

# The Tortilla Behemoth

## Sexualized Despotism and Women's Resistance in a Transnational Mexican Tortilla Factory

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A continuación entraron en pláticas acerca de la creación y la formación de nuestra primera madre y padre. De maíz amarillo y de maíz blanco se hizo su carne; de masa de maíz se hicieron los brazos y las piernas del hombre. Únicamente masa de maíz entró en la carne de nuestros padres, los cuatro hombres que fueron creados. (Popol Vuh cited in Recinos [1960])

Next they entered into discussions about the creation and formation of our first mother and father. Their flesh was made of yellow corn and white corn. Their arms and legs were made from corn dough. Only corn dough entered in the flesh of our parents, the four men that were created. (Author's translation of Popol Vuh's statement)

Tortilla making has a long and rich history within Mexico because of its ties to indigenous culture. Women have historically been the primary producers of this

staple food. Although tortillas are most commonly made in the home or bought on the street, the last twenty-five years have witnessed a large-scale industrialization of tortilla production. The explosion of tortillas into the U.S. market has revolutionized tortilla manufacturing. Food giants such as Taco Bell would not be able to operate without mass-produced tortillas. In the United States, the high-volume demand from supermarkets and the fast-food industry results in a mass-produced product manufactured, predominantly, by transnational corporations. In Mexico, small tortillerías still dominate the market. However, this scenario is also rapidly changing. Tortimundo,<sup>1</sup> the Mexican transnational corporation under study, is trying to shift tortilla production from occurring in the home and in small tortillerías to being mass-produced. The transformation of the tortilla industry in both the United States and Mexico is connected to corporate globalization and has resulted in the erosion of Mexican culture and the exploitation of women. The company has taken advantage of the eroded rights of workers to enforce a coercive labor regime that takes explicit control of women's bodies.

In this chapter I examine the working conditions of women who work for one of Tortimundo's wholly owned subsidiaries, Hacienda Tijuana (Mexico).<sup>2</sup> I argue that state policies in the United States and Mexico create conditions that allow managers at Hacienda Tijuana to sustain coercive labor practices. These policies include militarization of the U.S.-Mexico border, implementation of the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA), and lack of enforcement of labor provisions under the Mexican constitution. Furthermore, managers create a hypersexualized and racialized work environment by pitting women workers against one another to maintain shop floor control. Yet, these women are not mere passive victims on the shop floor. Their collective and individual resistance struggles make it a bearable work environment and shape the nature of managerial control.

### HACIENDA TIJUANA

Don Enrique Hernandez's lucrative tortilla manufacturing operations grew out of his corn flour empire. Tortimundo has 80 percent of the corn flour market share in Mexico. According to the company's senior vice-president of manufacturing, opening tortilla production facilities in Mexico seemed an impossibility in the 1970s and 1980s because "families would have their girls go to the corner to buy fresh tortillas or make them at home. Nobody would have bought packaged tortillas." In the early 1990s, though, the idea of opening tortilla manufacturing plants in Mexico seemed to have tremendous potential due to NAFTA, modern Mexico, and the rapid rise of the maquila industry.<sup>3</sup> Tortimundo's wholly owned subsidiary, Hacienda Tijuana, opened nine tortilla manufacturing plants all over Mexico, and its corn and wheat flour operations total twenty-seven plants throughout the country.

Hacienda Tijuana has had enormous success in selling their tortillas to the maquila sector and other industries. Every day, thousands of tortillas go to the

lunchrooms of the maquila industry with hopes of changing the Mexican palate. The operations manager at Hacienda Tijuana commented, "People are eating our product in the maquilas, and they are getting to know us and like us. We are changing their minds about tortillas. We are proving that our tortillas are just as good as the ones from the street."

Located in the center of a lower-middle-class neighborhood surrounded by maquiladoras, Hacienda Tijuana employs 140 production workers. The production manager tells me that the building was not intended to be a factory, and that they have had to undergo numerous adjustments to make it work. As a result, there is very poor ventilation, and it is extremely hot. According to U.S. standards, there are several health and safety violations. First, many of the machines do not have side covers, and open flames are in plain view. This contributes both to the heat in the factory and to numerous minor burn injuries reported by workers. Second, the cooking oil spilled onto the floor is not frequently cleaned up, and it traps small insects in the cracks of the flooring. And, third, although workers wear hair nets, they do not wear back braces or ear plugs to protect them from noise.

