Zooming Out/Zooming In: Visualizing Globalization

Deborah Barndt

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from the editor

When visual sociology was establishing itself twenty some years ago, I came across the work of Deborah Barndt. As I remember Barndt's lengthy report on the nature and promise of visual sociology was sent to me by the chair of the sociology department at the University of Michigan, where she had been a student. I was at that time going through the first stages of professionalized life. It was a disjointing experience. For my dissertation I'd done field work among agricultural migrants, and I was comfortable in the field, and less so in settings like departmental meetings. So Barndt's work was inspiring; a progressive sociologist putting images to work as visual sociology which integrated theory and method. Barndt has recently published *To Change This House: Popular Education Under the Sandinistas*, a photographic, narrative and analytical study of social change in Nicaragua, which we hope to review in future issues of *VS*. Last summer she attended our IVSA meetings and many of us were pleased to finally meet an individual who had such an important role in the formation of visual sociology.

I would characterize her article as one of the first to successfully visualize the micro/macro dimensions of a social issue. This is certainly one of the most challenging problems for visual sociology. I have not felt that Alan Sekula, Victor Burgin or others have succeeded in earlier efforts to confront this problem; for me their photographs are largely metaphorical, and their texts alone link the levels of social analysis. This is, I think, because few of the cultural theorists do field work; rather they theorize about society and construct visual and textual expressions of their theory. Of course, I join my colleagues in several disciplines in admiration of this work, but also find it wanting. Barndt's article is, to my mind, one of the first to meld field work, documentary photography and critical theory. We are pleased to offer it to the readers of *VS*.

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Zooming Out / Zooming In
Visualizing Globalization

Deborah Barndt

The challenge of 'visualizing globalization' requires analytical frames that engage the local-global dynamic as well as a variety of visual methods. The article reflects on two uses of photography in a cross-border research project tracing the journey of a tomato from the Mexican field to the Canadian fast food restaurant, and the role of women workers within the various stages of continental food production, distribution, and consumption. To examine *globalization from above*, the ubiquity of corporate advertising images is exploited, and their messages deconstructed and reconstructed to expose the production processes behind the commodities being promoted. *Globalization from below* is explored through photo-stories of the daily lives of Mexican women agricultural workers as food producers at work and at home; Teresa's story illustrates how subsistence and market economies co-exist and how family economies remain the survival and social base for Mexican peasants. The juxtaposition of two classic forms of image production—social documentary and corporate advertising photography—raises questions about the social construction of reality and creates new kinds of visual dialogues offering multi-layered interpretations of the local-global nexus.

In the 1970s, Canada's National Film Board produced a charming animated filmed called *Cosmic Zoom*. The camera initially frames a boy rowing a boat, while a mosquito alights upon his arm. Then it zooms out, within a few magical moments, from the mosquito and the arm into the galaxy and universe. After a brief pause, we return to earth and the arm, and just as seamlessly, the camera zooms into the microcosmic worlds inside the skin and the mosquito's stinger. The process of zooming out and zooming in appears effortless, and the viewer is transfixed by this imaginative artistic construction (supported by scientific knowledge), seemingly transported to locations that offer perspectives not available to the naked eye: from a God's eye view to the innermost chambers of human and insect life. Photographic technology in the past two decades has made it even more possible to 'see' and frame such macro and micro perspectives, from spectacular views of space iconicized in the film *Apollo 13* to a microscopic exploration of intimate insect life of a meadow on a sunny afternoon in a less commercialized French film called *Microcosmos*.

Visual sociologists have their own versions of macro and micro interests, and have used a variety of visual techniques to zoom in and out on issues of social structure and processes, from panoramic photos to map land use (Collier and Collier, 1986) to video studies of the intimate nonverbal communications between mother and child (Birdwhistell, 1969). Rarer are the attempts to make connections between the two. Yet we know that the challenge of zooming out and zooming in does not depend solely on techniques or tools; it requires analytic frames, too, which either remain implicit or are made explicit. John Grady (1996) suggests that sociologists 'visualize' "in order to create new concepts; to identify and order logic and metaphoric relations between existing concepts; and to clarify expression." As well, they use visual methods to research, produce, teach, interpret, and explicate these concepts.

Tracing the Trail of the Tomato

In a collaborative and cross-border research project, I have been grappling with ways to understand 'globalization'; the project challenges me both conceptually as a sociologist, in 'visualizing' a key social process, as well as methodologically and technically as a *visual* sociologist,

Deborah Barndt (dbarndt@yorku.ca) is a mother, popular educator and photographer who teaches Critical Education, Creativity and Communications at York University in Toronto, Canada. She has been using photographs in social research, education and action since the early 1970s, when she organized one of the first conferences on Visual Sociology.

in finding ways to 'make visible' the dynamics of this process. Ostensibly, the project employs the device of following the journey of a tomato from the Mexican field to the Canadian table as a code for the process of globalization as manifested in a globalized food system which touches us all daily through the food we eat. The tomato is called 'Tomasita,' a Spanish and feminine name, thus foregrounding the fact that under NAFTA both Mexicans and women workers are the most marginalized. The research attempts to weave together two kinds of stories, the corporate stories or *globalization from above*, with the stories of women workers in the various stages of production, distribution, and consumption of the tomato, or *globalization from below*. There are different kinds of challenges in developing either of these two perspectives, in zooming out and in zooming in on women, food, and globalization. Framing both explorations, however, is an analytical framework of power relations, drawing upon political economic, ecofeminist, and cultural studies perspectives.[1]

The journey of the tomato reveals a food system in which decision-making is increasingly centralized, while production is increasingly decentralized. Brewster Kneen (1993) suggests that the 'distancing' between the production and the consumption of food, illustrated by the movement of tomatoes from Mexican field to the boxes in Canadian supermarket warehouses, is the key characteristic of this process (Photos 1–2) which has left most of us unaware of who planted, picked, sorted, packed, processed, transported, prepared and sold the food we eat.

