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WOMEN AND TRANSNATIONAL CORPORATION  
EMPLOYMENT: A WORLD-SYSTEM AND  
FEMINIST ANALYSIS

By

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Abstract: I propose that contradictory analyses of the effects of transnational corporation employment on women should be examined in the context of the world-economy and women's economic marginalization during underdevelopment. Our evaluations of the costs/benefits of transnational corporation employment should be based on two criteria: the long-term effects of transnational investment on the level of underdevelopment and the effects on women's economic independence relative to men, their families, and the state. In the short-run, transnational corporation investment may lead to economic growth and increases in female employment. In the long-run, such investment may perpetuate underdevelopment while the instability of and low wages from such employment may lead to continued dependency of women on men and the state.

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WOMEN AND TRANSNATIONAL CORPORATION EMPLOYMENT:  
A WORLD-SYSTEM AND FEMINIST ANALYSIS<sup>1</sup>

INTRODUCTION

One of the intriguing problem areas of women and work is the relationship between transnational corporations (TNCs) and the incorporation of previously marginalized women workers into the capitalist world-system. With the initial intrusion of the capitalist economy into the peripheral regions, women have lost socioeconomic status relative to men (Boserup 1970; Ward 1984). Men have gained access to paid labor in the capitalist system, while many women have been relegated to unpaid labor within the home and the informal sector. More recently, a growing number of women have entered the the paid labor force through employment in transnational corporation (TNC) plants, producing electronics, textiles, garments, toys, pharmaceuticals and other light industries. Although the number of women workers in TNCs is small compared to the global female labor force, the female TNC labor force constitutes a growing proportion of the female labor force in Southeast Asia and in Latin America (Lim 1985).

For many development officials, policy planners, and researchers, women's employment in TNCs is a positive reversal of and solution to women's prior marginalization from the capitalist economy. For example, through TNC work, many women have acquired independent sources of income. Other researchers have argued that women's employment in the TNCs reflects a new form of exploitation based on gender. They note that women in TNCs face male managerial hierarchies, low wages, and unstable employment. How do we evaluate this conflicting research?

In this paper, I review some of the research on women and TNCs. I suggest that research and policy debates about the effects of TNCs on women's economic status should consider the context of the emerging capitalist world-system and not simply individual nation-states. We should evaluate TNC employment by examining the effects of TNCs on both the underdevelopment of the country and the economic independence and empowerment of women relative to men. This perspective defines underdevelopment as the patterns of classical economic dependency and dependent development experienced by the periphery for the benefit of core nations and TNCs. Finally, I suggest that, although in the short-run, TNC investment may enhance economic growth and improve the economic status of women, in the long-run, the economic underdevelopment and the marginalization of women continue, albeit in different forms than in earlier phases of dependency.

In the following sections, I first discuss the relationship between underdevelopment and the economic status of women. Second, I examine the rise of the global assembly line and export processing. Third, I outline the relationships between the economic position of women and the global assembly line. Finally, I discuss the long-run effects of TNC investment on underdevelopment, women, and the forces for change.

## WOMEN AND UNDERDEVELOPMENT

Women's current position in the global assembly line had its roots in the origin of the capitalist world economy (Ward 1984). The emergence of the capitalist world-system and classical economic dependency were reflected in the arrival of the cash economy and raw mineral extraction in the periphery. Colonial officials from core countries instituted programs of cash cropping and mineral extraction in the peripheral nations. In exchange for the raw materials, the core countries produced finished goods. Thus, the peripheral areas provided the raw materials for the development of the core regions (Frank 1966; Galtung 1971; Wallerstein 1974).

