BEYOND THE BEAUTY OF A DOZEN ROSES: IMPLICATIONS OF FREE TRADE ON WOMEN WORKERS IN COLOMBIA'S CUT FLOWER INDUSTRY

by

AMY CAMERON PRICE

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Student: Amy Cameron Price

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This thesis has been accepted and approved in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the Master of Arts degree in the Department of International Studies by:

Kristin Yarris, Ph.D	Chairperson
Erin Beck, Ph.D	Member
Yvonne Braun, Ph.D	Member
Derrick Hindery, Ph.D	Member

and

Kimberly Andrews Espy	Vice President for Research and Innovation; Dean of the Graduate School

Original approval signatures are on file with the University of Oregon Graduate School.

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THESIS ABSTRACT

Amy Cameron Price

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Department of International Studies

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Under the prevailing global capitalist model, increased access to the formal economy for women is touted as a panacea to women´s empowerment and gender equality. Despite an unprecedented increase in women's participation in the global workforce and international labor standards, women are often assigned to precarious and exploitative low-wage work with little opportunity for social mobility. This thesis examines the effects of the U.S.-Colombia Free Agreement and Labor Action Plan on women workers in Colombia's cut flower export-oriented industry. The impacts of free trade on women are contradictory, and despite hopes for the Labor Action Plan, women in the cut flower industry have seen little improvement in the working conditions and gender inequality. I explore the ways in which women actively resist exploitation and argue that women face powerful structural barriers to collective action under the imperialist and racist order of the capitalist patriarchy enshrined in Free Trade Agreements.

CURRICULUM VITAE

NAME OF AUTHOR: Amy Cameron Price

GRADUATE AND UNDERGRADUATE SCHOOLS ATTENDED:

University of Oregon, Eugene, Oregon
Portland State University, Portland, Oregon

DEGREES AWARDED:

Master of Arts, International Studies, 2014, University of Oregon
Bachelor of Arts, Sociology, 2010, Portland State University

AREAS OF SPECIAL INTEREST:

Gender and Development
Political Economy
Immigration and Displacement
Latin America

PROFESSIONAL EXPERIENCE:

Graduate Teaching Fellow, University of Oregon April 2014-June 2014
Scholarships Advisor

Graduate Teaching Fellow, University of Oregon Jan. 2013-March 2014
Academic Advisor, Department of International Studies

Graduate Teaching Fellow, University of Oregon Sept. 2012-Dec. 2013
Teacher's Assistant, Department of International Studies

GRANTS, AWARDS, AND HONORS:

Graduate Teaching Fellowship, Office of International Affairs, 2014-present

Graduate Teaching Fellowship, Department of International Studies, 2012-2014

Summer Research Grant, Center for Latino/a Latin American Studies, 2013

George and Connie Slape Fellowship, Department of International Studies, 2013

Thurber Award, Department of International Studies, 2013

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION: GLOBALIZATION, FREE TRADE, AND WOMEN WORKERS

Preface: A Vignette From the Field

I was in Colombia on April 12, 2012 when the U.S.-Colombia Free Trade Agreement passed. I had just participated in a Witness for Peace delegation in which I traveled across the county to learn about the situation on labor and human rights violations from community members, local leaders, and activists.[1] Concerns about how the Free Trade Agreement (FTA) would affect already marginalized groups echoed throughout my conversations with people on the delegation. According to the U.S. and Colombian governments, the Free Trade Agreement was going to benefit Colombia and its people through jobs, cheaper imports, and increased exports. To demonstrate its commitment to addressing the widespread labor violations and in order to pass the FTA, the Colombian government signed the "Labor Action Plan" on April 7, 2011. For many people in Colombia and for labor rights advocates in the United States, the Labor Action Plan was a glimmer of hope that Colombia would finally address the egregious and widespread labor violations that had plagued the country for decades. While the Labor Action Plan provided some hope, there was extreme skepticism around the progress that could be made toward improving labor conditions due to the longstanding history of labor repression, human rights violations, inequality, and lack of political will of the state. Colombians have long experienced the ways in which large multinationals and

[1] Witness for Peace (WFP) is a U.S. based not-for-profit NGO that started in the early 1980s in response to the U.S. involvement in the Nicaraguan civil war and today works in North America and in Latin American countries supporting the WFP mission of peace, justice, and sustainable economies. WFP's primary concern is addressing U.S. policy that contributes to poverty and injustice in Latin America and the Caribbean. Regional organizers for WFP lead delegations in Latin America to bear witness to injustices perpetuated by U.S. policy.

economic elites are privileged over social concerns of the people. In fact, more than one of the labor organizers I met during the ten-day delegation had personally received death threats from paramilitary groups. Several others indicated that they experienced threats of violence on a daily basis.

Fifteen months later I returned to do fieldwork for my master's thesis. One of my primary concerns was whether women workers in the cut flower industry were aware of the labor standards enshrined in the FTA and how it affected their rights as workers. In July 2013, I met with a forty-eight year old Colombian flower worker named Silvia to talk about the implications of the Free Trade Agreement and Labor Action Plan in the flower industry.[2] Just one day prior to our interview she had been called in to the human resources office and was fired from her job. The human resources officer told Silvia that that she was a "good employee" but her contract had ended, and if there had been enough work available, the company would have re-hired her. Silvia worked for the same *finca* (flower farm/plantation) for eight years but never had a direct contract with the flower company. As a common practice in the flower industry, Silvia worked under a third party contract and was re-hired through a different third party contractor every year. Silvia named at least five *cooperativas* (third party contractors) with which she had contracted over the years.

Less than a year before she was fired, Silvia's doctors diagnosed her with Lateral Epicondylitis, a condition commonly known as "tennis elbow."[3] The doctors also

[2] I use pseudonyms to protect the confidentiality and anonymity of all of my interview participants. See more in Chapter II on research methods.

[3] According to the Mayo Clinic (n.d.) Lateral Epicondylitis (tennis elbow) is a painful condition usually caused by repetitive motions of the wrist and arm (e.g. from cutting flowers) when tendons in the elbow are overworked. Rest and over-the-counter pain relievers often help relieve tennis elbow, however, if symptoms are disabling, surgery may be necessary.

qualified the Lateral Epicondylitis as an occupational condition. Silvia said, "we [workers] know how things are in the flower industry, if you are sick you get fired." On the same day Silvia was fired, she said that the company also fired six other injured workers whose contracts had also expired. Silvia was seeking help from CorpoLabor, a subsidiary of the flower workers' union UNTRAFLORES, which organizes flower workers and provides services to help defend workers' rights. Silvia wanted help filing a claim against the flower company for unjust termination, for back pay owed on her pension (she had only received compensation for three out of eight years), and for health coverage. Although Silvia found her way to an organization that could help her demand her rights under Colombian labor law, she was not aware of the Labor Action Plan and how it could be used as leverage to pressure the Colombian government.

Silvia, like many women in the cut flower industry, suffers from a debilitating occupational condition due to the harsh working conditions but has few alternatives. She says her choices are to either try to find another flower job and work despite her injury or to fight for compensation from the company. For Silvia, the reality of her position is especially profound. She was orphaned as a child and was brought to Bogotá, the capital city of Colombia, to become a domestic worker at the age of twelve. When she had her own children, she moved the Bogotá Sabana to work in the flower industry so that she could raise her children and support herself. After being fired, and barely able to use her injured arm, she knew that her only options were severely limited. Prior to her situation becoming dire (losing her job), Silvia had been discouraged from unionizing because when she did try talk with her coworkers about organizing, she faced resistance to the idea. Silvia also said that she did not see how unionizing with her co-workers would have

benefitted her directly. During our interview, Silvia notably began to see how a union might have helped. Her words are illustrative: “if we had unionized, I might not be here right now [injured and jobless].”

The Global Context: Feminization of Labor and Labor Standards

Globalization and neoliberal economic policies have had significant impacts throughout the developing world. One of the most prominent effects of the spread of global capitalism during the 1980s and 1990s was the increased demand for a highly flexible workforce. As export-oriented manufacturing and non-traditional agricultural industries expanded their presence in developing countries, the demand for a source of cheap, docile labor with “nimble fingers” increased (Aguilar 2004; Robbins 2010).[4] This trend resulted in the “feminization of labor,” as more women than ever before now participate in the labor force (ILO 2007).[5]

Access to the labor force generated hope for women’s empowerment and greater gender equality in the developing world. The belief was (and still is in many circles) that by providing wage labor and integrating women into the market economy, they would overcome poverty and inequality.[6] Feminists and development scholars agree that the effects of globalization and women’s participation in the labor force are profound. However, the implications for women and gender equality are contradictory and uneven.

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[4] Throughout this thesis, I use the terms export-oriented, export-led industries, and global assembly line synonymously to refer to apparel, manufacturing, and non-traditional industries (mostly) located in developing countries where products are manufactured and assembled for consumption in the developed world by low wage workers at a fraction of the production costs in most developed countries.

[5] The term “feminization of labor” is a term used by scholars to refer to the increasing integration of women into the formal economy through industrialization and globalization. Although the absolute numbers of women in the formal workforce are higher than ever before, there is still a significant disparity in the number of women compared to men in the formal workforce (ILO 2012).

[6] The World Bank saw the Colombian cut flower industry “as one of the major development success stories of the last two decades” (Meier 1999: 273).

On the one hand, location in the workforce (especially for poor, rural women) does offer a degree of financial autonomy and freedom not previously attainable for women (Chang 2008; Friedemann-Sánchez 2006; Ganguly-Scrase 2004; Kabeer 2004). On the other hand, globalization has assigned Third World women to low wage precarious work in hazardous conditions, thereby producing a new exploited labor class -- the female proletariat (Friedemann-Sánchez 2006; Aguilar 2004; Benería and Roldán 1987; ILO 2007).[7]

Discontent and increased mobilization around hazardous and exploitative conditions in export-oriented industries have increased awareness of working conditions for women across the globe. This has led to reforms in trade policy. These trade policy reforms, known as a "social clause" or "labor agreement," are intended to enforce international labor standards set forth by the International Labour Organization (ILO).[8] However, scholars contest the extent to which a social clause on labor serves the interest of women workers (see Dominguez et al. 2010; Hensman 2002; Kabeer 2004).[9] Rich countries and development organizations extol the virtues of labor rights and access to wage labor as the answer to poverty alleviation and gender equality for Third World women. But as we will see, the reality on the ground plays out quite differently.

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[7] Globalization has not evenly assigned *all* women to low wage and precarious work. Sanmiguel-Valderrama (2007) makes a case for the importance of considering the different locations and situations of women's groups when theorizing on the feminization of labor. In other words, the concept of intersectionality (which I discuss in more detail later) is crucial to the study of globalization and trade liberalization. While indeed, the impacts are gendered, they are also linked to multiple systems of oppression such as race, ethnicity, and class. The majority of the women assigned to the new female proletariat – those working in export-led production characterized by low-wage, precarious work environments, limited union representation, informality, and little opportunity for social mobility – are poor women of color (Chang 2004;Sanmiguel-Valderrama 2007). See below for more on my use of the term "Third World Women."

[8] The International Labour Organization was established in 1919 at the first Peace Conference in Paris. Reflecting the ideology that universal and lasting peace can only be achieved if based on social justice, the ILO promotes humane labor conditions such as regulation of hours and maximum work weeks, prevention of unemployment and the provision of adequate living wages, protection from occupational illness, the protection of children, young people and women, the freedom of association, and equal pay for equal work (ILO n.d.)

[9] Social clause is defined as a clause in an international trade agreement that links trade to workers rights and holds the signatories legally responsible for enforcement of core labor standards (Griffin, Nyland, O'Rourke 2002).

Despite the intended benefits of free trade and so-called altruistic motivations behind labor rights, Chandra Mohanty argues that it is "especially on the bodies and lives of women and girls from the Third World/South—the Two-Thirds World—that global capitalism writes its script" (2002: 514). Women bear the heaviest burden, while economic globalization "extracts from them the greatest suffering" (Aguilar 2004: 21). Hegemonic ideals of capitalism promote endless accumulation and privilege economic growth over the social welfare of women as the global capitalist system relies on exploiting women's labor to sustain itself. Chang recognizes the uneven effects of globalization on women and posits that it is "women of color, throughout the world are those who suffer first and worst under globalization," they struggle, survive against the odds, and actively resist neo-imperialism and the "new world order" (2004: 231).

The Problem Addressed by This Thesis

Research has explored the tensions between exploitation of women on the global assembly line, women's empowerment, and various forms of resistance. However, much of the literature forms a dichotomy between exploitation and empowerment of women. This dichotomy perpetuates two grand narratives of Third World Women: as passive victims or as empowered agents affecting social change through everyday acts of resistance. The reality is much more complex than the dichotomy presents. Addressing this dichotomy in the literature requires continued dialogue and on-the-ground research that reflects the nuanced and complicated lives of women. Moreover, there is a need for more research on the impact of the "social clause" and free trade agreements on women workers, especially in the Colombian context. Few studies have looked at the impact of the social clause designed to address labor issues in trade policy. This thesis contributes

the body of literature on women and globalization by addressing the following research questions:

1. *What are the ways in which women are empowered and/or exploited by work in Colombia's cut flower industry?*
2. *What is the impact of the U.S.-Colombia Free Trade Agreement and the Labor Action Plan on women workers?*

This thesis represents an effort to contribute a complex and multifaceted perspective to the ongoing debate about exploitation and empowerment of women in export-oriented industries. It examines the impact of free trade and the use of a "social clause" in trade policy to enforce global labor standards for women workers. In addition, it explores the ways in which women resist exploitation. Throughout my research and analysis, I apply Cynthia Enloe's concept of feminist curiosity. Feminist curiosity is an approach to understanding how and why phenomena such as globalization, militarization, and feminization of labor occur. Enloe (2007) urges scholars and citizens alike to pose feminist questions that help uncover potential consequences and shed light on causes obscured by power. Employing feminist curiosity is not just an academic endeavor, she argues, "It is political. It is cultural. It is personal." (1). Feminist curiosity requires energy and persistence to ask questions about taken-for-granted processes that appear inevitable or natural (Enloe 2004). The findings discussed here draw on data I gathered using my feminist curiosity during several visits to Colombia over the past two years and by reviewing the literature and results of other empirical studies.

The main argument I present concurs with many of the critical feminist perspectives: imperialist and racist processes of the capitalist patriarchy, globalization,

and trade liberalization exploit Third World Women and serve the interests of the elite, wealthy class. Yet, Third World Women are not just passive victims of exploitation, they demonstrate an astonishing amount of resilience, they actively resist oppressive structures, and find meaning in their relationships and work. Women do benefit in differentiated ways (largely because of their own agency and active resistance) from access to wage labor and labor protections, but in many developing countries the gap in gender equality remains significant while women continue to disproportionately bear the burdens of social reproduction (ILO 2012; UN DESA 2010).

Throughout this thesis, I am conscious of the perception and representation of women as passive victims of exploitation as a way in which First World feminism perpetuates neocolonialism and further subjugates Third World women (for more, see Hesford and Kozol 2005; Mohanty 2003). In no way do I want to contribute to the misperceptions and further subjugation of women by painting a picture of the "poor factory girl" that needs to be rescued by First World feminists. I do argue, however, that we ought to be cautious of romanticizing resistance and advancing the specious claim that access to the market is a magic bullet for women's empowerment and gender equality in the developing world. Keeping the politics of representation in mind, I reiterate throughout this thesis that although individual resistance is valuable, it must be weighed against the potential for transformative change in the inherently oppressive structures of global capitalism and patriarchy.

Trickle-down economics and market-oriented development have failed to create the transformative change necessary to liberate Third World women and eliminate gender inequality. Instead, the expansion of export-oriented industries has feminized poverty and

devalued jobs traditionally held by men (Sanmiguel-Valderrama 2007). In other words, the global capitalist system cheapens labor and seeks the most exploitable resources available for its goal of endless capital accumulation. While imperative for protecting workers, labor standards are a good idea but are often insufficient and ineffective. This is especially true if they are unevenly enforced. Moreover, when international labor standards are coupled with neoliberal economic reforms and free trade agreements that force countries to scale back social spending, the goals of these policies fundamentally conflict with one another; they are incongruous.

Thesis Scope and Organization

In Chapter II, I provide a description of my research methodology and research settings. I discuss the characteristics of my sample, the challenges as an outsider doing research, and the limitations of my data. I also foreshadow the analytical themes that emerged from my data such as empowerment, resistance, and exploitation. I will return to these themes throughout this thesis and especially in Chapter V, where I discuss my findings from interviews with women cut flower workers.

In Chapter III, I discuss the literature I reviewed for this project and the theoretical frames in which I situate my study. The two main areas of the literature that inform my thesis are: the global political economy and feminist literature on women and work. I provide an analysis of the political economy and background in which the Colombian cut-flower industry emerged. The need for this section in the chapter became more apparent to me as I recognized the importance of highlighting the policies that developed within a formative historical context in which global super powers and national elites dictated economic and trade policy in Latin America for over a century. I

then situate my research within the body of literature on women and work, particularly focusing on women on the global assembly line.

In Chapter IV, I expand on the discussion of the political economy to examine how and why the passage of the U.S.-Colombia Free Trade Agreement became contingent on the Labor Action Plan (LAP). I identify the actors who promoted the LAP, those who opposed it, and the discourse used to advance and denounce the agreement. It is within this context that I analyze how certain factors, such as the actors involved in negotiating the LAP and the degree to which these negotiations were transparent and open to outside influence (e.g. workers, women, and the public), impact its implementation and effectiveness. Analysis of the U.S.-Colombia FTA is critically important in the context of the impending Trans-Pacific Partnership (TPP), the most expansive and open-ended trade agreement to date.[10] It adds a current and timely case study and analysis to the ongoing debate about the implications of free trade and enforcement of global labor standards on women workers in export-oriented industries.

