

**FROM THE ASSEMBLY LINE TO THE FRONT LINES:
FILIPINA WORKERS IN MULTINATIONAL FACTORIES**

Jane A. Margold

Department of Anthropology
The Chinese University of Hong Kong
Shatin, New Territories
Hong Kong

About the author:

Jane A. Margold has a Ph.D. in anthropology from the University of California, Berkeley. She is an assistant professor in the Department of Anthropology at the Chinese University of Hong Kong.

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Abstract

This paper questions a common assumption among Western policy analysts that vigorous economic development leads inexorably to political liberalization, largely through the creation of a middle class that begins to demand greater civil freedoms. It argues for the consideration of a more complex dynamics, in which working-class and women's movements may be at least as significant as the middle classes in struggles for increased democratization.

The specific case studied is the Philippines in the post-Marcos era. Drawing upon 1993 fieldwork in Metro Manila factories and the Bataan Export Processing Zone, the author presents the political biography of a young, working-class woman activist, as a means of analyzing the problematic premise that the middle classes are the "natural constituency" or "prime movers" of democratization.

從裝配綫到前綫：在跨國工廠中的菲律賓工人

馬葛特 著

摘 要

西方政策分析家們有個共同的設想，即強勁的經濟發展創造出來的中產階級會開始要求更大的公民自由，因此必會導致政治自由化。本文質疑這一設想，並主張考慮一個更複雜的推動力，其中工人階級和婦女運動在為爭取民主化的鬥爭中可至少像中產階級那樣重要。

本文探討的菲律賓個案是後馬可斯時代。作者根據一九九三年在大馬尼拉工廠和巴丹出口加工區所作的田野考察，以一個年輕女性工人階級活躍分子的政治傳記，分析一個受質疑的前提：中產階級是民主化的“自然成分”或“首要推動者”。

馬葛特(Jane A. Margold)是香港中文大學人類學系助理教授。

FROM THE ASSEMBLY LINE TO THE FRONT LINES: FILIPINA WORKERS IN MULTINATIONAL FACTORIES

A key question in the age of transnational capital is how local political practices are being reconfigured by global economic forces. As giant corporations continue to fragment and internationalize production, relocating their factories to regions where wages are kept low and labor protests minimized, to what extent have the resultant tensions called into being new political actors, and new alliances? Despite the metaphors that have attached themselves to late-modern capital, stressing its fluid, "footloose" qualities and underplaying its harsh materiality, considerable violence has attended the establishment and maintenance of industrial zones in the Third World, in the form of land appropriations, forced relocations and state and corporate assaults on fractious labor (Sidel 1994; Ockey 1994). How has such violence remapped domestic fields of power, conditioning once-docile women factory workers to act assertively on their own behalf, when development-hungry states not only fail to demand social accountability from transnational corporations (TNCs), but unite with the TNCs against their own working classes?

These collusions between states and TNCs have occurred repeatedly during the past two decades in the Philippines, Thailand, South Korea, Taiwan and Sri Lanka -- to limit instances to the Pacific Rim (Pineda-Ofreneo 1988; Ong 1991; Bandarage 1988). In response, local activists have called increasingly for international scrutiny of the use of military and police force against them

(Dass 1993; Bactotoy 1993). It thus seems appropriate to ask whether and in what ways local groups' entry into world-wide forums on violence have expanded their political strategies and internal dialogues. Have local, culturally-framed concepts of satisfactory working conditions been reshaped by widening global debates over labor rights, women's rights and human rights? If international discussion of workers' and citizens' groups do indeed alter local understandings, under what conditions does revised expectation mount to engagement and action?

The grassroots political impact of global economic reorganization, and the accompanying shifts in outlook and reference, raise complex issues that are not adequately addressed by existing theorizations. Western policy analysts view vigorous economic development as leading inexorably to political liberalization, largely through the creation of a middle class that acts as a "natural constituency" for democratization (Sidel 1994). Within Asia, South Korea, Taiwan and Thailand are cited as nation-states in which rapid industrial growth has been linked to the undermining of military rule, and to the strengthening of institutions that guarantee civil rights and freedoms (Sidel 1994; Bunbongkarn 1993; Lee 1993).

