

Cross-Border Talk: Transnational Perspectives on Labor, Race and Sexuality

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The *frontera* between the U.S. and Mexico is one of the world's most fluid international boundaries. A constant flow of people, goods, and services traverse that 2,000 mile border and link the two countries of my birth: Mexico and the United States of America. Yet in many ways, Mexico remains separate from the U.S.; the border demarcates a divide between rich and poor, English- and Spanish-speakers, Mexican and "American." As Chicanas, our lives straddle the border and are embedded in the criss-cross of communities. We are therefore uniquely positioned to create channels of communication and collaboration with women in Mexico. As regional integration fosters economic homogeneity and reinforces capitalist hegemony, it is imperative that we do so.

This is an essay about mujeres talking to mujeres: Chicana/Latina women North of the border, and Mexicana women to the South. In this era of economic restructuring, trade agreements like the NAFTA and the GATT raise expectations that increased trade and investment will bring an increase in transnational communication and network-building, not only among business leaders but also among North American citizens. Progressive visionaries have predicted that transnational networks at the grassroots will have a hand in shaping economic and political outcomes in the Americas. Cross-Border Links, an alternative, grass-roots directory of North American organizations, for example, opens with these words: "From grassroots groups in border towns to labor union headquarters in New York, Toronto, and Mexico City, people are sharing experiences and ideas, fostering mutual understanding, and developing strategies to advance their interests. These social contacts are helping to shape the new economic structures being built on the continent."¹ This and other sources offer an optimistic view of the possibilities for a global society in which citizens, grassroots movements, and non-governmental organizations (NGOs) communicate and build networks across borders in response to an increase in shared interests and concerns.² But can we, as workers and women keep pace with the changes brought about by

regional economic integration? While capital is eliminating tariffs and knocking down barriers to international trade, investors are positioning themselves in an extremely advantageous position in relation to labor and the communities providing human and natural resources for their investments. It is often low-cost female labor that attracts foreign investors to Mexico. How can we, as women activists, gain access to transnational networks so that we can come with our own response to economic restructuring? How is economic restructuring affecting women on both sides of the border and what is standing in the way of building a collaborative response to these changes? These are some of the questions framing this discussion of contemporary transnational organizing among Chicana/Latina and Mexican women in a post-cold war context.

Between Chicanas and Mexicanas

When an organized tour of Mexicana garment workers visited the garment district in Los Angeles and San Francisco, they were amazed to find that the conditions were similar to Mexico City, leading to a radically altered perspective of the U.S. garment industry. "Conditions in Los Angeles," said one of the tour members, "were worse than here in México [D.F.]. Garment workers there have to deal with being undocumented on top of everything else. There are women from all over the world, from Asia, Mexico, Central America, trying to make their living in the garment district. It seems like clothes can be sewn anywhere and the owners are just looking for the cheapest labor. ... Seeing all this for myself helped me to realize that making our own little union is not enough, we need to go beyond a national union and figure out how to get together with other garment workers who, like us, are trying to make a living by sewing clothes whether they work in Los Angeles, the Philippines, or Mexico."³ Rafaela, another tour participant, commented "At least at home we can't get deported."⁴ Rafaela and her colleagues often discuss the forces of globalization and their place within that process. Their tour through Los Angeles, Watsonville, and San Francisco eroded the lines dividing Mexican and U.S. workers and they returned to Mexico with a new determination to organize across borders. U.S. workers who met with the Mexican garment workers were likewise inspired and determined. They talked about the futility of striking for higher wages and better working conditions if a victory would eventually lead to plant closures

and relocation across a border so that management could exploit other women. They reaffirmed their commitment to transnational organizing with Mexican and Canadian workers.

Little happened, however, after the tour. The contact dropped off to almost nothing, the flow of information ceased, and the joint actions that had been discussed never took place. This pattern is not uncommon in attempts to build transnational links among women of the Americas. There have been numerous attempts to create transnational links between U.S. Latinas and other women of the Americas. In some cases, women have attempted collaborative actions such as drafting statements of women's rights in the UN-sponsored International Covenant of Human Rights and the 1995 Women's Conference in Beijing, or participating in labor protests and international boycotts of products (e.g., Gallo wine, Nestlé, Levi Strauss). But the majority of contacts across the border have not yet reached a point of collaborative action, remaining instead in a beginning step of establishing contact and discussing common ground. While U.S. Latinas readily express a need and a desire to establish transnational networks at the grassroots level, they, as individuals and organizations, have experienced substantial roadblocks, largely due to a lack of resources as well as differences in the central focus and agenda. Part of the daunting nature of the enormity of the task of transnational organizing is that Mexicanas and Latinas have distinct ways of defining their agendas. Chicanas and Latinas in the U.S. have focused on issues of race and ethnicity while Mexicanas have focused on class issues and survival. Adding to these differences is a widespread perception that the interests of U.S. workers are at odds with the interests of workers in Mexico. Ross Perot's imagery during the 1992 presidential debates perpetuated this idea when he warned of a "large sucking sound" of jobs going to Mexico.

