

Global Agro Food Systems: Gendered and Ethnic Inequalities in Mexico's Agricultural Industry

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Restructuring of traditional economies, often associated with trade liberalization, has gendered and ethnic consequences for workers of the Global South. This paper seeks to understand the impacts trade liberalizations have had on the lives of Mexican women, especially those of indigenous descent, working in agro-food production industry. Focusing on Mexico's agricultural sector, this paper traces developments leading to Mexico's liberalized trade agreements and examines how ethnic and gender inequalities overlap to create unique experiences for the waged agricultural industry. A variety of theories are used; Food Regime Theory captures the large-scale historical and contemporary trade relations among nation-states, and is helpful in illuminating the economic atmosphere in which developing countries such as Mexico participate. In an attempt to move beyond the strictly macroscopic conceptualization of trade relations provided by a Food Regime perspective, however, an extension of a socialist feminist analysis is made through the use of intersectionality. It is here that the unique forms of inequalities in Mexico's agricultural waged labour force, by way of being both female and indigenous, are brought to light and critically examined. The goal is to understand how large-scale global trade processes have the potential to affect a developing country's most marginalized populations. garçon

Mexico's Trade Liberalized Agricultural Industry- What are the Inequalities and Who Bears the Consequences?

When a country enters globalized trade, several changes are made to its economic structure. Liberalization and the transition into a globalized economy are often characterized by cuts to social programs and the elimination of perceived barriers to the free movement of capital. Culturally established gender assumptions and experiences of ethnic marginalization, in turn, are also altered by the transition. Men and women's roles in society are transformed. Their respective gendered responses to economic growth, commercialization, and market change accordingly.

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According to Janet Momsen (1991), a feminist theorist studying the gendered effects of globalized trade, the “common denominator of gender in all societies is female subordination” (20). Following Mexico’s numerous trade liberalizations in the 1980s, women have often come to occupy the least desirable and, often, the lowest paid positions in the agricultural industry (Barndt, 2008).¹ Women have become more vulnerable as the market has absorbed many of the labour activities they traditionally engaged in, such as food processing and the making of clothes. These activities have long helped women to support themselves and their families (Momsen, 2004). Economic restructuring has altered the sexual division of labour, which has further served to isolate women from control over the means of production and from fair remuneration.

Inequalities sustained through Mexico’s liberalized agricultural production are not solely confined to gender. Ethnicity and class location affect wages, employment opportunities, working conditions, access to new technology, and formal education (Barndt, 2008). Communities located in Mexico’s southern region are predominantly indigenous and are often marginalized from resources. Job opportunities are scarce, as these communities are located away from the epicenter of economic activities in the north and north western regions.

This paper aims to bring to light inequalities sustained through a globalized system of commodity exchange within Mexico’s agricultural industry. It is important to note that trade liberalizations are not responsible for creating the various forms of inequalities experienced by marginalized groups. It will be argued, however, that the pre-existing inequalities have not only been sustained but have been exacerbated by the changes made through the introduction of the new globalized economically liberalized framework.

Literature on social inequalities in Mexico since trade liberalization has overwhelmingly focused on ‘the working class’—a socially undifferentiated proletarian aggregate. This focus is problematic as it has the potential of ignoring the various nuanced experiences of different social groups, namely women and, more specifically, indigenous women. Since trade liberalization, there have been relatively few studies that serve to illuminate the experiences of women in the agricultural industry. According to political scientists Christina Gabriel and Laura Macdonald (1994), “the links between gender and trade are very complex, and the implications of recent changes in trade for both men and women are far from obvious, especially given the lack of research in this area” (554). There are even fewer studies that clearly articulate the compounding effects of inequalities experienced by virtue of being both female and ethnically marginalized. According to Mexicanist and former migrant labourer Elga Martinez-Salzar (1999), “[a]n analysis [solely] limited to gender supports the dominant Mexican nationalist ideology of *Mestizaje*, which sees European heritage as superior and which excludes Indigenous peoples, ancestry and, therefore, their histories and rights” (101). Martinez-Salazar (1999) further asserts, “[t]he lack of race/ethnic analysis within gender or class theories has left indigenous peoples, particularly women, invisible, forgotten or neglected” (101). When indigenous people are the focus of social studies, Indigenous men’s experiences are generally highlighted as being

¹Mexico’s traditional economy tended to encompass locally owned businesses and, in particular to its agricultural sector, largely involved peasant agriculture, more equal land distribution among rural residence, and greater biodiversity in cropping techniques. Generally, traditional Mexican agriculture depended minimally, if at all, on high-tech farm machinery and biotechnology such as chemical fertilizers, manufactured pesticides, and genetically modified seed varieties (Barndt 1999).

representative of the experiences of all indigenous peoples, both male and female.