Photo 1: Field tomatoes in Mexico

Photo 2: Mexican tomatoes in Canada

Nor are we aware of the economic or health effects of this process: "Distancing in the food system means a decline in the real nutritive value of the food as well as an increase in its costs," asserts Kneen.

I do not want to dwell here on the debates concerning 'globalization,' which has emerged as a catchall term for this new phase of integration of economic, political, ecological, and cultural forces. I tend to agree with Maria Mies and Vandana Shiva that:

> "The 'global' in the global order means simply the global domination of local and particular interests by means of subsuming the multiple diversities of economics, cultures, and/or nature under the control of a few multinational corporations, and the superpowers that assist them in their global reach through 'free' trade, structural adjustment programs, and, increasingly, conflicts, military or otherwise..." (Mies and Shiva, 1993: 9)

Nonetheless, in most stages of production and consumption of food, no matter the location, women are clearly "at the centre of the food crisis" (Dankelman and Davidson, 1991). For example, indigenous women in Mexico are increasingly shifting from subsistence agriculture, joining a burgeoning migrant labour force in the lowest skilled and paying jobs (Barrón, 1994), while poor campesino women become major players in a growing maquila industry (Fernandez-Kelly; Kopinack, 1997). And again in the north, women predominate as cashiers in the supermarket industry (Kainer, 1996) and as fast food workers (Reiter, 1991). At the same time that women remain most engaged with this most "intimate commodity" (Winson, 1993), our sense of what we eat is less and less intimate. The globalization discourse, however, often makes these processes seem very distant, massive and uncontrollable. Visual sociology can perhaps challenge this abstraction and expose the workings of a system that has seemed not only out of reach, but out of sight.

I chose to focus on one commodity, the tomato, as a starting point for understanding globalization, because it grounds what many have sensed as a very abstract concept and distanced process.[2] The Tomasita Project, as it is called, involves popular education centres in the three NAFTA countries, which are committed to engaging a broad public in debates about globalization and creative responses to it.[3] 'Popular education' [4] based on the theories of Brazilian educator Paulo Freire (Freire, 1970, 1993), starts with the everyday experience of marginalized people, represents their social reality in the form of 'codes' (i.e., the story of the tomato), deepens their critical consciousness about that reality, and prepares them to act collectively to change it.

The Location Behind the Lens

The story of the journey of the tomato is framed by a critical perspective on power relationships between the north and the south, specifically on the asymmetry between Mexico, the U.S., and Canada. Our research dynamics are not immune from such a power analysis either. Borrowing from the work of Maria Mies on feminist research, we are declaring a "conscious partiality" (Mies and Shiva, 1993: 38), acknowledging that we start with a critical questioning of north-south relations, of a globalized and exploitative food system, built on the natural resources and cheap female labor of the south.

Starting with such a position does not deny, however, the complexity of the experiences of the women workers, whether they be pickers or packers in agribusiness, assembly line workers in food processing, cashiers in supermarkets, or fast food women workers. In another paper, I have played with the metaphor of the 'chain' to explore the myriad ways that women are at the same time bound, freed, and connected through their roles in the 'food chain' (Barndt, 1997). Young women packers in Mexican agribusiness, for example, are moved from one production site to another. This 'moving maquila' phenomenon takes them away from their families and communities, but also frees them from strict family surveillance and broadens their horizons through meeting young people from other parts of the country.[5] Closer to home, Canadian women cashiers are

Photographer/Researcher as Shadow

The early morning sun pours over the fields
in rural Jalisco in western Mexico
as I approach with my camera in hand
my shadow meeting the shadow
of a woman tomato worker.

Northern researcher/photographer
coming South
just like the agribusinesses,
the managers and technologies,
the hybrid seeds and pesticides.

I come to take stories and images
to find out where the food we eat comes from
and what happens to it along the journey
from Mexican field to Canadian table.

How is my taking any different
than that of the companies
who import most of the inputs
and export most of the produce...
taking advantage of the available land,
cheap labour, and ever-present sun...?

'bound' to many years of unpredictable work at constantly changing shifts until they gain the seniority which 'frees' them to choose the part-time hours that best suit their other personal and family needs, where the concept of "flexibilization" can finally serve their own and not just the company's interests.

Both postcolonial theory and feminist methodology (Patai, 1991) have reclaimed subjectivity and made transparent the role of the researcher. As implied in the musings on my shadow, I am compelled to locate myself in this study, as both photographer and researcher, as well as my complicity in some of the power dynamics that the project claims to challenge. Through each encounter with women workers–whether under the hot sun of Mexican tomato fields or in the lunch room of Canadian supermarket cashiers–I must confront my own relationship to this global food system as well as to the women participants in it. This research neither pretends to be neutral nor does it pretend to change the structural inequalities that underlie food systems and knowledge systems; but it does acknowledge them and it aims to make them more visible. As we build collaboration at various levels and across borders, we deal with and discuss questions of power and privilege within which we are immersed, and we try to honor the specifics of each context and relationship, i.e. not to fall into facile generalizations about either exploitation or oppression.

The Camera as a Power Tool

Ever since that moment in 1969 when I took my first people picture and got threatened by my subject/victim (who, in self-defense, wielded over me the butcher knife she had been using to carve her toe nails), I have understood that the act of photography is imbued with issues of power. The challenges of researching corporations' roles (globalization from above) in the global food system are different, of course, from those arising in examining women workers' roles in that system (globalization from below). In the process of this research, then, I have had to find different strategies for visualizing the process of globalization as revealed by the women workers' lives than for making visible the actions of the more powerful corporate actors and the global forces they represent.