Combing through the various attempts to build alliances among Latinas, a two-sided problematic emerges. North of the border, the "multicultural women's movement" tends to privilege race, ethnicity, culture, and national origin, arguing that women of color experience a four-way intersection of oppressions based on race, class, gender, sexual orientation. But given the centrality of racism in the experience of women of color, the multicultural women's movement privileges the discussion of racial difference. South of the border, the popular women's movement

focuses on family survival. A broad-based popular women's movement emerged in Mexico after the 1985 earthquake and defined what has been called a "popular" women's agenda centered around issues that have a great affect on "women's work" within a traditional division of labor, such as housing, basic needs, and public services.⁵ Residentially-based organizations such as neighborhood groups and renters unions constitute the bulk of the popular women's movement, formed to survive the "lost decade" of the 1980's. The losses have continued during the first half of the 1990's with Mexicans experiencing a constant erosion in their buying power, standard of living, and employment opportunities. Compounding these losses is a climate of political instability and violence punctuated by a string of political assassinations, rebellion in Chiapas, and a collapse of the economy. Within this setting, women have organized around issues of survival and their domestic responsibilities of caring for their homes and families; around what has been called "feminine consciousness" or "militant motherhood."⁶

To Mexican activists, the most immediate needs of housing, food, and services are not adequately addressed in the U.S. multicultural women's movement. When they have searched for counterpart organizations in the U.S., Mexican women found organizations not readily identified in the U.S. as "women's" groups, but rather as serving the poor: homeless shelters, welfare rights groups, labor groups, and church communities. To U.S. Latinas, meanwhile, the popular women's movement in Mexico appears to be confined to a domestic or private sphere with little attention specifically directed to what is perceived to be the central issue: the interplay of race and ethnicity with gender. U.S. Latinas find hardly a mention of race, ethnicity, and colonialism among Mexicana women activists in the popular urban movements. The color/culture line, an essential starting point for "women of color" in the U.S., is seemingly ignored by the Mexican popular women's movement. Race and ethnic differences exist between upper-middle class and educated feminists, and poor, working-class women in the popular movements, but the topic is largely skirted, as is the related topic of domestic service. Although Mexico is racially stratified, women activists disregard racial hierarchies among them, falling back on the revolutionary ideology of *mestizaje* - that all Mexicans are of mixed race.⁷

On a number of occasions, the centrality of race and ethnicity for U.S. Latinas became an issue for Mexican women in various transnational forums. In one international exchange, for example, Mexicanas voiced a concern that too much attention to racial and ethnic difference was going to derail the alliance discussion, while U.S. Latinas demonstrated impatience with having to argue yet again, that race indeed matters. Neither U.S. Latinas nor Mexicanas found comparable developments in women's organizing in the two countries, making it difficult for the movements to identify with counterpart groups and thus reach out to them across the border.⁸ Despite these obstacles to establishing transnational alliances and collaborative actions between U.S. Latinas and Mexican women, there are many examples of positive connections between women of color across the Americas. And in spite of the divisive spin of the NAFTA debate, women have been quick to realize that the benefactors of neoliberal economic reform are neither women nor workers on either side of the border, but investors and employers on all sides. While there are many points of contradicting interests in the short-term, Chicana, Latina, and Mexicana women have voiced an interest in creating cross-border links around their increasingly shared interests as women, workers, and community activists. Some of the most effective links between Chicana and Mexicana women have emerged around the very issue that has been at the heart of popular women's organizing in Mexico: community survival. Alliances between women in border communities, for example, have resulted in transnational coalitions within the environmental justice movement. Even women separated by thousands of kilometers are beginning to define a type of politics that is residentially or domestically based, but globally linked.