Yet the gradualist or evolutionist assumption that state authoritarianism will eventually be challenged by an expanding middle class is flawed on at least two counts. First, it renders inconsequential the political openings created by the struggles of labor, women and other interest groups to introduce their concerns into public arenas. Second, and relatedly, it

overemphasizes the political efficacy of emergent middle classes, missing the possibility that a new midsector of society may have conflicting interests, consumerist yearnings, and opportunities to evade the state's disciplinarians, all of which keep such a class politically ambivalent and disinclined to act in concert. Thus, within the Pacific Rim, Singapore's paternalist governance has not been seriously opposed by its professional and entrepreneurial classes, despite their extensive grumbling (Heng and Devan 1995). Malaysia's rapid industrial expansion has been accompanied by mounting constraints upon its citizenry (Case 1993). And democratization in the Philippines has not accorded with economic growth. The four-day popular uprising that expelled Ferdinand Marcos in 1986 occurred at a time of *failing* economic policies.

The perspective I have termed evolutionism or gradualism lacks the complexity to account for the variability in state/society relations that economic dynamism has brought to the Pacific Rim. Nor should we expect any single paradigm to explain the realignments in local spheres of power that have come about in the wake of the transnationalization of production. Thus, rather than construct a macro-model that assumes a slow but steady trajectory from development to middle-class pressure for a democratic transition, my aim here is to argue that the political biography of one Filipina factory worker may be as revealing of the nexus of forces brought into play by industrial development as any effort to generalize across nation-states, even within a particular world region.

I turn, therefore, to a brief chronicling of a young, urban Filipina's entry into the world of multinational work, suggesting that we follow her from her first factory job in 1986, the year of Corazon Aquino's ascension to power, to the moment six years later when the young woman -- Erlinda Cabuyao¹-- stood off the Philippine military in the dark, dead hours of a Manila night, with nothing but a megaphone and her own impassioned oratory. The highly condensed biography I present here is based on conversations that Erlinda and I had during three months in 1993, when we shared a room over a Manila sari-sari (variety store) with two other members of a left-progressive women's labor center, known as Kilusan ng Manggagawang Kababaihan (KMK, or the Women Workers' Movement). KMK is linked both to a larger labor center, KMU (Kilusan Mayo Uno, the May First Movement), which vigorously opposes the state's development policies, and to GABRIELA, a powerfully vocal branch of the Filipina women's movement, whose membership extends across several continents. Erlinda is thus situated within a political milieu that is at once rarefied -- since less than 3% of the Filipina working class is unionized (Angeles 1993) -- and central to the launching of challenges against an economic order that has dispossessed a large segment of Philippine society.

In recounting a few of Erlinda's experiences and arguing for their relevance to an understanding of how global economic restructuring also restructures face-to-face political encounters, I do not claim that my subject is typical of the Filipina factory worker. Rather, drawing upon feminist theorists

of the biographical, I want to suggest that her narratives are consequential because they encapsulate, and show the workings of a set of historically-specific transitions that mediate and narrowly shape her possibilities for action. The historian Joan Scott (1992) cautions against the rendering of women's experiences as so unimpeachably authoritative that issues of how "herstory"² is socially made and operates within broader political-economic settings are forgotten. Experience then becomes the basis for revising history, rather than itself the object of analytic examination.

Nicole Polier (1994) operationalizes Scott's warning in her ethnographic portrait of the rebellious life of a Papuan migrant woman. The migrant, Polier persuasively demonstrates, could not have escaped from what she herself saw as the numbingly monotonous life of the woman horticulturist, digging root crops under the watchful eyes of village elders, if colonization, missionization and multinational capital had not brought a rising tide of consumer trade goods to Papua New Guinea, and with them, the stuff of new dreams and new paths of resistance.

Similarly, the Filipina factory worker, Erlinda Cabuyao, came to maturity in a period when the urban underclasses who helped depose Ferdinand Marcos spoke headily of the political choice and fresh possibilities that the so-called People's Power Revolution had won for them. Yet, in the same year, 1986, when Erlinda took her first assembly-line job at a Metro-Manila export firm, new foreign investment substantially eluded the Philippines, as a result of the country's collapsing infrastructure, legacy of debt and reputation for popular

restiveness. In the context of the Aquino regime's intensifying quest for a fresh infusion of capital from abroad, the state's oversight of the TNCs that did operate locally was erratic, despite the spelling out of labor rights in a newly-ratified constitution.

