

LABOR TURNOVER AMONG MAQUILADORA WORKERS OF HIGHLAND GUATEMALA

Resistance and Semiproletarianization in Global Capitalism

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Abstract: In-depth interviews and a three-wave longitudinal study of workers in international export-processing plants (maquiladoras, referred to here as maquilas) of the central highlands of Guatemala were conducted to explore the effects of labor turnover on individuals and households. The data suggest a framework in which labor conditions and sources of support at home are linked to turnover of youths working in the maquila. Turnover in the study is associated with decreased input into important household decisions and a lowered sense of adjustment and life satisfaction. Despite this, turnover is often volitional, representing a form of resistance and response on the part of workers to adverse working conditions in the factories. The study reveals the complex dynamics underlying both involuntary and voluntary turnover in the maquilas.

INTRODUCTION

In the 1980s, South Korea found itself in a troubling situation related to global recession, namely high wages and difficult conditions in industries, which resulted in increased labor activism. At the same time, the state imposed production quotas to control production and exports. It was at that time that Korean-owned industries searched for new sites of production around the world. Guatemala became one of those sites, and Korean investments currently constitute 60 percent of all foreign investment there (Vestuarios y Textiles [Vestex] 2010; Asociación Guatemalteca de Exportadores [AGEXPORT] 2010). Koreans found in Guatemala low salaries, low levels of activism, and a large mass of indigenous peoples in search of their first jobs outside agriculture. The preferred workers, young and mostly women, were eager to adopt what they referred to as a modern life through industrial wage labor.

This is a study of labor turnover in the export-processing plants of the central highlands of Guatemala and the impact that turnover has on individuals and households. The study examines turnover from the perspective of workers rather than industry and offers a framework for understanding turnover. Turnover is understood, in part, as a form of resistance to industrial exploitation. Our

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findings point to a large percentage of what I refer to as voluntary turnover, a form of turnover that could be avoided if the worker chose to but that resulted from worker agency and expressions of frustration with difficult conditions. These conditions not only include workplace restrictions, exhaustion from forced overtime, and other factors but also reflect the impact of work on conditions at home, where children and aging parents are left unattended for extended periods.

When Scott (1985) first addressed peasant resistance in *Weapons of the Weak*, he pointed out that the conditions habitually associated with resistance and revolutionary processes were limited to open, overt collective expressions that would often result in drastic social change. He documented numerous forms of covert resistance on the part of subordinate populations that could be found among rural peoples or among wage laborers. Unable to conform to larger revolutionary expressions of resistance (e.g., wide-open strikes), the current working classes in the Guatemalan maquiladoras (or *maquilas*), not fully constituted as formal classes (Goldín 2009), are victims of being part of liminal geographies, with minimal protections of their labor rights (Sassen 2006; Goldín and Dowdall in press). In conditions where public resistance results in factories closing and moving to other sites that offered lower wages or more acquiescent workers, workers are left with few tools of recourse. "Resistance, like domination, fights a war on two fronts. The hidden transcript is not just behind-the-scenes griping and grumbling; it is enacted in a host of down-to-earth, low-profile stratagems designed to minimize appropriation" (Scott 1990, 188). In this study, turnover is found to represent the weapon or strategy of marginalized, often young and mostly indigenous women, unable to appeal to standards of law, organized demands, or extended work stops. Turnover represents far more than being manipulated by capital for capital's purposes; rather, it often is an expression of agency and control over one's life.

This article presents the findings of a longitudinal study completed in 2009, the context of the export-processing industry in Guatemala, workers' attitudes toward this form of labor, the ways in which industrial work has affected gender dynamics in mostly Maya households, and the ongoing debate in the literature of the impact of the jobs on the lives of workers. This presentation will be followed by a description of the study, its results, and the framework that emerged for thinking about turnover in the maquilas.

BACKGROUND

In Guatemala, the central highlands are considered to be areas that offer expanded labor opportunities. Many people throughout the country migrate to the highlands in search of work. The labor options include work in poultry farms, construction, export promotion strategies, and agriculture. Women can work as domestics in Guatemala City or in the maquila factories. Some men and women migrate to the United States, but international migration is lower in the central highlands than in other areas of Guatemala.

Maquilas in Guatemala are export-processing, labor-intensive plants that produce goods for international capital. The present study focuses on maquilas specializing in apparel production. The first factories opened in the region in the

mid-1980s. Foreign suppliers provided all materials, such as threads, cloth, and design protocols. The factories simply assembled the products. Presently, the factories are involved in all aspects of production, including inventory control and design, an approach referred to as a full-package industry. Finished products are sent to other countries, such as the United States and Europe, without export fees and with temporary suspension of import taxes. The main purpose of maquila production is to generate value-added either through labor or other resources provided locally (Ministerio de Trabajo y Seguridad Social 1989).

In the Korean-owned factories of the central highlands, the plants act as subcontractors for other companies, with a single plant often producing several brand items. Brands produced in the factories in this study include Liz Claiborne, Gap, Oshkosh, Land's End, and Tracy Evans. The factories supply such stores as Macy's, Walmart, and JCPenny. In 1992, there were approximately 275 factories with about fifty thousand workers involved in apparel production. By 2008, many factories had closed and moved to other countries that offered lower salaries. Currently, there are about 195 factories combining apparel and textile production, with seventy-five thousand workers (ninety-three thousand when related sectors are included). This suggests that current-day factories are larger than those of the past, employing a larger labor force per factory. During the years with the highest export and employment figures, 2003 to 2005, apparel maquilas supplied about 120,000 jobs (Vestex 2010). During those same years, Guatemala was ranked twelfth as a supplier to the North American market. In the most recent estimate by the Association of Exporters, Guatemala was fifteenth as a supplier (Gamarro 2009). The reason for the closing of factories is mostly related to competition with other markets, mainly China.