Differential Survival

From within a very traditional gendered division of labor, Mexicana and Chicana/Latina women have organized around their responsibilities of maintaining the home and family. While this focus may do little to alter the gendered division of labor, it highlights the importance of the home, the neighborhood, and the politics of everyday life. Transnational alliance building has been limited in this realm of women's organizing, partly because it is inherently tied to a spatially continuous geographical location. Within the borderlands, where both Mexican and U.S.

communities occupy the same geographical location, there are numerous examples of transnational alliance-building among Chicanas and Mexicanas around community issues such as water, health, environmental toxins, and access to public services. Women make up the bulk of the membership in organizations confronting the issues of community survival on both sides of the border. One example of an effective transnational network is the Southwest Network for Environmental and Economic Justice (the SNEEJ). The SNEEJ includes working class and poor people of color fighting for economic and environmental justice, encompassing groups as diverse as the Asian Immigrant Women's Advocates,⁹ the West County Toxics Coalition,¹⁰ Mothers of East Los Angeles, and Fuerza Unida, an organization of Chicana and Mexicana garment workers who were laid-off when Levi Strauss closed their plant in San Antonio, Texas and moved production to Costa Rica.¹¹ The Network has organized in small border towns in Mexico where Mexican communities have been fighting toxic waste and health hazards due to the practices of corporations attracted to the border for its lax labor, environmental, and health regulation.

In Nogales, Arizona and Nogales, Sonora, women activists have pursued a class action suit against various manufacturers and agencies that dump Trichloroethylene (TCE), a toxic cleaning agent, into river water which runs in a northerly direction from Sonora to Arizona. Along the Arizona portion of the border alone, there are at least ten bi-national organizations engaged in coalitional activism around issues of environmental justice.¹² Although women rarely head these organizations, they constitute the majority of the active membership. Women's labor organizations such as Mujer Obrera in El Paso, TX; the San Antonio chapter of the Amalgamated Clothing and Textile Workers Union (ACTWU); and Fuerza Unida in San Antonio, have all been active in a wide range of arenas, including the environmental justice movement and the Texas Network for Fair Trade and Clean Environment. In example after example of community organizing, women are a driving force, and when the community is spread out over an international border, women are engaging in transborder struggles for community survival.

In contrast, in communities whose difference is compounded by spatial separation and distance, it has been harder to create transnational alliances around the politics of community

survival. Even if women are aware of the relationship between conditions in their own neighborhood and international agreements, political action is usually focused upon local government and business. A Mexican activist may be attempting to bring potable water and bus service to her street while a Chicana activist may be resisting the elimination of after-school child care in the local schools. Both are attempting to hold their respective State to its role in providing public services that alleviate the burden of domestic work and child care for families, but the specific terms of survival differ in diverse contexts and the connection between the movements, therefore, is more tenuous than if the communities share at least a geographical location.

The bulk of the popular women's movement in Mexico is organized around residentially-based survival issues in organizations for poor and working-class women such as neighborhood groups or renters unions.¹³ These organizations often address the problem of the double day of labor for women, attempting to alleviate the burden of a long work day both in and out of paid labor by, for example, securing access to health services, public transportation, or public utilities such as water or electricity.¹⁴ The Feminist Tendency (*Tendencia Feminista*), one of the principal components of the Mexican feminist movement, is made up of feminist groups seeking expression of a new form of feminism grounded in the problems of the popular sectors of Latin America.¹⁵ Together with activist women in diverse popular organizations, they form a mass-based women's movement dedicated to the concerns of women in the popular sectors, and have developed feminist projects in response to those concerns.¹⁶

Because neighborhood associations and renters' unions focus on issues of housing and homelessness, Mexican activists have looked to U.S. homeless advocates for transnational alliances. In 1986, women from the CONAMUP, an umbrella organization of Mexican neighborhood groups, became involved in planning the International Year of the Homeless Caravan to the United Nations. They sent three members of the Women's Regional Council to take part in the caravan which made its way North through Mexico, Texas, and the Eastern states, ending up at the United Nations in mid-1987. Since Mexican and Latina participants were not satisfied with the treatment of gender issues during the caravan, they organized a second women's caravan back to

Mexico City in 1988. While the second caravan paled in comparison to the scope and visibility of the first, it allowed for women involved in housing issues to exchange information and experiences with fellow community activists as they explored the gender implications of the problems of housing and homelessness. For example, women discussed the correlation of domestic abuse and homelessness among women. However, once the caravans ended, cross-border contacts dwindled. As the Mexican representative explained: "You don't really have neighborhood associations in the U.S. like we have here in the D.F. and in other Mexican cities. Here, lots of neighborhoods were built by what you call "squatters," people who claim their land, build their houses, and refuse to move when authorities come to evict them. Later, women marched for paved streets and schools and services and now they have neighborhoods. Everything in the popular neighborhoods is there because of the struggles of the people who live there and the women are very important to that struggle. We didn't find the same thing in the U.S."¹⁷ Indeed, neighborhood activists exist in the U.S., but their struggles are not readily linked to feminist struggles.