Workers are employed in one of three departments: warehouse, trucking, and production. The production department is the largest part of the factory. Women work almost exclusively on the line, although there are a couple of female machine operators. Men work exclusively in trucking, warehouse, and machine operation. According to managers, over 90 percent of the workers come from somewhere other than Baja, California. Of the 140 production workers, who range from 18 to 45 years of age, 72 percent are women and only 28 percent are men. All workers at Hacienda Tijuana are from Mexico, and most are single women with no family in the area.

For many, Hacienda Tijuana represents a more stable employment opportunity than other jobs in the area. Many of the women I interviewed were former maquila workers. They left the maquilas because of long days, seven-day work weeks, and the instability of the industry in bad economic times. At the Tijuana plant, workers earn an average of 86 pesos (U.S.\$9.20) per day.<sup>4</sup> They have a six-day work week and, although they receive paid vacations, their health insurance benefits are meager.

Hacienda Tijuana has a loose managerial structure. The operations manager regularly reports to the corporate office and is in charge of overseeing all aspects of production and quality control. Under him, a production manager oversees the daily operation of the factory. The warehouse manager is in charge of sales and overseeing the truck drivers. The top leadership structure also includes supervisors and line leaders. Supervisors (all men) report to each of their department heads. Although line leaders (mostly women) lead the assembly line on a given day, they have no real authority as the position is usually determined on the basis of those who arrive at work first, rather than through a promotion system. Only the production, operations, and warehouse managers and supervisors have decisionmaking power. All of the managers are men, and all of them have some affiliation with the Tortimundo family.<sup>5</sup>

## FACTORY REGIME

### *Sexualized and Racialized Despotism*

In the *Politics of Production*, Burawoy (1985) explains the shift from despotic regimes to hegemonic regimes, and finally to hegemonic despotism. Despotic regimes are coercive by nature, and are founded on workers' dependence on wage labor. In such regimes, wages are tied to performance in the workplace. Hegemonic regimes are characterized by consent instead of coercion. External intervention and regulation by the state are responsible for the shift in labor regimes. Internal labor markets and the state contribute to the sustainability of a hegemonic regime.

Hacienda Tijuana incorporates components of despotism and hegemony, but it leans more heavily toward despotism. Much like Burawoy, I argue that the state plays a critical role in shop floor politics. In the case of Hacienda Tijuana, the state gives managers the tools to enforce coercion rather than consent. I also argue that race and gender are produced at the point of production and are not merely external factors. This assertion is consistent with the analyses of Lee (1998) and Salzingger (2003), who argue that managerial hiring practices create gendered subjectivities on the shop floor.

Hacienda Tijuana is governed by what I am calling a sexualized and racialized despotism. It is sexualized because women workers in the plant work in a sexually charged environment in which male managers make advances and ask for sexual favors. Most of the women I interviewed felt as if they had to flirt with management or lose their jobs. It is racialized because male managers pit lighter- and darker-skinned women against one another. Lighter-skinned and younger women get more attention from management than older and darker-skinned women. This creates a situation on the shop floor where many women feel compelled to outdo one another in flirtatious games and in productivity. At the same time, the character of the local labor market, influenced by both Mexican economic development policies and U.S. immigration policies, creates a situation where there are many single mothers who need stable jobs. Unemployment is rising because of the instability of the maquila industry. In 2001 there were 1,235 maquiladora establishments in Baja, California, compared to only 888 in 2003. Employment in this sector in Mexico as a whole also fell (INEGI 2003, 2004). Whereas production workers in the overall maquiladora sector in Tijuana earn roughly U.S.\$1.37 per hour (STPS 2003),<sup>6</sup> production workers at Hacienda Tijuana earn an average of U.S.\$1.15 per hour. Even though the hourly wage at Hacienda Tijuana is three times Mexico's minimum wage, it does not allow women to buy the product that they produce. Indeed, since Hacienda-brand bagged supermarket tortillas cost U.S.\$0.96, women in the factory would have to spend nearly one hour's salary to buy them. Many of the women I interviewed indicated that on their salary they are able to afford fresh produce, but they eat meat only two or three times a week. It is important to note that real wages have been declining in Mexico since the passage of NAFTA (Shalken 2001, 245), contributing to a further reduction of

women's purchasing power. Yet, even then, these women valued job stability over higher wages. Hacienda Tijuana provides jobs that will not move offshore.