Overall, the focus of this paper will be placed on those who participate in Mexico's waged agricultural labour force. To address the problematic areas previously identified in Mexican agrifood industry research, this paper draws on three theoretical bodies of literature. Food Regime Theory will be employed to bring light to the political, economic, and historical dynamics involved in a capitalist-oriented agro-food system and serve to illustrate the global context in which Mexico's agricultural industry is located. A brief examination of Mexico's transition toward liberalized trade, with specific focus on Mexico's agricultural industry, will follow. Subsequently, a feminist socialist analysis will be used to illuminate women's location within Mexico's agricultural industry. Lastly, an intersectional analysis will examine the various forms of inequalities women experience depending on the combination of marginalized categories they occupy.²

Agro Food Systems and the Global Context- Exploring Food Regime Theory

There are several ways of conceptualizing the impacts of trade liberalization. The origin, pervasiveness, and the effects of trade liberalization, both economically and socially, are still contested. Political economists such as Philip McMichael feel that liberalization serves as a continuation of historically embedded economic relationships that form distinct patterns involved in the formation of the current global food economy. Conversely, ecological feminists and theorists devoted to the study of marginalized populations have moved away from the study of large-scale economic forces and examine how standards of living of different segments of a given country or global region's population are affected by liberalization. Both means of examining the effects of trade liberalization will be used in this essay, but with more emphasis on the latter.

Trade liberalization can generally be described as the diminution interference with the free flow of goods and services across borders; it discourages the use of tariffs (such as duties, surcharges, and export subsidies) and non-tariff barriers (such as licensing regulations, quotas, and arbitrary standards) (Randal 2006). Behind trade liberalization is neoliberalism, a set of economic principles that "subordinate all social development considerations to the demands of private capital and the world market" (Barndt 2008: 214). Mexico, among many countries of the global South, has come to embrace it out of perceived economic necessity. However, before turning to Mexico's liberal transition, it is imperative to first understand the global context of Mexico's agricultural industry.

Food Regime Theory's inception by political scientists Harriet Friedmann and Philip McMichael drew from Political Regime and French Regulation Theory in order to address an identified lack of historical and political-economic perspectives in theories conceptualizing the various relationships and norms that operate within the agrifood system (Campbell and Dixon 2009). A widely accepted definition of a 'food regime' is a "temporally specific dynamics in the political economy of food. It can be characterized by

²The social location of women and ethnically marginalized groups in Mexico varies according to region. However, due to the lack of research specifically pointing to these regional variations, data supplied in this paper will be remarking on general trends that apply to Mexico's rural agricultural labour force.

The term 'social location' in this paper is used to signify how individuals are positioned within a given society (i.e. in terms of their access to privileges, resources, rights, etc) in relation to their race, gender, class, sexual orientation, political convictions, age, ability, etc.

particular institutional structures, norms and unwritten rules in international food production and consumption that are geographically and historically specific" (Peachlaner and Otero 2008:352). In their 1989 article, *Agriculture and the State System*, Friedmann and McMichael made note of an overemphasis on "the nationalist presuppositions that inform the literature on development and dependency" which characterized much of the theories that attempted to explain agricultural trade systems (94). Agrifood relationship patterns were no longer viewed as inevitable dependency-based transitions. Instead, informed by a Regulationist perspective, food regimes came to be conceptualized in terms of periods of institutional stability followed by periods of crisis, resulting in the reconfiguration of trade relationships. Thus, with the use of Food Regime Theory, the transitions of relationship patterns were conceived as non-linear and their formations were determined by a number of socio-economic factors.

McMichael and Friedmann (1989) distinguish between the emergence and transitions of two food regimes. The first, characterized by European imperial relationships based on imports of wheat and meat from settler states, took place from 1870 until 1914. During this time, trade relationships between settler and colonial countries constituted the primary trade relationships of the agro industry. Crisis followed, however, when settler states claimed independence, put in place their own government systems, and enacted trade tariffs. According to Prichard (1998), colonialism's influence decreased in the inter-war period, signaling an economic power shift from Europe to the United States. Food regime relationships were "inverted, subverted or reconstructed" by the transition (Campbell and Dixon 2009:263). Empires became nation-states, free trade turned into protected agriculture, and farming became industrialized, intensive, and highly subsidized in the industrial core countries. According to McMichael (2009), "the U.S.-centered food regime (1945-1970) pivoted on the contradiction between global integration and the coherence of national farm sectors" (3). During this time, the United States maintained its stronghold in the international market through the use of geopolitical 'food aid' to secure advantageous trade relationships. Global consumption and demand patterns were drastically altered by these reconfigured agro-trade relationships, and underpinned the process of industrialization within developing countries such as South Korea and India (McMichael 2006). The newly independent countries which today constitute much of the developing world became incorporated into specialized international agri-commodity. These trade relationships, however, intensified the contradiction between the United States protectionism and the deepening international trade relationships. The disbanding of these relatively stable relationships is attributed to the emergence of a crisis phase and what some regime theorists refer to as the emergence of the third food regime (Friedmann and McMichael 1989).