The presence of the camera in itself can reveal power dynamics, even before the shutter is opened. Thus the absence of photos from inside McDonald's or Loblaws or Del Monte's (three of the four corporations included in the study) is revealing: the fact that corporate giants are nervous about visual documentation must say something about both their power and the contestation of their power by those who question its morality. When I first tried to take a picture in a Burger King outlet in Mexico City, I was stopped and told that it was company policy to prohibit photography, because of "la receta," or "the recipe!" I don't really believe they were concerned that I would slip a photo of a Whopper to their competitors, producers of the Big Mac, and threaten any hamburger hegemony. My hunch is that the increasingly critical gaze on their operations, in terms of working conditions, wages, environment, etc. was more the motivation for blocking my potentially critical lens. And, as evidenced by the McLibel trial which lasted 314 days in England, multinationals such as McDonald's will go to great lengths to defend their image and corporate practices.[6]

Ironically, while it has been nearly impossible to capture photographic images inside these sanctums of power, I have found in almost any locale seemingly infinite numbers of images produced by these very corporations, ubiquitously framing their products and seducing consumers into their own ideological constructions. This is one of the ways that globalization makes itself present and concrete in our daily lives and local contexts. Even if these companies do not want critical eyes surveying their operations with cameras, they have no hesitancy to cover the world with images of their own making. These, at least, we have access to,[7] and the images can be deconstructed, revealing important aspects of global processes.

As an integral part of the system of production and consumption, advertising reflects what Marx called "commodity fetishism," a

process which "imbues products with meanings which have no relation to the production processes of these objects" (Ramamurthy, 1997: 154). And so the decoding of these images requires an analysis of the functions of "iconic communication" (Grady, 1996: 14) within a broader social context. I will draw from two examples here, one from the fast food sector and the other from the supermarket sector, two of the points of distribution of the tomato in Canada.

Nation Subsumed or Consumed?

While sales and stock prices in McDonald's restaurants are dropping in the U.S.[8], the multinational restaurant chain further consolidated its global cultural hegemony in 1996 with a special deal with Disney Corporation making McDonald's the sole promoter among fast food giants of all new Disney movies, so that Disney toys, TV and movie characters are now gracing billboards, cups, place mats, T-shirts and consumer items accompanying Big Macs in over 100 countries. The production and diffusion of images has become as important to McDonald's as the production of hamburgers (Photo 4).

Photo 4: "McDonald's Canada: maple leaf meets golden arches."

In the globalizing 1990s, the Golden Arches has achieved super-icon status in Canada: the maple leaf is now couched within the golden arches in every outlet and billboard across the country! Thus while in 1995 Disney got the exclusive rights to reproduce all replicas of the Canadian mounties, McDonald's Canada has now integrated the symbol from our flag into its over-arching logo. My Mexican co-researchers were shocked at this appropriation, suggesting that their government would never allow such a patriotic symbol to be used for commercial purposes. Another more nationalist interpretation,[9] however, might suggest the Canadian leaf at least distinguishes restaurants north of the border from those south of the border, where the multinational is based. Through a different reading from the perspective of globalization, the maple leaf subsumed within the golden arches speaks volumes about the eroding role of the nation-state and the increasing meaninglessness of borders in an era when multinational corporations are more powerful than many national governments, and are less bound by national regulations than they are shapers of national policies. The two icons are, each in their own right, ubiquitous in Canada; now merged in the eye and mind of Canadians, both can appear on a billboard in rural Ontario with absolutely no words of explanation needed, the only text directing the consumer from the highway to the nearest McDonald's restaurant.

Appropriation of the Global 'Other'

The other example of a 'zooming out' image of globalization comes from a recent billboard ad produced by Loblaw's, the largest supermarket chain in Canada's food retail sector (Photo 5). A traditionally robed Arab heads across the hot desert pushing a shopping cart. "Food Means the World to Us," Loblaws proclaims. How do these words and this image illuminate our understanding of global food production/consumption?