In Chapter V, I provide a brief overview of how the cut flower industry emerged in Colombia and discuss its importance in the region and in the Colombian economy. I also describe the basic features of the labor conditions and the types of exploitation to which women are subjected. I then present the narratives of three women cut flower workers whose stories, along with other relevant data I gathered in the field, illustrate the

[10] At the time of this writing, the TPP, which accounts for thirty percent of global GDP involving twelve Pacific Rim countries, is under negotiation. It is the most significant trade initiative in the twenty-first century. Drafts of the agreement are classified and not available to the public; they are restricted to select multinational corporations and government officials (Schott 2013). Moreover, authority to negotiate the deal is granted to the President of the United States under fast track negotiating authority, which means that the power of Congress is limited to approval or disapproval. In other words, Congress can only give a "thumbs up" or "thumbs down" vote; they have no power to amend the actual policies (Hughes 2014). The extreme secrecy and lack of transparency under fast track authority undermines democracy, erodes accountability, and poses threats to worker protections. Because women are the ones who suffer the greatest from the toll of capitalism, they will potentially be subject to new ways of exploitation. Conversely, if policy makers can learn from previous lessons, there is potential to ensure improved policy and implementation.

contradictory ways in which capitalism, imperialism, and patriarchal exploitation converge. This chapter highlights the dilemma for feminist scholars, as women are both liberated from exploitative conditions and yet exploited in new and different ways. The narratives also provide empirical evidence that demonstrates the gaps between the promises of trade liberalization to empower women and the reality; it shows how the Labor Action Plan is actually playing out on the ground; and it highlights the ways in which women respond to and resist exploitation.

In Chapter VI, I discuss my findings and conclude with recommendations for further research and concrete action. These recommendations are in part my own, however, more importantly, I hope to convey what the people who not only generously took time out of their busy lives but took a risk to participate in my study would like to see happen. I am fully aware that I cannot speak for the participants in my study. Nonetheless, with great caution, I attempt to relay their struggle and message so that perhaps I can use my power and privilege as a U.S. citizen and white woman to impact change and create solidarity networks that seek to improve the lives of all women, no matter their location.

Contested Terms: "Third World" and "Third World Women"

Because I use the contested and political terms "Third World" and "Third World Women" throughout this thesis, I believe it is important to define the way in which I use them.[11] The Third World is both a geographical representation (covering most of the world, often referred to as the "Global South") and a conceptual category for those states

[11] This exercise is critical because words and terms are powerful and political. Western hegemonic institutions (e.g., academic institution, of which I am a part) perpetuate power dynamics through the production of knowledge, use of words, and singular and monolithic categories. These categories "are the surface manifestations of latent economic and cultural colonization of the 'non-Western' world" (Mohanty 1991: 353-4).

that have been dominated by the transnational capital class and rich countries, historically through colonialism, and through contemporary forms of imperialism, militarism, and unfair trade (Isbister 2006).[12] Third World Women, especially poor, rural, and colored women, as mentioned above, are not only those that bear the brunt of these global processes, but they are also the subjects of the Western feminist gaze. They are perceived as victims who need to be saved by the virtues of Western feminist ideals. However, it is Third World Women's resistance that points to the possibilities of change through which we can envision a more equitable world. Therefore, I use the term cautiously but deliberately to describe women that are exploited by global processes, whose bodies and labor are used for capital accumulation, but also to invoke hope and potential for revolutionary action Third World Women represent.

[12] Isbister (2006) posits that the term Third World actually connotes hope. He traces its roots to a pun on the "third estate" in prerevolutionary France. The term 'third estate' became a revolutionary slogan. It connoted the majority, the disposed, and the disenfranchised. It promoted revolution and the promise of change. It became the banner of hope. Thus from its origin, the term Third World carried tension and opposition; the term itself called for change. It set up an opposition between the rulers and the ruled. It drew attention to a world empowered by the French Revolution. The definition has changed; it now represents the impoverished, unaligned, and non-influential countries and groups dominated by rich and powerful industrialized countries in the international system (16).

CHAPTER II

METHODOLOGY

Research Settings and Methods

My primary research methods are qualitative and rooted in an ethnographic approach. My aim in this study was to gather data on the impact of wage labor and policy from the perspectives of women, labor organizers and NGO workers who are "on the ground" directly experiencing the impacts in their everyday lives. Qualitative research that focuses on the lived experience is important because mainstream analysis of gender and development examines macro-level political-economics, thus limiting our full understanding of women's lives (Ganguly-Scrase 2003). By focusing on the lived experiences of women flower workers and their relationship to the political economy, I gained a better understanding of how macro political economic structures affect their daily lives. I consider the participants in my study experts on their situation and agents of social and political change; therefore the women workers were the primary source from which I gathered data.

Areas Visited and Sites

For three months in the summer of 2013, I was based in Bogotá, a large metropolitan city of nearly ten million and the capital of Colombia. While I was in Bogotá I worked as an intern for a Colombian NGO, Corporación Cactus, which for three decades has focused on gender and labor rights in the Colombian cut flower industry. It was primarily through this internship and other connections I had made on previous visits to Colombia that I gained access to interviews with NGO staff, union organizers, and

flower workers. From my "home-base" in Bogotá, I traveled by bus to three municipalities, Facatativá, Suesca, and Zipaquirá, all located in the Bogotá Sabana, to conduct interviews with workers, union organizers, and to observe a *paro* (work stoppage/strike). The Bogotá Sabana region is located in the province of Cundinamarca where Colombia floriculture began and which continues to be the primary region for cut flower cultivation in Colombia. While each of these municipalities has their own unique characteristics, they are largely rural areas with city or town centers. Some of the municipalities have urbanized more than others due to their proximity to the capital city.

Compared to the volatility brought about by decades of social and economic upheaval, a prolonged civil war, and massive displacement, the Sabana region has remained relatively calm. This is not to say that the region has been immune to social and economic problems. In fact, during my fieldwork a national strike took place in which thousands of small farmers, industry workers, students, and health workers took to the streets protesting free trade and violations of labor and human rights. The protests resulted in heightened military and police violence against the people and vandalization of property in the region and throughout the country. Additionally, due to the expansion of free trade zones on the outskirts of Bogotá and its proximity to the international airport, industrialization of the Sabana region is increasing. This has resulted in a rise in displacement and unemployment of farmers (Corporación Cactus 2012b).

Although there are upper-class families and foreign businesses that own most of the region's land and farms (including the flower plantations), the general population is working class, many of whom are working poor. Poverty was more visible in some of the homes I visited than others. For example, located in shantytowns with unpaved dirt roads,

some of the homes I visited were shoddy structures made out of cinder blocks with tin roofs and lacked many amenities enjoyed by the middle class. Other homes I visited were relatively comfortable well-built rentals in which the owner lived on the second level above the tenants with open access through the tenants' space. This lack of privacy was abundantly clear to me when I was doing interviews in similar homes. In one instance, I found it difficult to concentrate because I could hear the owner singing from upstairs; her voice carried directly down the stairwell into the main floor. In both of these situations, I reflected on my own cultural perceptions of comfort and privacy and what seemed like sub-standard living conditions and intrusion on the lives of their lower class tenants. Nevertheless, the point here is that not all flower workers live in the same conditions – some are better off than others, whether it be because they have partners, family members that help them, or have worked in the flower industry long enough to eke out enough savings to pay for better housing. Likewise, the municipalities varied as described in the following sections (see Figure 1: Municipal Map of the Sabana of Bogotá).

Facatativá

Facatativá is a municipality located in the Cundinamarca department, in the Bogotá Sabana with a population of 124,779 people. Although its primary sector is agriculture, consisting of large-scale flower crops grown for export, 90% of its population lives in urban areas. Food crops such as potatoes, peas, corn, other vegetables and some strawberry crops are important to the municipality's economy and supply the capital, located twenty-six miles to the southeast. The surface area on which flowers are cultivated in Facatativá is 1,210 acres – 9% of the total land area (Alcaldía de Facatativá n.d.).

Figure 1: Municipal Map of the Sabana of Bogotá (Corporación Cactus 2012c)

The town center shares the same characteristics of many Latin American cities and towns, with a plaza where people gather to socialize and sell goods. Just outside the main plaza on the main highway, there is a bustling open market and transportation hub where many residents work informally selling fruits, vegetables, coffee, and traditional Colombian food. On the outskirts of the town, greenhouses, in which cut flowers are grown and thousands of workers spend long days, cover large swaths of landscape. La Casa de Los Trabajadores y Las Trabajadoras de Flores (House of Flower Workers) is

located within the center of town where flower workers can find information about unionizing and labor rights, see medical staff for health-related issues, talk to a lawyer about labor law violations, and socialize with other flower workers. The home office of UNTRAFLORES, the independent flower union that started more than a decade ago, is also located in Facatativá.

Although it is quite normal to see children outside playing with no supervision, and I never felt threatened, I was warned by several people that I should leave the community before dark. Facatativá has a reputation for being dangerous due to petty crimes and violence. When I visited in early 2012, I learned from a human rights accompaniment group with whom I worked that Facatativá is a high security area for the organization's workers and delegates; Witness for Peace instructs their staff and volunteers to be on high alert when visiting and to leave Facatativá before dark. As an outsider doing research this meant that I had to be cautious when I traveled to Facatativá. I traveled with a companion who knew the area and left before dark. However, I never felt threatened. On the contrary, everyone I encountered during my visits demonstrated the hospitality and friendliness for which Colombian people are known.

Suesca

Suesca is also a municipality located in the Cundinamarca department thirty-seven miles north of Bogotá with a population of 14,038. Flower cultivation covers 479 acres – 3.5% of the land area. Crops such as potato, barley, corn, peas, beans, and wheat are grown for subsistence along with local milk production and livestock. The town is known for its tourist attractions such as climbing and other adventure sports. Suesca is significantly smaller than Facatativá and has the feel of a small, tranquil town. Suesca

Flowers, surrounded by tall stucco walls and barbed wire fencing, where I interviewed several flower workers and observed a worker strike, is located within blocks of the town plaza. The town is adjacent to the Bogotá River and the floriculture in Suesca contributes to contamination of the river, much of which is a result of irrigation and run-off of flower cultivation. (Alcaldía de Suesca n.d.)

Zipaquirá

Part of the greater metropolitan area of Bogotá, Zipaquirá is located in the department of Cundinamarca, thirty miles north of the capital with a population of 118,267. The town is primarily known for its Salt Cathedral, an underground Cathedral made from the salt mines which receives 500,000 national and international tourists per year. Agriculture and dairy farms are important to the economy, as is the production, processing and refining of salt. The town's meatpacking company is known as one of the best in the region. Flower cultivation covers 187 acres - only 1.5% of the total area, a small amount in comparison to many of the flower producing municipalities in the Bogotá Sabana. (Alcaldía de Zipaquirá n.d.)

Zipaquirá has a bustling town plaza with expansive walkable areas where families and tourists enjoy restaurants, shopping and passing time. From the center of town, unlike in Suesca, the flower greenhouses are not visible. Zipaquirá is also home to one of the offices for the union UNTRAFLORES and its subsidiary CorpoLabor.

General Characteristics of the Interview Sample

My sample includes twenty-one interviews with flower workers, NGO workers, and labor organizers.[13] Three of the interviews were with key actors in the flower sector who started out as flower workers and eventually became full-time union organizers, each of whom have had their own experience with the effects of flower work and the challenges of union organizing in a repressive anti-union environment. One interview was with a labor activist who worked in the capital city on regional and national gender issues related to labor in a high level position for the Central Unitaria de Trabajadores de Colombia (CUT) (United Federation of Workers of Colombia). Another interview was with an expatriate who worked for a United States labor solidarity project and now runs an NGO that assists displaced women in finding employment. Finally, I interviewed two people who work with Corporación Cactus; one is a lawyer and the other is a communications and media activist, and both have done a significant amount of analysis and activism in the flower industry. I identified all of the participants through working for the not-for-profit NGO Corporación Cactus as an intern, and by word of mouth. Although I will use pseudonyms to protect the privacy of all study participants, expert interviewees are well known figures in their communities and produce a variety of public work.

The rest of my interviews included fourteen flower workers from the municipalities of Facatativá, Suesca, and Zipaquirá. Twelve of workers were women and two were men; four of whom were not employed when my study took place. Participant ages ranged from ranged from thirty-eight to fifty-three and years of employment in the flower industry ranged from six to thirty-two. In my initial research design I planned to

[13] The group I call "women flower workers" in my sample were women or men who were either working in the cut flower industry at the time of the interview or had previously worked in the cut flower industry.

interview only women, and designed a purposive sample broken down by years of employment in the flower industry. The theoretical basis for this purposive sampling design was based on Greta Friedemann-Sánchez´s (2006) study of women cut flower workers. She argues that unlike other export-oriented industries on the global assembly line, the flower industry provides long-term employment opportunities. She suggests that length of employment is an indicator job satisfaction and stability.[14] I wanted a sample of interviewees that spanned evenly across 0-5 years, 5-10 years, and 10+ years worked in the cut flower industry. I expected to find different reasons for length of employment and wanted to determine if indeed length of employment gave the workers a sense of stability. However, I was unable to carry out this purposive sampling because of the difficulties accessing flower workers for interviews in the limited time I had to do my fieldwork. Instead, I relied on snowball sampling and was grateful for any interviews I was able to arrange, regardless of the years the workers had been employed in the cut flower industry.

Research Methodology

As indicated above, the reality in the field turned out to be more challenging than I had planned, for several reasons. First, as an outsider, I had very limited access to flower workers upon my arrival to the research sites. I hoped that volunteering for Corporación Cactus, a Colombian-based NGO prominently known for its work in the flower industry on women's labor issues would afford me greater and easier access to participants. However, upon my arrival (even though I had arranged this internship and

[14] While much of the flower work is done on a subcontracted basis (one of the primary violations of labor rights explained later in this thesis), Friedemann-Sánchez (2006) argues that even prior to the legislative change that prohibits short-term contracting, women were re-hired repeatedly for an indefinite period of time. In her sample, fifteen percent of the women interviewed had worked in the industry for over fifteen years and thirty percent of participants had worked in the 6-10 year range (62).

discussed with the director my research plan six months prior) I learned that the organization was in the process of developing a strategic plan and vision. Corporación Cactus' new focus meant that floriculture was less central to its new mission that focused on broader regional issues. Also, because of this transition and the nature of NGO work the staff was incredibly busy during my tenure.[15]

I had already committed to a ten-week internship with Corporación Cactus and felt that it was an important contribution; it was some way that I could give back, even if indirectly, to those that would spend their time helping make my study possible. Volunteering at this organization, along with the time and energy I spent searching for initial contacts, was both trying and time-consuming and resulted in limited time for interviews and a smaller sample size than I had hoped. Like many international researchers who experience unanticipated events and issues in their fieldwork, I adjusted my plans accordingly.

Second, access to participants is challenging because even those willing to interview may be reluctant to speak out because of fear of losing their jobs, or may be unable to find the time in their demanding schedules as full-time workers also responsible for domestic labor. Therefore, I relied on key informants – NGO staff and labor organizers – who helped me with access to participants. This means that my sample is potentially biased; workers who are associated (whether members of a union or not) with key informants in the resistance movement may be more likely to speak out against the employers and express their lack of satisfaction with working conditions. Because part of

[15] Although the NGO's new central mission was shifting to focus on regional issues impacted by free trade and neoliberal economic policies such as displacement of farmers and environmental degradation, the organization provided access to a wealth of archival reports and empirical studies on the flower industry. Several staff members had worked with the organization when their central focus was floriculture. The organization does continue to advocate for and work with flower sector workers. I am deeply grateful to the organization for welcoming me into their organization and providing invaluable resources.

my research goal was to learn about attitudes and barriers to union organizing and resistance, a limitation of my data may be that it does not include those workers who are either happy with the work or who, in the face of barriers, choose not to collectively resist. For this reason, if I am able, I plan to go back into the field and hope to obtain access to workers who are not associated with any resistance movement or labor unions.

Third, my research was logistically challenging and time consuming as it required a four to six hour round trip on multiple buses for each day in the field. I was based in Bogotá so that I could do my internship, have access to archives, and be centrally located in relation to the Bogotá Sabana so that I could visit surrounding municipalities. During the final weeks of my fieldwork, the national strike severely limited my mobility – to the extent that I had to cancel several key interviews because of road blockades.

Interview meetings with participants were typically forty-five to sixty minutes in length and consisted of a mix of in-depth semi-structured questions and open-ended questions. I also had a number of casual conversations with NGO staff and some flower workers. Prior to each interview, I explained the purpose of my research, reviewed the informed consent (see appendix), and explained how their identities and how the data collected from the study would be protected. The interviews and conversations dealt primarily with the characteristics of the work in the flower industry, how the work affects physical and mental health, its impact on domestic responsibilities, perceptions of the impact of the U.S.-Colombia Free Trade agreement and Labor Action Plan, repression of labor organizing and its impact on the labor rights situation, and why some women choose to affiliate with unions and others do not. At the end of each interview I asked each participant if there was anything that we had not discussed that they thought was

important. This provided an opportunity for the participant to speak freely about whatever she or he wished. I conducted interviews in Spanish, sometimes with the help of a translator. After reviewing the informed consent and obtaining verbal consent of participants and their permission to use my audio recorder, I recorded the interviews. I transcribed four of the interviews in Spanish, and to ensure accuracy I had a native Spanish speaker who accompanied me on some of the interviews review my transcriptions and transcribe the remaining interviews. When I returned from the field, I translated several of the interviews into English for ease of coding.