Labor organizations have been more successful than other types of Chicana/Latina and Mexicana groups at identifying with counterpart groups across borders. Garment workers in particular have been especially aware of the need to organize beyond national borders. Before 1990, the independent "19th of September" Garment Workers Union represented the only predominantly female sector of the Mexican industrial workforce which had managed to establish substantial transnational links. Since its dramatic inception in the aftermath of the 1985 earthquakes, this union has attracted international attention from feminist, labor, and church groups, resulting in a fruitful exchange that included a number of sponsored international tours and some funding for union projects and programs. In 1988, internal divisions put into question the legitimacy of the union's leadership and many supporters abroad suspended their support until the union could present a more united front. Nonetheless, Chicana and Latina organizations have maintained relations throughout the Union's ten year history.

The Garment Workers Union with the help of *Mujer a Mujer* and other advocacy organizations in the U.S. sent various delegations of women on international tours to compare

living and working conditions and to exchange materials and experiences with other women garment workers. They spoke at events and showed the documentary film, No Les Pedimos Un Viaje a la Luna (We're Aren't Asking For the Moon) about the movement that gave birth to their union.¹⁸ From 1987 through 1989, the Union and its International Commission produced and distributed an international newsletter to approximately 300 individuals and organizations in the U.S., Canada, and Europe.¹⁹

Chicana and Latina garment workers in Fuerza Unida, Mujer Obrera, and the two biggest garment worker unions in the U.S., the International Ladies Garment Workers Union (ILGWU) and the ACTWU, have pursued a relationship with Mexican garment workers in the "19th of September" Union. Irene Reyna, a leader of Fuerza Unida, described the relationship between her organization and the "19th of September" Union as "good." "They are aware of what is going on with us and we are aware of what is going on with them. While attending a conference on NAFTA, I stayed with women from the '19th of September' Union and they have visited us here in San Antonio." She went on to explain that "it has been hard to keep communication going ... the phone bills are expensive ... so are plane tickets ... so we keep in touch by phone, but not very often."²⁰

Despite the accomplishments of the international tours and occasional exchanges, even garment workers have not been able to maintain on-going exchange and communication or longer-term coordinated action. Transnational mutual solidarity remains a wish that has never become a sustainable daily practice, largely due to lack of resources. This sector has maintained a high level of awareness of the global nature of their industry and has made the most out of the transnational contacts they have managed. Foundation and individuals interested in building links between Chicanas, Latinas, and Mexicanas would do well to focus on garment workers.

Beyond the Cosmic Race

During the international tour of the Mexican garment workers there were moments which highlighted a difference in approach to issues of race and ethnicity between Mexican and Latina activists. The first took place in the San Francisco office of the ILGWU when the union leadership mentioned the racial divisions between Asian American, African American and Latina garment

workers. At that time, the San Francisco office was run by Asian women but the union's elected leadership was predominantly African American women. Latina garment workers had their own organization within the larger Union and had sponsored a separate reception for the Mexican garment workers. This was very confusing for the Mexican garment workers who felt the tension in the office but persisted in asking question after question about the racial dynamics of the ILGWU. They could not comprehend the division based on race and kept returning to this point until finally the ILGWU's local president, an African American woman, abruptly ended the meeting and referred the visiting delegation to the Union's Latina organization. Later, when we met with Latina garment workers, the relevance of race, ethnicity, and national origin was clarified in the numerous references to immigration status and discriminatory practices in the industry. It was a crash course for Mexican garment workers on U.S. race relations.

The "desencuentro" at the International Lesbian Conference in 1987 provides another illustration of how treatment of racial dynamics is another fundamental difference between Chicana/Latina and Mexican women's movements. In 1987, *Mujer a Mujer*, a collective of Mexican and U.S. feminists dedicated to promoting communication and exchange among activist women in Canada, the U.S. and Mexico, helped to organize and fund a bi-national lesbian conference in Mexico. Putting a high priority on the connection between Chicana/Latina lesbians from the U.S. and lesbians from Mexico, they made funds available to Latinas in the U.S. and fifteen Chicana/Latina women attended. During the conference the U.S. Latina contingent requested a closed session limited to Women of Color to talk about racism. The Mexican women rejected the request for a closed space. They were offended by the request and defended the rights of their white, middle-and upper-class friends to remain in the room and be a part of the discussion rather than separating with the "strangers" from the U.S.. This incident combined with language barriers and stereotypes made the meeting a disaster -- what was called a "*desencuentro total*" -- a total mis-encounter.²¹