At the same time, the peripheral areas became underdeveloped. These areas experienced lower relative levels of economic growth, structural distortion of their economies, and heightened income inequality (Bornschieer et al. 1978). Underdevelopment occurred because capital generated by cash cropping and mineral extraction flowed to the core countries for their development, rather than remaining in the periphery. Meanwhile, to prevent competition with the nascent core industries, core countries discouraged peripheral industrialization. For example, in India, Britain destroyed the emerging textile industries. Thus, the periphery experienced lower levels of economic growth relative to the core. An orientation toward exporting cash crops and raw minerals for core consumption produced structural distortion in the economics of the periphery. Given the greater military and economic power of the core, the peripheral nations found their trade concentrated with a single core partner (Galtung 1971). Likewise, exports of peripheral nations were concentrated on only a few products. Thus, the peripheral economies were dependent on fluctuations in the global economy and the core economies. Finally, income inequality increased as the core received much of the income and capital generated by peripheral production. Local elites controlled the remaining share of the income (Rubinson 1976; Bornschieer and Chase-Dunn 1985).

Since Boserup's (1970) landmark work, researchers have documented how women's social and economic position declined during the intrusion of colonial officials and capitalist enterprises. Where women had been the primary agricultural producers, men gained access to the cash crops and the new monetary economy. Men also extended their control over the new agricultural technology, seeds, and loans. Meanwhile, women were relegated to subsistence production (Tinker 1976; Blumberg 1981; Ward 1984). With the introduction of raw mineral extraction, women's positions became more tenuous as male workers were recruited away from farms, leaving subsistence agricultural work to women, children, and older persons.

Under conditions of classical dependency women experienced both economic underdevelopment and economic marginalization. This marginalization was particularly difficult for women who were expected to support themselves economically and yet were systematically removed from access to the cash economy. Women's marginalization was intensified by the arrival of import substitution strategies and dependent development because men were given the

preference for industrial jobs (Tinker 1976; Chaney and Schmink 1980; Mazumdar 1979).

### Dependent Development

From the 1950s through the early 1970s, many peripheral nations sought to generate development through import substitution strategies whereby they built their own industrial plants to remedy their poor balance of payments. These heavy industry plants produced machinery and other equipment. Cash crops and raw minerals often failed to provide the needed capital to pay for the industrial plants. The peripheral nations were forced to turn to the core and core corporations for their production facilities. Meanwhile, world financial institutions were interested in promoting investment in peripheral areas. As a result of these foreign capital flows, the periphery exhibited economic growth.<sup>2</sup>

Over time, however, signs of underdevelopment reemerged. Bornschier and Chase-Dunn (1985) found that development generated by foreign investment also led to underdevelopment. Economic growth occurred initially because foreign capital flowed into the country, thereby raising the level of the Gross Domestic Product. In the long run, however, much of the profits and capital from the new industrial plants flowed overseas to the core nations, to the headquarters of the investing TNCs, to local elites, or to all of the above. Muller (1979:164), for example, found that TNCs not only used local capital but also repatriated 79 percent of their profits during 1960-68. For TNC subsidiaries, 52 percent of the profits left peripheral countries. Thus, the profits often were not reinvested in local development efforts.

Structural distortion of the economy also occurred with the extraordinary growth of the service sector relative to the industrial sector (Evans and Timberlake 1980; Timberlake 1985). The TNCs and core nations provided the latest in industrial technology for their plants in the peripheral areas, that is, capital intensive technology rather than labor intensive technology. As a result, few jobs were created relative to the amount of investment. Agricultural workers displaced by the mechanization of agriculture found themselves competing for only a limited number of industrial positions. Hence, many workers went into the less productive and low wage service sector and underdevelopment was regenerated. Although the initial flows of capital led to economic growth, in the long run the stocks of capital led to deleterious effects on the nation's economy.

The economic position of women became more precarious under import substitution policies. With the tight industrial job market in many peripheral nations, men were given the preference for the jobs (Chaney and Schmink 1980; Mazumdar 1979). Protective legislation precluded women's employment because employers wanted to avoid maternity costs. Additionally, many of the plants replaced women's traditional cottage industries, but women were not hired in the new plants. Finally, many women only found jobs in the service or the informal sectors where they worked as domestic servants, food vendors, traders, laundresses, and seamstresses. This

displacement or marginalization of women has contributed to the growth of the informal sector (Chaney and Schmink 1980; Ward 1985). In many urban areas of Latin America and Southeast Asia for example, a majority of workers in the informal sector are (ICRW 1980:68). This sector comprises up to 69 percent of the urban labor force in peripheral nations (ICRW 1980:68; Ward 1985). Thus, underdevelopment under both classical dependency and dependent development has meant the marginalization of women in the economy.