For Erlinda, the concrete result was the absence of a paycheck for her first month of work. As yet unsure that she had any claim upon or leverage with her employer, her initial political act emerged not from notions of rights, but from feelings of indignation, need and humiliation. The shame, she explained, lay in telling her parents that she could not pay back the bus fare they had lent her for her daily commute. Casual laborers, they supported seven younger children on the sporadic cash they could glean from vending and hauling trash. Her indignation, Erlinda added, came from her discovery that it was not only she, the apprentice, who remained unpaid, but her co-workers, with lengthier tenures at the factory.

Energetic and outgoing, the 18-year-old Erlinda would lead a posse of anxious women to their supervisor's office to request the missing pay. Hours later, after being sent in vain to another building to wait, Erlinda, by now tearful, would tell the Filipino supervisor that the women, living day to day, spending their pesos on their families, had no money. And they were hungry.

The manager, newly sympathetic, was nevertheless unwilling to admit culpability. But he dispatched an underling to buy the women some fish, vegetables and rice. Dramatically, instead of merely purchasing lunch for his workers, he broke up shipping pallets for firewood in the courtyard outside his

office and genially cooked lunch for the group himself. As the women ate, confused and embarrassed at the small feast of obligation artfully laid out before them, paychecks did appear. And the group was induced to return to its labors.

Illustrated strikingly here is the capacity of late-modern capital to reinscribe, rather than sweep away, pre-existing hierarchical arrangements. The power practice that is reaffirmed is patronage, in the form of the manager's show of personalistic concern for his subordinates. The cultural card he plays is emotionally-attentive caretaking. In response, the women, forced by their familial responsibilities to *pakikisama* (go along to get along), have little choice but to allow themselves to be devalued from workers, with contractually-ensured claims upon capital, to clients, compelled to be grateful for the favors of the patron. The manager's manipulations, while transparent enough to the women, are filtered through an optic of necessity. Tenuously employed, situated as supplicants in the global economy, the women vent their discontent in small daily resistances to the factory's demands, lingering in the restroom and at times working carelessly. But they remain in other ways the ideal worker sought by late 20th-century capital: faceless, replaceable, and divested of discursive authority.

The childless, unmarried Erlinda, however, was more mobile. An opportunity for flight arose when her younger sister entered the work force, making it possible for Erlinda to look for a job at the high end of the industrial hierarchy. With a sense of hope and promise, she began work as an assembler

in a multinational electronics factory. Yet her visions of clean, well-paying work in a white lab coat soon dissolved in the reality of the air showers that dusted off the white coats five or six times daily, spreading tuberculosis and other respiratory diseases in the recirculated air. Forced night shifts resulted in black eyes and days without work or pay for the women who fell asleep on their microscopes. Talking, laughing and dancing in place to keep awake were prohibited, and a fierce race at the end of each shift left half the women unable to catch the transport buses provided by the company in insufficient quantity. The factory's glass doors, shattered by pushing bodies, attested to the anger of the women, who then spent as much as a third of their day's wages returning to the depressed, job-less suburbs where most factory workers resided.

In Erlinda's rendering, it was these "hard experiences" that led her to "arise" as an activist, who by 1993 worked full-time for KMK, the women's labor center, and lived with two other labor organizers in a room only large enough for a small table and four sleeping mats to be spread out side by side. By her own account, it was *mahirap ang buhay* (hard life/hard experience) that convinced Erlinda to jeopardize her person and her life on the round-the-clock picket lines that are customary in the Philippines because it is only by camping round-the-clock at a factory's gates that workers can try to prevent the removal of productive equipment that signals the setting up of a runaway shop, where ever-cheaper labor can be hired.

Yet *mahirap ang buhay* does not necessarily yield the fund of interpretive possibilities that are required to transform feelings of dispossession and longing into an activist's understanding. How did notions of labor rights and women's rights begin to gain credibility in Erlinda's thoughts, feeding upon and displacing the feelings of humiliation, indignation and need that had initially suffused her view of her place in the social order? The enabling practice -- whose existence I want only to mark here and will later elaborate in detail -- was the patient, intentional organizing effort of a workmate, who was already allied with KMK, the Women Worker's Movement, and with GABRIELA, the broader feminist federation.