Employment of Women in Maquilas Affects Household Dynamics

In Guatemala the rate of men to women maquila workers has been higher than in most other countries, about 30 percent to 40 percent male workers. Wilson (2002, 15) suggested that Mexican factories more often offered traditionally male jobs (packing, loading, use of industrial presses) and often see male workers as "docile, nimble fingered and non militant," just as women. This helps explain the higher percentage of men in Guatemala maquilas than in other parts of the world. For the most part, those hired who are older than twenty-five tend to be men and indigenous Maya.

Young teenage women tend to work in the factories, away from the fields, and practice occasional agricultural work during free time on weekends. According to the families interviewed, older women (mothers) are expected to work less in the fields, but this is because they have expanded obligations at home given that they have less help with domestic chores from their older daughters who work in the factories. Women in maquila households tend to receive cash contributions from their children and, as a result, have access to more consumer goods than those in nonmaquila households. The contributions of younger members of the family tend to relieve the need for their mother's paid work. On average, maquila workers keep approximately 20 percent of their wages and pool 80 percent for

household use. For example, a young female worker I interviewed whose mother is single and who has seven siblings says: "They say I am more responsible . . . because I help my mother economically. Of course, I do not give her everything I make, but I do share my salary with her." Mothers, in turn, provide food for their working children to take to the factories at lunchtime. They also use the money to hire field help. In the study conducted in Sacatepéquez, women in 64 percent of households administered the household funds. Income generated by nontraditional agricultural exports (NTAE) is usually controlled by men (see Asturias de Barrios et al. 1996; Asturias de Barrios, Tevalán, and Sullivan 1997).

Either as factory workers or day laborers, women's work is considered supplementary to men's work and confers less status (see Benería and Feldman 1992). Youths are considered more independent if they contribute to the household fund. In this sense, young workers acquire more power in the household. Safa (1995) noted that this was the case among women wage workers in the Caribbean, who acquired more negotiating power in the household. The fact that both young men and women work in the factories in the region of Guatemala that we studied, however, does not always translate into equal positions in the household. Young men tend not to be required to contribute to the family to the same extent as their female counterparts. This practice maintains patriarchal structures, but it also can introduce new sources of tension surrounding gender roles. The fact that daughters generate cash and purchase consumer goods and that mothers control more funds for subsistence suggests changes in authority within the household and the way that women are perceived outside the household.

Parental permission to marry is still considered important, but the fact that many young adults find wives and husbands in the factory, often from other townships, creates additional stress. Factory-based marriages often require accepting a woman from another town or permitting a daughter to leave town, as it is customary for women to move into their husbands' parents' home until they establish their own. In spite of the new position of young women workers and their access to cash, a patriarchal ideology is slow to change.

Attitudes toward Factory Work

Theories of women's incorporation into the formal economy and industrial work have suggested that such incorporation is either exploitative or liberating for women (see Tiano 1994). Most of the literature (e.g., Etienne and Leacock 1980; Isaac 1995; Kopinak 1995; Safa 1995; Elson and Pearson 1981) is consistent with the exploitation thesis, which suggests that capitalism creates a female proletariat supplying low-wage labor for accumulating capital. As a group, women are considered amenable to exploitation, willing to work for low wages, docile, flexible, and with few or no alternatives. Integration theorists argue that participation in the labor force is liberating for women, suggesting that factory jobs are better than no jobs at all (Tiano 1994; Lim 1983). These theorists suggest a complicated dynamic in which both exploitation and liberation coexist, emphasizing the positive outcomes of labor force participation. Many studies report that workers consider factory work to be a "privilege" (on Java, see Mather 1988; Wolf 1990). Also in

Indonesia, Hancock (2001) found that factory work contributed to household livelihood and raised young women's status. In Honduras, Ver Beek (2001) observed similar results.

Access to cash means access to decision making. Women's employment does not necessarily directly result in more power, but it improves women's ability to negotiate household relations (Raynolds 1998; Sklair 1989; Fernández Kelly 1983a, 1983b; Kopinak 1995; Cravey 1998; Salzinger 2003). Some of these dynamics also apply to young men in the Guatemalan maquilas. Most women and men working in these factories are too young to be fully independent, especially if they are single and living at home with their parents. For both genders, access to additional power in the household and the acquisition of some independence come at the cost of enduring difficult work conditions (Goldín 2001, 2009). Among the younger workers, decisions to turn over are linked to perceptions of status, self-esteem, alternative sources of support, and conditions at work. However, we have documented lower turnover among older male workers and discuss some of the possible reasons herein.

Since the late 1990s, workers have reported ambivalence about their jobs.¹ They are expected to work long hours, complete mandatory overtime, and work without food for many hours. Workers report being attracted to the social rewards of factory work, including the friendships and romantic relationships they develop, as well as new activities to engage in, such as going out after work (Goldín 1999, 2001, 2009).

The overall labor strategy depends on the workers' perception of their work as temporary (Wright 2006; Tiano 1994). The industry needs a large mass of workers to draw on, given the difficult working conditions. The labor strategy also takes advantage of worker hopes for a new and "modern" life (Goldín 2001; Pun Ngai 2005). In the workers' views, modernity represents a movement away from agriculture, as it provides access to the consumption of goods and lifestyles available in urban centers and portrayed through the media. The new life involves regular cash and a workplace that is viewed as social, removed from the heat of the sun of agricultural work. Several workers referred to agriculture as "our parents' jobs" (Goldín 2001) and commented on the types of goods they could purchase with their new regular income, including televisions, cell phones, and clothing. They imagine a life depicted in television and in magazines and in lives imagined as they assemble the soft and sheer blouses that they produce. Indeed, neoliberal policies aimed to reduce the size of the state by promoting private investment, export promotion, and individuality have transformed people's practices in developing countries. Neoliberalism has contributed not only to the destruction of prior broad institutional frameworks but also to local social and economic practices and particular ways of life, such as one's relationship to land and others in society. After global democratic gains that culminated in the crises of the 1970s, there was a growing sense among the upper classes that the antibusiness and

1. Workers' ambivalence and conflicted attitudes toward maquilas suggest conscious acts of resistance and control. They understand their predicaments. This does not exclude the fact that it is possible to document as well expressions of hegemony (Gramsci 1971).

anti-imperialist climate had gone too far. Neoliberal changes have resulted from the efforts by ruling elites to regain power (Harvey 1989, 2005, 2007; Gledhill 2000; Goldín 2009). Expanded outsourcing to the peripheries, a consequence of the new policies, contributed to high turnover rates, mostly voluntary.