During the late 1960s and into the 1970s, women have become the new favored workers in the next stage of development strategies: export processing/offshore sourcing. This shift toward women workers is a remarkable turnabout by TNCs. Although export processing constitutes a smaller proportion of overall manufacturing investment than import substitution (Bornschier and Chase-Dunn 1985), export processing has a higher proportion of women workers.

#### Export Processing and the Global Assembly Line

In their search for profits, during the 1960s and 1970s, many core corporations sought cheaper labor costs to raise profits and to remain competitive. This required lowering labor costs either by hiring cheaper labor or by automation. In the electronics industry, for example, technological breakthroughs lowered the price of an integrated circuit from \$50 in 1966 to \$2.35 in 1976 (NACLA 1977:7); the TNCs were unable to maintain profits by raising prices. Hence, the reduction of labor costs was one solution. For example, the average daily wage in U.S. electronics plants in 1976 ranged from US\$28 to US\$37. In contrast, the Mexican daily wage was US\$7, and in Taiwan, it was US\$2 (NACLA 1977:15).

TNCs transformed their production to take advantage of cheap capital costs in the core by beginning capital intensive production steps in the core. Then the TNCs used the cheap labor of the periphery for assembly or finishing work. Through this arrangement the periphery could avoid its expensive capital problems and employ its abundant labor supply to generate development. These steps have led to a new international division of labor that has been supported by the actions of international financial institutions and by core and periphery governments.

This division of labor is more detailed than that one that evolved in the early periods of the capitalist world economy, with each step in production divided among workers in different parts of the world. Capitalist control has been intensified over workers in the core and the periphery. Workers' or governments' threats to the TNCs' control over production have been met with threats to move plants elsewhere. This control differs from the early days of capitalism where the workers only needed to organize in one region or country. Now workers must overcome the logistics of organizing workers across nation-states and against transnational capitalists beyond the control of any one nation-state. Finally, the international division of labor has heightened male and capitalist control over women workers. The TNCs maintain control by importing patriarchal definitions from the core that intermingle with local

patriarchal attitudes. Further, the TNCs attempt to divide women of different regions and nations by pitting them against one another for jobs.

The TNC strategies have been encouraged by the world financial institutions and core nations. They have provided loans, mandated export processing projects, and promoted the establishment of export processing zones (EPZs). The EPZs provided the TNCs with industrial areas that had minimal taxes, no unions, and a supply of docile workers. In turn, the international financial institutions expected export processing to provide a source of income for debt and loan payments.

Within the core nations, the TNCs moved textile, garment, and electronics plants to economically disadvantaged areas where they could exploit indigenous female populations (Robert 1983; Safa 1981). In their next step, the TNCs sought the labor of women of color and recent immigrants, including illegal immigrants in the core nations (Sassen-Koob 1983; 1985). Finally, seeking ever cheaper labor in the competitive world market, the export-oriented TNCs in light industries (electronics, textiles, garments, pharmaceuticals, and toys) went overseas to peripheral areas. There the TNCs could take advantage of the female labor force generated by the marginalization of women during underdevelopment.

Not all of the TNCs' light industrial production has moved overseas, however. The capital intensive elements of production, planning, and research and development have remained in the hands of semi-skilled U.S. workers. Meanwhile the labor intensive facets of production have moved overseas (Ehrenreich and Fuentes 1982; Grossman 1978/79; Snow 1983; Green 1983). In the core nations, many of the electronics jobs originally belonged either to women or minorities, but now the proportion has changed. Snow (1983) found that most of the jobs that have gone overseas were women's positions. Most of the newly created jobs in electronics remaining in the U.S. have been men's jobs. Thus, core women workers have lost electronic jobs, and a similar situation obtains in the textile and garment industries (Chapkis and Enloe 1983).