I created field notes as contemporaneous notes to document my observations and make brief notations of information from interviews to which I would return and elaborate on during my data analysis and writing process. I kept a private journal in which I wrote notes and reflections on general observations about the culture and my interactions with people as a researcher and a foreigner. I also reviewed documents, newsletters, publications, and websites produced by labor organizations, social movements, and NGOs. Finally, I collected visual information such as pictures of posters, flyers, and graffiti art often used by activists to communicate information about events and as forms of social expression and commentary.

Data Analysis Methodology

Upon return from the field, I used a mixed method of constructive grounded theory and qualitative analysis taken from contemporary social science research (Charmaz 2006; Berg 2007; Emerson 2001; Rubin and Rubin 1995). I selected a few key interviews that I believed were exemplary. Then I began my analysis with open coding and identified in vivo codes, which are concepts inherent in the action and responses of

participants. I then came up with a list of focused codes and sub-codes, such as experiencing powerlessness and constrained choice, facing resistance to organizing, being persecuted by employers and coworkers, demonstrating resilience in the face of exploitation and hardship, realizing the importance of solidarity and collective resistance. From my reading of the existing literature, I deductively developed analytical themes such as exploitation and empowerment, everyday resistance and organized collective resistance. From the sixty-six initial codes, I selected a subset of codes as common and related themes that emerged from the data. Through the process of writing preliminary analytical notes, called memo writing, I began to see how the substantive codes related to each other and started forming analytical concepts (Charmaz 2006). The final process of my data analysis was sorting the analytical codes and forming a theoretical outline, which is discussed below. I also coded my field notes and used my observations as contextual information.

My study is based on a small, nonprobabilistic snowball sample. For this reason, my results are not generalizable to the entire population of women cut flower workers in Colombia or to all women workers on the global assembly. However, this case study instead provides evidence that trickle-down economics; development based on modernization, growth- or export-based, and economic theory; are not a panacea for inequality of Third World Women. Moreover, with Benería and Roldán (1987) and many of their feminist contemporaries discussed in the next chapter, I view my research as "activist" and "committed." The spirit of my research and volunteer work was not only to gather information about how U.S. policy impacts women cut flower workers but also to demonstrate solidarity and my concern as a U.S. citizen and scholar.

CHAPTER III

LITERATURE REVIEW AND THEORETICAL FRAMES

Development, Globalization, and Neoliberalism

The literature on globalization, neoliberalism, and development is central to my analysis on women's work, however a comprehensive review is beyond the scope of this thesis. For the purposes of explaining the way in which I use these terms, I find McMichael's (2008) discussion of these concepts useful. Most importantly, McMichael's and posits that globalization, neoliberalism, and development are political projects; they are not inevitable phenomena or necessarily the best path for all nation states and peoples. McMichael (2008) traces the roots of globalization to the mid-twentieth century development project, which was "an internationally orchestrated program of *national* economic growth, with foreign financial, technological, and military assistance" aimed at stabilizing the global economy, protecting the economic and security interests, and increasing the sphere of power of the West (21, original emphasis). This benchmark for development was a project initiated by Western powers that embraced economism as the remedy to colonialism and rebuilding of societies destroyed in World War II. The mid-twentieth century development era marked a dramatic shift in thinking from the nineteenth century ideas of development - an era in which moral imperatives were the drivers of development rooted in humanistic ideology and the desire to improve the fate of humankind (Picard and Buss 2009).

Along with material support, however, the West did promote "universal" ideals such as human rights, workers rights, and raising the standard of living, but most bilateral development aid and economic policies were political and designed to serve U.S. national security and diplomacy interests. In order to promote the mid-nineteenth century development project, the West created economic institutions, economic rules, and language that would result in a wider inequality gap between rich and the poor nations because of the power asymmetry created by colonialism and Third World debt. McMichael points out the coercive nature of development as "military and economic aid programs shaped the geopolitical contours of the "free world," bringing Third World countries into the Western orbit" (McMichael 2008: 83).[16]

The "development decades" of the 1960s and 70s set the stage for the globalization of capitalism, through the implementation of structural adjustment policies that forced governments to divest from social programs and liberalize their economies. In this era, development was mainly driven by economic globalization, a process by which economies and workers are integrated on a worldwide scale. Under the guise of development, export-led growth and economic globalization began to spread rapidly in the 1970s. This prevailing model encourages developing countries to industrialize and often to establish export-processing zones (EPZs) that operate outside the purview of national law, with no-strike policies, low environmental standards, and access to cheap skilled labor. These EPZs welcome transnational corporations that provide paid production jobs (or wage labor) to mostly lower class women (Kabeer 2004).

[16] For instance, "Plan Colombia," an economic and counter-narcotics U.S. aid package, has funded Colombia with over $7 billion for military operations and some development projects (Leech 2009). This aid package has ensured U.S. dominance in Colombia's economic affairs.

Globalization is a distinctively political project that succeeded the development era. According to McMichael (2008), powerful players, such as multinational corporations, in cooperation with the Washington Consensus, constructed the processes.[17] The vision of globalization is a top-down project led by political and economic elites that needed to create a "consensus" early on in order to redefine development in terms of "market rule." This "consensus building" process occurred via the restructuring of governments to support market freedoms and liberalization (McMichael 2008: 150-151). These structures consolidated the spirit of capitalism and created a system that prioritizes continual and endless accumulation of capital, and disciplines those who have other motivations, such as providing social welfare or protecting labor rights (Wallerstein 2004).

Harvey (2005) highlights the political and coercive nature of neoliberalism; he argues that neoliberalism is a project largely orchestrated by the transnational capitalist class and often implemented in nation states through military force and covert CIA action. Based on the assumption that the market is a better manager of the economy than the state, under neoliberal economic policies, the state's only role is to use its legitimate monopoly of force to ensure elimination of barriers to the free trade (Kingstone 2011; Petras and Veltmeyer 2001). Therefore, providing social welfare for its citizens is not an obligation of the state. This theoretical framework helps explain how the U.S. military involvement in Colombia has paved the way for transnational capitalists and elites to

[17] "Washington Consensus" is a term coined by the Reagan administration and economist John Williamson. It described a so-called consensus among representatives of the U.S. government, international financial institutions (e.g. the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund), and free market advocates to shift away from addressing the global dimensions of poverty through U.S. foreign policy and aid to developing countries and to allow markets to function freely without state interference. It marked the beginning of the structural adjustment era in which aid was provided with conditionalities. These conditionalities forced aid-receiving governments to adopt neoliberal economic policies such as fiscal discipline, market-determined exchange and interest rates, protection of private property rights, economic liberalization, privatization of state owned industries, and openness to trade. (Picard and Buss 2009; de Haan 2009; Kingstone 2011)

expand export-oriented industries and eventually pass the U.S.-Colombia Free Trade Agreement.[18] It also helps to explain how these projects perpetuate North-South inequality, often through the coercive arm of the state (e.g. militarization), and maintain the Third World through underdevelopment in areas such as health, education, and infrastructure (Harvey 2005).

Women's Work on the Global Assembly Line

It is difficult to find a case study that fits nicely into a single theoretical framework. Nevertheless, a patchwork of theories and perspectives provides a variety of lenses through which we can analyze empirical data. Therefore, my work draws on a range of interdisciplinary scholarship, weaving together threads across the literature. The following review highlights some of the themes and ongoing debates central to the research I present in this thesis.

Since the development era began in the mid-twentieth century, scholars have written about development and global capitalism, but have overwhelmingly neglected the significance of women. Early feminists, spanning decades, recognized the exclusion of women's role in the reflections on development. They began to articulate the ways in which development is gendered and its differentiated effects on men and women (see Boserup 1970; Benería and Sen 1981; and Fuentes and Ehrenreich 1983).[19] These early feminist works were also pivotal in recognizing the value of domestic work and the

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[18] Free trade agreements are mechanisms that bind states in the "new global regulatory system" as "surrogate managers of the global economy" and "subordinated states" as protectors of liberalization by "locking in the open-door provisions of the neoliberal doctrine" which emphasizes elimination of state interference in the market (McMichael 2008: 189).

[19] This early work set the stage for the institutionalization of women's participation in the development agenda in the 1980s and the UN Decade for Women 1976-1985 and was followed with the inclusion of women in the millennium development goals via the Third Millennium Goal to "Promote gender equality and empower women." A key strategy to achieve this goal is greater access to the labor market and more stable jobs for women. (UN Women n.d.)

notion that household labor is crucial to the functioning of society; Benería and Roldán (1987) further argued for the importance of avoiding the dichotomy between productive and reproductive work. Since women are present in the workforce in higher numbers than ever, and as Aguilar points out, "undeniably function as the engine of production in the world," (n.d.) women's work is touchstone for contemporary feminists (Morrow and Frederick 2012). Embedded in this body of literature, however, are competing and contradictory perspectives.

Morrow and Frederick (2012) distinguish two analytical and competing approaches to the analysis of women's work: transformative and reformist. Postmodern feminists emphasize "difference" and agency, which Aguilar argues, often obscures a fundamental dividing line - class, "the most important one in understanding the dynamics of capitalism" (n.d.: 1). Alternatively, scholars like Talcott (2004) argue that decentering production as the primary site for political and economic analysis helps us to understand women as not only workers affected by global restructuring and development, but also as mothers and wives primarily responsible for social reproduction. Talcott (2004) suggests that a purely Marxist analysis of class-consciousness fails to explain the gendered processes that impact resistance.

These tensions in the literature challenge scholars with some important questions. For example, how do we maintain class as central to our analysis *and* simultaneously recognize the ways in which gender and social reproductive roles impact women's resistance? Does the emphasis on everyday resistance, in an effort to demonstrate that women are not just passive victims, romanticize its role and overestimate its value? Is

organized collective resistance the only hope for women to actually make transformational change? These questions are at the center of my analysis.

Transformative vs. Reformist Approach

Morrow and Frederick (2012) created the term "access-based" feminism to capture the reformist approach that aims for equitable distribution of the gains of capitalism, which have traditionally benefitted men. The reformist approach is rooted in an integrationist (market-oriented) approach, which assumes that women are an untapped resource who could overcome poverty and inequality with access to the wage economy. Contributors to Morrow and Frederick's edited volume titled *Getting in is not enough: women and the global workforce* critically examine access-based feminism and its links to liberalism. They advocate for transformative feminism, which rejects capitalism as inherently oppressive.

Transformative feminists, take a revolutionary approach to social change.[20] Morrow and Fredrick (2012) argue that rather than facilitating a significant change in women's empowerment, access-based feminism has done more to serve the interests of the U.S. In other words, the transformative approach questions whether women's access to the global workplace translates into balancing the gendered power asymmetry; it is also skeptical of what access to the formal workforce does to tip the global scale of wealth inequality for women. Transformative feminists criticize the ways in which hegemonic development paradigms and access-based feminists push participation in

[20] See also, Petras and Veltmeyer, who describe a revolutionary approach to social change as "oriented toward transforming the institutional basis of bourgeois state power" (2006: 91). This means that the status quo in which elites control state power through economic policies that benefit the rich and powerful must be changed in order for real social change to occur.

market-based economy as a means to achieve women's empowerment and gender equality.[21]

Morrow and Frederick suggest that within the tensions between access-based and transformative feminism the necessary debate continues about "whether idealizing and embracing a single social change strategy that reflects the interests of select populations is as effective as deploying manifold, multidimensional tactics that empower diverse groups with disparate social locations, needs and desires" (2012: 10). They challenge the idea that monolithic approaches to gender inequality and women's empowerment such as market-based development and economic growth are sufficient and effective strategies, and instead encourage critical analysis of these processes.

Within the growth-oriented development model, economists and development theorists see women's labor as "wasted" and justify the feminization of labor because it is believed to also empower women and eliminate the gender inequality gap (Simmons 1992).[22] Also, since economic growth is believed to be a concrete solution to poverty, women's labor in developing countries is seen as instrumental in bringing countries out of poverty. For example, in Korea, operating under this premise, the military government orchestrated a concerted effort in the 1980s to bring women into factories to work and help improve the economy. During this campaign, the government encouraged women to be self-sacrificing for the greater good and promised them that they would be rewarded in the future for their disciplined work (Kim 1997; Enloe 2007).

[21] Transformative feminists similarly critique popular microfinance projects rooted in economic liberalism and which aim to give access to the market based economy rather than challenge the hegemonic rule and local hierarchies of power.

[22] Women's labor was 'underutilized' in the formal economy because they represented nearly half of the world's human resources that were not being accounted for in relation to its market value.

Assumptions about economic solutions to development and gender equality, and romanticized "success stories," are frequently used to justify market-based solutions and to promote women's participation in the formal labor force (Kabeer 1994). This market-based development strategy has been enshrined in international development institutions. For instance, a key strategy of the United Nations as embodied in the Third Millennium Development Goal (MDG), is to promote gender equality and women empowerment through increased access and participation in the global workforce for women (UN n.d.). The results are mixed, argues Kabeer in her assessment of the Third MDG. Greater access to economic resources through wage labor tends to increase women's power in making household decisions, but much of the wage labor is still exploitative; it rarely provides the social mobility opportunities and gender equality hoped for by the UN MDGs (Kabeer 2005).

Exploitation or Empowerment?

Across the globe, export-oriented industries and developing nations encourage, and in some cases, coerce, women's participation in factory work.[23] As feminization of labor and global capitalism spread rapidly, scholars attempt to keep up by expanding our understanding of its impact of women. On the one hand, we seek to understand how women's work in the global assembly line contributes to the elimination of gender disparities in the both the public and private spheres. On the other hand, scholars analyze the extent to which this work is exploitative and how it may help to preserve the sexist and racist capitalist global order (Benería and Roldán 1987; Chang 2004).

[23] In Korea, for example, economic strategists along with Korean military crafted a strategy that launched a campaign to change the image of a respectable young Korean woman as a disciplined worker who would sacrifice herself for the good of the country. The officials in the Korean military government persuaded Korean parents by using this newly invented image and conflating "national security," "national pride," "modernization," and "industrial growth," to send their young girls outside the home to work. (Enloe 2007, Kim 1997)

Many studies have found that women are exploited on multiple levels by wage labor jobs on the global assembly line (Dominguez et al. 2010; Friedemann-Sánchez 2006; Kabeer 2005; Kim 1997; Sanmiguel-Valderrama 2010; Ward 1990). First, poor women cannot afford to hire domestic workers, yet traditional roles as caregivers and housekeepers are not changing, and men are reluctant to share domestic work because it threatens masculinity (Dominguez et al. 2010; Kabeer 2005; Mills 2003). This means that many women work a double or triple shift, engaging in: 1) paid employment outside the home, 2) responsibility for the majority of household tasks, and 3) childcare.

Second, the patriarchal order is replicated on the factory floor. Many women fill low-skill, low-wage jobs, doing repetitive tasks with little chance for advancement in their careers (Arrifin 2004; Dominguez et al. 2010; Kim 1997; Ward 1990). Women are subject to sexual harassment by their male supervisors and colleagues (Dominguez et al. 2010; Friedemann-Sánchez 2006; Kim 1997; Sanmiguel-Valderrama 2010).

Third, women occupy positions in agriculture and manufacturing industries in which they are under extreme pressure, both psychologically and physically. They work long hours standing or sitting in one position continuously. They are exposed to poor safety conditions such as fire hazards, chemicals, and faulty machinery. Bathroom breaks are limited. They are subject to layoffs, flexible labor practices, and irregularity in payments. They are often forbidden or discouraged from unionizing and resisting exploitation. These are the exploitative conditions under which scholars such as Aguilar (2004) argue that globalization "has expanded its potential for producing inequalities" and has produced "a female proletariat consigned to the lowest-paid and least secure jobs with the worst working conditions" (16-18).

Conversely, Ganguly-Scrase (2003) says that her research contradicts the "overwhelming evidence of the negative impact" of globalization and economic liberalization on women articulated in much of the political economic research (547). In the context of a decade-long intensification of the globalization of the Indian economy, her study examines the experiences of lower middle class Indian women factory workers in West Bengal. Ganguly-Scrase found that women did not see themselves as victims of neoliberal policies - in fact, quite the opposite. She argues that the factory workers perceive themselves as better off than previous generations. Her research underscores the advancement of women and their sense of self-worth gained through what is perceived as dignified work in contrast to agricultural work, prostitution, and other informal jobs, which are seen as undignified in the West Bengal society. Participants in her study attribute the improvement in their lives to modernization of their country and the new opportunities it provides for women to enter the formal workforce.

Ganguly-Scrase (2003) discloses that she was struck by the optimism of the women because prior to her research she hypothesized that rather than challenging the patriarchal traditions in the globalizing Asian economies, capital harnesses patriarchal norms and uses them for its own benefit. She focuses her analysis on the paradox between women's individual experience of the increased sense of empowerment and the collective negative impact of neoliberal economic policies on women as a group. Her work is also a cautionary tale for the Western feminist gaze and politics of representation of Third World Women, because it challenges the "Third World Women as victim" narrative that obscures women's agency and essentializes Third World Women, and it honors the lived experience and voice of the women in her study. In my analysis, I hope

to offer a more nuanced account of the impact of globalization on women while simultaneously emphasizing the importance of collective action.