I argue that the regime is despotic because managers discipline or fire women who directly or indirectly challenge their sexual advances. The lack of alternatives available to women in Tijuana forces them to sell their labor power with little power to negotiate with their employers over their working conditions. The Mexican government does a very poor job of enforcing the provisions against sex discrimination and other labor protection provisions under Mexican Federal Labor Law (which explicitly prohibits sex discrimination). In two different reports, Human Rights Watch found that maquiladoras consistently engaged in sex discrimination by asking women to take routine pregnancy tests (Human Rights Watch 1996, 1998). This lack of enforcement of labor law provisions makes it easier for managers at Hacienda Tijuana to enforce shop floor control through coercion.

### *Gender and Race on the Shop Floor*

Tortilla manufacturing at Hacienda Tijuana is constructed as women's work. I asked the production manager at Hacienda Tijuana why the company hires more women than men. He responded: "Haven't you read all of the studies that prove that women are better suited for assembly line work? Women are more patient. They can stand around and do this work for hours. Men are impatient. They constantly have to do something different. Women are simply better for the job. Besides, producing tortillas has been in the hands of women for centuries."

Many of the women tend to agree with this analysis. Rosa Marra said, "I see it as women's work. Tortilla making is a tradition that women have in their blood. It doesn't make a difference if now we are doing it in a factory as well as in our homes." Hacienda Tijuana's recruitment literature is also geared explicitly toward women: "Looking for women, stable work, well paid." What is most interesting, however, is the fact that tortilla production at the Hacienda Los Angeles plant is constructed as men's work. At this factory, 75 percent of the workers are men. The managers there argue that tortilla production is men's work because it is heavy labor that involves working with many complicated machines. In terms of the local labor market, the marginalized status of men at Hacienda Los Angeles is similar to that of women at Hacienda Tijuana. The hiring of men in L.A. and of women in Tijuana is not simply a coincidence. Both groups provide cheaper labor in their respective areas. Similar to Salzingger (2003), I found that managers had a vested interest in constructing gender according to their specific needs on the different shop floors.

I asked the warehouse manager if men ever felt left out or marginalized at Hacienda Tijuana, given that so much energy was focused on women workers. He said, "The men in the factory are proud of their work. They are not tortilla makers, and they understand this. They also understand that the work they do is critical to the entire operation, and without them there would be no tortillas."

When one compares wages, it is easy to understand why the men do not feel left out of the process. Machine operators and warehouse workers, all of whom are men, earn a full two dollars per day more than the line workers, all of whom are women. When I asked the production manager about this differential, he replied, "Well yes, the men do earn more. Their job requires more hard labor or technical expertise with machines. Besides, many of them have families to support." I responded by asking, "Don't the single mothers also have families to support?" He replied, "Sure, but they do not have to support very many people, only themselves and their small children." His comments reflect the notion of a family wage system. The managers argue that men have more people to support than women. Even though the managers know that women workers in the factory are single mothers, they insist that their income is supplemental or that they have fewer people to feed. This is, of course, untrue. Although some women I interviewed had small children only, many also had older children, and a couple had to support grandchildren in addition to their own children.

Workers at Hacienda Tijuana are divided by skin color. As I mentioned above, lighter-skinned women are often preferred by managers. I witnessed managers and supervisors routinely walking around the shop floor. They would often stand behind the women, hug them, tickle them, and kiss them on the cheek. Many of the women workers looked uncomfortable. Maria Jimenez, a production worker, said: "It's part of the work culture. If we want to keep our jobs we have to go along with it. I don't like it. It makes me feel demoralized, but what can I do?" Women are caught in multiple oppressions (skin color, poverty, and gender) that intersect at the point of production. Because these women are poor, their job security is essential. If they are lighter skinned they have better job security because they are given more attention, but they also have to endure more sexual harassment. If they are darker skinned, they face less sexual harassment but have less job security. Although sexual harassment makes all of these women feel uncomfortable, they are forced to compete for attention. I asked the production manager what he thinks about how women respond to his advances. He said, "It doesn't matter. In Tijuana we have a very unique situation. There are many single women, and many single mothers. These women need a stable job, and since they do not have husbands, they do whatever we want." Managers at the plant feel very confident in their actions because of women's vulnerable position in the local labor market.