Turnover in the Literature

Worker turnover, decisions to continue working or to stop working in a given site or industry, has always been an option for free laborers. In the context of neoliberal flexibilization strategies, industries institutionalized “flexible” contracts and temporary work. Flexibilization deepened insecurity and contributed to precarity (Aparicio and Benencia 1999; Bendini and Radonich 1999; Tsakoumagkos and Bendini 2000; Anes 2004; Gills 2002; Collins and Krippner 1999). But the phenomenon of high voluntary turnover as observed in the maquilas cannot be solely explained by flexibilization policies. High turnover seems to precede them. The literature on export processing in Asia and Latin America has addressed, even if tangentially, some of the reasons for high turnover in maquilas. Turnover has been seen as a response to the demands of harsh work (Cravey 1998; Carrillo Viveiros 1994). Ngai (2005) described turnover as a result of lateral moves from factory to factory in Chinese factories. This is reinforced by the temporary worker image that youths tend to have of themselves (Tiano 1984). Some authors view turnover as a way to satisfy capital’s need for replacement of tired, less productive workers (Salzinger 2003; Ward 1990; Harvey 1989; Wright 2006).

All these perspectives reinforce the notion of the disposable worker, especially women, whose value decreases with time. By contrast, the literature from industrial and organizational psychology and sociology explores turnover relative to such constructs as job satisfaction, commitment to the organization, the perception of alternatives, the trade-offs between increased human and reduced social capital, and the value that flexibility affords the firm (Theodossiou 2002; Taplin, Winterton, and Winterton 2003; Cohen 2000; Pelled and Hill 1997). Most of this literature explores turnover from the perspective of capital and specific industries. Industry’s goals are to not exceed optimal turnover rates, beyond which there are additional losses in productivity and training costs (Wright 2006). Whether from progressive perspectives or from more conservative industry perspectives, the assumption is that turnover serves industry, up to a point.

Indeed, it is not a coincidence that industries identify areas of high population density to establish their plants. These areas need to be of low socioeconomic status, where people have some basic education and are eager to work. The population needs to be “docile” and “trainable” and willing to accept harsh conditions. The populations need to have limited labor organizing capacities to minimize “conflict.” The Guatemala apparel association’s promotion to attract maquila factories to the country, as posted on its Web page, essentially reassures potential factory buyers that organized labor will not be problematic:

The apparel industry relies on an ample supply of local labor force, notably skilled at manufacturing, value added, and high quality standards/products. . . . The sector has ongoing

programs in the labor related programs to VESTEX [the Apparel and Textile Industry Commission] of AGEXPORT [including] . . . a program managing the Arbitration Center for Labor Conflicts creation, giving importance to dialogue and negotiation, *with preventive mechanisms contributing to reduce social, political, economic and human costs which lead to non-resolved conflicts.* (Vestex 2010, emphasis mine)

Industries are offered a large, often “unending” mass of available workers eager to work. In Guatemala, industry also has access to many young men and women who are indigenous, which adds several layers of historical exploitation and expectations of submissiveness. Industries expect turnover and are prepared to deal with it. In terms of capital requirements, workers are considered disposable and replaceable.

THE CURRENT STUDY: EXPLORING THE NATURE OF TURNOVER IN THE MAQUILA

The maquila industries in Guatemala come and go, often in search of better production conditions (lower salaries and tax exemptions). They report high labor turnover. The literature suggests that industrial labor turnover across sectors in Latin America fluctuates between 20 percent and 35 percent per year (Sequeira 1998; Maloney 1998; Rodgers 2006; Collins 2006; Brown 2007). We know little about the effects of turnover on individual workers in the maquilas and the households they represent. Nor do we know much about how workers construe turnover. How do households manage to cope with unstable labor patterns? What are the characteristics of workers who do and who do not turn over, and what is the nature of resources available to individuals and households in the form of economic, human, and social capital? What is the relationship between turnover and conditions at work and at home? The findings of the present study reveal important facets of turnover-related decision making and resistance to difficult working conditions, to an unstable labor market, and to outsourcing strategies more generally. With the goal of understanding the effects of labor practices on individuals and households of the central highlands of Guatemala, a longitudinal study was conducted with a large random sample of households in four communities of the region. The study suggests a framework whereby labor conditions and sources of support at home are linked to turnover of young workers in the maquila. I find turnover for young workers (usually single, between the ages of sixteen and twenty-five, and living at home with their parents) to be associated with decreased input into important household decisions and a lowered sense of adjustment and life satisfaction. Despite this, turnover is often volitional in nature, in response to adverse working conditions. On the basis of the results, the study argues that work ideologies are not unidimensional but rather are complex and contain contradictory messages. They develop in the process of practice, and they allow us to accommodate, rebel, and cope with the conditions of life and work.

STUDY DESIGN AND IMPLEMENTATION

The study began in 2006 and finished in 2009. It relied on qualitative and quantitative methods. For the quantitative survey, a three-wave longitudinal design

with six-month intervals between waves was implemented with the purpose of documenting turnover rates during the period. We were able to document women and men who were working at each of the three visits.