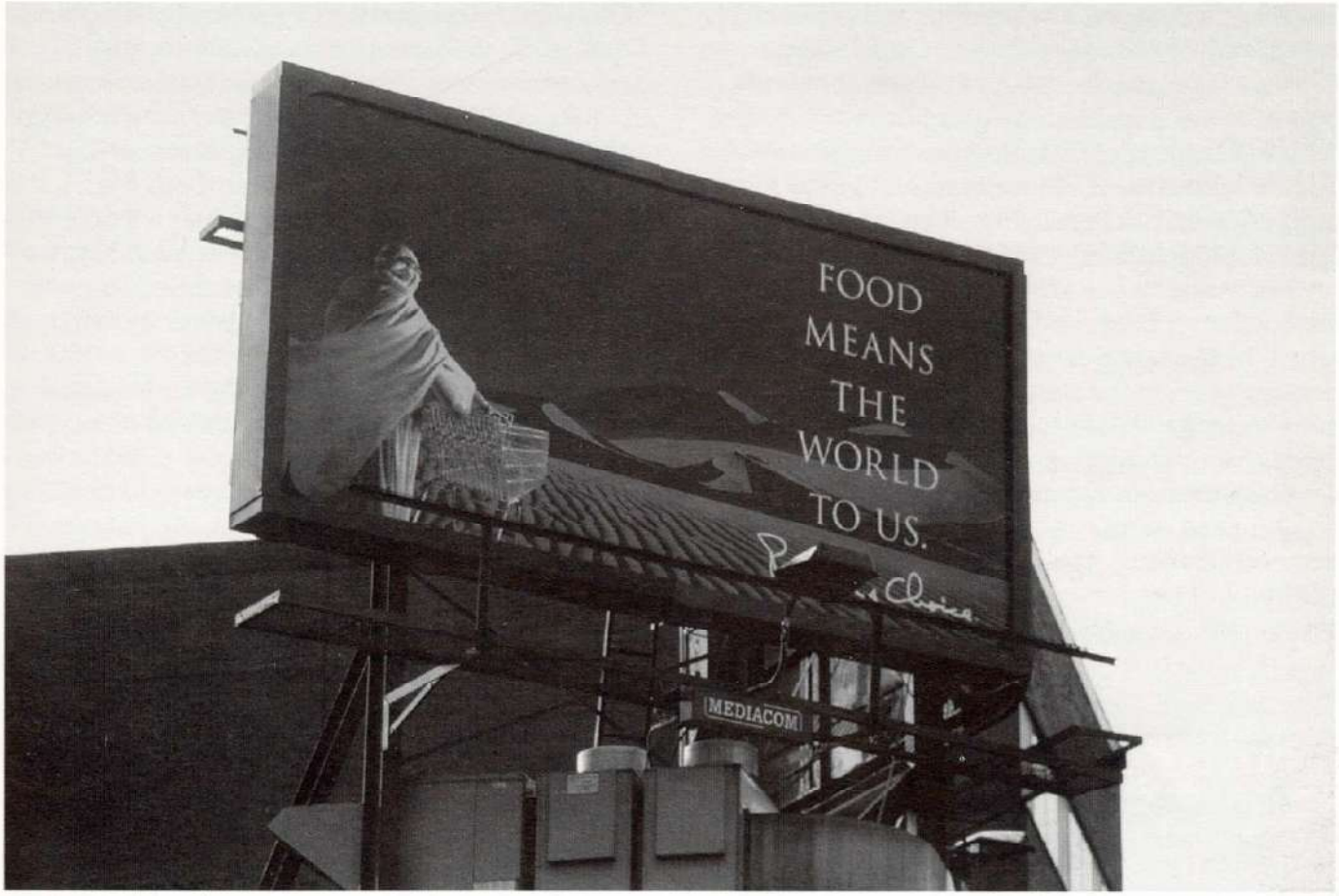


Photo 5: "Food Means the World to Us, President's Choice."

In a global food system that is increasingly driven by the demand of more affluent northerners for more variety and fresh "exotic" foods brought daily by plane, boat, and truck from far-away countries, the quantity of northern supermarket items has almost quadrupled in the past two decades (Cook, 1990: 67). Our shopping carts may be full; but those who grow, pack, and transport the foods don't have such an array of choices of 'world food' to consume.

The Arab-in-the-desert image plays clearly into the romanticization and appropriation of the 'other' that has been classic in advertising such as Benneton and, in the case of Loblaws, through a variety of product lines created around multicultural themes.[10] The stylized desert panorama is reflective of the increasing use of sensuous scenes of 'nature' (that appear anything but 'natural') to evoke a connection to the earth and the body, a kind of ecological and erotic seduction.

It is commonly understood that corporate advertising images are highly constructed, i.e., they are not assumed to be documenting real life. Raymond Williams (in During, 1993) considers advertising the "official art of modern capitalist society" and suggests that there is a kind of "magic" in its construction which promotes social and personal values almost more than products themselves. In fact, in the Loblaw's ad shown here, there are no food products at all: the shopping cart is empty! The 'other worldly' consumer moves into the world as a market which promises the exotic, the sensuous, and the natural.

The absence of any products is notable. Even in cosmetic ads, famous for their selling of a look or a lifestyle, one can usually find in a

corner or a box one tiny sample of the product being sold. Without any product, it is even harder to imagine the people behind the products who have created the goods. Marx's notion of the "fetishism of commodities" suggests that human labour is no longer apparent in the focus on products. The invisibility, then, of the agricultural workers in a post-NAFTA food system, further deepens our sense of alienation from the production of food, and our sense of the 'distance' between production in the south and consumption in the north. The Tomasita Project aims to make visible these workers as well as other actors and stages within this complex and decentralized production process.

Just as corporate advertisements are elaborate constructions, we can engage critically with these images by reconstructing or altering them slightly. In a tradition called 'adbusting,' developed to a fine art by the Media Foundation in Vancouver, British Columbia,[11] 'subvertisements' or doctored ads, play on the ubiquity of advertising images and our common sense interpretations, disrupting them so that the viewer is forced to reconsider both the message and its construction. When we take apart and reconstruct these representations, we can probe their ideological assumptions as well as the political economic arrangements on which they are built. With the Loblaw's ad, for example, we could emphasize the local-global connections by using the words "Food Means the World to Us" with images of the global workers behind the products or by making a collage on top of the existing image (perhaps filling the shopping cart with agricultural workers or pesticides) to tell a fuller story.

The reconstructed ad (Photo collage 6)