Many theorists since McMichael and Friedmann's have conceived of the world's current agricultural economy as characterized by the formation of a third food regime. The exact characteristics of this third food regime and the trajectories it is expected to follow have been the subject of debate. Political scientists David Burch and Geoffrey Lawrence (2009), for example, posit that the third regime is epitomized by financialization, which involves "increased influence of finance capital on the agri-food system". Financialization provides "new opportunities for profit-making by hedge funds and private equity consortia, but also creates a situation in which agrifood companies, including food manufacturers,

international commodity traders, and supermarkets, may benefit" (Burch and Lawrence 2009:267). They argue that from the 1980s onward there has been a shift from stakeholder capitalism to shareholder capitalism where firms are now not only trying to please consumers in the product market but are also trying to appease investors. For example, shareholders' funds were invested into various sectors of African agriculture through the Agricultural Fund, established in 2008 by Emergent Asset Management, with a projected twenty-five percent per annum return for the Fund's 5-year term. Thus, relationships in the agricultural industry are not strictly on trade and consumption of the agri-commodity itself. Rather, the investments in agrifood technologies such as fertilizers and pesticides and agri-management on a global scale are increasingly becoming a venue for large-scale capital investment. Food Regime, then, traces food products from cultivation through to transformation, trade, and consumption, with each composite part increasingly under multinational and corporate financial control.

On a different note, Pechlaner and Otero (2008) point to the "interrelationship between regulatory change and genetic engineering" as the central characteristic of the third food regime (351). They feel the global shift in the deregulation surrounding the use of corporate agri-biotechnology has "entrenched and exacerbated existing inequalities between nation states, particularly between developed and developing countries" (Pechlaner 2008:352).

Although theories devoted to explaining the emergence of the third food regime may differ in terms of the specific trends they choose as their focus, most food regime theorists agree that the driving force behind the third food regime is liberalization promoting the free flow of capital. It is through liberalization that financialization and the use of biotechnology in the agri-food economy can occur. Moreover, liberalization in the form of lax regulation and the growing presence of agribusinesses in the global South has been responsible for the increased flexibility brought through contractual work and the downsizing of the working class in the regions that these conglomerates occupy.

McMichael (2005) and Lawrence (1996) have conceptualized the underlying resistance to the emerging third regime. They point to peasant rights groups such as international peasant movement, *La Via Campesina* and the organic and fair trade movements as means by which global citizens are resisting the power imbalance between the global North and South as well as the asymmetries in power within these regions. While Food Regime Theory is able to capture the large-scale power relationships sustained in the globalized agri-food trade, it fails to address marginalized groups involved in the global agri-food economy.

Food regime theory provides a means to frame the power relations sustained within an increasingly globalized agrifood trade arena. But it fails to address the socially differentiated consequences felt by those involved in the agricultural commodity exchange.

The Implementation of Trade Liberalization in Mexico

With Mexico's independence from Spanish rule in 1810-1813, wealthy Spanish descendants (known as *creoles*) commandeered many indigenous communities by substituting the colonial rulers with the post-revolution national elites. By 1857, much of Mexico's land arable was concentrated among Mexico's wealthiest in the form of *haciendas*. In her

examination of land distribution under the *ejido* land-systems, Krueger (2005) indicates that “[u]pon the forced exit of President Porfirio Dias in 1911, less than 11, 000 *hacienda* controlled fifty-seven percent of the national territory, and 834 of these land-owners held 1.3 million square kilometers” (14). Ninety percent of Mexico’s peasant population became landless by the early 1900s as a result of land appropriations that benefited the elites. This wide-spread land dispossession became a major underlying force that ignited the Mexican Revolution in 1910. Article 27 of the Mexican Constitution, which arose out of the Revolutionaries’ demands led to land redistribution to peasants with government granted usufruct right, to be farmed continually and not to be rented, share cropped, nor sold (known as *ejido*) (Barndt 2008).