Just as the U.S. Latina women's movement has been reluctant to frame women's issues in terms of community survival and a traditional gendered division of labor, Mexican women's groups

have shied away from issues of race and ethnicity. Mexican women's groups are often made up of women of like ethnic/racial background but they rarely put forth race or ethnicity as a basis for their collective identity. Even organizations of predominantly indigenous women made scant reference to issues of race and ethnicity or to a collective identity based on race or ethnicity. Given the racial stratification and segregation within the various tiers of the Mexican women's movement, the absence of racial discourse is glaring. There is a marked predominance of indigenous and mestiza women in the popular women's groups organized around community survival while the white or light-skinned women form feminist groups focused more explicitly on gender-based issues. Some of the white feminist activists work with women of color in the popular women's movement on issues of labor and community survival but none of the groups emphasize race or racial hierarchies. The silence of white women is easy to understand; they enjoy racial privilege and depend upon women of color to perform burdensome daily tasks in the home such as cleaning, buying and preparing food, and caring for children and elderly. Much like upper-class women in the United States, their emancipation from housework and childcare comes at the expense of women of color who work as domestic servants and care-givers for low wages. If racial inequities were addressed, women enjoying racial privilege would put at risk their freedom from domestic duties.

It is harder to understand the silence around racial issues on the part of Mexican women of color. Perhaps it is related to the general tendency in Mexico to elide issues of race. Since early revolutionary writers such as José Vasconcelos, in his book The Cosmic Race, advanced theories of mestizaje and promoted the idea that the majority of Mexicans are of mixed racial heritage, the concepts of indigenismo, *mestizaje*, and the Mexican as *mestizo* have diverted the discourse on race and racism, resulting in a reluctance to discuss racism and assign racial meanings.²² But Mexico is a country deeply stratified by race and there is a great need for addressing issues of race and racism in the women's movement as well as other progressive movements. While Women of Color in the U.S. tend to define their collective identity equally around gender and race/ethnicity, Mexican women's groups focus more on gender and class, often without elaborating a formal position on race and ethnicity. This is a shortcoming on the part of the Mexican women's groups much like the

failure of the movement of women of color in the U.S. to adequately address issue of class and community survival. Both present obstacles to effective transnational network building among Latina and Mexicana women of color.

Despite these difficulties, transnational network building is an important and consequential part of the women's movement in Mexico and among U.S. Latinas and feminists in general. More than any other function, transnational contact helps activist women on both sides of the border place themselves and their collective actions within a global context and understand how citizenship is not gender neutral. Transnational networks facilitate the exchange of information, materials, and experiences between groups which allows women to make connections, both in theory and practice, between local issues, gendered citizenship, and processes of globalization. Transnational networks also serve to link otherwise isolated groups with organizations that can offer support and mutual solidarity from other areas of the world.

Comunidades in Cyberspace

One of the groups that succeeded in establishing a substantial and extended network of communication and exchange between women was the School for International Organizers developed by Mujer a Mujer in Mexico.²³ During 1992, 20 Mexican women from the labor and popular urban movements participated in a weekly training seminar which examined the process of regional economic integration and its effects on U.S. Latinas and Mexican women. Each participant went on at least one international tour to the U.S. and gained first-hand knowledge of women's organizations in the U.S.. Another of the group's accomplishments was to establish communication with Latina women in the U.S. via electronic mail over the internet. Participants in the school, especially those already familiar with computers in their workplaces, learned how to use the Internet system and the World Wide Web and got electronic addresses on PeaceNet.

We use electronic mail to exchange ideas and information, plan things, and to access a wide international public." During the Tri-national Encuentro of Working Women, we were able to instantly disseminate the results of the conference in Spanish and English, to electronic addresses on our mailing list. Within days we were receiving responses and making new contacts. We got over that old feeling that the conferences we organized were like a tree falling in the woods with no one around to hear it. Now we have a way to send information

about what we are doing and receive immediate responses from women in this and other continents.²⁴

In September, 1995, daily summaries of the International Women's Conferences in Huairou and Beijing, China were instantly disseminated in Mexico and the U.S. by a joint team of Mexican and U.S. activists.