The core nations also supported the investment efforts of TNCs by introducing favorable tariff laws for core corporations investing in peripheral nations. Relying on favorable tariff schedules that provided an important margin of profit, many core companies transferred their production to the global assembly line. Under the U.S. Tariff code 807, the TNCs were charged tariffs only on value added abroad. By 1977, over 596 U.S. electronics plants had gone to other countries to take advantage of these tariffs (NACLA 1977). Many U.S. textile and garment companies adjusted to the tariff situation by producing their textiles in the U.S. with new automated equipment and then sending the textiles overseas for assembly (Schmidt 1985).

At the same time, core nations provide peripheral nations with military and development aid. Recipients of TNC investment, such as South Korea, Singapore, Taiwan, Philippines, Indonesia, and countries in Central America,

have received extensive military aid and internal security training (Siegel 1978/79; Enloe 1983). In this manner, the host nations have maintained political control through heightened internal security and have promoted women workers to TNCs.

The peripheral nations also believed that TNC investment export processing would provide much needed capital for reinvestment in development efforts. Further, their workers would acquire job training and valuable skills. The newly created jobs would alleviate some of their unemployment problems. Hence, the export processing idea was very attractive. The governments sought to establish EPZs and to compete actively with one another for TNC investments.

Initially, the textile, garment, and electronics industries moved to Central America and the Caribbean in the 1960s (NACLA 1977). After unionization drives, demands for higher wages, and extensive advertising campaigns by Southeast Asian countries, the plants moved to Southeast Asia, in particular, South Korea, Taiwan, and Singapore. After the mobilization of women workers in these countries, the TNCs moved to Philippines, Indonesia, Malaysia, and China. Now some of the plants are moving to utterly impoverished areas such as Bangladesh (Lim 1983a). Given the relationship between TNCs and underdevelopment and the TNCs history of geographical mobility, I argue that the TNCs' investments in light industries may have mixed consequences for women workers. In addition, women workers across core and periphery nations may find themselves competing with one another. We now examine the impact of TNC investment on women workers in the global assembly line both at the micro and at the aggregate level.

#### WOMEN IN THE GLOBAL ASSEMBLY LINE

Women workers in the core were sought initially by factory owners for textile and electronics work. Economic and political elites defined this work as an extension of women's labor in the home. With the unionization of women workers in the core and demands for higher wages, however, the TNCs decided to seek female labor overseas at wages of 50 percent less than men's wages (Elson and Pearson 1981a).

Overseas, the TNCs found many unemployed female and male workers. Their target workers for the electronics plants, however, were young educated women who had no previous labor force experience. In the textile trades, TNCs often were able to hire older married women whose husbands were unemployed. This occurred, for instance, in the Mexico border area (Fernandez-Kelly 1983). Meanwhile, the general level of unemployment remained high around the industrial areas (Fernandez-Kelly 1983; Liano 1984).

Some researchers have argued that TNC employment provides economic opportunities for women and leads to the liberation of women from their economic marginalization and local patriarchal constraints (Tinker 1976; Lim 1983a,b). Lim (1983a), for example, argues that women TNC workers receive

better wages and working conditions than workers in local factories and other occupations. These wages enable women to acquire life experience, possessions, and status outside of the family. Women delay marriage and childbearing. Those women who work outside the home after marriage may have greater decision-making power within their families than women who do not work outside of the home.

Other researchers have argued that instead of liberating women, such employment only intensifies and recomposes women's subordinate position in their society (Elson and Pearson 1981a; Elson 1983; Fuentes and Ehrenreich 1983). Governments and TNC factories manipulate women's reproductive and productive roles to meet the demand for female workers. International economic elites have long pushed population control programs to forestall revolutions (Gordon 1977; Mass 1976; O'Brien 1983). Ironically, their traditional development programs have led to underdevelopment and the marginalization of women. This marginalization has undermined efforts to control fertility (Ward 1984). Now these population control programs may ensure a supply of nonpregnant female workers for the TNC plants. Enloe (1984) notes how when employers in Puerto Rico became concerned about the availability of female labor, investments in sterilization and birth control programs increased.<sup>3</sup>