The people in the study worked in several factories. The majority of the factories were owned by Korean capital. The study was conducted in the departments of Sacatepéquez and Chimaltenango. Maquila production coexists with the export of nontraditional agricultural export crops (NTAEs) as a strategy for the promotion of exports that began in the early 1980s. As part of the development strategies brought by Europeans and others after the earthquake of 1976, the population of these departments produced and exported NTAEs. In 1976, Alimentos Congelados Monte Bello S.A. was the first corporation to produce and process vegetables, such as broccoli and cauliflower, for the North American market, using a system of subcontracts with small vegetable producers (Asturias de Barrios et al. 1996). With the advent of international factories, they began competing with exporters and agricultural producers for labor, but the latter do not employ as many workers as the maquilas. Competition for labor occurred despite an increasing population in these departments because of many factors, including internal displacement from the brutal civil war throughout the 1980s and early 1990s and hopes for expanded labor opportunities (Internal Displacement Project: Guatemala 2004). The inter-American highway from Guatemala City to the western highlands became a preferred location for assembly plants, especially those of Korean origin. The central area of Guatemala has the largest population outside of the metropolitan area, with 125,000 economically active inhabitants. The movement of labor opportunities away from urban areas contributes to the reruralization of occupational strategies designed to take advantage of an ample labor force, a feature also observed in other Central American countries (Pérez Sáinz 1996).

The study was conducted in four communities: Aldea Buena Vista, Chimaltenango; Aldea Santa María Cauqué, Sacatepéquez; Caserío Bola de Oro, Chimaltenango; and Caserío San José Pacul, Sacatepéquez.² Buena Vista is a hamlet of Chimaltenango located close to the town center. It is the most urbanized of the communities. It has access to buses and the roads that connect to the factories and has proportionately more factory workers than more distant localities. Santa María Cauqué is a hamlet of Santiago Sacatepéquez with approximately 3,500 inhabitants. The hamlet is near the inter-American highway, at commuting distance to several assembly plants, and in an area that has been dedicated to NTAE production. The people generally use combined economic strategies that include production for subsistence, production of vegetables for the internal market, and production for export. Bola de Oro, a rural hamlet, is located southeast of a municipal center and has a population of 2,204. Community members combine work in the maquilas with NTAE. Many women worked in multiple shifts in the

2. Formally, the communities where we conducted the study are defined as rural. However, there is an increasing concentration of population in some of the hamlets with access to services characteristic of urban spaces, such as running water or toilets. The first three of them have been reclassified as urban. To visitors, it is apparent that there is a continuum from more urbanized to more rural conditions in the order listed here. Most Korean-owned maquilas are located outside of Guatemala City and draw from urban and rural areas.

maquilas during the maquilas' peak years (around 2003). Finally, San José Pacul is a rural village of 1,400 inhabitants located seven kilometers from Santiago Sacatepéquez. It is reached from Santiago by the road leading to San Pedro Sacatepéquez. Opportunities for work are limited. Although the overall perception of production of NTAE has been positive, this study found that villagers in the community, especially the young, have focused their hopes on the service and manufacturing sectors. All participants in a group discussion in Pacul agreed that a few farmers had made some money out of NTAE—most considered it only temporary—and that few, if any, farmers had benefited in the long run (Goldín and Asturias de Barrios 2001; Hamilton and Fischer 2003). Limited sources of employment in Pacul include two livestock farms, each of which hires around six men. Weaving is one of the few options women have to make an independent income. As in other towns, international migration in the communities has been an option for only a few (Saenz de Tejada 2004). At the time of the first wave of interviews, the employment situation became complicated by factory closings and the suspension of some bus routes through the entrance of San José Pacul and Bola de Oro.

In each community, a random sample of households was selected using a form of area sampling employing community maps. The households identified were then approached by project staff, who described the project and asked if they would participate. Within a household, it was determined who was the female or male head of household, and if either worked in the maquilas, he or she was interviewed (from hereon, these individuals are referred to as the adult head of household, or AHH). They were asked whether there was any "child" (an individual between the ages of sixteen and twenty-five living in the household) who was working in the maquila factories and that person was interviewed, accordingly. The factories indicate they typically hire women older than eighteen years old, as directed by law. However, there are workers in the maquilas younger than eighteen years old. If more than one family member between the ages of sixteen to twenty-five was working in the maquila factories, one of them was randomly selected to be interviewed. For households in which no one was involved in the maquila factories, an individual between the ages of sixteen and twenty-five was randomly selected for interview. Hereafter, the younger, non-head of household respondents are referred to as youths. The final sample included both male and female maquila workers in rough proportion to their gender distribution in the factories.

Table 1 Communities and Sample Sizes

	<i>Number of Households</i>		
	Wave 1	Wave 2	Wave 3
Aldea Buena Vista	151	137	136
Caserío Bola de Oro	100	100	98
Aldea Santa María Cauqué	150	145	145
Caserío San José Pacul	50	47	43
Total	451	430	422

Table 2 *Characteristics of Households*

Indigenous	73%
Mean age of adults	42.5
Mean age of youths	22.0
Adults who are Catholic	53%
Youth who are Catholic	52%
Median completed education of adults	6th grade
Median completed education of youths	6th grade
Mean number residents in household	5.0
Mean number contributing to income	2.0
Households that own a vehicle	20%
Households that cultivate for subsistence	40%
Households that cultivate for commercialization	21%
Individuals that identify as locals (from the community where they were interviewed)	65%
Occupation of interviewed adult (mostly female)	
Housework	41%
Agriculture	19%
Commercial (agricultural or other)	11%
Service	8%
Maquila	8%
Construction	2%

A total of 451 households were sampled, and three interviews were conducted with each household, with a six-month interval between interviews. The sample sizes as a function of community and wave appear in table 1. A subsample of thirty-five of the maquila workers provided in-depth interviews after participating in the survey. Descriptive statistics for the households appear in table 2. The percentage of individuals working in the maquilas was roughly 17 percent for youths and 8 percent for AHH at each wave. For data analysis, all analyses used either multiple regression (for continuous outcomes) or logistic regression (for dichotomous outcomes), with adjustments for clustering due to township. Whether the pattern of results for turnover dynamics differed for male versus female youths was tested using product terms with a dummy variable for gender. Unless noted, there were no significant differences in structural coefficients as a function of gender.

RESULTS: PRELIMINARY ANALYSES

Who Works in the Maquilas?