Instant and widespread dissemination of information via electronic mail was extremely important in the case of the 1994 Zapatista rebellion in Chiapas, Mexico. Sub-commandante Marcos communicated with the world via his lap-top computer and modem. His communiqués gained popular support for the rebels and helped to pressure the Mexican government into a cease-fire, temporary amnesty for rebel leaders and peace negotiations. For women, access to a public via electronic mail will diminish the problems of isolation and silence. With the capability of instantly and affordably spreading information and analysis, women gain the protection offered by vigilant eyes and ears in the international community. This vigilance has helped to limit army abuses in Chiapas, environmental abuses in the borderlands, and sexual abuse by government agents, most notably by Drug Enforcement agents in Mexico City. Although access to electronic communication is still extremely limited among U.S. Latinas and Mexicanas, there are some Raza women cruising the internet, creating a transnational sense of *comunidad* in cyberspace.

A transnational level of organization is more likely around some issues than others. Neighborhood and housing issues, for example, are more difficult to frame within a global context than environmental, labor, or trade issues. Many Latina and Mexicana women active in popular movements are involved in these localized issues and have had a difficult time addressing them through regional and global networks. One Mexican feminist faulted her organization's lack of resolve to create transnational channels of communication: "We haven't laid out a clear objective to establish transnational links. Projects have been determined by the necessities of the moment ... and although we know its important in the long run, in the short run, we don't have the energy to carry through on a project like that. ... With the Free Trade Agreement comes a more urgent need for communication and more concrete initiatives."²⁵

Women have been most effective in building networks around specific regional or single issue causes. Women in the maquiladoras, for example, are part of the Coalition for Justice in the Maquiladoras and the Tri-National Commission for Justice in the Maquiladoras. Women's labor groups have collaborated in a number of trade-related bi- and tri-national coalitions, including the Mexican Free Trade Action Network, the U.S.-Mexico-Canada Labor Solidarity Network, and Common Frontiers. Transnational collaboration among women in specific industries have been organized by *Fuerza Unida* in San Antonio; *La Mujer Obrera* of El Paso; *Trabajadoras Desplazadas* (a committee of Mexicana workers laid off by Green Giant in Watsonville, CA. when the company shifted production to Irapuato, Mexico) ; and *Mujeres en Acción Sindical* , and the *Frente Auténtico de Trabajo* in Mexico D.F..²⁶ *Mujer a Mujer* in Mexico D.F. has been especially active and successful in facilitating transnational exchange among women through encuentros, conferences, tours, and correspondence. They have greatly expanded their work in connecting activists women in the region through various networks, including an electronic mail network (via Peacenet) and participation in bi- and tri-national coalitions. Once women gain the facility to communicate across borders, they are faced with the challenge of addressing the many contradictions and conflicts of interests, real or perceived, that exist between women - Chicanas/Latinas and Mexicanas, white women and women of color. Whether the conflicts arise from distinctions based on race, national origin, immigration status, or culture, they present formidable obstacles to alliance building between women.

One activist comment that "globalization has started to erase the barrier of disinterest" in other women.²⁷ Time and time again women showed a strong interest in making connections and taking a more active role in establishing the rules and regulations of the process of regional integration. The frustration voiced by both Chicana/Latina and Mexicana women was that no one knows exactly how to take the next step in transnational network building after establishing initial contact. Women's movements lack a unifying issue or initiative around which groups can find common ground and take collaborative action. On every front, the move from communication and contact to collaborative action was not clearly defined.

The in-between step of increasing mutual awareness and understanding between U.S. Latinas and Mexican women has been one of the most consequential aspects of transnational communication and exchange. Exposure to the vibrant and multi-faceted women's movements of Latin America has offered U.S. Latinas a valuable lesson in examining the gendered nature of citizenship and broadening the basis of support for our own movements. Alvarez writes, "we in the U.S. have much to learn about how to promote and reinforce the process of empowerment and gender consciousness among low-income and minority women who are involved in welfare rights struggles, in our own growing numbers of comedores populares and collective survival strategies, in our own government make-work programs, and permanent "emergency" relief programs."²⁸ The extensive engagement between popular women's groups and feminist advocacy groups in Mexico, and in Latin America in general, has advanced our consciousness and analysis of how class and gender issues are intertwined. In the U.S., the connection between gender, race, and class consciousness needs to be established within the mainstream feminist movement, especially now that congress is legislating welfare reform and retreating from affirmative action. Organizations of U.S. Women of Color have come into the forefront of feminism in the U.S., demonstrating how issues of race and ethnicity are integral to women's empowerment. During the 1970's and 1980's, Latin American feminists drew on a rich and abundant source of criticism and analysis from feminists in the industrialized countries of Europe and North America. But in the 1990's, Latin American women's movements may capture the attention of U.S. feminists in search of a mass-base of support for both gender issues and issues of community survival. In the past few years, collaboration and exchange between U.S. Latina and Mexican women has become a busy, two-way street.

