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Reflections on a Dance

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In *We Are in This Dance Together: Gender, Power, and Globalization at a Mexican Garment Firm*, Nancy Plankey-Videla elucidates how changing international markets impacted the re-organization of factory work at a Mexican garment firm she calls Moctezuma. Plankey-Videla captures how shifts in global capitalism directly impacted workers at Moctezuma, and in particular, the women who represented 85% of the firm's workers. Faced with increasing international pressure, managers at Moctezuma implemented changes in manufacturing practices that brought the firm in line with Japanese-style lean production. These changes appeared to be successful, as workers continued to meet management's goals in terms of quality and productivity. Still, in a context of ongoing struggles, continued re-organization of production, and changing support from the state – to name a few of the issues plaguing Moctezuma – women workers eventually led a call for action and mobilized to strike. Plankey-Videla's *We Are in This Dance Together* provides readers with an analysis of the interrelated global, state, and local factors that led to the activism and resistance of women workers, and, in the end, to the closing of Moctezuma.

In the spirit of a symposium that enables interaction between Plankey-Videla and her reviewers, in this essay I ask the author to reflect on her work as an ethnographer at Moctezuma,

the women she worked alongside with, and on the industrial development of Mexico since her time in the field. I thank her in advance for her comments and insights and for providing reviewers with responses to our queries as part of this symposium.

Over the years, the changes in production made at Moctezuma changed women workers' relationships to their work and to each other. Women held different roles at work where they were expected to meet different production demands. While thinking about the lives of these women workers, I thought about the similarities and differences among them. The women shared a collective dual identity around being mothers and workers, which provided them agency, and ultimately drove their demand for dignity and respect in the firm. The women workers were of different ages, held different marital statuses, had different numbers of children, and some held other jobs outside of Moctezuma. Still, as I read through the pages of the book I wondered about the hierarchies that may have taken shape among the women workers. In particular, I thought about the interactions that may have occurred around racial/ethnic identities. Indeed, the myth of a racial democracy in Mexico and other countries across Latin America has dominated normative ideas about racial/ethnic equality. The author observes that one of the women that she worked alongside, Elena, had dark skin and indigenous features. Elena worked at Moctezuma in order to pay off the land on which her home was built. Her home was "a ten-foot, corrugated cardboard and metal shack with no running water, sewer connection, or electricity" (99). Interestingly, in chapter 4, the author writes that "Elena's dark skin and high cheekbones, combined with the metallic crowns on her front teeth, marked her as poor and indigenous, an outsider even among working-class women. Her lack of status in the group freed her from following group norms" (111). With this in mind, I wonder whether there were divisions that took shape at Moctezuma around race/ethnic identities? That is, did racial/ethnic identities affect women's relationships in their collective action at Moctezuma?

With the passage of time, researchers are afforded the opportunity to reflect on their experiences in the field. Researchers are able to think back on the changes that have taken place in the spaces and communities they were once a part of, and they can think back on the people that they grew to know, and the organizations they were a part of throughout the years. As we continue to see the changing effects of globalization and the power dynamics that impact the everyday lived realities of workers, I thought about some of the author's concluding remarks. In the final chapter, Plankey-Videla writes about development in the age of globalization, and asks whether Mexico is doomed to serve only as a source of cheap labor on the global assembly line.

Given the experience of Moctezuma and the present crisis in the apparel industry, it is easy to be pessimistic. This case has shown that development entails more than firm upgrading. But it has also

demonstrated that state policies matter in shaping the possibilities of industrial development and constraining worker organization. The lesson of Moctezuma's demise should not be about the failure of the high-road option to development; rather, it points to the importance of state involvement in blocking low-road options and facilitating industrial upgrading based on high wages and skill (204).

Indeed, Plankey-Videla's analysis highlights the complexity of macro, meso, and micro challenges coming together in a Mexican garment factory. The workers themselves were able to identify these challenges and found ways to address them as they demanded respect and dignity as workers in the apparel industry. Given that almost 15 years have passed since the author conducted fieldwork at Moctezuma, I wonder how the apparel industry has changed in Mexico. Has the state responded to the changing global economy and, in this way, stimulated the kind of industrial development and upgrading in Mexico that the author called for?

Finally, I appreciated the author's honesty and openness as a feminist ethnographer. She did not shy away from identifying the complexities of who she was, or her relationship to the women she was working with side by side on a daily basis—whether that work was taking place in the production line, while on strike, or as a mother sharing the same concerns that other women had when it came to their roles outside of work. Plankey-Videla was also very clear about noting the privileges that defined her life when compared to those of the women factory workers. Some of these privileges, in one way or another, at times, connected to the author's relationship with management at Moctezuma. In the end, she did not address those issues in an appendix at the end of the book, but rather noted them throughout the manuscript. I think that this is something that researchers can take away from *We Are in This Dance Together* – the value of honestly acknowledging the researcher's positionality in relation to that of her subjects – in this case, the women workers at Moctezuma. Likewise, the book led me to reflect on something that I do not think that we are taught to think about or acknowledge sufficiently as researchers, which is that there is a certain amount of emotional labor that we experience while in the field. I finished the book wanting to know how the author might respond to this observation: did she recognize emotional labor in her own fieldwork, and what advice would she share with junior researchers that are about to embark on their own research projects?

This symposium has provided reviewers with the space to direct some of their comments and questions regarding *We Are in This Dance Together* to the book's author. As many of us think about the ways that globalization continues to affect markets and policies of nations, states, and local economies, we also reflect on the workers that continue to challenge inequitable distributions of power. *We Are in This Dance Together* speaks to these issues by illuminating

the ways in which women workers' agency, resistance, and a collective call for dignity and respect mobilized factory workers against global, state, and local systems of power at a Mexican garment firm.