Most maquila workers in the youth sample were between sixteen and twenty-five and were female (about 70 percent). All the maquila workers in the AHH group were older than twenty-five, and almost all were male (about 95 percent). In spite of the government's mandate against hiring children under the age of eighteen (International Labour Organization 2010), the youth sample included a few workers as young as fourteen, as young workers often borrowed IDs from

older siblings or friends so they could work in the factories. For example, a mother told us that she borrowed an ID for her daughter: "I know it is a crime to do this, but one does it out of need, right? She went in when she was fifteen and turned eighteen in the same factory, and when they fired her she could not get her severance pay because it was in someone else's name." Given the smaller number of maquila workers in the AHH sample, our analyses focus on the youth sample, unless otherwise noted. In addition, given the relatively smaller number of males in the youth sample, formal statistical comparisons of differential dynamics for male and female youths must be interpreted cautiously because of low statistical power for tests using product terms.

On average, maquila workers had lower educational attainment than nonmaquila workers (about one year less of education). Maquila households also tended to have about one more member who contributes income to the household. Finally, youths who characterized themselves as independent and controlling their destinies were more likely to work in the maquila than youths who said they were not so. Specifically, of those who said they were independent, 53 percent worked in the maquila, as compared with 27 percent of those who said they were not independent. Similarly, 52 percent of those who said they control their destinies worked in the maquila, as compared with 33 percent of those who said they did not. These differences were statistically significant ($p < 0.05$). Although the data are only correlational, qualitative sources confirmed that workers identify a feeling of independence when working in the factories and indicate a sense of control over their lives.

Labor Turnover

We documented turnover rates by noting patterns of maquila employment across the three waves of the study design. People were said to turn over if they shifted employment in or out of the maquilas at least once in the year of study. Figure 1 shows turnover patterns. In figure 1, M refers to employment in the maquila at a given wave and O represents employment in a setting other than the maquila. The first letter listed in a category on the horizontal axis refers to wave 1 employment; the second letter, wave 2; and the third letter, wave 3. For example, M-M-M represents people who were employed in the maquilas at all three waves, whereas M-M-O represents people who were employed in the maquila at waves 1 and 2 but not at wave 3. Approximately 60 percent of the youths were continuously employed in the maquilas (hence there was 40 percent turnover), and about 85 percent of the AHH sample were continuously employed (hence there was 15 percent turnover for them).

Turnover rates for the youth sample (40 percent) were somewhat higher than other reports, whereas turnover rates for the AHH sample (which was predominantly male) was lower (15 percent). Possible explanations for this difference is that youths "chose" to turn over more than adults because they see themselves as having alternatives at home (other sources of support) and/or they may be more prone to be dismissed before adult males. Older married men are still expected

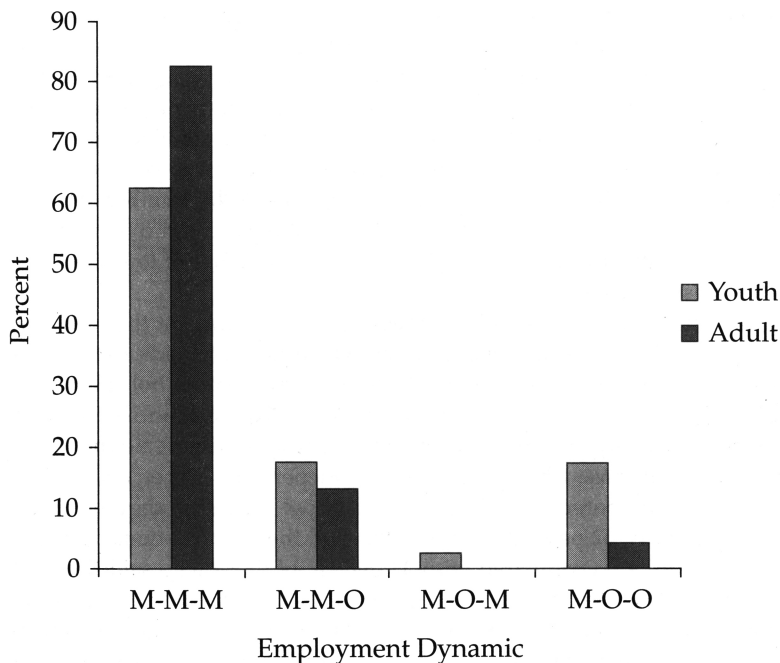


Figure 1 Longitudinal Employment Patterns for Maquila Workers

to be breadwinners, and the lower rates may respond to traditional patriarchal assumptions that young women can opt to stay home.

As indicated, employment of participants was documented for one year. Workers who were not working in the maquila when we first visited them at wave 1 (83 percent of youths and 92 percent of AHH) rarely entered into maquila employment in subsequent waves, with only 7 percent of youths and 3 percent of AHH who were not initially employed in the maquilas doing so. This suggests that large groups of individuals chose not to become involved in the maquila factories, and such orientations remain stable across time. Among the most common reasons that nonmaquila workers gave for staying away from maquila work were that they had “heard of the harsh conditions”; they did not like to work “long hours”; they were told about the “forced overtime”; they did not like the idea of industrial work; and they “had heard of the bad treatment of workers.” The reasons individuals resist participation in the maquilas altogether also are a basis for why maquila workers ultimately leave the maquilas voluntarily.