The women made it very clear to me that sexual harassment is not limited to the work day. Managers and supervisors have also harassed women after hours. Lupe said, "One time a supervisor told me that I had to go to dinner with him. I told him that I could not, that I had to go home and feed my children. He said that if I didn't he would have to let me go. I was terrified of losing my job, so I went. I don't want to talk about what happened after that." I asked her why she did not try to find other work. She replied, "Despite the advances, this is a good job, a stable job. Before coming here I worked in a garment maquila. There, I was not paid for over three weeks. The working conditions were terrible, and I was

screamed at. I cannot afford to wait three weeks for my paycheck. Here, at least I have friends. The women have similar experiences and so we bond."

Several of the women at Hacienda Tijuana did not feel the same way that Lupe did. Some did not feel a common bond with other women. Gloria said, "Sure, we all have some common experiences. But the younger, lighter-skinned women get more attention. This is difficult for the rest of us because we are forced to work harder while those women have it easier on the line. I don't mean to sound like I want the manager's attention. It's just that when they [the supervisors] like you, you are guaranteed a stable job. Sometimes I am afraid of not getting attention, because maybe they will fire me." Supervisors at Hacienda Tijuana are aware of this dynamic and are particularly adept at fostering favoritism since they have the most contact on the shop floor. I asked Oscar, a supervisor, what he thought of the competition between women for his attention. He responded, "A little competition is always a good motivator. We feel it keeps productivity levels up. We try to be fair when we are giving women compliments, so that they all feel good about themselves. But you know women. They can never get enough." Why does management at Hacienda Tijuana use the sexualization of women as the main form of coercion? The answer has to do with the complex relationship between state policies and the local labor market. To this issue I turn next.

### *State Policies on the Shop Floor*

The multifaceted relations between the U.S. state and the Mexican state play an important, though indirect, role in shaping shop floor politics at Hacienda Tijuana. Specifically, U.S. immigration policies and Mexican economic development policies and practices interact in such a way as to allow managers in the Tijuana plant to maintain a regime of sexualized and racialized despotism.

The United States and Mexico have had a long and complex relationship negotiating foreign capital and emigration. Over the last hundred years, Mexico has fluctuated between economic nationalism with complete state sovereignty and the attraction of foreign capital, on the one hand, and privatization of certain national industries, on the other (Caulfield 1998, 18). The United States, for its part, has fluctuated between opening and closing its doors to Mexican immigrants. The Bracero Program, Operation Wetback,<sup>7</sup> the Immigration Reform and Control Act (IRCA), and Operation Gatekeeper are examples of this fluctuation (Bank Muñoz 2004a, 2004b). However, in the last thirty years, Mexico has maintained a consistent process of export-led development highlighted by Mexico's participation in the General Agreement on Trade and Tariffs (GATT) in 1983 and NAFTA in 1994. Both of these policies have situated Mexico firmly in neoliberal strategies, forcing Mexico to open its doors and to support a climate of foreign investment in Mexico.

Globalization has led to serious social problems in developing countries by increasing the "proletarianization" of indigenous and rural peoples who relied mainly on subsistence agriculture (Lee 1998). Studies also predicted that the

liberalization of corn prices would displace thousands of small farmers (Hinojosa-Ojeda and Robinson 1992, 73). The resulting shift from subsistence agriculture to wage labor has led to internal and external migration, deterioration of the culture, erosion of the countryside, and superexploitation of workers.

Because corn and tortillas are essential to the Mexican economy and diet, tortillas have long been subsidized by the Mexican government. Food agencies were created in postrevolutionary Mexico as part of the welfare state. These agencies, such as the *Compañía Nacional de Subsistencias Populares* (CONASUPO), ensured that producers were given a good price for their harvest and that staple foods, such as tortillas, were available to consumers at affordable prices (Ochoa 2000, 4).