The actual political and economic intentions behind Article 27 and the subsequent establishment of the *ejido* are subject to much debate and stand as a source of contention among social scientists. For its supporters, Article 27 represented “a marriage between pre-Colombian communal land tenure and a Spanish tradition of public lands that answered the famous battle cry of *Tierra y Libertad*” (Land and Liberty) (Krueger 2005:14). According to Freidmann (1999), the *ejido* provided land to the landless and served as an economic basis for self-governing indigenous communities. Those who object to Article 27 view it as a means by which the Mexican government pacified an entire class of displaced peasants with land rights while simultaneously eradicating a highly exclusive political regime that existed through the elites’ use of the *haciendas*. Although land was redistributed to *campesinos*, for many indigenous communities in southern Mexico, this often meant gaining access to badly eroded land only. Wealthier *creole* landowners still controlled the most fertile land (Pisa 2001). Moreover, the way the expropriation system was established, *hacienda* owners could select land which, for obvious reasons, tended to be the areas closest to markets, most productive, and irrigated (Adler Hellman 1995). In addition to sustaining rural Mexican class relations, the *ejidos* have been associated with a patriarchal agenda. Access to land was viewed as a male right and inheritance patterns were patrilineal. Women’s land rights were not included under the agrarian law until 1971 (Deere 1985).

In theory, the intended outcomes of Cardenas’ policy amendments were to improve the productivity and economic opportunities of the peasantry thereby allowing for the growth of the internal market and industrial sector. The complementary development plan became a means by which Cardenas attempted to account for both the demands of the peasantry and the needs of the industrial sector. In the end, however, the plan arguably created a process that favoured large landholders (Barros Nock 2000). For example, the Ejido Credit Bank was created to finance and provide technical assistance for highly profitable commercial crops produced on large collective *ejidos*, to the detriment of peasants who were farming individual plots (Krueger 2005). Moreover, as a result of not being permitted access to equipment or loans for the purchasing of crucial farm machinery, small *ejidatarios* were forced to rent these tools from the *hacienda* owners, often at very high prices.(Krueger 2005). In the end, Cardenas promoted a modernized agriculture project similar to those being practiced by most Westernized countries, and not one that truly abided by the socio-cultural values of subsistent agriculture being practiced by some *ejidatarios/as* and their communities.

By the 1940s and through to the 1970s, grain became Mexico’s main export crop and

was to serve as a vehicle for increased participation in the global market. With the onset of the Green Revolution, “the bimodal approach to agricultural development was reinforced through extensive research, input subsidies, and infrastructure investment directed at a commercial farming sector producing food for middle income urban Mexicans as well as [for the purpose of] agricultural exports” (Krueger 2005:27). Foreign technological packages (hybridized seeds and agrichemicals such as fertilizers and pesticides) and devices for applying them such as water pumps for irrigation systems became increasingly depended upon by both Mexican agribusinesses and small-scale farmers alike. Monoculture, the cultivation of a homogenous culture on a single crop area without diversity, and the corresponding use of biotechnology subsequently became central to the modern form of Mexican agricultural production. The increased use of genetically modified and high-yielding wheat varieties coupled with the greater use of agricultural inputs such as fertilizer contributed to the tripling of crop yields and the increased total cropland usage in Mexico.

These benefits, however, were not felt equally among all Mexican farmers. Much of the economic prosperity being generated at this time was concentrated in the Northern and Northwestern regions of Mexico, further intensifying the polarization between large-scale producers with access to technology and small-scale *ejidatarios* who produced largely for subsistent and local market purposes (Friedmann 1999).

From the 1970s to the early 1980s, there was a shift in political and agro-food trade relationships in the global market. Toward the middle of the Cold War era, economic ties resumed between the United States and the Soviet Union, removing large quantities of wheat, corn and soy from the world market. Global food prices tripled between 1972 and 1974, which coincided with another colossal world event, the tripling of oil prices, and officially launched what Friedmann calls the era of the ‘global food crisis’. These two events were severely felt by developing countries such as Mexico which, during the Second Food Regime, had largely become dependent on cheaper and often subsidized food exports from the United States (Friedmann 1999). With an increasing need for food and few financial resources, Mexico continued to borrow funds intended for short term relief rather than addressing the underlying issues plaguing its economy. The situation was further aggravated when during the 1980s, the growth of US transnational corporations (TNCs) pushed for the United States’ desire for trade liberalization in Mexico (Friedmann 1999).