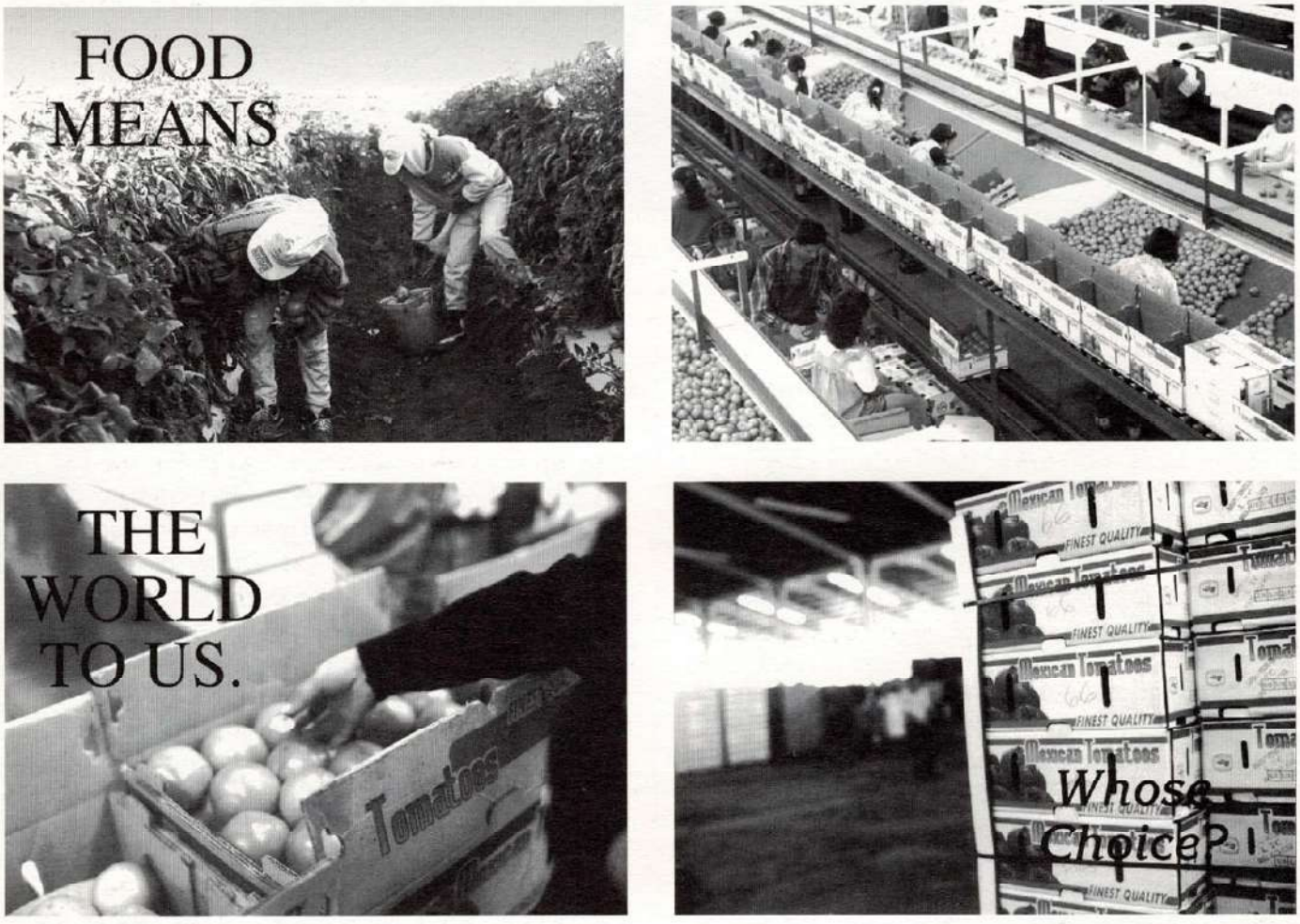


Photo collage 6: "Food Means the World to Us."

reveals the processes of picking, packing, and transporting tomatoes over long distances; the women workers most responsible for these stages of production become visible to us. "Food Means the World to Us" resonates differently from the workers' perspective; since NAFTA, the Guadalajara based Santa Anita Packers, once primarily a domestic producer, have increased their exports to 80% of total production. While the Loblaw's ad touts the 'President's Choice' line of products, the reconstructed ad asks (within a box of tomatoes marked in English rather than Spanish): 'Whose choice?'; the question could probably be applied to the managers as well as the workers in Mexican agribusiness, as neither have had much choice in whether or how they enter the global marketplace.

As representations of corporate control and as tools for promotion of dominant cultural ideology, then, advertising images can be deconstructed and reconstructed to suggest the layers and levels of globalization. That they have become integral to a process of multinational expansion also means that their readings in such diverse contexts will be multiple and varied. But they also represent a kind of common landscape, or 'mediascape' (Nelson, 1992) among communities questioning the impact of global corporate power. So these images are useful starting points for cross-border dialogues about the meanings within and behind them, a catalyst for shared analysis of the global food system. That dialogue can continue through the construction of documentary images that tell a different story than the corporate constructions, though not without its contradictions, as I describe below.

Exposing (Exploiting?) the Powerless

I first became aware of the complexities of photographing power dynamics when I turned my lens on the sociology department where I was a doctoral student in the early 1970s. It seemed much harder to get into the space of the powerful than into the space of the less powerful: the (primarily female) secretaries in the departmental office were easier prey, for example, than the (usually male) full professors; you had to pass through two doors and get their permission before you could photograph them. In parallel fashion, then, I found it harder to enter the domain of the corporate power brokers, and easier to photograph the less powerful actors in the food system. So in entering Mexican tomato fields, I was aware that photographing women workers already reinforced this tradition of easier exploitation of the poor and the female.

Nonetheless, one of the objectives of this project was to show the workers who brought us our tomatoes, to counter a general ignorance about where our food comes from and through whose labor we eat. The visual representations created by food corporations, as we have seen, don't tell us about the production process behind the food products (they, in fact, deliberately obscure them). Thus, 'exposing' was a primary purpose of this project. But exposing for whom? Primarily, as indicated, for a northern audience of unaware consumers, to raise their consciousness about the processes behind the food we eat. And, secondly, for the workers in this food chain, to enable them to see where they fit in this bigger picture, and to connect with other workers linked to them by this complex process of production, distribution and consumption.

At the beginning of this tomato journey, as a northern gringa researcher/ photographer documenting poor Mexican women workers, I had to pass through company gates, i.e., I needed the permission of those at the top to photograph those at the bottom. During my first two visits to Mexico, such permission was denied, and so, when in December of 1996, the vice-president of the large domestic agribusiness in our study invited me to tour the packing plant, and the plant manager allowed me to photograph the women pickers and packers, I went wild; like an investigative reporter who had one toe in the door, I snapped furiously as we were led through the plant and then into the fields. I was afraid that there would never be another opportunity, and I was determined to take advantage of this one. When we walked up and down the rows of tomato plants, and briefly interviewed women picking toma-

toes, I continued shooting. This entry, while an awkward reminder of our power differences, nonetheless, introduced us to some women workers who invited us to visit them later in their rural community.

Returning to Mexico four months later, (the picking season abruptly ended by a premature freeze), I found these women in their homes, no longer salaried workers in a multinational operation. Now they struggled to survive with other forms of casual labor, such as making straw mats for sale. The off-season rhythm offered me time for longer conversations with these women, and we sat around a table using the photos from the fields to elicit stories about their work days and their home lives.

