Journal of American Studies of Turkey
12(2000) : 91-92

Book Review

Beautiful Flowers of the Maquiladora by Norma Iglesias(1997) 128 pages $15.95.Available from: University of Texas Press

Larry J. Estrada

The book *Beautiful Flowers of the Maquiladora* was originally published in Spanish as *La flor mas bella de la maquiladora.* The book contains the extensive research of the author, Norma Iglesias Prieto, that summarizes the testimonies and narratives of over fifty Mexican women who work within maquiladoras and struggle on a daily basis to eke out a living for themselves and their families along the U.S. Mexico border.

Maquiladoras represent manufacturing plants which are situated in Mexico within close proximity to the U.S. Mexico border. The characteristics of maquiladoras can be described as those manufacturing plants established in Mexico that.

a. are U.S. subsidiaries or contract affiliates under Mexican or foreign ownership;
b. are dedicated to the assembly components, the processing of primary materials, or both, producing either intermediate or final products;
c. import most or all primary materials and components from the United States, and re-export the end products of the manufacturing process to the United States;
d. are labor intensive

The maquiladora system was initially designed in the 1960's and 70's as part of an extensive border industrialization project at the behest of the U.S. and Mexican governments and were intended to serve both the labor needs of Mexico and American corporate needs in terms of component assembly work, transportation costs and a cheap consistent labor force. Initially, touted to Mexicans by their government as a way of participating in the global market economy, the maquiladora system soon dispelled the notion that Mexican wages, benefits and standard of living would be improved through the creation of such a system

Corporations with their corporate offices located in the U.S., Japan, Germany and Korea have created massive assembly processing centers which have largely benefitted by the cheap, plentiful and expendable labor supply of Mexican female laborers who have in many cases migrated from the central and southern regions of Mexico to attain work unavailable in ther home areas. Many have been verbally offered economic incentives and the specter of an independent life style for their relocation to the northern "frontera".

"El norte" for many years has held out the promise of economic self-sufficiency, security and higher wages for Mexican laborers coming from economically depressed areas in the Republic of Mexico. Relocation to the northern frontera to many represents one step closer to entry into the United States and at minimum participation within the border

economy. Extended family networks across borders and contact with Mexican and Mexican-American family members and friends living within the United States and along the U.S. Mexico border make such a decision to migrate both feasible and attractive.

The United States, long dependent upon Mexican males for the success of American agro-production and the harvesting of crops, has turned to females within the maquiladora sector to largely stave off labor organization, unionization, work shut-downs and demands for better wages and living conditions. As narrated within the Prieto book, maquiladora supervisors have often been surprised and countered by the assertive and organizational abilities of young women who have demanded better working and living conditions within the maquiladora system

In many respects Prieto's work projects a human face and voice upon a global phenomenon which to a large degree is spoken about in anonymous, economic terminology within the international market place. The book provides compelling testimonies which describe the often times dehumanizing, controlling and demeaning structure of the maquiladora system. Aspects of sexual abuse, alienation, repetitive and physically disabling tasks and assignments as well as management threats to their personal safety and security are recounted by women who chose to speak out in Prieto's book. Furthermore, the book not only describes the work place conditions of maquiladora workers but provides keen insights into their social, familial and personal lives while reflecting upon their own human aspirations and hopes for the future.

Sub themes within the book also speak to the changes brought about within the traditional familial structure of Mexico due to the maquiladora system and the prospect of deteriorating social and communal roles as a consequence. It is interesting to note that the widely publicized and sensationalized murders of young maquiladora workers in and around the city of Juarez, Mexico over the past ten years have been increasingly attributed to the change in social and familial patterns brought about through women employed within the maquiladoras.

Prieto's work in its own way is monumental in challenging the primacy of economic integration theory and those paradigms which extol the benefits of neoliberal policies. With the expansion of NAFTA, GATT, the European Union and many other global economic alliances that seek to integrate first and third world economies, more attention is needed as to how these economic ventures will impact the ordinary lives of workers and their families. The Prieto work in this respect provides a literary template and model for the type of research and investigation that is required to gauge the effectiveness and the human aspects of globalization.