Although liberalization and neoliberal policies such as structural adjustment result in government cutbacks and privatization of social services, some women find that they have greater occupational choices, increased consumer power, increased household bargaining power, and greater freedom and independence as a result of economic liberalization and industrialization, while others do not (Ganguly-Scrase 2003). Indeed, Ganguly-Scrase, like many feminist scholars who study women, labor, and globalization, found that women are unevenly affected by globalization and economic liberalization. Ganguly-Scrase's (2003) study demonstrates how capitalism, imperialism, and patriarchal exploitation converge and present a dilemma for contemporary feminist scholars, as women are both liberated from exploitative conditions and yet exploited in new and different ways. While this thesis by no means supports the view that capitalism, imperialism, and patriarchal exploitation serve the interests of women, it is skeptical of scholarship that advances analyses that do not reflect the nuanced and complicated ways in which women respond to these processes. Therefore, I try to clearly identify the ways in which women flower workers are structurally constrained, but also how they find meaning in their work and demonstrate incredible resilience in the face of adversity.

Friedemann-Sánchez (2006) did extensive research in Colombia's cut flower industry. She posits that her research pushed beyond how traditional anthropologists do research by combining qualitative and quantitative data. She challenges the notion that women's work on the "global assembly line" is merely a site for exploitation of women that provides a competitive edge for capitalists (Friedemann-Sánchez 2006). She suggests

that women in the cut-flower industry find their work satisfying in many ways. Moreover, she argues that women cut flower workers harness their economic power in their personal lives. Using this newfound power, women re-negotiate relationships and contest gender norms.

Friedemann-Sánchez´s (2006) study made a unique contribution to the literature by focusing on household economics and intra-household bargaining. Five central areas provided the analytical framework for her study: property ownership, wage income, social capital, domestic abuse, and self-esteem (Friedemann-Sánchez 2006: 111). Property ownership has indeed been shown to increase power in household decisions; in addition, working outside the home has been shown to enhance the social position of some women (Ganguly-Scrase 2003; Sen 1999). Due to the high prevalence of domestic abuse in rural Colombia, the ability to escape the violence is especially important for women. Since wage labor in the cut flower industry increases women's ability to own property, it can thus provide the freedom to opt out of living with an abusive spouse (Friedemann-Sánchez 2006). Friedemann-Sánchez's findings also agree with much of the research that posits economic gain from women's wage work gives them more freedom in marital decisions (Kabeer 2005; Mills 2003). She specifies, however, that *non-migrant* (emphasis added) women workers use their wage labor income as leverage to contest male domination and assert their human rights as compared to indigenous and Afro-Colombians women who are disproportionately affected by multiple axes of oppression (2006). This finding demonstrates the differentiated effects of empowerment from wage labor based on the ways in which different forms of oppression intersect, which I discuss later in this chapter.

Friedemann-Sánchez (2006) argues that self-esteem is often neglected in studies that look at both material and social gains but that it is an important indicator of women's empowerment. She found that many women directly attributed the increase in self-esteem to their work (Friedemann-Sánchez 2006). Social capital gained from building networks in the cut flower industry offered support in the areas of loans used for education, housing and health. Those networks also helped with childcare and information about other informal work such as housecleaning and ironing (Friedemann-Sánchez 2006). Friedemann-Sánchez's analysis made an important contribution to the literature and specific context of women cut flower workers by highlighting the ways in which individual women are empowered by their work and the impact on the micro-politics of their daily lives.

However, the problem with Friedemann-Sánchez's (2006) study is that it emphasizes the individual empowerment (e.g. self-esteem, social networks) and job satisfaction of women; she uses this argument to directly challenge the exploitation thesis. She says that the research focused on the institutional structures essentializes women as "passive victims of subordination," and that it "overlooks the likelihood that women actively seek such employment" (2006: 42). Friedemann-Sánchez's approach is reformist and assumes that women's access to the global workforce provides opportunities that will lead to social change. This liberal economic view is aligned with the dominant structures that promote economism and contribute to the oppression women. While this approach does highlight women's agency and progress, which I find useful in my analysis, it does not fundamentally challenge, in a transformative way, the structures that maintain a female proletariat by repressing collective organizing and

offering small pacifying changes. Instead, I find Delia Aguilar's assertion that "nuanced and multifaceted narrations of everyday oppositional acts by individual agents can prove enlightening and useful if analyzed within a totality in which potential for collective action can be sketched" (2004: 410) provides a stronger framework within which I analyze the data in this thesis. It allows for acknowledgement of women's individual agency but is critical of global and local processes that repress women's collective action, such as patriarchal norms that maintain male dominance and promote ideas of masculinity and femininity.

Ahmed (2004) draws an important distinction that speaks to the deficit in Friedemann-Sánchez's analysis and responds to Aguilar's call for examining the potential for collective action. In "The Rise of the Bangladesh Garment Industry," Ahmed addresses the debate on whether Bangladeshi women are better off with factory jobs on both individual and collective levels. Ahmed argues that women whose family members rely on their support, mothers who want a higher standard of living for their children, and young unmarried women seeking the higher status of independence *are* (emphasis added) better off because of the factory work (Ahmed 2004: 81). Collectively, however, women are worse off because of the imminent threat of factory closure in response to workers organizing and making demands for better conditions. These types of threats keep women silenced and afraid to collectively organize, and thus rarely allow for transformative change.

Throughout my fieldwork and data analysis, I engage the thinking in the literature discussed above to probe for indicators that point to instances of individual empowerment

and resistance while simultaneously examining the ways in which social and economic structures constrain organized and collective resistance.

Intersectionality, Heterogeneity, and Difference

Uma Narayan (1998) and Naila Kabeer (1994) criticize First World feminists for their neocolonial approach to Third World women. They argue that First World feminists failed to acknowledge the differences across women, especially those who occupy different roles within various cultural contexts. Post-colonial and transnational feminists have problematized the notion that Third World women are simply marginalized and underprivileged women who lack education and/or political will to make decisions for themselves.

Benería and Roldán (1987) emphasize the importance of explaining women's subordination as a result of the interplay between gender and class. They argue that "real life does not present itself in a dualistic manner but as an integrated whole, where multiple relations of domination/subordination – based on race, age, ethnicity, nationality, sexual preference – interact dialectically with class and gender relations" (10). It therefore ought to be the goal of social scientists and feminist scholars to keep in sight these different elements while capturing the dynamics of the totality (Benería and Roldán 1987). As they foresaw, in regards to women's work, the findings are complex and contradictory.

Contemporary research looks at hegemonic ideologies, such as capitalism and patriarchy, which intersect with the local, historical, and demographic context, thereby producing varied outcomes (Mills 2003). Mills expands on the work of her predecessors' and argues that gender represents "one dynamic within a global labor force that is also

segmented by class, ethnicity and race, nationality and region, among other factors" (2003: 42). It is within these intersections that we encounter the perplexing and grey areas, she argues. These are the complexities and contradictions reflected in much of the contemporary literature and that I hope highlight in my analysis.

Indeed, many Third World women live under oppressive regimes, yet simultaneously, through resistance and struggle, they work to change these oppressions. The extent to which this happens is highly contingent on the context (Mills 2003; Kabeer 2004). Mohanty also cautions that, "singular and monolithic categorizations of women in discourses of globalization circumscribe ideas about experience, agency, and struggle" (2002: 527). She calls on academic researchers to "centralize the experiences and struggles of these particular [Third World] communities of women and girls" in order to "envision anticapitalist resistance" (2003: 514). Hesford and Kozol (2005) agree with Mohanty, and challenge scholars to decolonize the discourse and avoid the tendency to essentialize women thereby reproducing the "particular 'globalized' representations of women" such as the "poor factory girl," which fail to capture the complexities and contradictions of the roles and lives of women (Mohanty 2002: 528).

Naila Kabeer (2004) shares this critique. She also argues that the singular and monolithic categorization of Third World women who work in factories is problematic. As exploitative as export-oriented factory work seems under the Western gaze, she suggests that for many women, it is better than their only alternatives - domestic work, prostitution, and dependence on family or spouses. Kabeer also found that many women in Bangladesh prefer working in factories to the degrading and undignified jobs in the informal economy. While it may be misunderstood that Kabeer argues in favor of factory

work, she explicitly states that she does not support the view that unregulated global competition serves the interests of the world's working poor, especially Third World Women. However, she urges Westerners to be cautious of the "Third-World woman as victim" narrative because it fails to recognize the gains in autonomy and self-esteem women do experience from factory work. She critiques the negative images and politics of representation of Third World women who are portrayed as one-dimensional victims suffering in miserable factory conditions; she argues instead that reality is more complicated and varied.

Class and racial oppression is widespread in Colombia, and most of the men and women working on the cut flower assembly line in lower ranks are working class, semi-proletarianized indigenous and *mestizo* peoples who come from rural regions. [24] In my research of women cut flowers workers, I found that upper and middle class, mostly lighter-skinned European or mixed decent men and women occupy positions of power in the industry. What is interesting, then, is that we cannot assume that all Colombian women are exploited by the flower industry, or that there is a sense of solidarity across women as a group, because some women are benefitting more than others from the cut flower industry.

Women Workers and Global Labor Standards

Kabeer (2004) further critiques the victim narrative because she believes that it substantiates the creation and enforcement of international labor standards, such as those found in the form of a "social clause" in international trade agreements. The impact of these agreements is contested in debates about free trade, globalization, and labor

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[24] Mestizo is a person of mixed decent, European and American Indian.

conditions (Hensman 2002). Critics of labor agreements range from free market capitalists, to Third World governments, to feminist scholars. Free market capitalists argue that labor standards are a form of protectionism and hinder the ability for the market to function freely. Some Third World governments and feminist scholars argue that labor standards are a form of neocolonialism that imposes Western standards on the developing world (Griffin, Nyland, and O'Rourke 2002; Kabeer 2004). Kabeer (2004) suggests that social clauses and international labor standards threaten industry because factories will close down under the pressure to respect worker's rights. When factories close, hundreds of women lose their jobs and are often forced back into worse situations, which may "actually exacerbate social inequalities in the labor market" (Kabeer 2004: 3). Instead, Kabeer (2004) argues for more transformative changes that address the underlying international social and economic inequality of women.

Other skeptics of labor provisions in trade policy see them as political maneuvers to fast-track passage of FTAs. Tacked on to trade policy or cobbled together as an afterthought, some argue, labor agreements are merely designed to appease opposition (Delp 2004). Proponents of labor standards in FTAs argue that they are necessary in order to mitigate the adverse effects of free trade and neoliberal economic policies on workers, to improve working conditions with trading partners, and to demonstrate that the United States is committed to human rights and labor rights. In the next chapter I discuss the context in which the Labor Action Plan was enacted as a part of the U.S.-Colombia FTA. I also address the debate between opponents and proponents around the social clause.

CHAPTER IV

U.S.-COLOMBIA FREE TRADE AGREEMENT AND LABOR ACTION PLAN

"…Without proof of performance, the government of Colombia will get away with murder. It will export more of its goods – crude oil, coffee, fruit and flowers — to the U.S. and unwitting Americans will buy more blood red Colombian roses."

- *Leo Gerard, International President of the United Steelworkers, Colombia FTA Rewarding Promises Instead of Performance, April 12, 2012*

"….Given the actions taken by President Santos and the Colombian legislature I can announce that the U.S.-Colombia Free Trade Agreement will enter into force next month on May 15…. this agreement is a win for our workers and environment because of the strong protections it has for both, commitments that we are going to fulfill."

– President Barack Obama at the Joint press conference with Santos, Cartagena, Colombia April 15, 2012

Introduction

The Annual Survey of Violations of Trade Union Rights published by the International Trade Union Confederation (ITUC) on June 8, 2011 indicated that impunity and crime against trade unionists remains a serious problem in Colombia. The ITUC, an organization that works closely with the International Labour Organization (ILO) and specialized UN agencies, reported at least forty-nine assassinations of trade unionists and twenty-nine attempted murders and forced disappearances in 2010. In the past decade, 2,900 labor organizers have been assassinated in Colombia, accounting for 63.12% of the world's trade unionist murders since 1986 (ITUC 2012). A staggering impunity rate of 98% means that most of the cases remain unresolved and the murderers are never convicted; systematic repression of trade unionists including harassment, killings, illegal raids, and arbitrary detentions to continue without consequence in Colombia (ITUC 2011;

ENS 2010). These figures clearly indicate the state's complacency toward labor repression in Colombia.

Despite the fact that Colombia is the most dangerous place in the world for labor organizers, on April 15, 2012, Obama announced the implementation of the U.S.-Colombia Free Trade Agreement (FTA). The FTA included a social clause called the "Colombian Action Plan Related to Labor Rights" (widely known as the "Labor Action Plan"). This plan called for the Colombian government to take "major, swift and concrete steps" to address labor concerns prior to the implementation of the FTA (Office of the United States Trade Representative n.d.).

This chapter explores the context in which the FTA and Labor Action Plan emerged, starting with a brief historical overview of the political economy in Latin America. Data from this chapter comes from participant observation in protests, meetings I attended, and informal office interactions during my internship with Corporación Cactus. I also draw on interviews with labor organizers and activists. I reviewed government documents, newspaper articles, reports, and other sources of media such as videos and radio broadcasts. I build my analysis around this data to address the following questions: How did the United States, a country that purports a strong commitment to human rights and labor standards, justify making a trade deal with Colombia? What were the conditions on which the FTA passed? Who were the actors involved that promoted the Labor Action Plan (LAP) and who opposed it? Who was involved in crafting the LAP—specifically, were Colombian women workers represented at the negotiating table? What does the Labor Action plan stipulate?

Political Economy and Workers' Rights in Latin America

Neoliberal economic models have weakened worker protections in Latin America by privileging macroeconomic growth over labor rights and eliminating state interference (Harvey 2005; McMichael 2011; Petras and Veltmeyer 2001; Vanden and Prevost 2002). As Latin American states moved away from the failing Import Substitution Industrialization (ISI) model and implemented neoliberal economic policies, workers' rights protected by the state disintegrated through corporatism and patron-clientelism.[25]

Under these modes of political organization and industrialization, trade unions and workers benefitted, but governments maintained control over the types of labor activities that were allowed (Kingstone 2011). Corporatist states centralized power and sharply limited the avenues for political participation through state-legitimized corporations, such as labor groups and unions that served the interests of the states while also providing worker protections. Patron-clientelism was a system of informal linkages that funneled state resources to business interests. The state used the economic gains from the trade-off with business to make economic concessions for trade unions in exchange for electoral support and to contain protests of the increasingly vocal masses (George 2003; Helmke and Levitsky 2004). These traditions of political organization would, however, eventually be challenged by impending economic crises and growing discontent that led to a major shift in economic policy across the region.

The debt crisis in the 1980s and failed economic policy left many Latin American countries desperate to attract foreign investment. The turn toward international financial

[25] In Latin America, the failure of Import-Substitution Industrialization, a period guided by the principle that developing countries should reduce their dependence on imports by producing more at home from 1950s to 1980s, opened the door for free trade advocates to promote their agenda again. This was the beginning of the neoliberal economic period in which through structural adjustment policies lowered trade barriers and focused on export industries. (Jackiewicz and Quiquivix 2008).

institutions (IFIs) such as the World Bank, the International Monetary Fund (IMF), and the Inter-American Development Bank (IDB) for financial assistance meant that governments, along with multinational corporations (MNCs), had to guarantee that workers could not affiliate with independent unions because unions are perceived as threats to free market capitalism. The emphasis on repression of unions and workers' rights served to create a flexible and exploitable workforce, which would in turn create a friendlier investment environment for IFIs and MNCs. Therefore, as neoliberalism began to take hold in the region in the 1990s, and governments embraced free market ideology, the political left was weakened.[26] Labor organizations lost power and were broken up, in many cases they were subject to overt government repression orchestrated and clandestinely backed by the U.S. government in the previous decades (Vanden and Prevost 2002). Repression of labor and policy adjustments would pave the way for increased free trade, foreign investment, and expansion of export-oriented industries. However, neoliberalism began to show its flaws. Rather than receiving the trickle-down effects from the economy, workers were further exploited and inequality gaps widened.

Response to Discontent: Global Labor Standards and Free Trade Policy

Discontent around the failure of the neoliberal economic model as the magic bullet to address struggling economies and poverty has since been accompanied by growing concerns over the deterioration of working conditions and worker protections. In order to address some of these concerns, the U.S. passed legislation in 1997 that identified respect for workers' rights as a principal negotiating effort in trade

[26] Prior to the 1990s neoliberalism was introduced in Latin America under authoritarian rule in Argentina and Chile. For more see Harvey (2005); Kingstone (2011); Vanden and Prevost (2002).

agreements.[27] Labor agreements or a "social clause" have since been included as formal instruments in trade policy to address labor standards; they are usually aimed at developing countries in which concerns arise over government compliance with international labor standards.[28] According to the United States Department of Labor, "[the] labor provisions of FTAs help ensure that the benefits of trade are widely shared, that worker rights are not denied in order to gain a trade advantage or attract investment, and consequently that U.S. businesses and workers compete on a level playing field globally" (United States Department of Labor n.d.). However, labor protections fundamentally conflict with objectives of neoliberalism, and thus come into question when coupled with trade policy that promotes the tenets of neoliberalism.