Reasons for Turnover Offered by Workers

When asked in the survey why they had stopped working, about 30 percent of youths indicated that they were not receiving enough pay; about 13 percent said

they stopped working because they either got married or had a child; another 13 percent indicated they were tired of working so hard and being forced to work overtime; 9 percent said they had been fired or given "forced vacations"; and another 9 percent stopped working because they had become sick. Other reasons mentioned less frequently included being "abused" by employers, "my husband did not let me," being "bored," being needed by their mothers, or "lack of respect." These data suggest that factory closings and being fired are a small percentage of the reasons people stop working. In fact, other than getting sick or being fired (about 18 percent of the sample), most stopped working for "voluntary" reasons related to the conditions of employment. On the basis of this, two broad types of reasons for turnover were identified: voluntary and involuntary or forced. Voluntary turnover represents cases in which the worker chooses to stop working. The reasons are often related to poor working conditions, bad treatment of workers, overwork, and the need for a "break from work" or what people called, loosely, a "vacation." Some theorists would argue that these reasons are not truly voluntary, as they result from adverse conditions generated by others. I use the term *voluntary* to denote agency and a choice made by the worker to remove themselves from those adverse conditions. I use the terms *forced turnover* or *involuntary turnover* to refer to the case of factory closings and dismissals. The occurrence of illness may fit with one or the other category, depending on the degree. For example, workers complain about backaches or gastritis. These are usually not severe cases that "force" the worker to resign but may contribute to the decision to stop working. Serious diseases may altogether incapacitate a worker even if he or she would like to continue working.

Involuntary Reasons

Factory Closings and Dismissals / Workers described factory closings and the consequences of the closings for their lives. There also were forced "vacations," where, for example, factories dismiss people until new production orders arrive. Factories typically close because they find better conditions (e.g., lower wages, less organizing) elsewhere. Many factories move to other countries in Central America and Asia (including China). A factory closing often causes other household members to seek employment to compensate for the lost income:

It affected us a lot because I was giving my mother money and then they closed the factory. . . . [S]he went to San Lucas where they export vegetables. . . . She had to stay up working all night. She would leave at 8 a.m. and return at 4, 5 in the morning.

Why so long?

Because they say there are lots of vegetables.

Is she still working?

No, she got sick.

When we asked the workers why they think factories close, they often blame themselves for the closings:

They had told us that they had to send by plane a lot of merchandise. Regrettably, not all of us comply with our obligations to hurry and to be conscious that the product has to go

out fast if one wants to work. If we wanted to work, we had to cooperate with the company. The other plant closed because the owner did what he had to do. . . . [I]f you don't want to work and you don't cooperate with what needs to be done . . . then they had to go. People in the factory that closed did not work fast. We miss that factory because it was the closest to us. I was so sad. I said to God: "Why?" One needs to work and one damns the factory that helped one so much. But people don't always think about this.

According to many respondents, it is the worker's responsibility if the quality of the product is poor: "What happens is that when the quality is low, the owners don't like it and they send work to other places." Sometimes respondents indicated that if someone was fired, "they probably deserved it." In earlier research, I documented two worker explanations for worker misbehavior, those who are so tired of working that they misbehave to instigate being fired (this would be included among voluntary reasons) and those who are thought to misbehave independent of their desire to be fired (i.e., they underperform or are considered disruptive in their own right; Goldín 2005, 2009).

Voluntary Reasons

Bad Treatment / The abuse and overall poor treatment of workers in the plant was one of the most common workers' explanations for turnover:

I have been 5 or 6 years in each factory, but last year I was in a Korean factory where they treat people very badly. They humiliate people [*lo hacen de menos*], and you get tired of it, you despair, until I stopped working there. Now I am in a new one, where, thank God, the treatment is different. They are not Koreans; they are Guatemalans. They make children's clothes. They make a brand for Walt Disney. It has a label with the picture of Aladdin.

Workers cite numerous examples of bad treatment, from being slapped on the back of their heads if they are thought to be working slowly or talking to others, to shouting with angry and offensive comments. Many workers report being intimidated by managers. They also describe being denied permission to go to the bathroom or being scolded and sent to the office if they took longer than a few minutes for a bathroom break. In addition, workers describe the lack of communication with Korean management, which contributes to frustration and overall dissatisfaction—"Koreans don't understand" was a very common statement:

With Koreans, there is no good communication. Sometimes I don't understand them very well, and when I talk to them they seem lost [*se quedan en la luna*]. They don't understand how we talk. Luckily, we once had a Guatemalan manager, because the Koreans don't understand anything and they would never give us permission.

This lack of communication reinforces the distinctions among Koreans, Guatemalans, Americans, and other social groups now present in the lives of Maya workers.

Gastritis / The incidence of gastritis is high among maquila workers and could be reduced by a simple change in factory policy, one that would probably increase

production rather than decrease it. Workers are not allowed to bring any food or drink into the plant. They are checked before they enter to ensure they don't bring a bottle of water or food. When at home, workers usually would have a small snack in the middle of the morning, consisting of a cup of coffee and sweet bread or toasted corn tamale. They would have a similar snack in the middle of the afternoon. Plants' policy states that food or drink may stain the clothes, but the consequences are that workers get hungry and thirsty and develop gastric problems due to long hours with no food:

For example you leave your house at six a.m. We prefer to have breakfast when we get there so that our stomach is more or less full. But we get hungry around eight or ten in the morning, and you cannot eat or drink anything until twelve. Many of us suffer gastritis and all we think about is lunchtime!

Did anyone talk to the Koreans about that?

All they think about is production. . . . There are Guatemalan factories that they say give you 10 minutes to eat something, but they are Guatemalans. One can communicate better with Guatemalans. People from other countries come with another form of thinking. All they care about is production and money.

Too Much Pressure / Pressure, exhaustion, and returning home to be with young children are some of the additional reasons people gave for leaving work.

I worked in Fashions for one year. I worked in Almar and I worked in Don Bin. There, the first time I worked for one and a half year. Then two years in Alian, then in Modas Kate for one year and in the last one for one year.

Why did you stop working in Don Bin?

Too much pressure. In Almar I quit because they did not comply with the rules of the law. For example, if it was a holiday, they did not pay us. That is why many people don't like it. That is why I left. In Don Bin and Almar, I resigned. In the other factories, production went down and they fired many people, not just me, many. They closed Fashions.

How long were you unemployed?

When I left Don Bin I did not work for two or three months. I preferred working in construction. The factory is so boring! Then one looks for another factory. When I left Almar, it was the same. I was out for two or three months, and then I moved to Lindex. But I left it because I did not like working in sanitation. I stayed there for three months.

