the two approaches would seem to give us grounds to critique Lenin's vanguard concept. My reading, however, of "What Is to Be Done?" the 1902 essay in which he argues the vanguard concept, amidst a thicket of competing theories and practices, indicates that the idea does not apply to all historical situations[63]. Lenin addressed the predicament of the Russian labor movement in a police state, Tsarist Russia. Here is how he describes the vanguard within the trade union—just after discussing "the amazing top-heaviness" of the usual union bureaucracies and which provide "a paradise for the police" in the Tsarist state:

> A small, compact core, consisting of reliable, experienced and hardened workers, with responsible agents in the principal districts and connected by all the rules of strict secrecy with the organizations of revolutionaries, can, with the side support of the masses and without an elaborate organization, perform *all* the functions of a trade union organization, and perform them, moreover, in the manner Social-

[63] I'd like to thank Professor Mark Longaker for peaking my curiosity about this work. I had always avoided it because I dreaded reading a writer who wrote a title in the passive voice. As it turns out, the construction of the title actually has a satiric purpose and shows, I think, Lenin's brilliant sense of language. He uses the passive to paraphrase and reflect the anxious state of mind of frantic, activist Russian youth of the 1890s. Without leaders and without theories, they run about not knowing what to do, but undeterred, energetically deploying well-known protest and resistance techniques. They are unable to utter "we" and, so distrustful of theory, even Marxist theory to which they are attracted, they are unable to ask, 'what shall we do?' (128)

> Democrats desire. Only in this way can we secure the *consolidation* and development of a Social-Democratic trade union movement, in spite of the gendarmes [a term he uses interchangeably with political police in this translation]. (142-143, emphasis Lenin's)

Lenin never proscribes the vanguard itself in detail, specifying principles only and referring to it merely as an organization of trained "*professional revolutionaries*, irrespective of whether they are drawn from among students or workingmen" (147, emphasis Lenin's). Waxing metaphorical and underscoring again the threat of police and the purpose for secrecy, he writes: "[I]t is far more difficult to catch a dozen wise men than it is to catch a hundred fools" (147). He goes on to justify this form of leadership against criticism of his "anti-democratic views":

> I assert: 1) that no movement can be durable without a stable organization of leaders… 2.) that the more widely the masses are spontaneously drawn into the struggle and form the basis of the movement and participate in it, the more necessary is it to have such an organization… for it is much easier for demagogues to side-track the more backward sections of the masses); 3) that the organization must consist chiefly of persons engaged in revolutionary activities as a profession; 4) that in a country with an autocratic government, the more we *restrict* the membership of this organization to persons who are engaged in revolutionary activities as a profession and who have been professionally trained in the art of combating the political police, the more difficult it will be to catch the organization, and 5) the *wider* will be the circle of men and women of the working class or of other classes… able to join the movement and perform active work in it. (147-148, emphasis Lenin's)

One can see in the outlines of the vanguard features, here and there, of the organizing methods of the Coalition for Justice in the Maquiladoras and of the Comité Fronterizo de Obreras. One can also see, in the CJM's Duro experience, elements of a vanguard misapplied. Lenin's influential work on praxis invites an analysis of practice and of the composition and behavior of oppressive power and the caveat that they must match.

Lenin is a student of history and learns from the nation-wide strike in Russia of 1874 and the strikes of the 1880s and 90s (73) that ended in defeat. For comparison, he studies the German labor movement, which he admires (70). He writes for a time and place in which the state prohibited all workers' associations and regarded "the principal weapon of the workers economic struggle—the strike… as a criminal offence" (138).

One group of his opposition, to whom he explicitly alludes in this essay, is the "reformists," also called "Economists." They pursue discrete economic demands of which the workers can see the direct value—higher wages for example, or benefits. Moreover, they offer an alternative to what they call Lenin's "anti-democratic views." Their proposals correspond to what they say is the level of workers' consciousness and, therefore, accord with democratic procedures. Lenin maintains, however, that economists are opportunists. They only address concrete or "bread and butter" issues. By contrast, Lenin wants to address systemic (revolutionary) changes, but he is mindful of the particular circumstances. To that end, the purpose of the structures he proposes is to "centralize" the "functions of the *organization,*" which "does not mean to centralize all the functions of the movement." He declares that "to concentrate all secret functions in the hands of as small a number of professional revolutionaries as possible does not mean that the latter will 'do the thinking for all' and that the crowd" will be prevented from taking "an active part in the *movement*" (148).