The workmate, seated next to her at the electronics factory, shared the forbidden snacks the women hid in their white smocks, and whispered and laughed with Erlinda throughout their 10-hour shifts. She quickly confirmed that the factory's superficial comforts, its airconditioning and its spotless, tiled hallways, were intended to protect the product, not its assemblers. Workers were dispensable, she commented, given the pool of unemployed and underemployed who comprised almost one-third of the adult working population in the Philippines of the late 1980s.

From behind her white mask, Erlinda's new friend discussed the reasons for higher management's indifference to the worker's many complaints, pointing out how weak the women were if they did not band together, and coaxing her to attend progressively lengthier labor seminars, rallies, and strike actions at other factories. The friend conducted her, too, to the marches and

street-theater performances of GABRIELA, the feminist federation that spoke out continually against the violence that confronted the Filipina domestically and internationally. As GABRIELA made known, the Philippines had attained the dubious distinction in the early 1990s of becoming the world's largest exporter of maids, low-paid entertainers, mail-order brides and overworked nurses in the inner-city hospitals of North America (Anti-Slavery International 1990).

Erlinda's subsequent rearrangement of herself under the banners of multiple collective identities -- of leftist, nationalist, unionist and feminist -- took hold in the disjuncture between her hopes of a life expanded beyond that of her parents, and the reality of daily miseries, and in the gap between the Philippine state's formal guarantees of civil rights and its failures to implement its legislative policies. She would not forget the shock of being sprayed with red ink by the military during a demonstration, so that she and other protesters could be tracked down when the large crowds had dispersed. Nor would she forget the fear she felt in slipping through the streets with her hair, arms and clothing marked red for any pursuer to see.

Sharpening her realization of the degree of disprivilege the Filipina worker endured were transnational contacts with her counterparts at factories in Malaysia, Indonesia, South Korea and elsewhere in the Pacific Rim. Erlinda only mused about being sent abroad "someday" but local conferences and informal visits brought women of many nationalities and diverse activist backgrounds to the offices shared by KMK and GABRIELA. The strategies

that were exchanged would later be debated in private by the Filipinas and incorporated into KMK's organizing practices if they spoke to the group's goals of guaranteeing factory and saleswomen a just wage, improved workplace conditions, the eradication of all forms of sexual degradation and the freedom to organize and participate in political actions.

Yet, much is missing here if we are to comprehend the process that took Erlinda from mere receptivity to a workmate's whisperings to the highly-charged moment, several years later, when her political sophistication would be fully tested. Seizing a megaphone in the midst of a 2 a.m. attack by armed men upon her all-night picket line, where had she acquired the persuasive powers to transform passersby from disengaged spectators into riveted witnesses? How had she had learned that public acts of watching may impede state terror, which depends on the lightning hit, the unidentifiable agent? And what underlay the quick, desperate calculus that convinced her to speak out, exposing herself as a target of the assailants' attention, in the hope of rescuing her companions? How did she know that her shouted pleas and explanations were unlikely to be ignored in a poor section of Manila, where the pre-dawn hours belong to home- and factory-bound workers? Or that a sense of commonality among these workers might be sufficient to impel a few witnesses to help the strikers flee, as they did in this incident?

In answer to such questions, Erlinda says she acted blindly and impulsively. All she knew, she told me, was that the strikers were mainly teenage girls who had been locked out of the cosmetics factory where they

both lived and worked. Their few possessions were in their dormitory: small radios, an electric fan, stuffed animals, clothing. Their protest was not solely about pay, but about losing the small visible results of several years of work. They were 15, 16 and 17. Sisters and cousins, they all came from the same rural town a few hours from Manila. They had no picket-line experience and they were becoming separated in the dark. Caught by themselves, they were certain to be abducted, beaten, and raped by the attacking men. Erlinda could not remember the words she had screamed. Indeed, it was her roommates who spoke initially of this incident. Erlinda had been shouting into the megaphone and crying, one of her roommates said: "But not like a woman's tears. Not soft and weak."