Forced Overtime / Overtime is part of most workers' workday. The eight-hour workday should end at 4 p.m., but no factory closes before 6 p.m. unless it has completed orders. Overtime is part of the bimonthly pay. Often, workers are asked to stay until late at night, and sometimes they are not allowed to leave the plant until the job is complete. This may take two or three days (up to thirty-six hours without sleep). Numerous workers reported these extended stays occur once or twice in a two-week period. In those cases, the factory offers workers some meals, but workers don't always like the meals and feel that the food makes them sick. Workers try to resist excessive overtime. They report some success at doing so, such as when newly arrived managers from Korea told them they had to work on Saturdays and without extra pay. They report that people simply stopped working and left.

I asked an officer of the Apparel Exporters Association why she thought there is such high labor turnover in the plants. She said:

I think it is cultural. For example there are areas where there are five or six companies and the worker goes from one to the other. I think it is more cultural. They used to do that in the sugar harvest—they would work four or five months and with what they made they would live the rest of the year.

A common practice is for people to move in and out of maquila employment, to try other factories to see whether conditions are any better or if they will be assigned something different to do. A worker says:

Many people arrive and work two or three months and then they resign. They come back two or three months later; they come in and out, in and out. Thank God they have the opportunity! I thought when I leave I am never coming back, so I am putting up as long as possible.

Coping with Turnover

There are numerous examples from the qualitative interviews that illustrate the widespread strategies workers use to cope with turnover:

How do you cope?

I don't even know how we manage. But we live all together and everyone contributes something. Then it is not like, see what you do, it is your problem. We all pitch in, shoulder to shoulder. If someone does not have, I will do what I can, and that is how we've done it. (Six adults and their children)

We are ten. I live with my mother in law. She has six sons. My husband and I and my mother- and father-in-law; we share all expenses with her. Four of us work. I worked in the maquila, I was fired, and did not work for two months and then found another job. I stayed home and helped the family and took care of my children. In December, there is not much work because then is when they pay the thirteenth month [*aguinaldo*]. They start hiring again in January. (Young woman)

When I did not work, I stopped buying wood. One load is Q50 [US\$6]. If I buy two or three loads every two weeks, it is Q150 [US\$20]. So to help save, I'd go to the hills to get wood. There, I would also collect herbs. Instead of beef, we would eat wild herbs. That's what we do. (Thirty-six year-old married woman)

I helped my father. He is also in construction. Now he works by himself. How did it affect us? It was the money. We had so little. If one wants to eat beef, we can't. We had to agree among ourselves how to deal with it. But in the future, I plan to go to the United States. I want to improve myself. I would like to have a house in three or four years. If I can, maybe. But for now . . . maybe next year. That is the idea. (Young man)

As these examples show, some people cope with turnover by forgoing basic provisions—they may stop eating anything beyond what is required for basic survival or practice subsistence strategies, using any resources they can muster from the land, such as wild plants, animals, and firewood. Others rely on householding strategies in which all members of the family pitch in. Finally, they rely on resources generated by the employment of other family members. Factory

work often is possible because traditional subsistence practices are not fully abandoned, and though reportedly not the preferred form of survival for youths, they are clearly still accessible, even if on a limited basis. There is little land and little work from the land, as evidenced by diminishing returns from NTAEs. But modern labor regimes still rely on these transitional states in which land and family are part of the indigenous peasant landscape.

Possible Effects of Turnover

I compared at wave 3 those youths who had experienced turnover in the maquila in the previous twelve months with those who did not experience such turnover to determine how the two groups differed on selected outcomes. I found that both groups were similar (i.e., showed statistically nonsignificant differences) on a variety of indicators of reported health status, their access to social support, friendships, and their overall household economic status. The groups differed in a statistically significant way, however, on indicators related to two noteworthy variables, one related to family decision making and one related to depression. Specifically, individuals who did not experience turnover were more inclined to participate in important decisions in the home than those who did experience turnover. For example, the percentage of youths who said they participated in important decisions in the home among those who did not experience turnover was 97 percent, but for those who had experienced turnover, the percentage was 79 percent. Stable workers seem to be more trusted to make decisions, and their income, which is important to the household, empowers them to be active decision makers. In turn, those who experienced turnover in the previous twelve months tended to indicate that they are sadder and more depressed than those who did not experience turnover. For example, of those who experienced turnover in the previous twelve months, 32 percent characterized themselves as sad, but this was only true of 8 percent of those who did not experience turnover. This may be caused, in part, by the fact that those who turn over often leave behind their friends and lovers in the factories and lose some of the power they held in their homes.

DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSIONS

Resistance, Response, and Logics of Production

Turnover draws from three different logics of production. In combination, the three forms fulfill the current needs of capital and the related needs of workers. Both sectors benefit from elements of each system: (1) a Fordist schema involves the continuation of some aspects of classic Fordism, including a large controlled industrial setting with a clear division of labor that facilitates speed and efficiency; (2) a global capitalist logic that depends on outsourcing to facilitate the expansion of capital to the periphery and to deal with the cyclical crises of capitalism that result in limited growth and profits. This particular logic addresses workers' activism in the core countries and global competition for cheaper labor. It depends on flexibility expressed in the form of temporary or serial workers who are not fully

identified with industrial capitalism. Finally, (3) a noncapitalist logic that relies on self-imposed "vacations," local strategies organized in multiactivity households (De Janvry 1981), and complementarity of labor in the household (householding strategies; Chayanov 1986; Polanyi 1944) or the organization along gender lines of two parallel household economies (Ehlers 2000). In the combination of these three logics of production, turnover strategies serve the needs of capital in the form of efficient divisions of labor and flexibility of production and, at the same time, serves the needs of workers who use turnover to secure times for rest or family and/or to protest exploitative labor conditions.