Lenin has been influential all over the world; he has provoked criticism and adversaries, as well as followers and misguided followers. I can't see that his detractors or admirers have done a good job of reading him. They miss his sense of history and his address of the historic situation in Russia. They over-generalize his recommendations—assume he promotes universal programs, good for all times and places. Professor Paul Halsall of Fordham University, for example, in his introduction to "What Is To Be Done?" for readers of the *Internet Modern History Sourcebook*, suggests that one may find definitive views in Lenin's work. He prompts the student to decide for herself if "[o]ne may see in Lenin's proposals a deep insight into necessary requisites for a revolution or a deep contempt for the working classes" (Halsall).

Linda Stern, a member in the 1970s of the October League, a Marxist Leninist organization in the U.S., testifies in her unpublished memoir to how 20th-century followers created an authoritarian organization. The October League collapsed suddenly after trying to foist on its members uncritical support of the Cultural Revolution in Maoist China and the Pol Pot regime in Cambodia, a few months before revelations of "the killing fields." Stern writes, in retrospect, about the October League,

> Not only was leadership taking incorrect positions, but it also became clear that an organization built around such a hierarchical model of leadership, strict discipline, and secrecy was unnecessary and a bit silly. Lenin's model made no sense at all in an open society where there was relative freedom of expression of political ideas. An organization run by something other than a democratic process became totally untenable, unworkable, and ultimately morally unacceptable to most of us[64]. (22)

In the end, Stern writes, she felt "betrayed by people I'd chosen to follow, but uncomfortable, too, about my willingness to go along so uncritically. I had to ask why it had been so comfortable for me to join a highly structured organization." On the other hand, she says, "I'll never regret my involvement. I'm glad I was part of the movement against racism in Boston. The networks of people that formed around this time are still in existence…" (23).

A second conclusion is more of an observation. When we become part of liberation struggles and join with other people, we care about the democratic and egalitarian values at play in our work together. In other words, we want to be part of an organization that has integrity; that practices its values internally, does not hold them merely as an idealized goal to be actualized in the greater world. These are matters that pertain to the struggle for justice in the maquiladoras that goes on in Mexico and also to our effort on this side of the border to be in solidarity with them. Austin Tan Cerca has been engaged since 1999 in that solidarity role. But what is this kind of solidarity? Since 1999 we have been defining it. We've had rich experiences, made new friends, spread information and awareness within the U.S., changed lives—our own—and delivered material aid. Another kind of product we might take credit for is, precisely, the model of solidarity that we have created. We are not a political party and we are not revolutionary. What we are doing is mysterious to the general public or to anyone who has not been

[64] Stern, who happens to be my first cousin and one year older, has participated in the creation of an interesting genre – political and personal autobiography, originally intended to be published collectively with memoirs of long-time friends—other women of her generation who traveled the same or parallel political paths.

involved. For most people on this side of the border the word solidarity does not register; it flies past the radar. But that's what we are—a solidarity organization. One productive way of defining ourselves has been to accept and define our strengths and limitations on this side of the border and to insist on a modus of operation appropriate to who we are, against the pressure of others' wishes and expectations—on this side of the border. We are not a tourist venue; we are not a research organization helping academics connect with fresh research subjects; we are not purveyors of news sources for the press. The trickiest determination we had to make came during the national debate on CAFTA, the Central American Free Trade Agreement, before it came to a Congressional vote in September 2005. Are we a venue for Mexican workers' testimony against free trade for the edification of a Congressman? If we are, it is so much more complicated than we thought, that now that we know the pitfalls, we would probably not attempt such a project again.