From the mid-1980s onward, Mexico pursued a neoliberal strategy to end its economic problems. This included attracting foreign investment, opening Mexico to the world market, and rapid privatization. As a result, the operations of CONASUPO began rapidly to decline. Many of CONASUPO's industries were privatized and others were eliminated altogether. The elimination of price controls on corn forced CONASUPO to purchase imported corn at higher levels in order to continue subsidizing tortillas and other food products (Ochoa 2000). NAFTA has facilitated the importation of U.S. corn to Mexico. In fact, the United States is the largest producer and exporter of corn in the world, and 25 percent of the corn consumed in Mexico comes directly from the U.S. market (Ribeiro, *La Jornada*, January 17, 2005). After the passage of NAFTA and the complete dismantling of CONASUPO in 1996, the Mexican corn market was privatized and flooded by firms such as Arthur Daniels Midland (ADM) and Cargill-Monsanto (Mendoza 1996; Pujol 1996; Ribeiro, *La Jornada*, January 17, 2005; Torres 1996). The results have been disastrous. Not only have hundreds of thousands of Mexican corn farmers been displaced and migrated (Malkin, *New York Times*, March 27, 2005), but privatization also has taken a serious toll on the economy.

Many of the displaced corn farmers migrated to work in maquiladoras along the border or in large cities in the interior of Mexico. Others moved to work in the tortilla corn flour industry, which employs over 225,000 people (and is one of Mexico's largest industries). This was certainly the case for Margarita, a production worker at Hacienda Tijuana. "My family," she said, "has a long history in the corn industry. My entire family used to grow corn. In 1998 my father had to abandon the farm that we all grew up on. He could no longer compete with the cheap U.S. corn that was coming into Mexico. We [the children] moved to Tijuana to find maquila employment. I worked as a garment worker for two years, but then the factory closed. So that is how I came to work for Hacienda Tijuana."

Margarita is not the only worker who experienced such circumstances. Most of the women I interviewed said they had to migrate because there were no opportunities for their families in their home towns. In fact, maquila employment rose dramatically after the passage of NAFTA. In 1995 the industry employed 648,263 people; at its peak in 2000, it employed 1,291,232 (INEGI 2003; Pastor and Wise

2003). All but one of the women I interviewed had migrated to Tijuana with their husbands and small children. Half of these women came from rural areas, and the others came from small cities. Many had been planning on crossing the border with their families. However, because of U.S. immigration policies, such as Operation Gatekeeper, the women decided to stay in Tijuana with their children and to let their spouses cross alone. Operation Gatekeeper is a policy that was implemented in 1994. Its intent was to "restore integrity and safety to the San Diego border crossing." The initiative increased the number of border patrol agents from 980 in 1994 to 2,264 in 1998 (Immigration and Naturalization Service 1998). This policy did not stop immigration (as noted, although the women decided to stay in Tijuana, their partners continued to cross the border); it only made it harder for people to cross the border at relatively safe places, leading them to cross in more dangerous places such as the Arizona desert. Since its implementation, there have been over 200 deaths at the San Diego border crossing alone. Many of the women I interviewed were left as single mothers in Tijuana with no familial networks. Some of their spouses are missing, others are dead, and yet others cannot afford to bring their families to the United States. Rosa said, "I haven't been in communication with my husband for five years. When he crossed to the other side, our daughter was 6 months old. I stayed here in Tijuana without any family, waiting for him."

Mexican elites have been trying for many years to attract foreign capital to the border region in the name of development. The state has played an ambivalent role in this process. They have had to succumb to pressures by Mexican elites, the United States, and supranational institutions such as the IMF and the World Bank. U.S. corporations have had the most to gain from foreign investment in Mexico because they have been able to avoid many of the provisions protecting workers under the Mexican constitution. U.S. foreign capital along the border, along with restrictive immigration policies and the militarization of the border, has created a local labor market of single women, particularly single mothers. Hacienda Tijuana has been able to attract these single women into its factory because of the stability of the tortilla industry in comparison to maquilas. Since these women prize stable jobs above wages and other working conditions, managers and supervisors can be unscrupulous in their exploitation of women.

NAFTA—in combination with the liberalization of the corn market, the militarization of the U.S.–Mexico border, and the instability of the maquila industry (as it moves to Asia or other developing countries)—has created a system whereby capital is extremely mobile and flexible, while labor has become increasingly less mobile and workers have fewer options. On the one hand, the Mexican state is weak because it has succumbed to structural adjustment policies, and U.S. pressures are increasingly liberalizing its market. In significant ways, the Mexican economy historically has been, and continues to be, shaped by U.S. imperialism (González 2004). On the other hand, the Mexican state acts as a strong and powerful institution in relation to the regulation of poor women's bodies and lives. Such policies impact both the shop floor and the ability of managers to enforce coercion. I turn to this issue next.