After decades of sharp pendulum swings between state-led and market-led economic models, and tendencies to reject the previous model as a failure, some scholars are now arguing for a balance between the two models. In Latin America, the hope is that this balance will promote economic growth and address poverty and inequality (Kingstone 2011). Incorporating labor protections into trade policy is one approach to balancing state and market-led models. However, as we will see in Colombia, the Labor Action Plan, like its predecessor, the Labor Side Agreement to the North American Free Trade Agreement, has had dismal impact on protecting labor rights. They do little to fundamentally address global inequality and patriarchal structures that allow export-oriented industries to subjugate women.

[27] See Senate Bill put forth by Mr. Roth, from the Committee on Finance S. 1269 in the 105th Congress 1st Session, October 8, 1997. The bill established objectives for negotiating and indicated procedures for implementing certain trade agreements (Beth 1997).

[28] The United States has 19 FTAs that include provisions to protect labor rights. For a complete list see: https://www.dol.gov/ilab/programs/otla/freetradeagreement.htm (United States Department of Labor Bureau of International Labor Affairs (ILAB)).

Setting the Precedent for Labor Agreements

In groundbreaking history, deemed by proponents of free market capitalism an impingement on “the freedom of multinational corporations to bring goods to the consumer at the lowest possible cost” and a barrier to a country’s comparative advantage, the Labor Side Agreement (NAALC) was introduced in the 1994 North American Free Trade Agreement between the U.S., Mexico, and Canada (NAFTA) (Bolle 2001: 9). Workers’ rights had not previously been considered as a major component in a mutual trade agreement (Bolle 2001; Levison 2003; Delp 2004). The decision to attach a major labor component to NAFTA was the first time in which theoretical debates around workers’ rights were applied. Therefore, the NAALC was “both an experiment and prototype” (Bolle 2001: 5).

During candidacy for his first term, Bill Clinton negotiated the Labor Side Agreement for NAFTA in an effort to assure labor unions in the U.S. that the Mexican government would be required to enforce its own labor laws as a condition of the trade agreement (Levison 2003). This agreement would serve as a precedent for future free trade agreements and changes in legislation (e.g. the aforementioned U.S. Senate Bill 1269).

The Labor Action Plan: Playing to Domestic Politics or Hope for Social Justice?

Almost two decades after NAFTA, U.S. President Barack Obama and Colombian President Juan Manuel Santos signed the U.S.-Colombia Free Trade Agreement. Stalled in Congress for five years under the Bush Administration because of concerns over Colombia’s poor record on human rights and labor, the labor community and human rights activists were disappointed in Obama. The president had shifted gears from his

campaign, during which he said the FTA was bad for U.S. workers (Goodman 2012). Human rights and labor activists were demanding to see real change on the ground before a trade agreement was signed; specifically, they wanted to see three years without murders or executions of trade unionists.

Pressure was not only coming from the human rights and labor communities, it also came from politicians within the U.S. Government. On March 17, 2011 six Democratic House Representatives wrote a letter to President Obama urging him to withdraw consideration of the FTA, stating the following:

> For the past several years, the proposed U.S.-Colombia Free Trade Agreement (FTA) has not advanced in the U.S. Congress because of labor rights and human rights abuses in Colombia. A chief concern has been the plight of Colombia's trade unionists, who defend the rights of workers producing the goods to be traded with the United States, and who continue to be threatened, attacked and killed. Colombian workers also lack the basic rights to organize unions, bargain collectively, strike or otherwise engage in public protest aimed at improving their standard of living. Internationally, Colombia, in particular, is set apart by its long history of murder and threats against labor unionists and the deprivation of the most basic worker rights. (McGovern 2011: 1)

While hopes for real change were disappointed, the Labor Action Plan did stipulate a set of milestones including legislative and institutional changes (see Table 1). The Colombian government was to reach specific milestones in order to demonstrate its commitment to improve labor conditions and strengthen protections prior to implementation of the FTA (Goodman 2012). These milestones are outlined in the Table 1.

Table 1

Summary of the Labor Action Plan

Milestone	Objective	Target Completion Date Initial Phase
I. LABOR MINISTRY	Create an institution to broaden protections for labor rights and more effectively enforce protections. Hire a total of 480 (100 by April 22, 2011) new labor inspectors, improve the system for citizens to file complaints, improve mediation, conflict resolution, and conduct outreach.	December 15, 2011
II. CRIMINAL CODE REFORM	Establish criminal penalties for employers that undermine the right to organize and bargain collectively.	June 15, 2011
III. COOPERATIVES	Amend Article 63 or 2010 Law of Formalization and First Employment to prohibit misuse of cooperatives (employment relationships that affect labor rights). Establish and impose fines for violations. Dedicate first 100 labor inspectors to exclusively address cooperative cases in priority sectors: palm, oil, sugar, mines, ports, and flowers.	May, 2011 (pass bill in Congress) December 15, 2011 (labor inspectors trained)
IV. TEMPORARY SERVICE AGENCIES	Create robust enforcement regime to prevent temporary service agencies that circumvent labor rights.	December 15, 2011
V. COLLECTIVE PACTS	Amend Criminal Code to make illegal collective pacts used to undermine the right to organize by extending better conditions to non-union workers in such pacts. Conduct public outreach campaign to promote awareness of legal changes.	June 15, 2011

VI. ESSENTIAL SERVICES	Disseminate information to labor inspectors, judicial branch, unions, and employers.	April 22, 2011
VII. INTERNATIONAL LABOR ORGANIZATION OFFICE	Seek assistance from the ILO for help with implementation of labor rights.	June 15, 2011
VIII. PROTECTION PROGRAMS	Broaden the scope of the protection program for trade unionists and former unionists under threat.	September 15, 2011
IX. CRIMINAL JUSTICE REFORM	Assign 95 National Police to exclusively investigate criminal cases involving union members and activists. Broaden definition of illegal threats and strengthen penalties.	December 15, 2011
X. FOLLOW-UP MECHANISM	U.S. and Colombian Governments will meet periodically to assess the progress of implementing the Labor Action Plan.	Thru 2013

Data Source: Office of the United States Trade Representative "Colombian Action Plan Related to Labor Rights" (2011)

The initial phase of the April 7, 2011 Action Plan, aimed at addressing these egregious violations, was to be completed by December 15, 2011 and full implementation of the FTA was to be implemented *after* verification that the milestones had been successfully met. A follow-up mechanism was also established to assess progress of objectives through 2013, at which time senior officials would meet and decide on further meetings (Office of the United States Trade Representative 2011).

Meanwhile, free market capitalists and conservatives feared delaying the U.S.-Colombia Free Trade Agreement would be a lost opportunity to secure democracy, to consolidate free trade partnerships throughout the Americas, and to support a U.S. ally.

Making an ally of Colombia is an important geopolitical strategy, especially to counter the "new wave of anti-American socialism of the 21st century that aspires to undercut free markets and individual liberty," such as "Chavismo" in Venezuela, and Rafael Correa's socialism in Ecuador (Walser 2011: 2). When Colombia and Canada announced the two countries had put into force a trade agreement, conservative republicans Dave Camp and Kevin Brady urged President Obama to implement the FTA because further stalling was "for no good reason – U.S. workers and exporters are now disadvantaged in Colombia, a key export market for American-made goods and services" (Camp 2011: 1).

Geopolitics such as building economic ties and opening the Colombian market to increased imports overshadowed the concerns raised by civil society groups. Citizen's concerns became "background noise" at the Summit of the Americas in Cartagena, Colombia in April 2012 when President Obama announced the full implementation of the FTA (Chen 2012: 1). The Washington Office on Latin America (WOLA), the US Labor Education in the Americas Project (USLEAP), U.S. labor unions, along with civil rights groups in Colombia publically denounced the White House's certification that conditions had been met. I was in Colombia during this time and witnessed the uprising of hundreds of thousands of small farmers, miners, students, health workers, teachers, and port workers as they protested the implementation of the FTA.

A report published by the AFL-CIO two months after the FTA passed urged the U.S. and Colombian governments to commit more resources and political will to make the promised changes (AFL-CIO 2012). The authors recognize that:

> Though the Labor Action Plan included some important measures that Colombian unions and the AFL-CIO have been demanding for years, its scope was too limited—it fully resolved neither the grave violations of union freedoms nor the continuing violence and threats against unionists

> and human rights defenders. In addition, there was no specific provision in the Labor Action Plan requiring Colombia to establish a sustained, meaningful and measurable record of enforcement of any of the commitments prior to a congressional vote on or official entry-into-force of the trade agreement. (AFL-CIO 2012: 1)

The pressure to secure domestic interests in Colombia clearly won over the pressure from the civil society groups, who still today are demanding that the FTA be reconsidered. The also demand that Senior Officials in both Colombian and United States governments adhere to their commitments found in the U.S.-Colombia Labor Action Plan These concerns were echoed by the Washington Office on Latin American in a letter to the Colombian Minister of Labor. They are summarized in Table 2 below.

Table 2

Summary of WOLA Letter to Colombian Minister of Labor

Sector	**Issue**	**Related to Labor Action Plan Objective No.**
Ports	80 percent of workers continue to work under subcontracting model that creates obstacles to organizing	III. COOPERATIVES IV. TEMPORARY SERVICE AGENCIES
Sugar	Murder of trade unionist Juan Carlos Pérez January 28, 2013, continued death threats and mass firings in 2013	VIII. PROTECTION PROGRAMS IX. CRIMINAL JUSTICE REFORM
Flowers	Occupational Health Consequences related to extended workday and toxic exposure, indirect contracts, fear of organizing	III. COOPERATIVES IV. TEMPORARY SERVICE AGENCIES VI. ESSENTIAL SERVICES

Source: WOLA "Letter to Labor Minister Pardo Expresses Concern Over Lack of Progress"

Indeed, Colombia has made some progress toward fulfilling their commitments and it would be remiss to ignore those accomplishments. According to the Minister of Labor, Mr. Rafael Pardo Rueda, who spoke at an Inter-American Dialogue conference on February 3, 2012, Colombia had recreated the Ministry of Labor as a part of its efforts to address labor issues. Mr. Rueda claimed that labor issues lost visibility in response to deep financial crisis and shortages in 2002 when ministries were combined (Justice with Interior, Environment with Housing, Labor with Health), and priorities where shifted to recovering from the economic crisis. Since its inception in 2010, the Ministry of Labor has provided new powers and functions to handle issues with trade unions, the pension system, an institution to train people for work, and policies about cooperatives.

Mr. Rueda said that the Ministry of Labor is working to address key challenges outlined in the LAP in order to: provide protection for members of trade unions; reduce impunity in crimes committed against them; and to increase communication and protection. The Ministry of Labor has exclusively dedicated nineteen prosecutors, one hundred-forty five investigators, and three judges to investigations of labor crimes. According to the Mr. Rueda, prior to 2002, there were only two cases but as of February 2012 there were four hundred cases, and an additional eighty cases were added in the last year. Mr. Rueda also indicated that as of June 2011, the government established a table of fines and comprehensive inspections. In response to recent investigation in the palm sector, an industry known for egregious labor violations, the Ministry of Labor had recently issued two large fines: $1.5 million and $4.5 million USD for violating the law that prohibits cooperatives. Mr. Rueda insisted, “We are taking very seriously the law and the dismantling of certain forms of intimidation” (Inter-American Dialogue 2012).

Despite these efforts, and the overall sentiment expressed by the Colombian Minister of Labor that they are "very satisfied" with the progress, concerns over continued labor violations and repression bring into serious question the effectiveness of the Labor Action Plan and the extent to which the lack of political will, structural problems, or the collective action problem are sources of ongoing trouble. Colombia was – and still is – a long way from meeting the objectives laid out in the LAP, and even further from social justice for workers. For example, all of my research participants reported that the flower industry still widely uses cooperatives to hire workers under third party contracts – a practice that makes it nearly impossible to organize workers into unions. I turn now to a discussion of the lessons learned from NAALC and how they apply to the Labor Action Plan.

Lessons Learned: A Way Forward

The Labor Side Agreement in NAFTA and the Labor Action Plan in the U.S.-Colombia Free Trade Agreement are two examples that demonstrate how human rights and trade union activists' efforts may have succeeded, to a certain extent, in tempering the impacts of unbridled free market capitalism and neoliberal economic policies on workers. But my research questions whether the evidence points to another story -- that labor protections in trade policy are largely symbolic (existing only on paper) and are used as political tools to appease activists and pave the way for neoliberal economic models. Unregulated markets have failed to serve the interests of the workers, so it seems logical to enforce global labor standards. However, as Kabeer (2004) cautions:

> The debate about global labor standards is both an extremely complex and highly polarized one, in which accusations of protectionism and double standards clash with claims of exploitation and "social dumping." It recognizes, too, that both many who support, and many who oppose, the global enforcement of labor

> standards are motivated by the spirit of international solidarity with the interests of workers rather than by protectionist or free trade sentiments… (4)

Despite the motivations for some, whether they be to appease opponents and quell resistance in order to implement neoliberal economic policies or in the spirit of international solidarity, I argue that there is utility in identifying the ways in which existing agreements and subsequent agreements can be more effective as a way of immediately addressing labor violations. Simultaneously, however, we must aim for solutions that address the underlying causes of labor violations and the subjugation of workers through transformational social change that balances the power asymmetry and economic inequality between the North and the South and between men and women.

Let us turn to the lessons learned from the NAALC. Delp (2004) argues that there is a political historic moment in which a social clause for labor provisions can be used as a tool to improve conditions because of the scrutiny of media and political attention. Once that moment passes, refusal to use the process and a lack of political will "nullifies the effectiveness" of the agreement (Delp 2004: 39). In this moment – during the pending negotiations of the U.S.-Colombia FTA – the U.S. had leverage to pressure Colombia on labor violations and to pursue the objectives of the LAP. Once the FTA was passed, the moment was lost and major concerns arose in human rights and labor communities because they all too familiar with the absence of political will in Colombia and the priorities of United States.

Delp (2004) also identified evidence of structural problems, such as inadequate government agency inspections needed to address worker demands for legal remedies. Data from my research in Colombia indicates that both structural inadequacies and corruption are barriers to enforcing the Labor Action Plan. For example, several flower

workers said that they had yet to see an inspector at their plantation since the initial phase of the LAP in 2011, despite the flower sector being one on of the prioritized sectors under the agreement. Moreover, both flower workers and the "experts" I interviewed indicated that it was not uncommon for inspectors to notify the company prior to an inspection to "warn" them of plantation visits. This gives the employers an opportunity to falsify documents and cherry-pick workers for interviews with inspectors so that the company appears compliant with regulations for the inspection. One study participant reported that she volunteered to talk with an inspector but instead her employer chose another "more conformist" worker to meet with Ministry of Labor inspectors. Such practices lead to a common perception held by the flower workers that the Ministry of Labor works in the interest of the companies and not of the workers.

Another illustrative example I found was when I was invited to observe a work stoppage in Suesca where workers had recently reorganized themselves in order to pressure the company for back pay owed them. The workers had filed a claim with the Ministry of Labor and a case against the employer with help from CorpoLabor organizer, Patricia. Patricia explained that the claim (for one-year of unpaid pensions, several back paychecks, and three years that the company failed to supply uniforms) was held up in court. The company claimed that due to financial difficulties it could not pay the workers. Patricia explained, however, that it is not uncommon for the companies to pay their debt (as obligated by law) to other companies for supplies such as fertilizer, and the to claim bankruptcy before compensating workers. Once a company liquidates, the Ministry of Labor has little recourse to protect the workers. These examples demonstrate, again, how

neoliberal economic policies favor profit over people and how the state is complicit in addressing violations of workers' rights.

Delp (2004) also suggests the need for cross-border campaigns. She found that workers and labor organizers recognized the global scale of the problem created by globalization trends that privilege mobility of capital and undermine the ability of governments to effectively enforce labor standards. This study suggested expanding networks and strengthening international solidarity as strategies to strengthen the labor movement and put international pressure on governments who fail to protect workers' rights. Finally, the same study suggests, as indicated earlier, that the larger political context might quickly overshadow the moment in which public scrutiny and attention can be leveraged; letting the crucial moment pass results in a lack of political will needed to address problems later. The social clause on labor, after that decisive moment, becomes symbolic of rights but lacks teeth that bring about actual remedies, such as holding the corporations and governments accountable (Delp 2004).

I explored four organizations working on cross-border solidarity campaigns and raising awareness of gendered labor issues: Corporación Cactus, Witness for Peace, the Central Unitaria de Trabajadores (CUT) (United Federation of Workers), and the Solidarity Center launched by the American Federation of Labor-Congress of Industrial Organizations (AFL-CIO) in 1997. Each of the organizations have done extensive research into the labor and human rights situation in Colombian and consistently denounce the U.S.-Colombia Free Trade because it gives too much power to business and makes labor conditions worse. Additionally, these organizations collectively agree that

the Colombian government has failed in its role to enforce the Labor Action Plan and that the U.S. government is complicit in the labor violence and rights as a trading partner.

While many of the above mentioned organizations were vocal during the negotiations for the FTA and Labor Action plan, I found little evidence of their presence at the actual negotiating table in the White House. For instance, Jeff Vogt, deputy director, International Affairs Department, AFL-CIO spoke at the May 11, 2011 Hearing Before the Committee on Finance in the United States Senate on the U.S.-Colombia Trade Promotion Agreement but no testimony from workers was heard (2011). The exclusion of workers from the crafting of such policy, as Delp (2004) suggests, is correlated with the ineffectiveness of a social clause on labor. In sum, Colombian workers appear to have been absent from the process; in fact, I found no evidence that women workers in the flower sector were involved. This raises serious concerns about the policy making process and helps explain why the policy is ineffective.