The story starts with our attempt to collaborate with Lesley Ramsey, director of the Texas Fair Trade Coalition, a small, enthusiastic, under funded scion of a national NGO, tasked with supporting *fair* trade and opposing *free* trade— NAFTA, and more recently, CAFTA, for example. The Texas Fair Trade Coalition (or TFTC) mobilized considerable resource and wit to persuade key Congress people in Texas to vote against this latest government-sponsored free trade project. One Texas Congressional Representative whom TFTC targeted was newly elected Al Green (Houston-D). Lesley Ramsey had been on an ATCF's delegation and felt the workers, with their experience of NAFTA, might offer eloquent opposition to CAFTA. Together we made a plan to take Green on a mini-delegation on April 23, 2005, to show him the impact of NAFTA. Congressmen always have busy schedules, but this one finally agreed to go. Contributing to his decision was the invitation from John Patrick, Texas regional director of the United Steel Workers of America (USWA), stationed in Houston. As USWA representative, Patrick had contributed to Green's campaign chest and had even mentioned a border sojourn as a prerequisite of the union's support. When we received Green's affirmative decision, we celebrated. "U.S. Congressman meets Mexican maquiladora worker!" "What a photo opportunity!" "What an historic occasion," we exclaimed. As planning developed, we agreed on Reynosa, across from McAllen, as our destination, organizing

territory of Maria Elena García. Green and his staff decided to bring with them AFL-CIO leaders from McAllen, Houston, and Austin. A member of the Black Congressional Congress, he also would bring representatives from the NAACP and LULAC (League of United Latin American Citizens). ATCF designated Josefina Castillo as our representative and as official translator for the delegation.

As it turned out, the Congressman was a fairly attentive listener. He asked questions and took care to get what he had come for. But somewhere in the early part of the one-day trip, he had to appeal to Josefina for help. Many of his entourage were bi-lingual, particularly the union men from McAllen, and did not seem interested in the stated purpose of the trip or the agenda the CFO had designed. They were interrupting, taking over the translating, going off on tangents, and Green wasn't getting the story. They wandered off from the delegation, or interrupted it with side conversations. At one point they were at the brink of sabotaging the whole thing with a shopping expedition. Green never objected to their rudeness or gave a sign that he noticed it. He never called them to be on task. Josefina and Lesley managed to bring the delegation back on track. Then some of the delegates who had their own cars left. They had been part of the trip for only two hours. They did not say goodbye or thank you. Maria Elena noticed and said later that she had assumed they would return to say goodbye. She added, "They didn't respect us and we don't like people who don't respect us. The workers are not at the disposal of whoever wants to come to the border and take advantage of us."

The trip served its purpose, but narrowly. Though CAFTA passed in the House on July 28, 2005 (by a tiny, coerced margin, 217 to 215), Congressman Green voted against it. However, everyone concerned—from TFTC, ATCF, and CFO—was mortified. Relationships were strained and not all of them repaired. In lieu of a debriefing and evaluation meeting, emails passed back and forth in Austin. Josefina remarked that ATCF had lost control of the delegation that we had been instrumental in setting up. "We facilitated a situation that went against our own guidelines." Lesley Ramsey, caught between incompatible organizational models—"the patriarchal culture," on one hand, of "hierarchical" organizations, including those that provide funding for TFTC; and, on the other hand, "actual community based, non-hierarchical models of cultural change as well as political change—like AFSC [the American Friends Service

Committee] and CFO." It felt like a fiasco to those groups who had organized the trip. We couldn't maintain our priority of attention to human relationships within the protocols of politics. As a solidarity organization our idea of professional courtesy was different than that of the politicians. Their culture seemed to contain no courtesy at all. The politics within the politics, as someone quipped, had hijacked solidarity. Lesley wrote "if we try it again in the future, [I hope] Josefina and I will be able to lay out (and enforce) some ground rules…" This seems unlikely. Josefina and I quickly planned and took a trip to Reynosa, just to visit—to repair relationships.

This foray into politics was unique for us. More commonly we encounter academics that want to "borrow" our solidarity relationship as a research contact but do not want to participate in it. One such encounter earlier in our development became paradigmatic. At the time Theresa Van Hoy lived in San Antonio and taught both at the University of Texas, Austin, (Department of Latin American Studies) and the University of Houston (History). In Austin, she advised the senior thesis at UT of honor student Michelle Engert, who was also an enthusiastic and founding member of Austin Tan Cerca. The two had a transactional relationship, that is, they traded favors, engaged in professional courtesies. Van Hoy invited Engert, an undergraduate, to participate in a graduate conference in San Antonio; Engert gave her the CFO contact for a research trip to the border. Maria Elena García bore the brunt. The CFO organizer obligingly gave Van Hoy a tour of Reynosa. It included a stop at the garbage dump, a dramatic and graphic instance of the environmental and social impact of transnationals on a poor community. Serving the city's rapid industrial growth, the government had dug a big hole in a sandy area to remove material to mix cement for construction. Seeping water had filled the hole; it became a series of lagoons. The government then authorized the area for use as a dump, again serving the needs of Reynosa's growth. Waste exceeded the boundaries of the hole and began eating residences. Then the government decided to "clean" the mess and set fire to it. Accidentally, but not surprisingly, the fire burnt down homes. Just at that moment, while the heap was still smoking, Van Hoy, who is married to a Latin American and is bilingual, came by on her research junket. Bereft and outraged, residents who had lost homes crowded around. Would she save them? Would she write a letter to the mayor of the city in protest and demand restitution? Van Hoy had