**THE STATE, UNIONS, CONSTITUTIONAL RIGHTS, AND ENFORCEMENT**

Another way in which the state plays a role in giving Hacienda Tijuana managers the tools to maintain a despotic regime is through lack of enforcement of the Mexican constitution. On paper, this constitution is one of the most progressive in the world. Written in 1917 during the Mexican Revolution of 1910–1920, it affords workers unprecedented labor protections. Article 123, the provision that delineates workers' rights, includes minimum-wage standards, the right to form a union, nondiscrimination (including sexual harassment), health and safety, overtime pay, health insurance, and paid vacation, among other benefits. However, it is often not enforced. Hacienda Tijuana is located in a border zone aimed at attracting foreign capital. As Ong (1999) notes, border zones are often zones of graduated sovereignty. The border in Mexico is a place where the Mexican state gives up some of its sovereignty in order to attract foreign capital. This results in both a loosening of labor laws and a lack of enforcement of constitutional provisions. Many government officials turn a blind eye to such violations. Location in this zone benefits not just maquilas but national industries as well, because the latter receive some of the same benefits and compete with the maquilas.<sup>8</sup>

Hacienda Tijuana uses its advantageous location in the free trade zone to maintain a regime of sexualized despotism. The company has a very close relationship with national leaders and the local government. There is also a strong relationship between the union and the company. During my first visit to Hacienda Tijuana, I asked the production manager if there was a union in the factory. Looking at me suspiciously, he replied, "Yes and no. The CTM [Confederación de Trabajadores Mexicanos]<sup>9</sup> represents the factory in Monterrey [headquarters for Hacienda], and supposedly this union also has jurisdiction over the Tijuana factory, but not really. In any case, we like it this way because if anyone tries to start something I can show him that a union represents him. If anyone ever started making trouble and tried to get a union, I would kill them [signaled with a hand to the throat]. We are a business, not a charity, and I am the only one who controls these workers."

When I observed sexual harassment on the shop floor, I asked the women why they didn't file a grievance with their union. Most of them rolled their eyes at me. Marra said, "The union is not a union for workers. They are always on management's side. They are sympathizers of the same political party as the owners of the company, so they help each other out. We don't go to the local arbitration boards, because we know that the state will also protect the union and the company, since they helped them [the ruling political party] get into power." Ximena said, "There was a girl who worked with us, Juana was her name. She went to the union once to complain about the harassment. The very next day she was fired. What kind of confidence does that give us?" Managers at Hacienda Tijuana can count on the union siding with the company. They can count on the state siding with them. The women in the factory are forced by their economic circumstances to sell their labor power, and they are coerced by managers to flirt with them and to

perform sexual favors. Although there are constitutional provisions that supposedly protect them, they are not enforced. This leaves no buffer between women and the corporation. Furthermore, the economic instability of the area, owing to the cheaper production sought by maquilas in the interior of Mexico and other developing regions, limits the options for work in the surrounding maquilas.

**RESISTANCE**

Despite serious oppression on the shop floor at Hacienda Tijuana, the workers are not passive victims. They engage in acts of both collective and individual resistance. As indicated in my interviews with several managers, when the Tijuana plant opened in 1994 management at Hacienda headquarters in Mexico signed a contract with the CTM before the workers even started working at the factory. This collective bargaining agreement covers all employees in the factory, including the truck drivers. The contract is renewed every three years without worker input or knowledge of negotiations. Union leaders who are not part of the workforce negotiate contracts behind closed doors. According to the production manager, in 1996 a few production workers started talking about unionization during a particularly bad month in which five workers were injured on the job and management did nothing for them. When the workers threatened to unionize, the plant manager told them that they could not because they were already represented by the CTM. When the workers tried to contact their union to file a grievance against management, they were told that the union was based in Monterrey. Although there were many attempts to file a grievance, the union never responded to the workers. As a result, 50 percent of the workers in the factory participated in a walkout that lasted several days. When they returned to work, managers still had not met the workers' demands for better health and safety. Accordingly, many women workers left to go work in the maquila industry, which at that time offered better wages and benefits.

There has been no mass-scale worker movement inside the factory since that time, nor have attempts been made to organize an independent union. Josefina said, "It's not that we don't want an independent union. We do. We want a union that will fight for our rights. We don't want to live in constant fear. But we will have to be patient and wait to organize. Times have changed, and the situation for women workers is much more difficult today than eight years ago."