In this context, assembly plants condense various forms of understanding that summarize diverse and complex practices relative to the aforementioned logics. In Rabinow's terms (in Ong and Collier 2004), the plants constitute sites of ethical problematization, which include multiple threads of intersection, including ideas of nation, ethnicity, class, age, gender, patriarchy, identity, production, consumption, culture, capitalism, as well as issues of human rights, dignity and morality. As such, the study of turnover is linked to factors related to the larger processes of production and distribution and corresponding consumption. What do these processes and expressions of economic practice say about the economy, culture, and humans in global capitalism? As an example of global assemblages (Deleuze, in Ong and Collier 2004), maquilas are subject to technological, political, and ethical intervention. It is indeed possible to document expressions of hegemonic ideologies whereby workers identify with capital and regret their "bad" behavior or low productivity. They take blame for circumstances beyond their control. Sometimes the same workers who use turnover to assert themselves are also grateful for their jobs and take responsibility for their failures or low wages (as in "we get paid what we deserve"; Goldín 2005). It would be misleading to identify one single interpretation to labor ideologies. Just as workers are ambiguous and permanently conflicted about their fate, so are the ideologies and practices that emanate from these problematic places of work. The spaces we describe are not exclusively manipulated from positions of power located outside the theaters of production. Instead, as shown here, these spaces are conditioned by the decisions workers make as they weigh their options, however limited, in their pursuit of their livelihoods. Turning over allows them to exercise some of their limited opportunities, namely to break away from harsh conditions at work and to gain the freedom to give time to their children or mothers. Turnover is not a solution to exploitation. It is a strategy workers often use that allows them to cope with adverse conditions, and it creates flexibility for workers, in spite of the documented drawbacks. The fact that we found that workers who remain continuously employed are less likely to feel sad, are more likely to feel a greater sense of independence, and tend to elicit more respect and access to decision making in their homes suggests that turnover takes place at some cost to workers.

As noted, two general forms of turnover emerged in this study. Voluntary turnover is turnover that occurs as a reaction to exhaustion, a self-prescribed need for what workers call vacations, a need to be home with children, to help mothers who previously relied on young daughters for house chores, and those who choose to get themselves fired by purposely misbehaving in the factory. A

second form of turnover is involuntary turnover and is a result of workers being dismissed because of a factory closing or activism or by workers being forced to stop working due to serious sickness or conditions beyond their control.³ We offer here, accordingly, a framework for thinking about turnover that includes the following variables: (1) individual decisions to turn over; (2) the presence or absence of additional sources of support at home in the form of others in the family that can contribute to the household fund; (3) the nature of the conditions at work (more or less restrictive, demanding, and/or controlling); (4) worker's psychosocial adjustment, expressed as a sense of independence and life satisfaction; and (5) capital's needs for a flexible labor force. In this framework, individuals are more likely to decide to turn over when labor conditions are worse and there is a perceived option at home to make up for the lost income. Households resort to innumerable strategies to compensate for lost income. These include some in the household taking on a new odd job; another household member going to work in the maquila; or subsistence strategies, such as collecting wood, wild plants, and animals. In turn, better labor conditions and/or a perceived lack of alternative sources of income result in decisions to continue work, when possible. Higher turnover impacts individuals beyond the simple loss of income—it also can lower their sense of independence and control, weaken their contribution to decision making in the family, and perhaps lead to feelings of sadness and depression. Those who can stay longer at work enjoy people's recognition as contributors to the household fund, which, in turn, contributes to the well-being of parents and education of younger siblings. It is somewhat paradoxical that while maquilas provide capital with the opportunity to expand gender exploitation, continuity of work in the maquilas contributes to the leveling of household gender relations.

By turning over, workers show that, although they are curious about capitalism and have a desire for modernity, they are not willing to commit to what they see as a degeneration of what the capitalist project may produce, real or imagined. By making turnover-related choices and controlling to a certain extent their work cycles, workers show that they are still in transition, not fully proletarianized, but keeping a foot in agricultural practices. As such, turnover can be construed as an expression of resistance to a version of capitalism that does not fit with expectations of a modern, better life, removed from agriculture. Turnover provides the opportunity to create spaces for asserting worker dignity (Scott 1990). These spaces allow workers to express their agency and a (mild) sense of control. In fact, turnover is an expression of precarity in production, one that presently sees "Fordism as exception and precarity as norm" (Neilson and Rossiter 2008, 51). Capital takes advantage of the perception of temporariness and flexibility to control, manipulate, and extract additional surplus (forced overtime). Turnover is an expression of disposability and labor replacement. As the world economic crisis deepens, turn-

3. Factory closings have also been related to attempts to demand better conditions, although few are reported in rural factories. They often take the form of organizing along production lines, resulting in more or less successful attempts to partial stoppages. Workers report that when management finds out about these attempts, they often fire the presumptive organizers. The type of activism documented in this region is not as developed as that in urban settings, where workers are older and more experienced (see Goldín 2005 and Goldín and Dowdall, in press).

over, as precarity, becomes the normal conditions under flexibilization rules. The needs of capital are provided by the needs of workers in an unequal symbiosis of maximum exploitation “up to a point.” As the factory can close down and move, so can the worker establish his or her own limits through turnover.

In conclusion, maquila workers are active participants in global assemblages that connect spaces around the world in ways that the actors involved only imagine. Workers constitute the link between production and consumption as they imagine the mythical consumers they are purportedly serving (e.g., some workers asked us, “Just who wears such big clothes?”). Workers are forced to negotiate the ethical dilemmas that are not solved by inspections or codes of conduct. In turn, maquilas offer capital temporary options for expansion, extending the opportunities of exploitation at a world scale and offering workers a glimpse of modernity and a place of resistance. Turnover is the shape that labor takes in global capitalism. It serves both capital and labor (differentially). It provides a tool to workers so they can experience a taste of “modernity” while giving them control over their lives. Workers resist and respond to how they are treated while fully understanding their limited options. In their conflicted views about working in the maquilas and reluctance to fully proletarianize, they use turnover to give themselves the breaks they need. Turnover *is* semiproletarianization.

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