Likewise, men and TNCs manipulate women's productive capabilities. Women's economic dependence on these plants, men, and their families is perpetuated through low wages, limited job stability and untransferable training. Young women move from the control of their family and fathers to TNC plants that replicate the patriarchal control. These plants have male managers and hierarchical forms of organization that allow limited opportunities for advancement of women (Grossman 1978/79; Fernandez-Kelly 1983; Pena 1985). The TNCs have tried to reinforce passive female behavior with tactics such as company sponsored beauty pageants that promote core standards of femininity, instead of paying women living wages (Grossman 1978/79).

The women TNC workers receive wages barely at the subsistence level even by the standards of their own countries. In electronics during the late 1960s and early 1970s, women's wages ranged from 17 cents an hour in Indonesia to \$1.20 an hour in Singapore (Grossman 1978/78). For the garment industry, the International Ladies Garment Workers Union has noted that women's wages "can run to 16 cents an hour for China, 57 cents an hour in Taiwan and over \$1 an hour in Hong Kong" (Serrin 1984:5). In a program advised by the World Bank, Sri Lanka garment workers earn \$5 for a long work week (Fuentes and Ehrenreich 1983:38). Women's wages are \$5 an hour or more in the United States. Almost universally, if women become too proficient at their work, they lose their jobs. Employers argue that experienced women workers are too expensive compared with inexperienced workers. Many women also must turn over their wages to their families and can keep only small amounts for themselves.

Job stability is also tenuous in these plants because of labor turnover, hazardous working conditions, threats by TNCs to run away, and downturns in

the international economy. If women workers become pregnant, they lose their jobs. In the electronics plants, women must peer through microscopes for hours at stretch. Eventually, they lose the perfect eyesight needed for employment. Hazardous chemicals or dust in the textiles and garment plants also cause health problems (Grossman 1978/79; Ehrenreich and Fuentes 1981; Jackson 1983). Further, if the women workers attempt to organize into unions or struggle for higher wages, the companies may retaliate by threatening to close the plants, by firing women organizers, or by the use of violent thugs (Grossman 1978/79; Fuentes and Ehrenreich 1983). Governments suppress unionization by using military/security equipment they have received from the United States (Siegel 1978/79; Enloe 1983). Alternatively, women may find that at the request of the TNCs, protective legislation has disappeared (Grossman 1978/79).

Finally, women's employment becomes tied to the vagaries of the international economy where women's jobs are subject to recession-generated layoffs, particularly in the electronics industries. Training is minimal for the workers. Often when TNCs lay them off, the women find themselves with nontransferable job skills. Once the EPZ incentives cease (e.g., with the imposition of taxes and tariffs), TNCs often leave the country and women are unemployed. This has occurred in Jamaica and Puerto Rico (Fuentes and Ehrenreich 1983; Bolles 1983). Women must then seek work as service or informal sector workers or as prostitutes or, sometimes, return to their rural villages (Neumann 1978/79; Barry 1979). Alternatively, they make the rounds of the other plants, seeking that added contact or advantage in finding employment. With these job stability problems, the number of women going through the TNC plants has grown. Ehrenreich and Fuentes (1982) have estimated that more than nine million women have passed through the TNC plants. Thus, during these economic crises, women are potentially more dependent on men.

Bornschier and Chase-Dunn (1995) and Ward (1984) have provided some macro empirical evidence for these arguments. Bornschier and Chase-Dunn found that, over time, higher levels of foreign investment in manufacturing had negative effects on levels of economic growth and magnified income inequality. Ward found that countries with higher overall levels of foreign investment and investment in manufacturing had fewer women relative to men in the industrial sector. Many case studies support the negative effects of such employment on women's share of the labor force and industrial employment.<sup>4</sup>

Thus, I would argue that, in the short run, TNC employment enhances some women's economic opportunities. In the long run, however, these women have meager employment opportunities because of the eventual effects of underdevelopment and the instability of industrial employment. Thus, in the long run, women's subordination is merely recomposed and reintensified by such investment and employment.