In order to alleviate its accumulating debt load, Mexico obtained loans from international lending institutions such as the International Monetary Fund (IMF) and the World Bank (WB). Prior to issuing these loans, the IMF and WB assigned a number of “conditionalities” or fundamental changes that were applied to Mexico’s economy in the form of *Structural Adjustment Programs* (SAPs). These changes, under Carlos Salinas de Gortari’s (1988-1994) presidency, led to the elimination of certain government subsidies for small-scale/peasant farming and further opened Mexico’s borders to foreign trade (Pisa 2001). During the 1980s, the Mexican Food System (SAM), designed to deal with rural development agencies, food storage, and distribution systems, was dismantled in favour of large national and international business interests and foreign investment. The constitutional amendments Salinas made to Article 27 of the Agrarian Law in January 1992 allowed for a large portion of the *ejido* land to be consolidated and made available for sale. They were subsequently bought up by large-scale agricultural corporations

(Preibisch, Rivera Herrijon, and Wiggins 2002). The profits made from the sales largely benefited the male landholders; the transactions further isolated women in rural communities. Once *ejido* lands were opened up for sale.

In 1994, President Ernesto Zedillo further encouraged Mexico's participation in liberalized trade through the enactment of the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA) between Canada, the United States and Mexico. Further liberalization was encouraged in order to attract foreign investment, tariffs and other trade restrictions were lifted, leading to the flooding of Mexican markets with inexpensive foreign produce. According to Priebisch et al. (2002), "Mexican maize imports totaled 5.6 million metric tons in 1999, accounting for 25 percent of the country's total maize consumption- up from just 2 percent in 1993, the year before NAFTA was implemented" (69). Commercial producers of corn, however, experienced 48 prices between 1990 and 1998 (Preibisch, Rivera Herrijon, and Wiggins 2002). This, in conjunction the discontinuing of programs that subsidize food sources such as CONASUPO (Compania National de Subsistencias Populares) during the 1990s have left many small-scale farmers unable to compete in the agricultural market (Barndt 2008). This vulnerability of peasant farmers was compounded in the absence of government security nets following significant cuts to social spending.

The result of Mexico's 'liberated' market has been the displacement of whole populations no longer able to sustain themselves. Neoliberal reforms have led to increasing consolidation of Mexico's land into efficient, industrial, large-scale, chemically intensive production units, to the detriment of small-scale farmers. Subsequent to the privatization of farmland and the increased presence of TNC in Mexico's country side, many Mexican workers have become employed by large-scale agricultural corporations as a means of earning a meager wage (Pisa 2001). Since the signing of the North American Free Trade Agreement, Mexico's gross domestic product has been on a steady rise (Randall 2006). By contrast, Mexico's attempt to secure foreign trade through privatization has negatively affected the earning power of the average Mexican worker, not to mention Mexico's more marginalized groups. According to Barndt (2008), "NAFTA has made permanent the export-oriented [and trade liberalized] model imposed on Mexico by earlier structural adjustment programs of international agencies, a model built on and dependent on low wages for Mexican campesinos [rural people] and other existing social inequalities" (216).

A Feminist Socialist Analysis: Illuminating Women's Location within the Agricultural Industry

Structural oppression, leading to unequal opportunities and life chances, can be understood as "an enclosing structure of forces and barriers which tends to the immobilization and reduction of a group or category of people" (Frye 1983: 11). A feminist socialist perspective encompasses a critique of two sources of structural oppression; capitalism and patriarchy. Socialist feminists generally agree with a Marxist analysis of class relations under capitalism as a source of oppression. Marxists and socialist feminists alike assert that exploitation of the working classes is an intrinsic part of the capitalist economy. Socialist feminists, however, reject claims that capitalism is the *only* means through which exploitation is sustained in a given society. They argue that patriarchy is a separate yet complementary form of exploitation that interacts with capitalism to produce a system that further exploits women and favours men. They refer to this dual system of comple-

menting inequalities *capitalist patriarchy*. Males assume primary decision-making power and are granted higher status, which often translates into higher wages, greater access to land, etc. Therefore, socialist feminists stress that it is essential to look past the Marxist's assumption of bourgeoisie homogeneity and look to the gendered division of labour backed by patriarchy as a force that serves to further subordinate female proletarians *vis-à-vis* their male proletarian counterparts (Ritzer 2005).

According to Christina Gabriel and Laura Macdonald (1994), "Mexican culture has traditionally been characterized by a strong patriarchal ideology, machismo, in which social, political, and economic activities are seen as men's work" (554). Rigid dualism between male and female tasks is especially prominent in the rural areas. *Compesino* women are largely responsible for reproductive tasks in the families, such as cleaning, cooking, and tending to their families' emotional and, in the case of their husbands, physical needs (Deere and Leon 1987). Since the 1980s however, rural Mexican women have increasingly entered the waged labour force. Mexican real income has dropped significantly during this time period, making one income families unfeasible to. A *campesino* family now needs five rather than three of its members working in the waged labour force in order to stake out its collective subsistence.