Nonetheless, workers do resist in both individual and collective ways. The women I interviewed cited various individual actions that they engage in to make the day pass faster. One example was provided by Marra: "I take many bathroom breaks during the day. This bothers the managers because they have to move someone from another part of the factory to keep my place on the assembly line while I go to the bathroom. I do this because it makes the day go faster. I get more chances to rest. They [managers] complain that I use the bathroom too much. What will they do? People have to use the bathroom." Taking bathroom breaks

is not uncommon among the women I interviewed. Many of them told me that they did the same thing, and that other women in the factory also engaged in this activity.

Women also viewed getting to work late as an act of resistance. They know that they will not be penalized for arriving late, so they take their time getting to work. Ximena and Rosa said, “Why should we give them [managers] an extra fifteen minutes of our sweat, when we get paid the same if we come on time or are fifteen minutes late? We are so busy that it is hard to get to work on time. This way we have a little extra time. We can’t leave the factory early, so we take advantage of the fact that we can come late.” Occasionally women will engage in spontaneous collective action inside of the factory: A small group will all take a break, drink water, or go to the bathroom at the same exact time. When this occurs managers slow down the machines for a few minutes until everyone is back in their places. However, this kind of action is rare.

Aside from the more general matter of having a legitimate union that represents their rights, the women in the factory were particularly interested in organizing around health and safety issues, including sexual harassment, in order to work in a cleaner and safer environment. However, any kind of collective organizing is viewed as threatening by management. In order to launch an effective campaign the women need to fight the company, the union, and the local state. But doing so is extraordinarily hard for workers in Tijuana who are single mothers with little support. This is not to say that organizing has not been done or could not be done.

There are community organizations in Tijuana such as the Centro de Información para Trabajadoras y Trabajadores (Information Center for Workers) and the Factor X-Casa de la Mujer (Woman’s House) that are actively working on campaigns in the maquila sector. They organize around environmental justice, sexual harassment, and independent union organizing. The Environmental Justice Coalition and the Maquiladora Solidarity Network also engage in active campaigns along the U.S.–Mexico border. However, many of these organizations focus on the maquila sector and not on national industries or Mexican corporations. Places like Hacienda Tijuana can slip through the cracks. Furthermore, organizing in Mexico remains an extraordinarily difficult venture. Mexican labor law makes it nearly impossible for independent unions to win recognition and collective bargaining. Although there are some successful independent union campaigns in Mexico, there are none, to my knowledge, in Tijuana specifically.

## NOTES

1. All names (including that of the company) have been changed to protect confidentiality.
2. This chapter is part of a larger project that compares the labor regimes of two tortilla factories owned by the same Mexican transnational corporation on both sides of the U.S.–Mexico border. For more details, see Bank Muñoz (2004a).

3. “Maquilas” (also known as “maquiladoras”) are export processing factories that assemble parts produced in Mexico for the U.S. consumer market. Some examples of maquilas in Mexico are garment, electronics, and food processing factories. Since the passage of NAFTA, much of Mexico’s industries have turned to production processes that are similar to maquilas. While Hacienda Tijuana is not a maquila in the traditional sense, it does have components that function like maquilas.

4. I calculated this dollar amount using the nominal exchange rate.

5. The operations manager is the son of a close family friend of the the Torrimundo family, the production manager went to school with one of Don Hernandez’s sons, and the warehouse manager is an in-law. All of these managers have college educations. Two of them graduated from universities in the United States.

6. I used the average exchange rate for the year 2003 to calculate the average hourly dollar wage.

7. The Bracero Program (1942–1964) was initiated by the U.S. and Mexican governments to solve a labor shortage in the United States and an agricultural crisis in Mexico. Experienced agricultural workers in Mexico abandoned their farms in hopes of earning significant money in the United States. Anti-immigrant sentiment reached new heights in this country during the time of the Bracero Program. In fact, nativist feelings among the U.S. population led to the development of Operation Wetback in 1954. Operation Wetback was concerned with “illegal” Mexican immigration to the United States. In 1954 border patrol agents raided Mexican barrios in the Southwest and deported anyone who looked Mexican. Operation Wetback deported thousands of Mexican immigrants, including a sizable number of U.S. citizens of Mexican descent.

8. This information was gathered during interviews with several managers at Hacienda Tijuana and with one manager from an apparel maquiladora.

9. The CTM is considered a “charro” union. It is tied to both the company and the ruling party of Mexico.