## DISCUSSION

By examining underdevelopment and marginalization of women at the micro and macro levels, we can evaluate the costs and benefits of TNCs for women's status. I would argue that two criteria are important: the level of long-term development (underdevelopment) induced by the TNC investment and the degree of economic long-term independence and or empowerment acquired by women through their work in the TNC plants (Leghorn and Parker 1981). In the long run we need to question whether TNC employment "makes survival easier for women, increases women's access to resources, or gives women more tools to fight with, more self-respect, or opportunities to get together and build networks" (Leghorn and Parker 1981:226).

### TNCs and Underdevelopment

I would argue that underdevelopment in most countries has remained relatively the same despite TNC investment. Lower relative levels of economic development and growth for some of the earlier recipients of TNC investment are all too common (for example, countries in the Caribbean such as Puerto Rico and Jamaica). One reason for this is that export processing does not generate products for local consumption. Instead, the products and profits flow overseas and to the core nations. Mexico, for example, thought that the TNCs would use Mexican supplies and products for servicing their plants. Instead the TNCs imported the supplies from its subsidiaries in other countries (Fernandez-Kelly 1983). A second reason is that TNCs often consume local investment capital instead of bringing in capital from abroad (Mueller 1979). Third, by bargaining away taxes and tariffs in the EPZs, the governments lose revenues and control over the TNCs' investments. Women's meager wages contribute little to the Gross Domestic Product. Finally, these countries also have experienced increased debt dependency on the IMF and the World Bank. Debt dependency has led to austerity programs and the decline of social welfare programs in the afflicted nations (Bolles 1983; Glasberg and Ward 1985; Glasberg and Ward 1986). Additionally, capital flight from debt repayments to international financial institutions has only aggravated the capital shortages of the periphery (Wood 1985; Debt Crisis Network 1985).

The economies of the nations experiencing TNC investment have remained distorted in their orientation toward the core nations. Export processing fails to change the outward orientation or unemployment rates. Development money builds new airports and tourist facilities to woo TNC investments rather than to aid development efforts (Wood 1985). Hence, TNC investment often leads only to increased service sector growth. In the Philippines, for example, it is hard to envision how "hospitality girls" who cater to Japanese businessmen and U.S. servicemen generate healthy sectoral growth (Neumann 1978/79; Barry 1979; Wood 1985). Meanwhile, the unemployment problem remains unsolved since the plants frequently bring new workers into the labor force rather than hiring from the pool of unemployed women and men. The unemployment situation is aggravated further when the TNCs lay off the new workers. Hence, many peripheral nations are finding that the TNCs

are generating more underdevelopment. Yet many of these countries' development packages require export-oriented investment as a condition for continued loans from the IMF and World Bank (Debt Crisis Network 1985; Wood 1985).

Income inequality remains high in the peripheral countries as profits accrue to the local elites and the TNCs. If we include the militarization of the state or authoritarian dictatorships in defining socioeconomic equality, then many of the countries have particularly poor records, for example, the Philippines, Indonesia, and South Korea. The high levels of U.S. military aid to countries in Southeast Asia and Central America and a growing militarization of their societies means less freedom for workers to organize and exert pressures for indigenous development and a share of the profits from their labors. Thus, in the long run, underdevelopment is only reinforced in these countries. Developing countries should consider that continued underdevelopment is one of the negative effects of competing with one another for TNC investment. And these conditions set the context in which women compete for access to valued jobs.

#### TNCs and Women's Position

The long term prospects for women vis-a-vis men and TNCs are dismal. In the short-run, millions of women have found employment in these plants. They have become a major means of support for their families and their jobs have become important for the survival of their countries' economies. At the same time, we need to evaluate whether, in the long-run, this employment empowers women relative to their environment. What happens over time to these women and their jobs, given the various crises of the international economy? When the competition between countries for the investment leads to runaway plants? Who takes care of women who experience health hazards and the double day? Alternatively, what difficulties do women face being reintegrated into their societies after participation in beauty pageants and other such activities? What happens to women's employment when the TNCs pull out due to labor demands or the end of alluring incentives in the EPZs?

