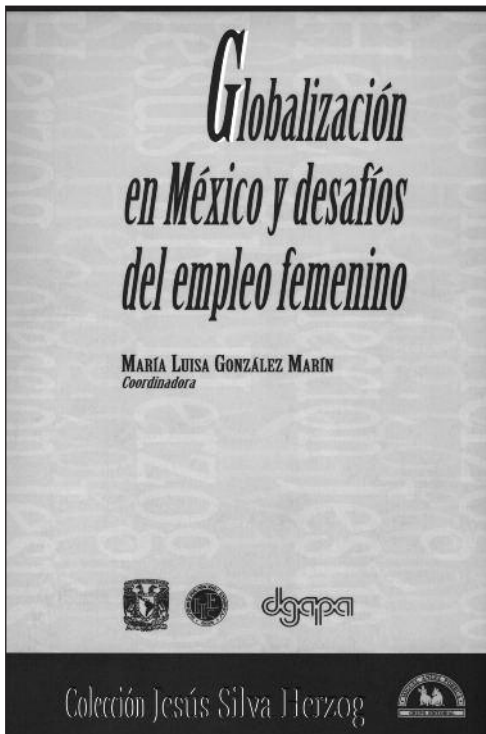


Reviews



Globalización en México y desafíos del empleo femenino

(Globalization in Mexico and the Challenges
for Women's Employment)

María Luisa González Marín, comp.

Miguel Ángel Porrúa

Mexico City, 2000, 323 pp.

This book's central objective is to look at the changes that globalization has brought about in women's working conditions. The trade opening, the restructuring of production, flexibility on the job, the introduction of new technologies, the growth of the informal sector, the drop in social spending, the proliferation of maquiladoras and the spread of poverty are all issues that condition the way women enter the world of work and the magnitude of the challenges they face.

The first point that should be emphasized is that the increase in women's economic activities has not gone hand in hand with a growth in family income levels. Second, instead of the new forms of organization of labor alleviating or eliminating the old problems that women in the work force faced, they have sharpened them: we are now seeing new forms of submission, discrimination and obstacles to improving working conditions.

At the same time, several of the essays in this book deal with the fact that technological advances, increased media coverage, growing participation of women in the work force outside the home, their increased educational levels and the possibilities opened up by part-time work, piecework and homework

are contributing to the construction of a new feminine identity. Traditional values (being submissive, sensible, self-sacrificing) are being displaced by others that make it possible for women to participate more in public life (being intelligent, hard-working, organized).

The book points to how at the same time that it has increased poverty and women's employment in low-paying jobs, globalization has also caused transformations in the social consciousness that leads to the construction of a new women's identity. Today, women are expanding their presence in the different spheres of public life, occupying high-level posts and taking responsibility for important jobs in government, schoolrooms, business and research. However, for most women, having the best-paying jobs is still a far-off goal. The possibility that the little girls of today achieve a high educational level and a good job in 15 or 20 years depends on several factors, among which is the change that must be made in today's economic policies.

No matter how fast they run to catch up with modernity, women almost always get there late; only a few are part of the privileged minority. What is happening is so bad that getting a job as a worker in a maquila plant or as a saleswoman or doing homework is seen by the women themselves as something to be prized given the poverty, unemployment and violence around them. Not only does society need to offer women better jobs, but it must also eliminate sexual harassment in the work place, the depreciation of jobs that mainly women do, violence and the lack of concern over the problems they face in raising and educating their children. A world in which housework and taking care of children is seen as an essential social function that must be fulfilled by both men and women—the key for really establishing the bases for an egalitarian society—still seems a long way off. While globalization has contributed to deepening women's struggles for their rights, it has also worsened women's working conditions.

The book mainly looks at women's employment in Mexico by economic sectors (services, commerce, agriculture and industry). It also examines two topics of special interest: the changes in women's educational levels and the future of women's employment in Mexico between now and the year 2015. Since the factors that affect the job market are not exclusive to Mexico, we have also included four studies that compare the effects of the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA) on women's employment—including indigenous women—in the three countries of North America.

This book can be useful to readers interested in scrutinizing the challenges that NAFTA and globalization pose for women's employment, challenges that future generations of women will have to face. Change always causes uncertainty and fear; modernity could be catastrophic for us women; avoiding that depends to a great extent on the action taken to put an end to gender and class subordination.

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