The situation has been exacerbated following cuts to social spending such as farming subsidies, education, and healthcare (Barndt 2008). Greater emphasis has been placed on rural women to earn a wage in order to help contribute to their family's survival. Socialist feminists refer to this movement of rural women into the formal labour force as the 'double burden effect'. The double burden occurs when women are still responsible for domestic tasks, while also being increasingly more responsible for supplying a wage to their families (Sen 1987). However, much of this labor is 'invisible'; much of the rural women's double contribution to is unacknowledged. What is more, some rural families still maintain a plot of land, known as a *milpa*, for partial subsistence. Barndt (2008) remarks that the maintenance of this plot has largely become women's work, leading to a *triple* burden for rural Mexican women.

For women in the agricultural waged workforce, the remuneration is significantly less than for their male counterparts. Men's work is often associated with physical strength, such as heavy lifting of vegetable crates, in contrast to women's work which often involves fine motor skills used to pick, prune, sort, and package agricultural produce. While neither requires specific skills, greater value is attributed to men's jobs. Cultural assumptions of male breadwinners in rural Mexican families give justification to paying men higher 'family' wages, even when both men and women are working the same number of hours in the same position (Moser 1993).

Women's advancement in the workforce is frequently stifled. Women are often denied access to technical training, often a requirement for the better paid and typically male positions (Taylor and Thomas 1999). In rural Mexico, women's education is also deemed a lower priority, which serves as a systematic barrier and further confines women to low status and low pay jobs. International development theorist Gita Sen (1987) notes that "women have been excluded from agrarian reform and training programs in the new agricultural methods because Western experts have assumed the existence of a pattern of responsibility for agriculture similar to their own societies, in which men are the main agricultural decision makers", failing to recognize that often women work more hours on

and have greater direct contact with the land (36). Patriarchy, in the form of gender assumptions, serves to further remove women from capital in terms of an equal wage. Gender roles have been compounded by the greater financial need for women to enter the waged labour force in the agricultural industry, contributing to overburdened workloads.

Ideal femininity in Mexico, as in many cultures, is seen as compliant, gentle, and therefore submissive. For example, the owner of Santa Rosa, one of the largest Mexican-owned agribusiness, Gabriel Torres suggests that the “the criteria for the division of labour is the assumption that men are better [both] at heavier jobs requiring physical strength as well as managerial jobs that require experience, access to technical information, and the initiative and ability to exert authority” (Barndt 2008: 227). Women, on the other hand, are presumed to be dexterous, and therefore ideal for jobs requiring complying with directions as well as the handling of delicate fruit like the tomato (Barndt 2008).

While an important addition to the more male centered narratives of oppression, socialist feminism is not without its problems. A major critique is the lack of attention paid to the social differences among women themselves. Their preoccupation with women as a homogenous category is arguably significant (Sachs 1996). Strictly socialist feminist analysis is insufficient to capture the varying effects of inequalities due to one's location in a number of marginalized categories. Further differentiation is needed among the female aggregate in order to understand the full consequences of liberalization on Mexico's rural communities, and women in particular.

A Step Beyond the Homogenous Category of 'Woman'- An Intersectional Analysis

The concept of intersectionality was first introduced in 1989 by Kimberle Crenshaw, a feminist legal theorist, in order to shed light on the particular experiences felt by women of colour in North America. At the time, feminist perspectives, tended to emphasize the common experiences of women by virtue of belonging to the female sex (Davis 2008; Conaghan 2009). Anti-essentialism emerged in feminist theory during the late 1980s, driven by the concerns of Black feminists who argued that mainstream feminist discourse was premised upon, and thereby privileged, the experiences of white women. Rather than emphasizing universality, Crenshaw argued that feminist theory must seek to address how occupying multiple marginalized positions can transform one's experiences within a given society (Conaghan 2009). Crenshaw uses the following traffic analogy to illustrate the importance of moving beyond feminist theories that neglect account for variation in these experiences:

Consider an intersection, coming and going in all four directions. Discrimination, like traffic through an intersection, may flow in one direction and it may flow in another. If an accident happens at an intersection, it can be caused by cars travelling from any number of directions and, sometimes, from all of them. Similarly, if a black woman is harmed because she is in the intersection, her injury could result from [either] sex discrimination or race discrimination. (Crenshaw 1989: 149)

Located at the intersection of racism and sexism, the experiences of women of ethnically marginalized groups were therefore seen as “the product of both and equivalent to neither” (Conaghan 2009: 23).

