

Beautiful Flowers of the Maquiladora: Life Histories of Women Workers in Tijuana.

By NORMA IGLESIAS PRIETO. Translated by MICHAEL STONE with GABRIELLE WINKLER. Foreword by Henry Selby. Translations from Latin America Series. Austin: Institute of Latin American Studies; University of Texas Press, 1997. Photographs. Appendixes. Notes. Bibliography. Index. xxvii, 115 pp. Cloth, \$20.00. Paper, \$9.95.

The passage and implementation of NAFTA has brought about an increased global interest in the border development zones known as maquiladoras (or maquilas) in Mexico. Typically, maquilas act as export-processing zones that transform semifinished and raw imported materials from the United States into market-ready final goods for reentry back into the United States' consumer-rich marketplace. For the most part, the global competitive advantage of Mexican maquilas stems from low wages vis-à-vis the United States and a disciplined and semiskilled workforce. For over a generation this workforce has remained primarily young and female.

Beautiful Flowers of the Maquiladora focuses on the daily routines of ten female maquila workers in Tijuana in the early 1980s. The author, Norma Iglesias Prieto, uses qualitative information gleaned from a semistructured interview process to provide the reader with a fascinating and detailed account of the work-world and daily life of maquila women. Specifically, the daily grind and hazards of maquila work are examined along with the decisions pertaining to family choice and employment options, as well as adjustments to relocation.

The power of this work emanates from the ability of the author to allow her respondents to share with the readers their experiences of looking for work, being injured on the job, dealing with family fatigue and separation, undergoing numbing pre-employment physical exams where more than health was checked, living within a macho work environment, going on strike, and dreaming of an improved life. In short, within this brief monograph that presents the Mexican point of view, the reader is able to run the gamut of the life cycle within the maquila context. The translators and press have done an important service in making this work available to a wider English-reading audience in a highly readable translation.

However, *Beautiful Flowers of the Maquiladora* has several limitations. First, 15 years have passed since this book was originally published in Spanish. Thus the text is somewhat dated, as the maquila industry has undergone tremendous changes during this time span. Second, the nonrandom, all-female sample was selected from only one border complex, Tijuana. It may, therefore, at best be only indicative of other areas along the border; at worst it may distort the regional nature of the border area. Finally, the life histories of the ten maquila women were presented within a biased socialist theoretical perspective. These limitations notwithstanding, the book should find its widest audience in courses on women's studies, sociology, and labor economics.

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