¹) From Ricardo Hernandez and Edith Sanchez, eds. (1992) Cross-Border Links. Albuquerque, NM: Inter-Hemispheric Education Resource Center. Also, see: Milton H. Jamail and Margo Gutiérrez (1992) The Border Guide: Institutions and Organizations of the United States-Mexico Borderlands 2nd Edition. Austin, TX: CMAS Books. Both guides provide comprehensive listings of organizations and agencies that seek to create links and promote collaborative action between peoples and communities of Mexico and the United States.

²) Cathryn L. Thorup examines the link between free trade and the need for coalition-building in her article "The Politics of Free Trade and the Dynamics of Cross-Border Coalitions in U.S.-Mexican Relations." Columbia

Journal of World Business Vol. 26 No.2 (Summer 1991) pp. 12-26.

- 3) From a personal interview with Octavia Lara, Secretary of External Relations of the "19th of September" Garment Workers Union. 3/25/89. San Francisco.
- 4) From a personal interview with Rafaela Dominguez, Secretary of Sports and Culture of the "19th of September" Garment Workers Union. 3/25/89. San Francisco.
- 5) See: Lamas, Marta, Alicia Martínez, Maria Luisa Tarrés, Esperanza Tuñón (1995) Junctures and Disjunctures: The Women's Movement in México, 1970-1993. Unpublished paper sponsored by the Ford Foundation, Mexico.
- 6) Temma Kaplan, argues that in line with a traditional sexual division of labor, women accept the responsibility for "preserving life" and act on what she calls "female consciousness," forming mass mobilizations in defense of their right and obligation to maintain a home and provide the basic needs for their families. See: T. Kaplan (1982) "Female Consciousness and Collective Action" Signs: Journal of Women in Culture and Society Vol. 7 No. 1 pp.55-76. For a related discussion of "militant motherhood" see: Sonia Alvarez (1990) Engendering Democracy in Brazil: Women's Movements in Transition Politics. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press.
- 7) See: Alan Knight (1990) Racism, Revolution and Indigenismo in Mexico. In Richard Graham, ed., The Idea of Race in Latin America. Austin, TX: University of Texas Press.
- 8) Moraga and Anzaldúa edited the collected volume This Bridge Called My Back (1981) NY: Kitchen Table: Women of Color Press which became a groundbreaking text on feminism among Women of Color in the U.S.. A more recent collection, Making Face, Making Soul/Haciendo Caras, edited by Anzaldúa, was published in 1990 (San Francisco, CA: Aunt Lute Foundation Books). For a discussion of the differences in women's agendas across national boundaries see Chandra Mohanty's "Introduction" and "Under Western Eyes" in Mohanty et al, (1991) Third World Women and the Politics of Feminism. Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press.
- 9) The Asian Immigrant Women's Advocates (AIWA) is a group of Asian and Asian-American women in the electronics, hotel, and garment industries working to improve their own working and living conditions. AIWA has pursued a varied agenda, ranging from leadership training and literacy campaigns to improving health and safety regulation and enforcement in the workplace. Asian garment workers organized a boycott of Jessica McClintock garments and their major retailer, Macy's, in order to pressure for back pay owed to workers that had been laid off. AIWA's agenda is described in the newsletter Race, Poverty and the Environment Vol. 3 No. 1 (Spring 1992) p.12.
- 10) The West County Toxins Coalition is made up of residents of an area in Richmond, CA. known as the "petrochemical corridor" where Chevron, Ortho, Whitco Chemicals and other petrochemical firms generate and process hazardous waste on-site. Coalition activists, predominantly African American women, have opposed expansion of the industry and pushed for more stringent control of toxins. In 1995 they reached a compromise with Chevron for a new health center as a condition of expansion. For more on the West County Toxins Coalition see Robert D. Bullard (1993) Confronting Environmental Racism. Boston: South End Press. p. 29.
- 11) For more on Fuerza Unida see: Kara A. Zugman (1996) Rising from the Ashes: Raza Labor in the Global Economy. César E. Chavez Institute for Public Policy Working Paper Series. San Francisco State University.
- 12) Some of the binational environmental organizations include: The Health Council for Northeast Sonora and Cochise County in Agua Prieta, Sonora; Ecological Link in Agua Prieta Sonora and Douglas, AZ; Arizona Toxics Information in Bisbee, AZ; the Border Ecology Project in Naco, AZ; Grupo Dignidad in Nogales, AZ; Grupo Ecológico los Campitos in Cananea, Sonora; Proyecto Fronterizo de Educación Ambiental; the Coalition for Justice in the Maquiladoras in San Antonio; Alert Citizens for Environmental Safety in El Paso; and the TCE Information Center in Tucson, AZ.