With camera and tape recorder, I followed Teresa through her day as she prepared food for her family. The accompanying photo-story explores key themes of our tomato/women study: the relationship between production and consumption, salaried work and subsistence work, work and home, and the local and the global. This sequence attempts to ground ideas of the feminization of labor and of poverty that are central to understanding the shifting role of women in the new global economy. Teresa is a salaried worker for an agro-export company based on monocultural (one crop) production which has an impact on the health of both the land and the people who work it. Her story illustrates how subsistence and market economies co-exist and how family economies remain the economic and social base for Mexican peasants.[12] In a broader sense, the photostory exposes one piece of a globalized food system: Teresa doesn't know where the tomatoes she picks end up, and she can only contribute to a small part of the story about where they come from. This has been one of the most powerful and recurring themes in our efforts to trace the trail of the tomato: no one has the whole picture, and most actors in the system only understand their small piece of the long and complex process. Nonetheless, Teresa's story begins to fill a void in our distanced, northern understanding of where our food comes from, and what impact its production has on other people and lands.

Teresa, Food Producer— At Work At Home

When I first met Teresa, in December of 1996, she was picking tomatoes and supervising workers in an agribusiness tomato plantation outside of Sayula, in the state of Jalisco, Mexico.

With 40 pails to fill for the 28 peso ($5-6) daily wage, she couldn't talk much then so she invited me to visit her sometime in her village, half an hour away.

When I returned to Mexico four months later, the tomato harvest had prematurely ended due to a freeze. I found Teresa, her family, and many co-workers at home in Gomez Farias.

I was born in 1930 in a familly of 5 kids. My papa died when I was 2, so my mama had to raise us on her own. I never went to school. They brought books into the rancho and my brothers taught themselves to read. But not me, I didn't learn; I'm like a burrito (donkey).

You need reading for everything–to read the prices when you buy things. If you don't study, you can't get work. I helped my mother sweep, carry water to the house, and so on. When I was older, I made tamales and sold them in the market.

Teresa:

We got married when I was 17, and I kept doing the same work. Now I'm 67, and Pedro's 72, five years older than me.

We had 16 children–imagine! The oldest is 47 and the youngest is 21. Nine of them are still alive; seven died of illness, of bronchitis (from the cold).

Our two oldest daughters are married and live in Tlapapa; three married sons and two daughters live here. They visit often and help; we share what we have. While we are alive, as long as God offers us the gift of life, we help each other.

Pedro:

I come back from working in Sayula at 2:30 p.m. and go to work in our milpa (*cornfield*). *This corn in the bags here lasts us for the whole year.*

I work in both places, and I see something good in both. But the land in Sayula is not mine. I feel more related to the land here because it is mine, I use it for what we need at home.

When my wife has time, she comes with me and we work together.

Teresa:

Now many women buy tortillas already made at the tortilleria, but when I'm not working in Sayula, I make my own.

We all feel the economic crisis. The work in Sayula stopped in February because of the freeze. There is no chamba *(work) now. We can't keep working, so we don't earn any money. It's very depressing; we're sad when we're not working.*

When we find work, we're happy.

Our grandchildren are studying, but when they're not in school, they come to work in the fields on the weekends and during vacations; they get the same pay as others.

Everyone has their job. My husband and I are the cabos *(foremen) for our* tabla *(field). Some are* piscadores *(pickers), others are* vaciadoras *(who empty the pails), others are* aquadoras *(they bring us water), and* apuntadoras *(who record the number of pails).*

Pedro:

Before, we worked harder, we worked with animals. We cultivated 3 crops together–corn, squash, and beans–in the same field. We rotated from one lot to another.

Before, the tomatoes and corn grew well without chemicals. We used the waste of animals as fertilizer, we put it on the plants; it was very good and would last for 2–3 years.

The fertilizer we use now only lasts for one season. It's expensive and very strong. It kills the squash and the milpa *(field) becomes very sad. The corn grows well, it grows tall, but the fertilizer damages the squash and the beans.*

Teresa:

The chemicals bother us, if they get into our lungs. Those who don't cover themselves suffer more. We put one handkerchief in the back, one in the front, just leaving a slot open for the eyes. This protects us from the pesticides, the insects, the sun.

We get eggs from our chickens. From time to time, we eat beef, chicken, squash, carrots, lettuce.

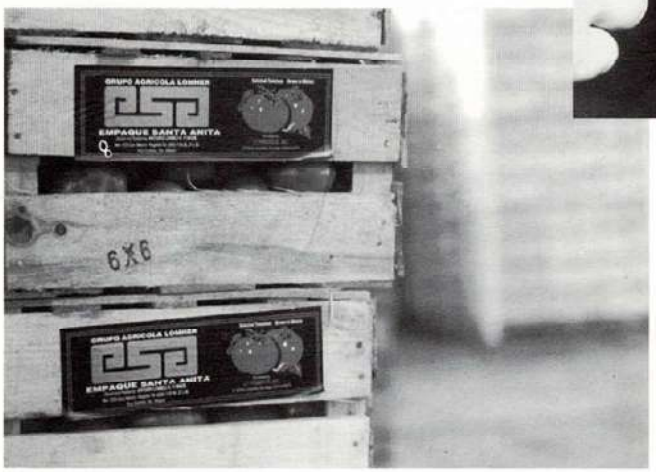
When the day dawns, with God's blessing, we find things to eat, even if it's just beans.

We always grew beans in the monte *(mountain field). I don't know why we don't grow them anymore. Now we buy them.*

(When I showed these photos to Teresa, she wasn't aware of the work of the 500 women workers in the packing plant just five minutes from where she picks tomatoes.)

I've seen big trailer trucks on the highway, I've wondered where they're going. They come from far away, and they go far away, we don't know where.

The tomatoes don't stay here.



(The boxes on the left, with second rate tomatoes that may be bruised, are for the domestic market; the best tomatoes, labelled in english, are for the export market.)

I have seen a lot of changes. Now women don't work as much. When I was growing up, we worked more– making tamales, washing diapers (for 16 children!) going to the stream to fetch water.

Now there is water in the house, tortillas in the tortilleria, washing machines...

But many women also must leave the house to work...