Under these conditions, survival is very difficult for women. The result is that, in these newly created jobs, women lose their economic independence to the uncertainties of the global economy. Further, with the scarcity of other jobs, women face the threat of economic dependence on men and on the state. Women's subordination is recomposed and intensified through the TNC employment. Likewise, women find limited organizational opportunities in both the core and the periphery. Women workers compete with one another for jobs on terms set by the TNCs, rather than by the women themselves. The millions of women who have passed through the global assembly line and into the service and informal sectors become nearly impossible to organize. Thus, the economic consequences of TNC employment fail to permanently enhance the position of women.

#### Forces for Change

With women's increasingly central role in the global assembly line, there is potential for organizing women workers at the national and

international levels. The continuation of the global assembly line depends on the geographical separation and isolation of women workers from one another. The maintenance of the world system depends on workers in the various nations remaining alienated from one another (Chase-Dunn 1982).

At the same time, women workers have organized and are fighting back. As Nash (1983) has argued, gender as an organizational identity can become more salient at the international level than in nation-states. Thus, more than ever, women workers need to push for unions that promote the unionization of women workers across national boundaries. These unions also must overcome the misplaced concerns of conservative U.S. unions about unionization in developing countries creating subversive communist organizations (Siegel 1978/79). A promising development is the increased militancy of women workers (Chapkis and Enloe 1983; Fuentes and Ehrenreich 1983; Lim 1983a, 1985). For example, Cho (1985) argues that TNCs have generated greater militancy of Korean women workers. Women workers of the core should organize with these efforts. If TNC workers go on strike in Southeast Asia, for example, their sisters in the core will also go on strike and vice versa. West German workers setting the wage levels of workers in the subsidiaries in peripheral countries in their own contracts (Safa 1981) is a positive move in this direction.

Meanwhile, union organizers and women must overcome threats to unionization and independence created by fiscal austerity programs. Around the world, workers whose governments have cut social welfare programs (social safety nets) have seen their socioeconomic circumstances decline. It is these programs that enable workers to strike and to take a strong bargaining position vis-a-vis capitalists and the state. In the U.S., for example, major budget cuts have affected the social safety nets. This government response to the decline in U.S. hegemony in the world economy and pursuant economic crises have disproportionately affected the power of women and their children relative to men (Stallard et al. 1983; Ward forthcoming). Likewise, the underdevelopment and debt crises in many peripheral nations have meant austerity programs that undermine the bargaining positions of women and other workers in the peripheral nations. Of course, one of the solutions to the debt crisis is the reintroduction of export processing plants for the supply of hungry workers.

Thus, evaluating the costs and benefits of the TNC investment in industry for the economic position of women workers is very complex. Researchers at both the macro and the micro level need to consider the effects of TNC investment and employment on both underdevelopment and women's economic independence from men and from the state. Furthermore, such assessments of TNCs must include the short-run and long-run effects. Given the relatively brief span of TNC investment in exports (since the 1960s), the long-run effects are not yet wholly apparent. Yet the underdevelopment and feminist perspectives provide a way of analyzing the costs/benefits of women's work in transnational corporations.

NOTES

- 1 This paper is a revised version of a paper presented at the meetings of the American Sociological Association, Washington, D.C. I acknowledge the comments of Linda Grant and Anita Weiss and the patient word processing of Laura Whistle Cates.
- 2 See, for example, Evans 1979 and Cardoso and Faletto 1979.
- 3 A similar motivation may have been behind the influx of population control programs in Southeast Asia. Many of the celebrated cases of export processing generated development have taken place in countries with intensive family planning programs. The question for future research is: who are the targeted women for these programs and who are the female workers in TNCs? Electronics workers are young, single, and educated while textiles and garment workers are older and often married. Family planning programs frequently target older women who seek to end their childbearing. Hence, family planning programs may not have much of an effect on young single workers compared to the effects of older married women.
- 4 See, for example, the articles in Nash and Fernandez-Kelly 1983.

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