She had shouted and pleaded into the megaphone, Erlinda sought to explain, so passersby would understand the danger they were in and stay with them. And some of the people passing in buses and jeepneys (a cheap form of transport) had jumped down and helped them in response to her screamed pleas.

Erlinda's blankness after the incident is an important detail. She cannot herself explain what led her to participate in the teenage girls' strike, beyond a request from a workmate that they both go every night after work to show their "support" for the locked-out factory workers. Nor can she explain why she stayed and risked her life on the night of the assault. She "didn't think" about it; "didn't plan" it. It was part impulse, and part knowledge of the demonstrating workers' probable fate. Acts of political commitment are

highly complex, and not explained adequately by the comfortable, evolutionist assumption that state authoritarianism will fall away, as the new middle classes of developing nations come to insist upon an expansion of their civil freedoms. The willingness to oppose an existing order builds not only upon impulse and personal experience, but upon the shared memories, images and analyses of people who appear to be situated in similar social circumstances and thus can credibly reinterpret the experiencing subject's past and help her expand her political vision. Absent in the evolutionist model is an examination of how, where and within what experiential setting the small, unstable midsector of a newly-prosperous nation is "made" into the prime movers of democratization.

Yet, even as an accounting of a few shaping events in a working-class activist's life can enlarge the picture of how a coercive state is urged toward liberalization -- not by the middle classes alone -- but by plural class struggles and contestations, Erlinda's political subjectivity begs for a more extended consideration. If we are to follow Joan Scott's suggestion that women's narratives are not to be utilized in a foundationalist way that insists that nothing could be truer than a subject's account of what she has lived through -- and therefore neglects to ask how her experiences were imposed and encoded -- then Erlinda's perspectives need to be more adequately contextualized within contemporary Philippine political economy and history.

The next section of the paper thus takes up the question of how Erlinda's interpretive framework was structured in the transnational workplace. It seeks

to show that the crucial mediating agencies in her political life were the dissenting social movements represented by such groups as GABRIELA, KMK and KMU. In providing a capsule history of the rise of these groups, and an examination of how they achieved a public voice and visibility, I want to suggest that it is just these discursive and organizational dynamics that remain most unspecified in an evolutionism that assigns the middle classes of the Third World a pivotal role in democratization. Unexplained in the evolutionist formula is how a community of political actors is formed, attains a coherent identity, defines its aims and interests, transmits its knowledge and strategies among its members, wins commitment from those it seeks to represent, and sustains itself in a tense, critical relation with the ruling elements in society.

In what follows, I seek to address a few of these questions in relation to KMK and GABRIELA, returning at the end of my paper to the problem of how a young factory woman's life has been reordered by a global economy that requires the Philippines to remain within the orbit of advanced capitalist centers, but has denied it the means of attending to its own social and technological development.

* * *

KMK, the Women Worker's Movement, and GABRIELA, the larger umbrella organization of women's groups, were ideologically anchored in the late 1960s youth movements that revived the moribund communist party in the Philippines, transforming it into the more broadly-based and lively

National Democratic Front, or NDF, whose Maoist-Leninist orientation has since dominated the country's left. For KMK, GABRIELA, and the male-dominated labor coalition, KMU, however, the NDF's advocacy of an all-or-nothing seizure of state power through armed resistance by a corps of peasants, workers, and urban poor has been less a prescriptive grammar than a repository of concepts, rhetoric, and tactics, to be articulated selectively. Faced with periodic allegations by the military that they are communist fronts, KMU, GABRIELA and KMK have consistently denied NDF links, managing to maintain their legality and legitimacy since the early 1980s, when all three groups were founded.

Internally, the beleaguered status that the groups have shared has been at once problematic and organizationally useful, forming them into communities of opposition. Accusations that they are NDF-backed raises the specter of arrest and assault, but also acts as a source of solidarity and bonding. As I have argued elsewhere (Margold 1994), state and corporate violence against such dissident groups as KMK operates to terrorize and discourage many potential members, but for a critical few, serves to strengthen resolve and provide a more crystallized understanding of the power marshalled against them.