walked into a situation that had nothing to do with her research, but being kind, she got involved. Of course she would write a letter for them, and she did. Now it was Maria Elena's turn to be furious. As a professional organizer, she saw the dump residents' anger as a ripe organizing moment, a time to figure out, for example, land issues—which are constitutional—and the underlying problem: government uses of land to serve industry, which generates mountains of waste, while ignoring and sabotaging peoples' needs. The next step would have been to create a strategy based on the already existing relationship the people had with government—as citizens—and thus put in motion a process of reinforcing their citizenship and claiming power. Instead the residents gave up agency and relied on the good-hearted professor from Texas. Austin Tan Cerca realized that we were responsible for creating this situation that had stolen an opportunity from Maria Elena, and from the people. The CFO had been willing to escort Van Hoy only because they thought she was an ATCF colleague. They mistook her for a solidarity partner. Their graciousness had backfired. It had been counter productive to solidarity and to organizing. In addition, it had taken time they could not afford. (Julia estimated once that they receive more than 25 requests a year for interviews from the press or researchers. They are not eager to comply because of the time it takes away from their work.) Austin Tan Cerca decided then to be careful about trading our relationship with the CFO as a favor to the university hierarchy or to support research. The caution extended further. We were defining ourselves as a solidarity organization, which is not a research organization, even thought many of us are academics who do research. This was a chance for us to see ATCF as a professional organization. We affirmed that our professional protocols, as a solidarity organization, do not coincide with political or academic custom.

When another academic request came up, we were ready. At a conference at the University, a former ATCF delegate introduced me to history professor John McKiernan-González (who has special research interests in the border). He in turn, introduced me to a protégé, a sunburned young anthropology student from the University of Arizona. The latter was doing a research project on the whole length of the U.S.-Mexico border. He was using an unusual methodology. Eschewing finances and not having any, he planned to bicycle the length of the border, stopping on either side, immersing himself in

communities and conducting interviews. The slow pace of transport would put him closer to his material. He didn't have any connections along the Texas part of the border and that's where Austin Tan Cerca could be useful to him; however, I told him, we are a solidarity organization, not a research organization. In person, I told him no. He persisted by email. I asked him what value his research might have for our Mexican partners, the workers, and why we should support it? He did not reply[65].

[65] There is, however, a growing literature that criticizes service learning and the ways in which such academic projects can exploit the subjects they study.

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VITA

Judith Rosenberg was born in Boston, MA on April 21, 1943, the daughter of Harriet Amy Stern and Robert Hays Rosenberg. She graduated in 1961 from Walden School, a private high school in New York City, and in 1968 from Columbia University School of General Studies with an Art History major. She then worked for 10 years at the New York headquarters of Olivetti Corporation of American, in secretarial and communications positions, and left in 1978 to open her own studio in Brooklyn, NY as a promotional writer and commercial artist. Her favorite accounts were a small CAD-CAM software company and *Shofar*, "the [national] magazine for Jewish kids on the move." In 1985-88, she met incarcerated and homeless people, while volunteering for an NGO, The Healing Foundation. They inspired her to begin working in community-based education at Carroll Gardens Neighborhood Women, first as a recruiter for the Brooklyn College entrance program for older women and later as an adult education instructor. The experience inspired her, in turn, to seek a credential in graduate school that might be useful to improving public education for poor people. She earned a Masters Degree in English at the State University of New York at Albany, while working as a supermarket clerk and a museum docent at Hancock Shaker Village, completing it in August 1997. A few days later she moved to Austin to begin work on a Ph.D. in English at the University of Texas. While studying she has volunteered for the American Friends Service Committee, locally and regionally, taught in community adult education and in the UT Rhetoric and Composition program, including the Undergraduate Writing Center as a Consultant and a Substantial Writing Component Course as a Mentor.

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