The next chapter provides an overview of the cut flower sector in Colombia and describes the conditions in which the workers who participated in my study are situated. I explore the extent to which women workers are aware of the protections provided under the Labor Action Plan. It also addresses a common question: Why do women choose to work in the cut flower industry if it is so exploitative? Answering this question reveals the constrained choices of women in the Bogotá Sabana, and partly explains why many women are afraid to collectively organize and confront the companies that exploit them.

CHAPTER V

DISPATCHES FROM THE FIELD

In this chapter, I discuss the findings from my fieldwork and interviews with women flower workers, labor organizers, and NGO staff. I build my analysis around the narratives of three flower workers and present these women's stories in the final sections of this chapter as a way of demonstrating how globalization and free trade impacts women in this particular context. The portrait of the working conditions in the flower plantations and of women workers I present here is based on data I gathered from my fieldwork. It is important to note, though, that working conditions vary from plantation to plantation and that women's experiences vary.[29] My data revealed a number of themes, three of which I selected because of their salience in my data and presence in the literature: exploitation, empowerment, and resistance.

Through sharing my findings and these selected narratives, I hope to illuminate how women are entangled in a complicated process of exploitation, empowerment, and resistance. I seek to show the ways in which women's experiences are shaped not only by their own agency and local dynamics, but also by structures, institutions, and the political economy, each of which leverage local hierarchies of power, patriarchal cultural norms, and use the state as a repressive apparatus to take advantage of women as a source of cheap and flexible labor. I also aim to highlight the gap between labor policy and the everyday realities of women workers in the cut flower industry. Although I had hoped to

[29] The results of my study are intended not to generalize across the Colombian cut flower industry or make sweeping generalizations about the impact of globalization and free trade across the globe. Rather, I present a case study that contributes to the discussion of the uneven impacts of trade liberalization on women, keeping in mind that the effects of these global processes differ based on a variety of factors including race, ethnicity, class, and on the roles as wives and mothers (Sanmiguel-Valderrama 2007).

find more women who could leverage the Labor Action Plan to demand their rights, my findings revealed that most workers are unaware of the policy.

The Cut Flower Industry in the Sabana of Bogotá

The highland landscape of the Bogotá Sabana, located in the department of Cundinamarca, is covered with thousands of greenhouses. Flower cultivation accounts for 53% (13,669 acres) of the total land used for agricultural production in Cundinamarca (DANE 2010). The cut flower industry had its beginnings when American foreign investors returned to the Bogotá Sabana region in the mid 1960s during the restructuring of the Colombian economy and recognized the comparative advantages for modern flower cultivation (Corporación Cactus 2011; Ferm 2008; Meier 1998). David Cheever, a graduate student in horticulture at Colorado State University, studied the region and documented the potential to produce cut flowers for the United States market (McQuaid 2011). He also took note of the proximity to the international airport from the Bogotá Sabana, just a three-hour flight away from Miami and thus a shorter distance than from California, where the majority of the U.S. domestic cut flowers were produced at the time (McQuaid 2011). The ease of air transportation, combined with the principal comparative advantages – cheap and available fertile land, year-round sunshine, an abundant source of water, and access to cheap labor – made the Bogotá Sabana an ideal region to relocate the U.S. domestic cut flower industry.

Montañez et al. 1994 argued that the transformation of the Bogotá Sabana region that came with the establishment of the flower industry had one of the most profound social and economic impacts in a quarter century on the region (as cited by Corporación Cactus 2011). It brought about displacement of small farmers who supplied the

Cundinamarca region with agricultural products and raised livestock originally inhabited the Bogotá Sabana began. These displaced farmers became potential workers already accustomed to agricultural work; nearly half of them were women (Corporación Cactus 2011). The cut flower industry established itself steadily in the first fifteen years, and during 1981 and 1994 the production area doubled (Corporación Cactus 2011:29). It has also faced a number of crises but remains an important industry in the Cundinamarca region, and as a whole accounts for nearly 3% of the country's gross domestic product (DANE 2010). According to the Asociación Colombiana de Exportadores de Flores (ASOCOFLORES), annual sales to North America averaged $1.1 billion between 2006 and 2010. Colombia is now the world's second largest producer of cut flowers, representing 14% of the global production (ASOCOFLORES 2010; DANE 2010).

In 1998, Dole, the largest multinational company in the industry, acquired Splendor Flowers and consolidated into the region's largest employer and one of Latin American's largest businesses (Corporación Cactus 2011: 29). In 2009, Dole sold its operations to Colombian company Floramérica/Sunburst, which downsized operations shortly thereafter. Floramérica/Sunburst closed one of its unionized plantations and cut back sharply on other its two unionized plantations, claiming financial hardship and leaving thousands of workers without pay (USLEAP n.d.; ILRF 2007). The global financial crisis in 2008 impacted consumption of flowers in developed countries (namely the U.S., as the largest importer of Colombian flowers) and forced the reevaluation of the Colombian peso, resulting in the loss of 18,000 jobs (Corporación Cactus 2011: 29; Corporación Cactus 2009:1). The industry has since increased its revenues, and in 2010 exports were up $145,000,000 USD from 2008. But according to experts I interviewed,

the lost jobs have yet to be restored. Despite the job losses, the flower industry remains one of the largest employers in the Bogotá Sabana region. How does the cut flower industry maintain production levels without restoring the thousands of lost jobs? The following section, in which I discuss the conditions of work in the cut flower industry, helps to answer this question.

Working Conditions

Over 100,000 workers toil in harsh conditions on plantations, under greenhouses, and in refrigerated packing centers in the cut flower industry (ILRF 2013). Women make up 70% of the industry's workforce, and of those women many are the head-of-household (Ferm 2008). Consensus among groups who have studied the conditions in the flower industry extensively advocate for improvements because women workers endure serious and harmful labor rights violations; they are used as an easily exploitable "reserve army" of laborers who produce for "fickle" customers in the North (USLEAP 2009; ILRF 2013; Corporación Cactus 2011a). Evidence from the last twenty years gathered by NGOs and union organizations consistently identifies three main areas of labor rights abuses in the flower industry (Corporación Cactus 2009; ILRF 2013; USLEAP n.d.):

> **Obstruction of the right to organize**: Third party contracting, illegal firings for organizing, threats to close down plantations or move from the location in which labor organizing occurs, black-listing union organizers, and disrupting organizing by shuffling employees around.
>
> **Gender Based Discrimination**: requiring pregnancy tests or proof of infertility as a hiring condition, sexual harassment, and limited upward mobility for women.[30]
>
> **Work-related Health and Safety Hazards**: Poisoning from toxic chemicals in

[30] Gender discrimination surprisingly is not addressed by the Labor Action Plan despite consensus that it is a problem in the flower sector (on of the five prioritized sectors in the LAP) and that the Third MDG goal of gender equality and women's empowerment pushes for an end to workplace discrimination, which prevents women from equal opportunities in employment (UN 2013).

> pesticides and fungicides cause respiratory problems, skin rashes, eye irritation, chronic orthopedic conditions in the hands and wrists, miscarriages, premature birth, and malformations.

Norm Ferm (2008) documented these types of violations during a five-year study in which she gathered data in the Peruvian and Colombian flower industries. Ferm (2008) worked with the International Labour Rights Forum (ILRF) to gather information through interviews with cut flower workers and attending numerous meetings with NGOs. She found that most of the women workers are paid the minimum wage set by the state, which averaged $200 USD after payroll deductions for taxes, health care premiums, and pension contribution, and which is barely enough to survive (Ferm 2008). Though the minimum wage has increased since Ferm's study, my research revealed that lower rank (production line) workers are paid the minimum wage no matter how long they work in the industry. For example, one woman I interviewed who had worked for thirty-two years, the longest duration in my sample, indicated that she still earns the minimum wage and has no expectations of a raise. Other workers confirmed that flower companies only pay minimum wage for low ranking jobs.

Serial short-term contracts, offered to women more often than men, create instability and periods of unemployment (Ferm 2008). Ferm also found that the combination of gender discrimination and low levels of education (common in rural parts of Colombia) limit upward mobility for women. Moreover, in spite of "decades of experience" in floriculture, women are still infrequently offered opportunities for advancement from their entry-level positions (Ferm 2008: 1). One worker in my study describes the challenge many women face with low education:

> I started working in flowers because my family had very little resources and I had very low education. After working, I was able to achieve my high school degree

> and a technical degree. Most people in the Bogotá Sabana work in flowers. To work, for example, in the milk industry, those are jobs that demand people with technical degrees. And another thing is experience. How do you get experience if you don't have a way in? Many people are working in the flower industry because they don't have technical degrees but [even if they did] they don't have experience the other companies require.

Indeed, these conditions allow companies to maintain production levels by exploiting women. The picture painted here is clearly of a situation in which women's choices are constrained. The lack of alternative job opportunities, low education levels, and their roles as primary caregivers of families make women vulnerable to exploitation. Moreover, labor violations disproportionately affect women because they make up the majority of the workers, but also because of gender discrimination rooted in patriarchal cultural norms. The following narratives address these questions: How do women perceive the working conditions affecting their lives? What are the ways in which they are empowered by the work? How do women respond to these conditions? How do women perceive the labor protections granted by the Labor Action Plan? What are the barriers to resistance and union participation?

Exploitation: "Today We Are Like Modern Slaves"

At 4:00 a.m., before the sun rises in the Bogotá Sabana, thousands of women flower workers wake up to prepare breakfast and lunch, and to help get their children ready for school. For many of the women and their children, it is mostly in these early hours that they briefly see each other. Most workers arrive at the flower farms between the hours of 6:00 a.m. and 8:00 a.m. They travel to work on foot, bicycles, or take company-provided buses. Layered over their tattered company uniforms, women wear

sweaters and coats to protect themselves from the morning cold and later in the refrigeration rooms if they work in the assembling and packing area.

Laboring Bodies, Excessive Hours, Discipline, Harsh Environments

In harvesting areas women work on average eight to ten hour days, Monday through Saturday. Those who work in post-harvest areas (preparing and packing flowers for export) work ten to twelve hours days. During the high season most women work excessive hours, up to twenty per day.[31] During the high season one worker said poignantly, "we might as well bring our pillow to sleep at work."

The work is hard on bodies, dull, and tedious. Most women workers are assigned one or two repetitive tasks such as tending flowerbeds, pruning, cutting flowers, removing thorns, de-petaling, or packing flowers. The type of work does not change much over time or from company to company. Many women described to me that they had worked pruning and cutting flowers year after year. Workers spend long hours exposed to high temperatures under the plastic greenhouses designed to trap heat and force flowers to bloom. Women that work in the refrigeration units, where the flowers must be kept cold to prevent wilting, are exposed to a consistent temperature of thirty-four degrees Fahrenheit. Exposure to extreme temperatures and chemicals used to spray flowers pose higher risks for respiratory issues such as asthma (Corporación Cactus 2011b).

As mentioned earlier, production expectations have increased due to increasing trade demands despite job losses in the industry (Corporación Cactus 2011a). Several

[31] As indicated previously, most of the flowers cultivated in Colombia are for export to the United States. High seasons coincide with holidays celebrated in the U.S.: Valentine's Day (not celebrated in Colombia), Mother's Day, Christmas, and other holidays in between.

women reported the extreme sense of pressure to increase their productivity and the fear that they will lose their jobs if they do not meet the quotas. Supervisors checks on worker's progress multiple times throughout the day, reminding them that they must meet their quotas before they go home or they are subject to termination. All of the women workers I spoke with knew exactly how many flowers they were supposed to pick and how many they averaged per hour. The following is an explanation of the pressure and discipline workers experience, more so now than ever, this worker recalled:

> We have to cut 380 flowers per hour and if we don't produce that many, they send you home. It's like a military schedule. Every day they come up with stranger things. [After we arrive in the morning] we have to do exercises and wait for the boss to give us orders. There is an attendance list and the supervisors take role every day. We have to do mandated exercises to warm up. We go to lunch and we are stressed and worried and just want to throw in the towel. We start at 6:00 a.m. and we don't break for lunch until noon. I don't bring food in because it is not safe to eat food because of toxic chemicals. We have a half hour for lunch but it takes ten minutes to get to and from the lunchroom so we have ten minutes to eat.

The workers clearly know their quotas and the consequences for not meeting them. Additionally, they are required to know the customer demands and ensure that they are cultivating the flowers accordingly. One woman discussed at length the variations in demands between different importing countries. For example, she explained the "gringos" (white people/Americans) like the roses to be slightly open but the Japanese like the buds to be tightly closed.

Some women approximated that the increase in workload started in the mid 2000s, while others estimated that the increase started around 2009. The latter report coincides with the overall increase in exports – between 2010 and 2012 there was an 8% increase according to ASOCOFLORES, Colombia's flower growers association. For many women I interviewed, the production demands had increased and varied but ranged

from 50% increases to doubling the amount of work. Corporación Cactus (2011b) found that from 2008 to 2010 in post-harvest (e.g. packing, selecting, de-petaling, and assembling), the average hourly demand increased from 200 stems per hour to 300 per worker.

A Mother's Dilemma: "We Have to Abandon Our Children"

In addition to the physical demands on their bodies, women experience mental stress related to production pressures and concerns as mothers for their children, many of whom are unsupervised while their mothers are working. One worker said that in order to maintain our jobs "we have to abandon our children." The children also long for time with their mothers and wish that their mothers did not have to work in conditions that are so hard on them.[32] Mothers often rely on older siblings (usually the eldest female sibling) to help with the household chores and childcare because they are too tired and weak due the physical demands on their bodies.

"today we are like slaves…we are the workers, we are the ones that make the capital, because ready!... A company puts the capital in to begin earning the profits and it is us [the workers] that give our health, our life, we sacrifice a lot, we get up at 4:00 a.m. and don't sleep until 11 p.m. We neglect our families." Clemencia is conscious of the way the processes of capitalism exploits women and she articulates exactly what Aguilar (2004) and many other feminists say about the sacrifices women make to support capitalist production.

[32] Several of the mothers I interviewed indicated that when they work long hours it is a hardship for their children. Cactus Corporación has also produced documentary videos in which children of flower workers describe the extra work they have to do in their homes, the time they spend alone missing their moms, and their desire for their moms to find better working conditions (Corporación Cactus 2012).

Labor Segmentation

According to both men and women workers with whom I spoke, the division of labor is less gendered than it was in earlier decades. Through technological advances, jobs that men used to do by hand, such as removing plants and watering with heavy hoses have been mechanized and are no longer restricted to men. Fumigation, on the other hand is still a job typically assigned to men. The segmentation of labor is less a matter of gender as it is other statuses that divide the workforce into low ranking, middle management, and high-ranking positions. Olga Sanmiguel-Valderrama found that "occupational segmentation by sex is not an entirely clear-cut matter once race, class and socio-economic status are considered…without doubt, gender plays a significant role in the allocation of work, but cannot be isolated from class and race as determiners of where in the hierarchy a person work" (2007: 7). In other words, upper class and middle class women occupy ownership and management positions in some flower plantations and mix-raced *mestizos*, descendants of indigenous people, or women and men of African descent fill low ranking positions.

Gendered Discrimination and Health Effects

Although the division of labor is less gendered than before, discrimination targeted at women is common in the workplace (Ferm 2008). Some women report that they had been sexually harassed and patronized by men. For example, management and supervisors call women "*niña,"* a diminutive Spanish term that means "little girl." This behavior on the factory floor replicates the patriarchal structures in the household and Colombian society (Sanmiguel-Valderrama 2007).

Health effects and hiring practices are also gendered and discriminative.[33] A study by the Colombian National Institute of Health found an elevated rate of miscarriages, premature births, and congenital malformations among flower workers (ILRF 2013). According to Corporación Cactus (2011b) the use of chemicals (fungicides, insecticides, and fertilizers), repetitive movements, and body postures required to work in cut flowers pose a higher risk of contracting illnesses such as dermatological and respiratory conditions, lumbar problems, carpal tunnel syndrome, cancer, and other less known and difficult to treat illnesses such as autoimmune disorders. Many women I spoke with said that their employers, sometimes in coordination with the occupational medicine departments, deny that health conditions are occupational. This precludes the workers from getting the treatment that they need, in addition to workplace accommodations mandated by law.

Unjust Termination, Mass Layoffs, and Withholding Pay

My research revealed that age discrimination and reports of unjust termination are commonplace. Flower companies tend to hire women between the ages of eighteen and thirty, so once a women reaches the age of forty, she is less likely to be hired and more likely to be fired at the end of a temporary contract. Being sick or injured is also a barrier to getting hired or staying employed after the end of a temporary contract.

Other types of material exploitation such as mass layoffs and withholding paychecks keep women vulnerable. All of my study participants had experienced either being laid off when a company liquidated or conducted mass layoffs. CUT, Cactus representatives, and union leaders all indicated this practice has been identified as a

[33] Multiple studies have found gendered health effects and hiring discrimination practices in the cut flower industry. See discussion of the legislation that protects worker and how these laws in general are bypassed or ignored is in Chapter IV and Corporación Cactus 2011 and 2012; Sanmiguel-Valderrama 2007; and ILRF 2013.

significant problem throughout the cut flower industry. Flower companies, often when faced with worker resistance, will close their doors but shortly after will open another plantation under a different name and legal license to operate. Companies may also claim financial hardship or bankruptcy and leave the fired workers without pay and unemployed. Several workers indicated that their paychecks, healthcare, or pensions had not been paid for a period of one month at least once during their employment. One group of unionized workers was actively on strike demanding several months of back pay.