Of their picketline and protest rally experiences, Erlinda and the other KMK members comment, with a rueful pride: "we eat harassment for breakfast." A similar stance accompanies many stories, not only of violent encounters with company security guards, police and military, but of the gritty

discomfort of sleeping on flattened cardboard boxes at factory gates, vulnerable to rain, rodents, insects, plumes of bus exhaust, and the throbbing feel and sound of traffic only a few feet from where they sleep. Shared narratives, of months spent day and night on a picket line, of women hoisting a concrete beam or rolling heavy barrels across a factory's driveway to force negotiations with management, become ways of recasting female endurance as female prowess. As the stories are told and retold -- of "male workers watching from across the road as twelve of us moved one end of a concrete beam, inch by inch, to block the factory gate" -- feelings of frightened, desperate victimization are replaced by a sense of agency and capacity.

To the question, then, of how a community of political actors is formed, gains an identity, wins commitment from its members, and sustains itself in a fraught, oppositional relation with the dominant elements in society, a partial answer in the specific case of the Philippines is that the disciplinary efforts of multinationals seeking to shed their unionized labor force had contradictory effects. While the majority of workers were demobilized, an admittedly small but voluble segment of labor militantly regrouped, drawing upon the spelled-out analyses and organizational tactics of already-existing radical social movements. KMK and KMU activists critiqued the successive development plans of the Marcos, Aquino and Ramos states as sets of worn-out strategies that would keep the Philippines an industrial neo-colony, attracting labor-intensive, low-tech, dangerous sweatshops that repatriated their profits and moved on elsewhere whenever greater advantage beckoned.

KMK and GABRIELA's existence was predicated upon the development of a nationalist consciousness that had drawn tens of thousands of Filipinos into the streets in the late 1960s, in the first wave of protests against the open-door development policies of the Marcos state. Their immediate predecessor was an explicitly revolutionary group, established in 1970, and known as MAKIBAKA, or Malayan Kilusan ng Bagong Kababaihan: The New Movement of Free Women. The acronym MAKIBAKA, however, also meant Dare to Struggle, expressing the interstitial position of women who found in radical politics no more than rhetorical answers to the question of how Filipinas were to liberate themselves socially within the larger project of freeing the country from foreign domination. The radical student movement trivialized women's issues, or saw them as divisive and distracting from the purportedly more encompassing aim of national and class liberation. This was a common phenomenon globally.

Yet MAKIBAKA -- whose heroines were the Vietnamese and Chinese women who had engaged in day-to-day fighting in their own revolutionary struggles -- could hardly be accused of insularity or of lacking a political-economic perspective. Emerging in the context of a capital-intensive industrialization program that escalated the Philippine's foreign debt from less than \$300,000 when Ferdinand Marcos took office in 1965, to two billion dollars at the end of his first term four years later, MAKIBAKA simultaneously looked outward and to the country's past, to develop a practical means of addressing the multiple axes of Filipinas' subordination.

Four centuries of Spain's colonizing and evangelizing rule had made the Philippines a Catholic country that prescribed a demure, obedient domesticity and humble religiosity for the female indigene, suppressing but not entirely erasing an earlier system of gender symmetry in which communalism had prevailed in production, household maintenance and child rearing. Under the subsequent fifty-year period of American conquest, which nominally came to a close following World War II, women's public role expanded, but only through a tremendous struggle for suffrage, for protective labor legislation, and for an end to colonial rule.

A generation hence, the incomplete attainment of all but the vote for women would lead MAKIBAKA's founders to write that the upper-class Filipina remained "a mindless ornament," and the underclass woman "a mindless drudge," in sorry contrast to the historical agency needed to "engage fully in the destruction of imperialism and feudalism" that would make the Philippines an autonomous nation (Aquino 1994: 598). Declaring itself publicly with a picket of the Miss Philippines Beauty Pageant in 1970, MAKIBAKA informed the intrigued media that the action was aimed triply at the objectification of the Filipina, the commodification of her body, and the glaring absurdity of a beauty contest within a poverty-stricken country.

Some analysts have seen MAKIBAKA's first public action as a glib appropriation of U.S. feminist tactics of the time, or have claimed that demonstrating at the 1970 pageant was MAKIBAKA's initial reason for being

(West 1992). But the group was no mere shadow of the American women's movement; it had its own distinctive aims and social-change agenda.