Today, intersectionality is recognized as “the way in which multiple identities cut across each in order to produce disadvantages for particular individuals and groups in society” (van der Hoogte and Kingma 2004: 47). Although Crenshaw’s analysis of intersectionality was referring to the experiences of Black women in a North American society, there is presently a need to embrace a global perspective that recognizes the social circumstances that intersect with women’s experiences of gender inequalities. Carolyn Sachs, a Third World feminist, acknowledges this sentiment through her critique of contemporary feminist theories that fail to account for the multiplicity of women’s experiences of sexual oppression, which are compounded by the forces of globalization which further marginalize developing countries, as well as the disadvantaged groups within them (1996). Annie Taylor and Caroline Thomas (1999) argue that “the impact of changes in the international trade regime will vary dramatically between groups of women and across the global economy depending upon such factors as region, class, race, ethnicity, and state policies” (54).

According to Gabriel and Macdonald (1994), trade liberalization consolidated by trade agreements like NAFTA interact with pre-existing ethnic differences. Its impact “may be even greater on indigenous and rural women than on *mestizo* [non-indigenous] women in the northern part of the country” (Gabriel and Macdonald 1994:544). According to Castillo (2004), “with the displacement of indigenous peoples from their original cities [by the conquistadors], those populations moved to lands peripheral to recently-built colonial cities. The spatial arrangement defined the Spanish core and the Indian periphery within colonial Mexican cities, an arrangement that in many cases subsists to the present day” (47). In 1810, extensive economic activities, such as mining, led to the privatization of the land, further dispossessing and displacing indigenous people (Castillo, 2004).

Today, most of Mexico’s indigenous peoples are located in Mexico’s southern and poorest states (Barndt 2008). Studies examining the effect of *ejidos* consolidation on the surrounding communities rarely make a distinction between the mestizo and indigenous populations. It is known, however, that indigenous people in many regions depend on their access to communal lands as a means of providing for their families and their communities. As land was privatized, indigenous communities were forced in to areas that were less desirable for cultivation. Castillo (2004) argues that the impacts of the recent trade liberalizations on Mexico’s indigenous communities are similar to that of colonization. It makes it difficult for indigenous people to provide for themselves, and forced entry into the waged labour force as a means to survive. This transition however is not unproblematic.

The majority of Mexico’s indigenous communities are remote from greater job opportunities of urban centers. Expanding wage sectors are predominantly located in northern Mexico, far away from the majority of indigenous communities in the south. The lack of job opportunities, coupled with a lack of access to farming land since the erosion of the *ejido* land systems, has placed greater pressure on indigenous people to find waged positions in the agricultural industry. Contractors recruit workers from remote, and often impoverished, indigenous communities and bring them by the truckload to large agro industries. Often, indigenous farm workers are not guaranteed a job once they arrive on premises. If there is not enough work they are simply sent home without pay (Lara 1997).

Many indigenous families have decided to migrate to areas neighboring the large agro industries. Because of low levels of expendable income, migrant workers who travel within

Mexico are left with few options; most stay in shanty towns provided for them by the agro industries. Houses in these towns often lack running water, electricity, and plumbing. They often are one room dwellings that can hold up to ten people (Barndt 2002). Living conditions in these shanty towns can be abysmal:

Rows of tarpaper shacks, with only doors and no windows, were connected by clotheslines. A single faucet offered water to the six hundred living in the camp, and a makeshift communal shower was set up nearby. It was made from discarded plastic woven bags that held fertilizers; doors were constructed from cardboard tomato boxes, and old pesticide cans have become recipients for water. (Barndt 2008:244)

Barndt's (2008) research in the tomato industry notes the importance of social capital in obtaining a secure position. She makes reference to Yolanda, a mestiza tomato sorter (one of the highest remunerated and most secure jobs available to women in the tomato industry) whose father and brother-in-law are managers at a tomato packaging plant and at the company headquarters, respectively. In an interview with Barndt, Yolanda acknowledges that it is these contacts that have given her access to her current position as a tomato sorter. Indigenous people usually lack access to these crucial contacts (Barndt 2002), and as such, are marginalized from important opportunities of social mobility.

Language and literacy are also crucial to establishing gaining access to better remunerated positions. Indigenous individuals rarely have an education past primary school since many of them entered the workforce at a young age or played a major role in the domestic duties of the home. Although many indigenous people speak Spanish in addition to their native language, there are still some who do not. According to the *Instituto Nacional de Lenguas Indígenas*, (INALI), presently 5.4 percent of Mexico's population speaks an indigenous language and cannot speak Spanish (2008). It is often assumed in Mexico that there are far more indigenous individuals who do not speak Spanish than is actually the case. These assumptions become embedded in the hiring patterns within the agricultural industry, selecting employees with competency in issuing and following detailed instructions in the Spanish language (Gabriel and Macdonald 1994).