Photo-Stories Connecting Across Borders

One purpose of this study is to compare and exchange women's experiences across borders. This is happening in several ways: through video letters, through discussion of films about the women in the global system, and through the sharing of popular theatre, cartoon books, and photo-stories. Most recently, Teresa's photo-story became a catalyst for conversations with Susan,[13] one of the Canadian Loblaw's cashiers we interviewed. Her responses reflect her curiosity about and empathy with the women working at the other end of the food chain, those who pick the tomatoes that, a week or two later, she punches in at the supermarket counter. After reading the story, Susan muses:

> "We live in different cultures, with different climates and different life experiences, and yet we're going through the same things. [For example,] Teresa used to make her own tortillas but now she has to go and work. And she's feeling that pull just like the North American women are: should I stay at home with the kids? Should I go to work? She's feeling the economic thing, obviously because everybody has to survive, everybody has to eat. She's taking care of the family, that's a priority in her life; I'd like to think that in my life that's a priority."

When Teresa mentions the freeze that cut short their harvest season and left them unemployed, Susan remembers the impact the freeze in the south had on prices in her store, that signs were posted in the produce department explaining why the vegetables were suddenly so expensive. She has some sense of the broader costs of global food production, too:

> "How can you sell a head of lettuce for 75 cents? All the costs incurred along the way, you know. If you think of shipping those tomatoes up from Mexico, how are they shipped? By truck. Look at the price of gas, the companies have to maintain their vehicles, they have to pay their employees."

At the other end, Susan is concerned about the impact of monocultural cash crop production on the Mexican land and the health of the workers. She admires Pedro's deeply rooted understanding of the land:

> "He's saying that [the agrochemicals] are expensive and that they're ruining the soil. And you feel like this man has so much knowledge, he's so in touch with what's going to happen, he can foresee in three years this soil will not be any good. This guy should be in a management position. They're really knowledgeable, they know the land, they're in touch with it."

Nonetheless, she also expresses some empathy for the Mexican companies (and the Mexican government) caught in this new global spiral of restructuring to meet the demand for exports:

> "When the companies come and say they want to do business, they have to have some responsibility over the environment they're using. But then because they're so desperate and they need the jobs and they're welcoming this American money, they sort of become lax on [the environmental regulations]...."

One of the ways that the globalizing pressures play out in the daily work rhythms of women workers is through the control of their productivity. Susan is interested that Mexican workers must pick 40 pails a day, but are not offered bonuses for exceeding that quota.

She compared their experience to her own of scanning items through the supermarket line; she has seen computer print outs which indicate how many items per hour she has scanned. While there are no monetary rewards for increased productivity, Susan likes to challenge herself to beat her own record, and thus scans faster and faster, perhaps increasing the overall standard for cashiers. This comparison, while reflecting technological differences in two distinct stages of the process, reminded me of an interview with a French engineer responsible for organizing production in one of the Mexican greenhouses. As we observed the women packers moving tomatoes from the computer-scanned conveyor belt and into boxes, he remarked: "We are trying to increase their speed, but they will never be as productive as European workers." [14]

Swasti Mitter, in the now classic *Common Fate Common Bond: Women in the Global Economy* (1986), documents the shared experience of women workers in all sectors of the new global economy, and suggests that the major impact of new technology, whether in the industrial, commercial, or service sector, seems to be in the intensification of the work process and the casualization of labour. At the same time, she observes a "new sense of solidarity that brings female white-collar workers closer to their manual counterparts," (1986:146). What Mitter calls the twin effects of the new technologies—automation and fragmentation—affect women in the food system in similar ways. And as part-time workers feeding the corporations 'flexibilization of labour' strategy, they also share a common vulnerability. The exchange of these stories across borders can contribute to a stronger sense of this shared precariousness, can deepen women's analysis of the structural constraints shaping their double work days (in the field, plant or market as well as at home), and can help consolidate global networks that can act more effectively in response to multinational phenomena that shape their lives. The visualization of women's experiences (their differences and their similarities) as well as of their collective actions feeds this 'other globalization,' bringing a positive twist to the notion of 'globalization from below.'

I am currently working with Susan on her photo-story, which will present another piece of this puzzle and will be shared with Mexican workers. While recognizing that these single stories cannot claim to represent the realities of the many different kinds of women who contribute to this continental food system, we hope the photo sequences will resonate and suggest connections rather than explicitly make them. The Mexican pickers, when hearing about the Canadians who receive and sell the fruits of their labor, raised the question: "I often wonder what happens to our tomatoes. I wonder if they realize the work we have done so they can eat tomatoes." This, in the least, is a connection between women workers that can be nurtured by this red fruit that makes the long journey passing from one hand to another. As a photographer of both ends of the process, I become a conduit, and the photographs a medium for connecting them.

Another role that I consciously play as a committed researcher/photographer is to return the photo-stories I make of people to them. This is extremely important to me, not only as part of what I often feel is an unequal exchange in the research process. Working with women on stories of their lives is an intimate experience; the hours I spend with the transcripts and making images in the darkroom deepens my feelings about the women and draws me even closer to them. When I return my edited version of their stories to them, it is an expression of a friendship and hopefully, a memory of an experience shared. But more importantly, these photo-stories can affirm the histories and daily lives of these women, allowing them to see themselves in a new light.

Nonetheless, it is also and always a risky business to represent others and to return those representations to them. At that moment, I must acknowledge my own biases and subjectivity, the fact that I have named and framed them with my photos and my editing of their words. Will they recognize themselves? Will they agree with my interpretation of their lives? In the case of Teresa, I had a very recent experience of returning to her the photo story that appears here (Photo 7) exactly one year after I first photographed her in the fields. It was not a simple task: first I had to fly to Mexico, to Guadalajara, then take a bus to Sayula; the road to her village was closed for repairs, so I set off to find her among the 1,500 migrant workers working in fields that spread for miles around the town. After one futile afternoon of wandering up and down rows of tomato plants, I went to the company office, gave the field manager a photo I had taken of him, and was offered help in my search. Early the next morning, he took me in his pickup to three more fields before we actually found her. In the process, he also asked to see the story, and perused the first few pages, apparently without any problem.