The news media, drawn by the novelty of middle- and upper-class women picketing their peers, devoted substantial attention to MAKIBAKA, particularly when several national beauty queens and fashion models were recruited to the organization's ranks: Gemma Cruz, Maita Gomez and Nelia Sancho. (The latter two would be founders of GABRIELA fourteen years later.) In the Philippines, as elsewhere in Southeast Asia, a fine appearance culturally signaled divine favor and imbued the beautiful (or handsome) with moral power and charisma. That women who possessed this capital wished to restructure the order of privilege, rather than manipulate it to their own advantage, spoke eloquently of the strictures that women at all levels of society faced, and lent the new militant women's movement an urgency, and a romantic cachet, particularly when MAKIBAKA was forced to go underground with the 1972 declaration of martial law.

As such women as Sancho and Gomez divested themselves of the privilege they might have enjoyed in order to live the life of revolutionaries in the NDF's New People's Army, their example indicated that the "new woman" that MAKIBAKA promised could move toward self- and societal transformation without the defeminization, anti-familism and female separatism that Filipinas read into radical Western feminism. MAKIBAKA women married and had children, even as female soldiers in the New People's Army. Moreover, popular legend attributed to them a prowess and strength

that would later become thematic for the KMK women, as already mentioned. The MAKIBAKA women were reputed to have appeared on road crews in remote rural areas, dressed fashionably in the miniskirts of the time. Yet, they impressed the peasantry by constructing and repairing roads and bridges in regions never visited by the government. Reportedly, the Marcos military's response to this insouciant discourse of resistance was to begin randomly arresting any women seen wearing very short skirts.

It can be argued that what MAKIBAKA contributed to the building of a militant women's movement was a public identity that disturbed and opened out the restrictive gender and class norms for the Filipina, defining for her a new level of participation in the politics of protest. As the MAKIBAKA women fanned out into the factories and villages, joining the NDF and the leftist nuns who organized among the poor, the economic and social critique they brought with them found a small but tenaciously defiant audience among young working-class women. They had been recruited into the labor force in unprecedented numbers within a relatively short period of time, and thus were subject to the extreme stresses that had made of Erlinda Cabuyao a willing receptacle for new explanations, new ideologies, and eventually a transformative course of action.

A heavily female industrial work force had not been envisioned by the Macapagal or Marcos governments of the 1960s, which set new directions for the Philippines' integration into the global economy. The export-oriented growth policies, begun by Macapagal and followed by the Marcos state, had

been intended to absorb jobless men into the new factories that foreign capital brought to the Philippines of the late 1960s. Instead, the TNCs had hired young, preferably single women, with no work experience, and hence, ideally, no propensity to unionize. Amidst the abysmal conditions of the Philippine workplace, however, organizers from the overlapping NDF, labor and women's movements found a corps of 15- to 25-year-old working-class women who were astonishingly ready to take to the streets. Women formed the backbone of the 1975 La Tondena distillery strike in Manila, which mounted the first opposition to the martial law ban on industrial protest. Women, several years later, poured out of the barbed-wire enclosures and well-guarded gates of the Bataan Export Processing Zone to directly challenge the Marcos regime's promise of a docile workforce for transnational corporations (Witeck n.d.).

Strikes have periodically wracked the Bataan zone since then, in response to which the Marcos and post-Marcos states have deployed a form of psychological warfare, or "psy-war," as Bataan organizers say, in which rumor, intimidation and the slain bodies of several women unionists left in the side streets near the Zone have constituted a highly unequal battleground, upon which women workers continue to fight because they view themselves as having no other choice. Many of the TNCs have pulled out of the Zone, seeking less troublesome labor elsewhere and providing a rationale for state development policies that allow a full panoply of union-destroying practices, from no strike/no union enclaves in the newest of the Philippines' four export-

processing zones to an escalating campaign of violence, in which women have increasingly been the objects of beatings, abductions, rape, cars and trucks suddenly veering into picketlines, and other forms of attempted and actualized murder. This is the historical and structural matrix within which Erlinda Cabuyao's life is set, and her possibilities for personal mobility are limited.

