



Introduction:

Review Symposium on Nancy Plankey-Videla's *We Are in This Dance Together: Gender, Power and Globalization at a Mexican Garment Firm*

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Plankey-Videla's book, *We Are in This Dance Together*, is a tour du force, having won the National Women's Studies Association's 2012 Sara A. Whaley book prize and the 2013 Best Book on Globalization Award by the Global Division of the Society for the Study of Social Problems. Plankey-Videla conducts a feminist ethnography of a high-end men's suit manufacturer in Mexico, exploring its transition from a piece rate work system to team production. After working at the factory for only a few months, Plankey-Videla ends up participating in, and documenting, a factory strike led by women workers. The aftermath of the strike results in women losing their jobs, being harassed by management, corrupt union officials, and labor authorities, and being exposed to violent governor-sanctioned police actions. The book documents how the women's identities change, as they experience a shift from a familial work culture (when they labored under the piece rate system) to a motherist work culture (when the workers shifted over to teamwork). The motherist ideology prioritized female workers as mothers first, but also as workers. During the strike, women shifted their identities from mothers who worked to workers who were mothers.

I organized an Author Meets Critic Session on the book at the 2014 Southwestern Social Science Association (SSSA) in San Antonio, Texas. Because I do work in sociology of gender and had gone to Texas A&M University, where Dr. Plankey-Videla joined the faculty at the end of my graduate school years, I was excited about the opportunity to convene this conversation. The session featured four critics. Three of the analyses that follow in these pages are from participants at the Author Meets Critic session. I contacted Dr. Morales and Dr. Murga because both of them do work on labor and the working lives of Latinas, with a focus on women who live on the U.S.-Mexico border. Dr. Bair agreed to participate after Dr. Plankey-Videla suggested her as a critic whose work on gender and globalization made her an ideal fit for the session. Additionally, Dr. Mary Romero participated as a critic in the SSSA session, though she was unable to contribute to this subsequent JWSR symposium.

As the four critics at the SSSA Author Meets Critic session noted many contributions from Plankey-Videla's work, I will restrict myself to three. First, Plankey-Videla is self-reflexive of her position as an outsider (not a Mexican woman) and her position as an insider (a new mother) during the entire study. Second, although the book points out the usual gender differences within the workplace (e.g. men earn more than women; men are promoted to upper management, while women are promoted only to mid-level management, etc.), Plankey-Videla focused upon the micro practices "to see how larger power dynamics affect the everyday lives of the workers—especially those of women" (57), which leads to a much more richly nuanced study.

Third, Plankey-Videla contextualizes the shift from Taylorism to teamwork and what this shift meant to the female workers. Piece rate work was seen as working for themselves. However, the shift to teamwork promoted the formation of a familial-like or motherist ideology. She notes the ways in which the factory was set up under the modular production system and the resulting internal team conflicts between predominately female workers, as some were promoted to the role of team leader. She demonstrates how the company promoted ideas of women as mothers or potential mothers, but also how the shift to modular, team-based production entailed a new focus on leadership skills. The contradictory result was that the company's own policies, and the women's response to them, ended up "reproducing and resisting gender subordination" (103). In a sense the company, by shifting to teams, taught women the tools to strike.

As the convener of the original conversation, I am pleased to see this expanded symposium on *We Are in This Dance Together* featured in JWSR, and I would like to thank Nancy Plankey-Videla, Jennifer Bair, Maria Cristina Morales, and Aurelia Lorena Murga for their participation in the scholarly exchange that inspired it.