The irony is that many women do these jobs so that they can take care of their children and yet their ability to tend to their children's needs is compromised by their work. Women also told me that they were thankful for their jobs, because without them they would be dependent on a male partner, their families, or would have to work in the informal market. Several women also told me that they are able to make an impact in their children lives so that their children do not have to work in the flower industry.

Women's Empowerment and Agency

Naila Kabeer (2005) argues that the Millennium Development Goal for gender equality and women's empowerment indicators (education, employment, and political participation) have the potential to positively affect change in women's lives and to address gender disparities, but they also have limiting implications. For instance, she argues that while women's access to wage labor has been shown to "increase women's agency in strategic ways" studies have also found that women are often relegated to exploitative work conditions (Kabeer 2005: 18). Kabeer thus defines empowerment and uses her conceptualization as a measuring stick. This operational definition of

empowerment can be used to analyze the impact of wage labor on women's lives. Empowerment has three dimensions: agency, resources, and achievement and at the most basic level "ability to make choices" (Kabeer 2005).

Kabeer's (2005) conceptualization of empowerment has important conditions that must be present so that "real choice" may be fulfilled. If one does not have an opportunity to choose an alternative because of poverty and disempowerment, their ability to make meaningful choices is impeded. In terms of women and wage labor, this dimension of her conceptualization could be applied to a scenario in which a peasant woman who is a head of household 'chooses' to work at a low wage, unstable job because there are no other jobs available for her yet she needs to provide for basic needs for her family. Furthermore, the simple presence of other choices is not sufficient; Kabeer posits that the choice must be apparent to the actor. One must recognize their ability and/or freedom to make the choice. They must believe their choice will be free from repression or retaliation, uninhibited by any power outside of themself. Kabeer also qualifies her conceptualization by characterizing choices as unequal in their relationship to power; for instance, some choices have a greater potential for meaningful impacts in people's lives while others may be inconsequential.

The dimensions mentioned above are linked closely around the concept of empowerment:

- Agency is generally defined as the capacity to act and alter the world. Kabeer (2004) indicates that the important part of this definition is that choice is exercised "in ways that challenge power relations" (14).
- Resources are the necessary means to exercise choices and put them into effect.
- Achievements are the result of people actions, whether a desired outcome is realized or not.

Resources and agency are part of a person's capacity to decide how they want to live their lives. Achievements are the results of the choices and of one's efforts.

Domestic Violence: The Freedom to Leave

According to Friedemann-Sánchez (2006) domestic violence in rural Colombia is pervasive and therefore the ability to exit a household in which a woman's human rights are violated by threats of and acts of violence by men is paramount in the analysis of empowerment. Access to material gains and independence through wage labor in the cut flower industry is one of the ways in which women are empowered. But Friedemann-Sánchez argues that these quantitative material gains also manifest in qualitative ways that increase women's power in intra-household bargaining; specifically, the ability to leave an abusive partner, is the "decisive contextual feature" in the northern Bogotá Sabana that leads to increased self-esteem and social change (2006: 148).

Several women I interviewed indicated that raising children alone was preferable to living with an abusive partner or staying in a bad relationship. Friedemann-Sánchez also found that 43% of the women she surveyed preferred to raise children alone (2006: 161). Having a job in the flower industry allows many women to make that decision. The inverse is also true – and thus, we can see why one woman I interviewed went back to a relationship with an abusive partner. She was fired from her flower job and had no other means of survival, so she reluctantly went back to him for economic support.

Demanding Rights

Some women I interviewed indicated ways in which they felt respected or vindicated by challenging their employers. When a woman risks her job to seek justice for labor violations and sees that she can achieve her goal, she feels more empowered.

Winning a battle against a powerful actor that normally enjoys impunity from prosecution for labor violations is empowering (although as we will see, it can also result in negative consequences for women). These individual acts of opposition may help to set a precedent that challenges impunity of employers and abusive partners for the injustices against women, and that encourages other women in the struggle.

Women's Resistance

Recent research on women and work acknowledges and identifies a diverse range of previously unappreciated and misunderstood forms of resistance (Ward 1990). However, scholars disagree on the central feature of analysis. Aguilar (2004) acknowledges and appreciates the utility of everyday forms of resistance. She argues, however, that by highlighting "the complexity, multiplicity, and agency in women's everyday lives and experiences" postmodern feminists dislodge class as the central feature of analysis within the political economy, thereby obscuring the global order that produces inequality (404). On the other hand, for example, Friedemann-Sánchez (2009) focuses on the ways in which women exercise individual agency outside the workplace and in so doing, reshape patriarchal relations of reproduction.[34]

Making a distinction between everyday acts of resistance and collective organized resistance is important. There are two key reasons I argue this is important. First, collective organized resistance is the most effective way to fundamentally transform the social structures that oppress women. Women as a group gain benefits from collectively organizing that they are unable to achieve individually. Individual acts of everyday

[34] It is important to note here that Friedemann-Sánchez ´s focuses on local and individual experience and her study explores women´s agency and resistance to gender norms at a household level – "precisely where first contest gender inequality" - and from an individual perspective (4). She argues, "women gain a larger margin of ideological mobility in society at large, gradually re-writing the gendered role expectations in the marriage contract" (4).

resistance may lead to incremental change and eventually create space for broader social change but they have less potential to result in transformative change. Second, organized resistance is the target of much of the labor repression sponsored by the elite class and MNCs in the Colombia. Therefore, it is critical to understand how this repression interplays with other barriers that inhibit women's resistance.

Everyday Resistance

Everyday resistance in women's wage labor is "intertwined with contradictory elements that reinforce their [women's] traditional roles as wives" and with cultural notions of women (Wood 1990: 15). Further, everyday resistance is challenging for researchers to identify as I demonstrate below.[35] An interesting study done by Ong (1987) of Malay women factory workers identified instances of spirit possession on the factory floor as forms of capitalist discipline resistance. More recently, researcher Maurice Eisenbruch et al. (2014) documented waves of mass fainting in Cambodian factories in the past two years. Eisenbruch et al. argue that evidence has yet to confirm that these episodes are directly related to poor nutrition, physical health, or a psychological phenomenon. Instead the researchers posit that, like the Malay women's spirit possession, the mass fainting is a form of social protest to the structural violence that oppresses and exploits women in garment factories.

Other researchers have documented forms of everyday resistance in studies of factory women such as: laughing at time-and-motion researchers; using biological

[35] Measuring outcomes of everyday resistance is perhaps as difficult as measuring empowerment. Much like empowerment is a latent phenomena, meaning that we can only measure its presence by identifying actions or results, everyday resistance is often subtle and does not result in an immediate or direct response (Narayan 2005:15). In some cases I coded as acts of everyday resistance there are direct and obvious results, but in others the responses and outcomes are less obvious or impossible to see, either because my timeframe did not capture latent results or there were no changes that could be linked to a specific act of everyday resistance.

differences to convince managers that women require special rest periods; and insisting on recognition of work roles in the home (Wood 1990). Also, at the household level women resist their traditional roles by delaying marriage, leaving abusive spouses, postponing childbearing, and cultivating homes without men (Friedemann-Sánchez 2009; Wood 1990; Ganguly-Scrase 2003). Hondagneu-Sotelo (2002) found that domestic workers quit their jobs (as an act of resistance and to avoid being fired); they also call in sick or use other alibis to indirectly express unhappiness with working conditions.

Given the various forms of resistance that emerge in local and culturally specific contexts, I conceptualize everyday resistance as acts of opposition to exploitative conditions that challenge traditional roles and expectations and demand incremental or immediate change. Every resistance is enacted most often by individuals but can occur collectively by groups. Drawing on Wood's (1990) definition, everyday acts of resistance can often invoke traditional ideas about women's roles to challenge the oppressor. Dill (1989) also suggests that survival itself is a form of resistance as well as the use of meager resources to ensure that the next generation survives (as cited by Wood 1990). Conceptually, everyday resistance is different from organized collective resistance because rather than overtly seeking to fundamentally change structural systems of oppression and exploitation, its demands are more proximate.

I found fewer instances of everyday resistance in my fieldwork than I expected. This could be due to the limitations in my methodology. It is more difficult to illicit information about ideas and activities that are subtle and culturally nuanced without long-term ethnographic study and participant observation in a natural setting. Nevertheless, I

did find instances in which women challenged their bosses, which I relate in Lucia's story below).

Organized Collective Resistance

Organized collective resistance is a conscious and intentional strategy used by groups of workers seeking specific demands, such as better wages, improved occupational safety, or the addressing of discriminatory practices, with the overarching goal aimed at making lasting structural changes. Researchers agree that, while not impossible, organizing women collectively on the global assembly line is difficult (Benería and Roldán 1987; Wood 1990; Enloe 2007; Kim 1997). Flower worker unions in Colombia have never been strong; however, they have suffered a dramatic decrease in membership in the recent past. Of the thirteen women workers I interviewed, only three of them were affiliated with a union.

My interview with the head of the department on gender for CUT, the largest federation of unionized workers in Colombia, revealed that despite CUT's efforts organizing women in the cut flower industry, they have had little success. In fact, they drastically cut back workshops provided for women flower workers due to lack of attendance. She explained that excessive hours in the flower plantations and the "double shift" make it nearly impossible for women to attend trainings and rallies. Two other labor organizers I spoke with indicated that their strategy is to go to flower plantations or women's homes and talk with workers. However, most women do not become members of a union or seek out a union until they are desperate. Getting fired unjustly or suffering an illness or injury that interferes with women's ability to work are often the only reasons

that compel women to seek out union representation as demonstrated in Clemencia and Maria's stories below.

Many of the women I spoke with said that people look out only for themselves and not the group. Solidarity does not seem to be a strong part of the flower worker culture. The women in my study who are with affiliated a union said that many workers are "conformists" and that instead of joining the collective struggle, they align with their bosses so that they can serve their own needs.

The most common and salient reason I found that women do not organize is fear. Many women fear losing their jobs, being blacklisted, and being persecuted at work. One flower worker explained her experience with unionizing:

> There is a law that one can organize, so with my coworkers we created a union and thanks to this union, we did protests and exposed the situation about what was going on in the company. This was three years ago. And supposedly, with this law, you have the right to organize and you can protest. But this is on paper. If you do it, then you are a criminal, terrorist or guerilla, to fight for ones right. Supposedly with the law, you have the right but the companies don't comply. People are afraid to join unions because they will be blacklisted. They return to being conformists.

The fear of job loss is compounded for mothers because they are largely responsible for family expenses such as food, children's education, and clothing. This means that many women simply cannot lose their jobs.

Narratives of Three Women Cut Flower Workers

In the next section, I outline three narratives. As we will see, Maria, Lucia, and Clemencia are complex characters whose lives and bodies are shaped by the political economy, and yet their responses to structural power and exploitation demonstrate

resilience and agency. Their struggles of survival and resistance highlight the ways in which they are impacted by the political economy and how, in turn, they respond.

Maria

Maria is a thirty-eight year-old single mom. When her family moved to Facatativá, she was fourteen. She started working in the flower industry when she was sixteen because her parents needed help supporting her large family. She lives on a hillside she climbs every day after a long day of work in a neighborhood called El Pesebre (The Manger). Her home, which she calls her own, is constructed out of cinder blocks and worn wood. I talked with Maria about the land, delineated with a barbed wire fence, as we climbed the hill toward her home, where we conducted the interview. Maria said the owner of the land does not live in El Pesebre, which is one of the poorest neighborhoods in the municipality of Facatativá. It is also known as the most dangerous. Despite its reputation for being dangerous, Maria feels safe in her home and neighborhood. She says that she can leave her door open and let her child play outside without worrying. Maria expressed gratitude for her house that she heats sparingly with a pipe-stove. Buying a home on her meager salary, covering health care costs, and living expenses would be impossible, so she is grateful to have inherited the house from her mother.

In addition to her own health problems – severe carpal tunnel and back pain – Maria cares for her twelve year-old son who has a heart condition that requires regular visits to doctors in the capital city, Bogotá. Each trip to the doctor requires that she take unpaid days away from work and travel a four-hour round trip. These trips cost about $25.00 USD for bus fare and food. Sometimes, she says, “I have to ask to borrow

[money] because it is money that I don't have" to cover the trip expenses. Even though she does not have to pay rent from her salary - $286 USD per month, the minimum wage in Colombia - she stills struggles to cover the cost of living each week. After paycheck deductions, just under 10% of her salary, she takes home about $260.00 USD. Although her health insurance should cover the medical bills, during our interview she said that recently her son was denied healthcare. The clinic could not attend to him because her employer, a flower company, had not paid their health care bills lately. This worried her because without proper medical care, the burden of taking care of her son is exacerbated.

In October 2011, she received a dismissal letter from her flower-cutting job after working for the company for six years. The company claimed that her contract was over, a reason commonly used to dismiss workers in the flower industry. Maria said that she knew that it was a lie. Rather, they had fired her, like they do many other women, because of her health problems. She also knew, contrary of what her employer claimed, that the constant aching in her back and shoulders and loss of strength in her hands was work-related. Years of working an average of ten to twelve hours per day, six days a week cutting flowers – at approximately 1,000 flowers per hour – meant that her agility had diminished and that she could no longer cut as fast as before. Because she was seen as less productive than healthier young women, she says, "there are no companies that want to hire me."[36]

Maria was thankful that she found La Casa de Las y Los Trabajadores de Flores (The House of Flower Workers), an advocacy organization run by a former flower worker and union organizer. Through the help of this organization, she was able to obtain

[36] Maria said she cut more flowers per hour than her employer expected from workers hoping to get paid extra. She was not paid any extra.

official documentation that her health conditions were work-related. With the help of her lawyer who works with La Casa de Las y Los Trabajadores de Flores, she won her case against her employer for unjust and returned to work in December of 2011, two months after her dismissal. The company was also ordered to provide health coverage for her three surgeries, and any subsequent surgeries needed to treat her carpal tunnel, a common condition that plagues many flower workers. At her age and with her health conditions, she says she would not likely have been able to return to work if it were not for the legal help she obtained.

Maria now works a modified schedule, limited to eight-hour days. This is in comparison to the average ten- to twelve-hour days for most flower workers. While the modified schedule is better for her health conditions, it means that she is unable to earn overtime, which would help her pay for her son's doctor visits, food, and other living expenses not covered by her base salary. Returning to work has not been easy, Maria says.

In addition to her diminished agility and seven illnesses with which she has been diagnosed, Maria says that she is persecuted for her affiliation with a union. When she was reintegrated at work, she says her employer did "illogical things" to her such as overpaying her for time she did not work and then "making it out as if I were a thief." The management also told her coworkers that they should not talk to her.

She questioned again the honesty of her employer, who claimed that the reason they had told other workers not to talk to her was because of the legal investigation in which she is involved. She told me, however, "not many co-workers talk to me because they know that I am associated with a union; I am the only one at this company. The rest

[of the workers] are [hired] through cooperatives [third party contractors]" and therefore unable to organize. Maria talked to her lawyer about what was going on and he suggested that they begin to take measures against the employer for labor persecution.[37]

For now, Maria has a job with an indefinite direct contract and health coverage, but she is unsure how much longer she is going to be able to work in flowers. At age thirty-eight, she has already submitted an application to receive disability benefits; she hopes to at least receive a partial pension, which she thinks is the minimum wage but "the truth is," she says, "I don't know." When I asked her about how she could survive on that, she says that she will have to adjust because her hands are so damaged she struggles even to wash dishes and do household chores, and her future in the cut flower industry is uncertain. Although she is thankful in many ways for her job because it helps her to take care of her son as a single mom, she says "life is boring and it is very hard; even worse is that I am not the only one, there are more people like me."

Lucia

Lucia is a forty-five year-old married woman. She moved to Facatativá and started working in flowers in 1997. Both of her children are grown and no longer live with her and her husband. She came to Facatativá with her husband because, at that time, they could not cover the cost of living for her family on her husband's income alone. Prior to working in the flower industry, she worked as a domestic worker but that was not enough income to help sustain her family. When I asked her if flower work was better or worse than domestic work, she said that if she were single without children, she would have preferred domestic work to flower work. The primary reason she preferred domestic

[37] Although I did not get details on whether she was going to pursue a case against her employer on grounds of labor persecution, the Labor Action Plan and Colombian Labor Law protects the right to organize and affiliate with a union. Primary concerns in the country are threats of violence and murders of trade unionists, however, less egregious, persecution at work, among other factors, as we will see, is a strong barrier for union participation.

work to flower work is the exposure to chemicals in the flower industry that caused her asthma. In domestic work, she was not exposed to pesticides and fertilizers.

Lucia described a typical day working in flowers. She gets up at 4:30 a.m. every morning and prepares breakfast and lunch. Now she works eight hours daily, but before she was put on a modified schedule for her occupational health claim, she had to work at least ten hours and during the high season as much as eighteen hours. She says that the government has limited overtime to only two hours extra per day, but she does not know the details of the law or when it changed.[38] In her area – post harvesting – they do not start as early as others; instead, they start at 8:00 a.m. It gets very cold in the plastic greenhouses, but when the sun gets stronger as the day progresses it can get unbearably hot. The exposure to the chemicals bothers her so much and she has developed respiratory problems, which as indicated previously, is one of the reasons she said she prefers domestic work over flowers.