It is by now a sociological truism to observe that all forms of domination contain within them the seeds of their own destruction. Yet, if power insistently breeds resistance, analysts seeking to build on Foucault's insights have found it necessary to ask: resistance of what strength and longevity? To what avail? With what degree of socially-transformative possibility? In the mid-1990s, the mobilizing capacities of organized labor in the Philippines should not be exaggerated, given the fluidity, mobility and recombinatory capacities of the global economic forces that eternally seem to promise prosperity for the country, yet (as of 1995) still position it further from newly-industrializing-country status than Indonesia, Malaysia and other neighboring Southeast Asian economies. However, in what one observer calls "the dialectic of crisis" (Elson 1992: 30), the Philippines' unstable economy provides not only a turning point for capital accumulation and growth, but also for contesting a range of social practices and institutions, some of which may be dislodged and others reasserted in more oppressive mode.

Over three decades, the Philippines has represented a setting in which the radical restructuring of production forms and spaces was most dislocating for the peasant and urban poor women entering the global labor market as exploited factory and service workers, transnational migrants, and “prostituted women” (as sex-industry workers are termed to emphasize the involuntary nature of their employment). I have sought to suggest that these women have at once borne the short-term costs of the Philippine’s skewed integration into the global economy, and been discounted as a political coalition with the potential to organize and be organized, define their own identity, aims and interests, and maintain a sense of commitment to their goals, even as they are relegated to the borderlands of their society.

Erlinda, encapsulating within her political life the chaos of her historical moment, has an unresolved and unpredictable present and future. At 26, she has burned certain bridges. She is overage and lacks the innocence to be hired by the TNCs searching for naive high school graduates. Moreover, if the rumor is true that blacklists of KMK and KMU labor organizers are widely exchanged on the corporate circuit, she is unlikely to find employment in the factories, department stores or other workplaces that accept the less formally-educated. At the same time, as the world she can imagine has opened out over six years of activism, its confines have grown more apparent. Thus Erlinda, and her roommates, sharing a kitchen with a six-member family in a rickety building the women call Hell House, are unable to stop or escape the distressing sounds of the young husband of the family hitting his wife, who is

their friend and former factory workmate. **Delicadeza** (social sensitivity) leaves them with no other option, they say, than to wear GABRIELA t-shirts around the house that read on the back in Tagalog "a real man doesn't beat his wife."

* * *

Carolyn Steedman (1987), in a biography of her British working-class mother, comments upon the difficulties of documenting a life that fits neither the conventions of proletarian literature, nor any other related genre, because it is not a story of angry politicization, or flight from a hardscrabble existence, or of unfolding insight into the social order that deprives and degrades the laboring poor. Steedman's mother -- reared in a Lancashire mill town where an explicit class consciousness and a pride of plain origin were served up religiously -- emerged from her North England childhood wanting money, glamour, adventure, a New Look skirt with yards upon yards of fine swinging wool, a timbered country cottage, to marry a prince. Erlinda's desires are less materialist, and somewhat less discordant with her position in her social surroundings. She would like to attend college, to speak English, to walk down the street with a foreign male visitor and not be subject to the leering, needling jokes of the market vendors, who think her a prostitute despite her lack of makeup and her baggy although crisply-ironed t-shirt, loose jeans and sneakers.

Yet hers is a drama of class, as discomfiting, if not more so, than Steedman's mother's frustrated life, because it can neither be absorbed into the central story of the culture, nor can it stand completely on its own. As

Steedman observes, tales of the lower classes exist in an anxious, dependent tension with the narratives of the more powerful; and Erlinda's experiences dispute the notion that industrial development will naturally bring about the political and social openings that would ameliorate her existence. Steedman comments that we need a more complicated sense of peoples' relationships to the historical situations they inherit. Following feminist theorists' warnings about viewing experience as a direct, unmediated reflection of the real, I have sought to show that Erlinda's experiences were constituted at the intersections of a particular ideology, history and culture. Experience is an effect of power; in and of itself, it does not necessarily politicize. What is lived may be repressed, or called forth, in conjunction with burgeoning social movements and alliances that are only beginning to be apparent in the age of mutable, restless global capital.

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Notes

1. A made-up name intended to protect the activist young woman.
2. "Herstory" refers to a woman's account of her own life experiences. It is also used to mean women's collective experiences, which are sparsely documented in the historical record.

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