As part of her commodity chain analysis of the tomato, Barndt (2008) notes that the higher the job status one holds in the tomato industry, the more likely one is to be male and *mestizo* (non-indigenous). Barndt further comments that "in Mexico, ethnic differences are perhaps most pronounced between the indigenous workers that the agribusiness brings by truck to pick tomatoes under the hot sun and the more skilled and privileged mestiza women they bring in buses to pack tomatoes in the more protected packing plant" (Barndt 2002: 83).

The tomato industry, similar to much of the produce harvested in Mexico, represents a commercial crop that is heavily and repeatedly sprayed with dangerous pesticides, most of which are toxic chemicals that produce acute and chronic health problems among those who are exposed to them. According to Martinez-Salazar (1999), those who harvest the chemical-laden produce are often indigenous people who are not given proper information about the toxicity of the pesticides. A study conducted at a produce picking plant in Sinaloa found that most workers were unable to follow the safety rules regarding handling chemical inputs (Schrader 1995). These instructions, advising the proper use of protective

gloves and masks, were written in English. Furthermore, most Mexican agricultural industries charge employees with the responsibility for bringing their own safety equipment to protect themselves against pesticide residue. According to Barndt's study (2008) a female indigenous picker earns approximately 28 pesos/day (\$2.29 USD) whereas a mestiza/creole produce packer garners approximately 110 pesos (\$ 9 USD). With such wages, it is almost certain that the necessary safety equipment cannot be purchased (Deeds 1997).

Because of their precarious position, there is also greater pressure for children in indigenous families to participate in waged labour. Produce pickers, largely constituted by both indigenous men and women, are often required to meet a quota in order to be paid a minimum wage. Indigenous female produce pickers, however, are not only responsible for meeting their own quotas but those of their children (Taylor and Thomas 1999). This added responsibility consumes women's energy, requires longer hours of work, and makes it difficult to surpass quotas and obtain some bonuses.

Indigenous women's experience of marginalization is also distinct from mestiza women since mestiza women generally work in better paid positions. The better remuneration that mestiza women garner allows them the opportunity to have a family member (often the oldest female in the family) stay home with the children as there is less pressure on each member of the household to bring home an income (Florez 1999). Indigenous women, on the other hand, must simultaneously perform parental responsibilities along with their work-related tasks. It is not unusual to see these women working in the field with babies on their back—a clear illustration of the double burden.

Indigenous women's limited access to education, exposure to high levels of pesticides both in completion of domestic responsibilities and work related tasks, and their distinct experience of the double burden thereby demonstrates the unique experiences of oppression faced by indigenous women employed in the agriculture industry. Therefore, true to principles of intersectionality, the compounding effects of occupying multiple marginalized social categories transform one's experience of oppression.

Tying Up Loose Ends: Conclusion

The purpose of this paper has been to illustrate how pre-existing inequalities have not only been sustained but also exacerbated through the implementation of trade liberalization in Mexico. By first looking at the broader, ever-changing political-economic relationships maintained within the agrifood system, Food Regime Theory has been used to depict the complex geographical and historical configurations of globalized capitalist structures. But the macroeconomic story is not the only one.

A socialist feminist analysis was the applied to illustrate how the marginalized location of rural *campesina* women in Mexican society has been further exacerbated once they were pushed into agricultural waged labour force. The patriarchal-based capitalist mode of production served to further isolate rural Mexican women from the means of production—in this case, land. Moreover, culturally-based gender assumptions translate into the lower status jobs typically held by women, and the poor remuneration upon entering the agricultural labour force.

It is argued, however, that the socialist feminist's analysis of women as a homogenous category is insufficient to capture the multifaceted nature of interlocking oppressions like

those faced by Mexican indigenous women. Intersectional analysis must be employed to fully understand Mexican indigenous women's distinct forms of oppression. The gendered experiences felt by indigenous women who must perform both parental and work-related tasks simultaneously is a crucial point of separation between indigenous women's experiences and that of indigenous men's. Although indigenous women share similarities to rural mestiza women and indigenous men, their experience of being both female and indigenous is transformed and thus is distinctly felt by their particular experience of the double burden when they participate in the waged agricultural labour force. These unique experiences must not be glossed over. They must be brought to light, discussed, and understood if more equality is ever to be brought to Mexico's rural population.

Further research encompassing case studies from a number of regions would enhance researchers' abilities to compare and contrast these regions in order to better ascertain the extent to which these regionally-based factors produce variances in inequalities experienced by those working in Mexico's growing waged agricultural labour force. Further research specifically looking at race and gender as overlapping rather than separate forms of inequalities will also greatly improve researchers' ability to better articulate additional factors that intersect with gender and race pertaining to those employed in Mexico's waged agricultural industry.

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