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- ¹³⁾ See: Julio Moguel (1992) Caminos del movimiento urbano popular en los ochenta. El Cotidiano 50 (Sept) pp. 221-226
- ¹⁴⁾ For an excellent analysis of Mexican women's survival strategies against ecological and environmental impoverishment, see Lynn Stephen (1992) Women in Mexico's Popular Movements: Survival Strategies Against Ecological and Economic Impoverishment. Latin American Perspectives Vol. 19 No.1, (Winter) pp. 73-96.
- ¹⁵⁾ See: Norma Mogrovejo Aquis (1990) Feminismo popular en México: analisis del surgimiento, desarrollo y conflictos en la relacion entre la tendencia feminista y la regional de mujeres de la CONAMUP. Masters Thesis, Department of Social Science, U.N.A.M., México D.F.
- ¹⁶⁾ Marta Lamas and other Mexican feminist analysts have pointed out that the feminist movement and the broader-based women's movement in Mexico are not synonymous. Lamas described the "movimiento amplio de mujeres" as a loose coalition of campesinas, women from popular urban organizations, women wage-earners, and feminists in Marta Lamas (1995) El movimiento feminista en Mexico: una interpretación. An unpublished paper. Lamas cites a preliminary attempt to classify women's democratic struggles in the second wave of feminism in 1970 by Acevedo, Lamas, and Liguori published in the feminist journal, FEM in No. 13, 1978.
- ¹⁷⁾ From a personal interview with Vicki Villanueva, Regional de Mujeres de la CONAMUP 5/6/92 Mexico D.F.
- ¹⁸⁾ No Les Pedimos Un Viaje a la Luna (We Aren't Asking the Moon) is a one-hour documentary film produced by Mari Carmen de Lara and distributed in the United States by First Run/Icarus Films in New York.
- ¹⁹⁾ For more on the Mexican Garment Workers Union see: Teresa Carrillo (1990) Women, Trade Unions, and New Social Movements: The Case of the "19th of September" Garment Workers Union in Mexico. Ph.D. dissertation, Department of Political Science, Stanford University, Stanford, CA.
- ²⁰⁾ From an interview by Kara Ann Zugman with Irene Reyna, Fuerza Unida. 9/13/95. San Francisco, CA.
- ²¹⁾ From personal interviews with Elaine Burns, Mujer a Mujer 7/20/92 and 8/25/92. Mexico D.F.
- ²²⁾ For a full discussion of the cosmic race, see: José Vasconcelos (1925) La Raza Cósmica. Paris: Agencia Mundial de Librerías. For more on racism in Mexico see Alan Knight's discussion in the previously-cited article "Racism, Revolution, and Indigenismo in Mexico."
- ²³⁾ For more on this and other programs of Mujer a Mujer see: Correspondencia, a bilingual newsletter containing information and analysis about the impact of globalization and economic restructuring on women's lives and struggles. It is published three times a year by Mujer a Mujer, AP 24-553, Colonia Roma 06701, Mexico D.F..
- ²⁴⁾ From a personal interview with Elaine Burns of Mujer a Mujer/Woman to Woman, on 8/25/92, Mexico D.F.
- ²⁵⁾ From a personal interview with Itziar Lozano of CIDHAL, a feminist service organization. 6/30/92. Mexico D.F.
- ²⁶⁾ For more information on these and other cross-border networks, see Hernandez and Sanchez, eds., (1992) Cross-Border Links. Albuquerque, NM: Inter-Hemispheric Education Resource Center.
- ²⁷⁾ From a personal interview with Elaine Burns of Mujer a Mujer. 8/25/92. Mexico D.F..
- ²⁸⁾ From Sonia Alvarez (1992) Redibujando el Feminismo en las Americas and "Redrawing" the Parameters of Gender Struggle" A paper presented at the Conference - Learning from Latin America: Women's Struggles for Livelihood. UCLA. February 28, 1992. p. 8.