Teresa herself was happy to see her photos, and tucked the book into her lunch sack, for safe keeping, so she could go on

Photo 7: Teresa receiving her photo-story.

picking tomatoes. She is unable to read, and so only with help from her literate children will she get the full story; and for now, I am not sure how she feels about it. I am glad that at least she has it, yet the encounter raises anew all the sticky questions of power and difference in research. Is it mainly my own conscience that I soothe in taking it back? What difference can this story or the larger study possibly make to the working and living conditions of migrant women such as Teresa? Very little, I know, but I was able to offer copies of the story as well to a group in Sayula organizing around health and environmental issues related to the tomato workers. In that way, these images can be integral to local efforts to challenge and improve these conditions.

Making the Connections Conceptually

We have thus far explored two visual strategies for examining globalization from above (through corporate advertising) and from below (through photo-stories of women workers). A further challenge is to more explicitly connect these themes of globalization and forms of storytelling. The reading of these images is, of course, also dependent on the viewer, primarily Northerners who must interpret these images with their own limited experiences and various cultural biases. When I recently exhibited some of these images in the Art Gallery of Ontario, I was concerned that the documentary images might be read uncritically. On the one hand, I wanted to play with that illusion sometimes perpetuated by documentary photography: it served my purpose of exposing what I was framing as unjust. On the other hand, I didn't want to leave the women workers alone on the wall, to be interpreted out of context, as isolated victims; and I wanted, to integrate in some way, the corporate presence that I had not been permitted to photograph. And so, I chose to juxtapose clusters of black and white photographs, in classic documentary style, with one color image which disrupted that tradition, both visually and analytically. With three images of

(original in color)

A Family Affair

When I entered the Guadalajara McDonalds
with my 10-year-old son, Joshua,
he found Ronald's Playland familiar territory,
except for the barred gates.

One hour away in Sayula, extended families,
grandmothers to grandchildren,
rise early to get to the fields,
work under the hot sun,
fill at least 40 pails to get their $5 daily wage,
take all the risks,
and never taste the tomato they picked
when it's sandwiched into a McNifica,
The Arch Deluxe, Mexican style.

tomato workers, for example, a child, a grandmother, and a man spraying the field with pesticides, I placed a brightly colored image of McDonald's taken from behind the heavily barred black gates that limit the entrance to Ronald's Play Place in the fast food restaurant in Guadalajara, just an hour away from the fields where these peasant children work. The viewer is invited to challenge his/her own reading of the black/white documentary images and to make the connections with the corporate icons representing the global process within which the workers operate.

The juxtaposition of the two classic forms of image production—documentary and corporate photography—raises questions as well about the construction of 'truth'; neither tradition has been immune from the post-modern debates reclaiming subjectivity and emphasizing the social construction of reality. Perhaps juxtaposing them can create new kinds of dialogues that raise questions and offer multi-layered interpretations of the local-global nexus. As viewers, too, we are invited to acknowledge our own locations and subjective responses to these images as generative tools; our voices join the cacophony of other voices trying to make sense of globalization as we experience it in our daily activities and perceptions of the world.

Notes

[1]Ecofeminist perspectives suggest a relationship between the exploitation of nature and the oppression of women in the context of colonization and the current manifestations of global economic restructuring. See Mies, M. and V. Shiva, 1993.

[2]Commodity chain analysis has become both a conceptual and methodological tool in world systems theory, linking micro and macro processes by

logical roots in the word "popular" mean "of the people" with a clear class connotation, referring to the marginalized poor majority. See Barndt, D., 1991.

[5]One very visual indicator of this phenomenon, for example, was the way women packers "dressed to the teeth," complete with high heels, for their 10–12 hour days of work standing up; the plant (with a ratio of 1:10 male/female workers) was also their only social milieu, a site for seeking potential husbands.

[6]Billed the McLibel suit, the longest trial in English legal history caught world-wide attention as a David vs. Goliath battle. A British judge ruled that leaflets two environmental activists distributed 13 years ago libelled the global burger chain by saying that McDonald's destroyed rain forests, sold unhealthy food, and contributed to starvation in the Third World; the judge sided with the activists, however, in their statements that McDonald's exploited children in advertising, paid low wages to workers, and was responsible for cruelty to some animals. See Drohan, M., 1997.

[7]Not only do corporations spend millions of dollars in the production and dissemination of their images, but they also restrict the reproduction of those images by us who consume them. When I tried to produce a transparency for the Visual Sociology conference, the Kinko's employee hesitated in copying a photograph I had taken from the outside of a Mexican McDonald's, suggesting that I might be contravening copyright laws, even though my photo was taken outside the building in the public domain.

[8]This phenomenon has been developing steadily in the 1990s, just as global restructuring has opened up new markets for McDonald's abroad. Yet investors are finding McDonald's Corp. stock "about as appetizing these days as a week-old French fry." See Northfield, 1997.

[9]Stuart Hall suggests images can be decoded in three ways: as a dominant or preferred reading, a negotiated meaning, or an oppositional reading; in this case, while the 'preferred' reading intended by

[12]Kathryn Kopinak, 1997, suggests that global economic restructuring in Mexico's maquila sector has not created 'family consumer economies' (as predicted with economic liberalization and NAFTA) but rather perpetuated a 'family wage economy' in which several members of the household, often including women and children, must work in salaried positions outside the home to support the family. "The number of minimum-wage salaries needed to buy a basic basket of goods for a family of five was 1.8 in 1981 and 2.7 in 1988, and had jumped to 5.4.

[13]Susan is a pseudonym for a Canadian cashier, interviewed on October 3, 1997, in Toronto, Ontario.

[14]Interview with Yves Gomes, San Isidro Mazatepec, Mexico, July 24, 1996. Greenhouse production is increasing in Mexico since NAFTA, as favourable climate and cheap labour permit year-round production of tomatoes. In this particular greenhouse, all the infrastructure and the management is foreign, and 100% of the production is directed to export.

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