Lucia told me about some of the struggles she has faced in trying to get an official diagnosis of asthma and get qualification indicating that her illness is work-related. She said that she was forced to continue to work in the cold because her boss did not accept the medical reasons as valid. Instead the boss scolded her, denied her illness, and said that she needed to move to a warmer place, like La Guajira (the northeast coastal region of Colombia where the climate is always warm). She was able to get an order to see a doctor who told her that she should not be working but instead should be in the hospital. According to Lucia, this doctor was forced to retire and was replaced by a new doctor because he had diagnosed her illness and a coworker's illness as work-related.

[38] Current labor law indicates that in no case shall an employee work more than two hours extra per day or twelve extra hours per week (Baker and McKenzie 2008).

Lucia said that it took a lot of fighting with her boss to get another visit with the new doctor in order to have her illness recognized as work-related. She said, “After so many fights I told my boss ‘no, no more!’” Following up on suspicion that her boss was colluding with the new doctor, she decided to go to the human resources administrator and report what was happening. She confronted her boss and told the human resources administrator everything. “She [Lucia’s boss] could not do anything because everything that I was saying was true and she stayed quiet for an hour and could not say anything. That helped me quite a lot,” Lucia said, self assuredly. “Now, after a few years, that problem has passed and I do not work where I should not [in the cold].”

Lucia described another confrontation in which she was looking out for herself and coworkers by voicing injustices. She said that the company took away privileges to coffee, which gave the workers access to free hot coffee. The hot coffee, Lucia says, helped them warm up in the cold, and she did not think that it was fair that the company would no longer provide coffee. After she was successfully able to get the company to restore coffee for her coworkers, Lucia said that her boss disliked the appreciation she received for helping them. Lucia was subsequently written up for not complying with her schedule, since she had not asked permission to go for the coffee on a number of occasions. Lucia initially refused to sign the written warning because she did not agree that she had committed a violation. Her supervisor told her that she could not do anything and that she had no ground on which to stand. Although Lucia felt like her boss was the one who had committed an error, she signed the memorandum but she said, “I remained offended.”

I asked Lucia if she had considered joining a union. She said ¨maybe¨ but that her coworkers would say no. When I asked her why, she replied, "Personally, I have not been in a union but other people that have been in a union in other companies say that [the union] brought on the liquidation of the company... I don't know with certainty. It could be a collective pact; in a collective pact it is true that [a company] can avoid a union." Lucia's response is illustrative of two key points. First, most of the women I interviewed said that they themselves had experienced a closure of a flower company because of workers organizing or that they knew of a company that closed for the same reason. This is a common strategy of companies to repress labor organizing and to avoid having to bargain with organized labor. Therefore, many women decide not unionize because they are afraid to lose their jobs. Second, the fact that companies get away with violation of labor law that protects the right to organize by either closing or using collective pacts – unrepresentative agreements between third party intermediaries or employers with non-unionized workers for salary and benefits to undermine unionized workers – is indicative of the systemic and structural nature of the repression of labor organizing (AFL-CIO 2014).

Clemencia

Clemencia is a forty-one year old who lives in Zipaquirá with two of her three children. She is the head-of-household. Her oldest daughter lives on her own and works as the manager at the Salt Cathedral, a local tourist attraction. Clemencia's other two children are boys ages fifteen and seven. She sometimes babysits her grandchildren in return for financial support from her oldest daughter. Clemencia worked in the flower industry for sixteen years with the same company. The company she worked for

reorganized itself and was sold to another company two years ago. They fired all the workers without just cause, Clemencia said, claiming that it was due to financial problems. Clemencia says she was one of the first to go because of her health. She had a spinal injury, a herniated disk, and osteopathy, none of which had been qualified as work-related at the time of our interview.

Regarding the process of qualification for a work related illness or injury, Clemencia told me:

> In order to access my pension, I myself have to prove that the health issues are related to my job on my own. It is difficult. I have to give my medical history to the EPS [healthcare company] and meanwhile I have to enroll in the public health system that is for the people that don't work…but the government subsidized healthcare is not going to treat what I have and not going to work to prove that I have work related health problem.

Clemencia also claimed that the reason the process to obtain official documentation for an occupational is so difficult is because of the corruption and collusion between private insurance companies and the flower companies that bribe doctors. Flower companies also threaten to challenge medical licenses for providers who make a determination that a worker has a work-related medical condition. Clemencia believes that although there are some doctors that do not succumb to the pressure, in general, "corruption prevails."

Now Clemencia struggles to do housework such as washing clothes and mopping because of her medical condition. Despite her physical health struggles, she learned to sew in order to make a small amount of money to help her pay bills. When she sews, she has to take frequent rests throughout the day to prevent pain and further injury. Basically, she says, "I have to do nothing" in order to help her condition, meaning most types of prolonged activities cause her some discomfort. Her doctor warned her about repetitive tasks that will worsen her condition. She does get some therapy treatment, and feels that

it helps, however. I asked her about how her condition affects her self-esteem and daily life and she replied:

> A lot, there are moments when you get depressed. One feels depressed. Let's say, because at my age, obviously I want to be working and my orthopedist says, 'keep working if you want to end up in a wheelchair or don't work if you want to get better.' It's very frustrating. In other words, I have kids that are still small and are still studying. They are the phases of their lives when they have lots of needs. And I have always been the head of household. It's always been very difficult.

When I asked her whether work in flowers had improved over the sixteen years she had worked in the industry, and if it was something she wanted for her daughter, she responded:

> Our youth do not want to work [in flowers]. For example my daughter worked in flowers for three years and she said 'no more' she asked me 'mama, how do you put up with it?' So there have been laws and regulations by the government that have improved the situation. We used to have to pull up flowers by roots and pull hoses to water roses and carry sacks of fertilizers but now the men do those jobs and there are some machines and technical improvements in watering. Previously, the chemical that they used when they did fumigations, we didn't leave from there, [they fumigated while] we kept working or we only left for one hour and at the hour, we had to return. Now, because of the law passed 8 years ago, if they are going to fumigate, we have to leave until the next day.

"Do you think it has gotten better?" I asked. Clemencia replied:

> There have been improvements but there is still a long way to go. Let's say about ten years ago, fully productive flower beds, one person was in charge of 15 plots when there wasn't as much intensive work, when the work was more intensive, there would be 25 plots. Now in the production, the first phase, one has 25 plots and in post-production, 50 plots…..For example, in one hour we cut 600 flowers. How are you not going to get sick doing that?

Although Clemencia clearly felt like flower work is exploitative, she said she was thankful for her job in the flower industry because over the years she was able to accumulate enough savings to buy her own house. She did this through a program that

helps workers save some of their wages for housing, education, and retirement. This law is supposed to provide some protection for the worker so that if a company goes out of business, the employees would be left with something. Clemencia was fortunate enough that her employer, unlike many in stories I heard, adhered to the law and paid out her yearly pension. Many workers have cases against their employers for withholding pay and pension contributions. After eight years contributing one month of her salary every year, Clemencia was able to buy a house from her pension. She says that buying a home now is much more difficult because property lots have quadrupled in value. Workers earning minimum wage can hardly afford the cost of living and buying a home almost always requires financial help (e.g. borrowing or a spouse's income).

These three stories highlight the variation in women's experience of wage labor in the cut flower industry depending on their individual context. They also highlight the common themes that emerged across my data and in the literature. As we saw in Maria's case, she clearly finds flower work to be exploitative – the signs of which are written on her injured body and in the pain she experiences daily - but she relies on her job as a single mother to support her son. Maria also demonstrates how winning an individual case can lead to a higher degree of empowerment; for example, she is no longer forced to work excessive hours because she was able to seek and win legal protection. Maria also decided to affiliate with a union and has become an organizer and Secretary for Women's Affairs for a the new National Organization of Colombian Floriculture (ONOF) (Casa de Las y Los Trabajadores de Las Flores de Facatativáá (2014).

Lucia highlighted what everyday acts of resistance can achieve by taking a stand against her employer and struggle to win recognition over her health issues. In this case,

she exercised her capacity to act and alter her world, which Kabeer (2004) indicates is as an important part empowerment. However, Lucia indicated that she had not joined a union because she was afraid to face the very real consequence of potentially losing her job. The potential for everyday resistance, as Aguilar (2004) argues must be considered with the totality for collective action. Lucia's case demonstrates how "gana mas el temor" (fear wins) and thus the potential for collective action is diminished.

On the one hand, Clemencia's case highlights the possibility for women cut flower workers to use their income from the wage labor to buy their own homes and to provide better economic opportunities and hope for their children. On the other hand, her case demonstrates the ways in which women are exploited by wage labor. Further, although Clemencia was able to economically provide for her, the labor exploitation directly affected her ability to provide non-economic care for her children.

In regards to the Labor Action Plan, only one of the women I interviewed expressed that she was vaguely aware of it. Indeed many of the women had some knowledge about national labor laws but were generally unaware of the potential leverage that the LAP could provide. The lack of knowledge renders the women unable to use the leverage to demand their rights, which further supports my argument that the Labor Action Plan was a political maneuver and not a policy intended to support social justice.

CHAPTER VI

CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The aim of this thesis was to examine the effects of free trade and labor standards on women workers, using a case study of the Colombia cut flower industry. The research presented here contributes to the body of literature on women and development, particularly research that examines women workers on the global assembly line. Through in-depth interviews, participant observation, and document analysis, my findings revealed that the effects of globalization and neoliberal economic policy on women are complicated by several factors: the cultural and social context; the intersection of institutionalized oppression (such as racism, sexism, classism); and the social roles ascribed to women (such as caregiver and homemaker). I also explored three themes and found a complex interplay between empowerment, exploitation, and resistance, which clearly demonstrated the impacts of wage labor on women are uneven and complicated. In addition, this study revealed that the Labor Action Plan is largely symbolic and lacks teeth. Furthermore, widespread impunity of labor repression and perceptions of labor activists as guerillas or guerilla empathizers, a view often supported by government officials and multinationals, creates an environment in which women workers are reluctant to organize collectively.

Empowerment, Exploitation, and Resistance

Wage labor jobs in the cut flower industry provide access to the formal economy that many women might not otherwise have. Women see jobs in the cut flower industry as a source of independence and an economic means to provide for their children. The

economic factor was the number one (and often only) reason women cited when I asked women what they thought is the best part of the work. Without these jobs, many of the women in the Bogotá Sabana would be dependent on men or relegated to more precarious work in the informal economy. Mothers often reported that although work in cut flowers provides little social mobility, the jobs help them provide education for their children, which means hope for empowering the next generation.

The flower industry is the largest employer in the Bogotá Sabana region and is one of the few options for women with low educational levels. The large pool of female labor in the Bogotá Sabana combined with the complicity of the Colombian government around labor violations allows flower companies to abuse labor rights without consequence. Women continue to bear the brunt of the cut flower production and the increased demand for exports. These consequences are especially apparent on women's bodies that endure injuries and illness as a result of the harsh work, often leaving them physically disabled. Physically disabled women rely even more on their jobs because employment options are extremely limited for them; injured workers are undesirable by flower companies because they infringe on profit margins.

Because women in the Bogotá Sabana are the primary caregivers of children, the fear of losing their jobs is a significant barrier to organized collective resistance and unionization. Women are also subject to the "double" or "triple burden" which means they have extremely limited time to participate in labor organizing. Nevertheless, women cut flower workers exercise their agency in a variety of ways both through individual and collective acts of resistance. My study revealed that, while limited in the flower industry, women are present in mobilizations such as strikes, labor stoppages, sit-ins, rallies, and

trainings. Everyday resistance takes a variety of shapes, such as contesting traditional ideas about women's dependence on men and challenging superiors on the factory floor. There are several organizations led by women (House of Flowers, Corporación Cactus, and CorpoLabor) that provide essential services and support to women cut flower workers. These groups also mobilize workers, organize community events, and provide critical gender analysis of economic policies that infringe on the rights and basic needs of women. Women workers are creating newly imagined spaces in which social justice takes precedent over economic growth.

These newly imagined spaces are achieved through collective organized resistance that challenges neoliberal hegemony and global inequality. Conversely, the Labor Action Plan was a political tool used to pave the way for Free Trade and was not intended to challenge the neoliberal hegemony by truly addressing inequality and inequity of women workers. The moment in which the LAP was most useful as leverage for substantive change expired after the U.S.-Colombia Free Trade Agreement passed. Moreover, workers were excluded from the negotiating process and in many cases remain unaware of the policy and the protections it potentially provides. However, as Maria Cook (2007) argues, despite lax enforcement, the symbolic power of labor laws does offer a reminder that workers and organizations have not always been weak. Cook (2007) also suggests that labor laws provide reassurance that labor power is not forfeited and subject to an "indefinite disadvantage" under globalization (2). In other words, the Labor Action Plan, despite its failures and packaging within neoliberal trade policy, provides some important utility.

Indeed, there are signs of hope as the bonds of solidarity strengthen in Colombia. The country has seen an awakening and revival of mobilization in response to the failure of the benefits of economic growth to trickle down. La Marcha Patriotica, an anti-imperialist, anti-capitalist, Bolivarian, socialist movement along with other leftist groups have gained momentum mobilizing marginalized groups such as small farmers, Afro-Colombians, indigenous groups, and workers across sectors, including women in the flower sector. The revival sprung from the pivotal point in April 2012 when the U.S.-Colombia Free Trade Agreement was passed. The Labor Action Plan provides a focal point for this backlash against the longstanding history of empty promises from the Colombian government and imperialist powers. Women cut flower workers stand to benefit from and will most certainly contribute to this movement. As the movement strengthens, it has the potential to deepen international solidarity and counter repression against all marginalized groups.

Finally, these findings largely support feminist literature that has identified wage labor in export industries as both empowering and exploitative. It also supports the claim that women resist exploitative conditions in a variety of ways, both on a micro-level in everyday interactions and women are also organizing themselves and collectively resisting. Specifically, however, this research points to the larger context of labor repression and violence perpetuated by neoliberal economic policies as particularly strong barriers to organizing and collective resistance. It also posits that women heads-of-household and mothers face additional barriers to organizing collectively. For these women, time constraints in addition to fear of losing their jobs have a profound effect on their decision to organize with a union.

Implications of Research

Recent trends in development research have expanded to look at the differentiated effects of globalization, trade policy, and global labor standards on women. Much of the analysis is reformist and offers neoliberalism with a "human face" as a solution. In other words, the reformist approach suggests mere modifications to the imperialist and racist processes of the capitalist patriarchy enshrined in Free Trade Agreements and the globalization project. These processes exploit Third World Women and serve the interests of the elite wealthy class rather than pushing for transformative change.

This research highlights the need for scholars who make inquiries into women's work to engage Cynthia Enloe's "feminist curiosity" (2007) and to be persistent in asking questions about taken-for-granted processes that appear natural or inevitable. It suggests a transformative approach to women's equality that challenges hierarchies of power rather than working within them. This research echoes the call for critical feminist theory and a transformative framework suggested by Aguilar (2004). She questions claims made by post-modern feminists that "highlight the notion of women's consciousness and agency" and reject the "projection of 'woman as passive victim' that they read into Marxist and radical feminist theories – capitalism and patriarchy, respectively, symbolizing the oppressive forces," calling it "colonialism *redux,* feminist style*"* (Aguilar 2004: 108).

This research also provides a timely and important analysis of free trade agreements and the social clause ("neoliberalism with a human face").[39] Without a doubt, feminist scholars and critical development theorists have written volumes on the impacts

[39] Kingstone (2009) argues that democracy score data for Latin American countries suggests a weakening of democracy is associated with contestatory left aggressive politics. The "emergence of stable politics" such as moderate governments in Chile under president Bachelet, in Brazil under President Lula, working within the market-oriented system and with existing institutions to make modest adjustments to the neoliberal model is "neoliberalism with a human face" (106).

of globalization on women in the developing world, but less is known about the impact of implementing global labor standards as a part of free trade agreements. The most significant free trade agreement in history is currently under negotiation and represents more than forty percent of the global economy. The United States claims that the Trans-Pacific Partnership (TPP) will include "commitments on labor rights protection and mechanisms to ensure cooperation, coordination, and dialogue on labor issues of mutual concern" (Office of the United States Trade Representative n.d.). How the U.S. government can make such claims in the face of the current failures of the Labor Action Plan is a critical question for researchers. Since women, and especially women of color, are disproportionately affected by labor exploitation, women stand to suffer even further from the implementation of the TPP.

Finally, this research contributes to the wider discussion on feminist scholarship, activism, and political affinity. Throughout my work on this project, I have reflected on how I situate myself as a feminist scholar and activist. These reflections have led me to question the false dichotomy between academia and activism. What I found, despite differences between and within the feminist scholar community and the activist community, is that we have in common a shared political project. This political project is rooted in the struggle to dislodge the dominant system of oppression and transform unequal power relationships, particularly the gendered dimensions of oppression. As a feminist scholar I locate myself within the wider community struggling against oppression and I also recognize that all feminists are not coming from the same starting point. As I mentioned in the introduction of this thesis, I cannot separate myself from my socio-economic and geopolitical position, which carries a certain amount of relative

privilege compared to the women in my study. Therefore, I emphasize the importance of recognizing this privilege and how it effects the production of knowledge. I hope to mitigate this power asymmetry by contextualizing my research and challenging the prevailing academic research model that touts itself as objective science in which "truth" is discovered by doing research on subjects.

I am encouraged by the possibilities of collaboration between scholars and activists. My experience with feminist activists who participated in my research project challenged the false dichotomy between academia and activism. While in the field, I became a part of their community, I fostered connections, and I consciously chose to be political (marching in the streets alongside women protesting the FTA and joining them in their critique of oppressive power relations by denouncing exploitation of workers on a live radio show). We acknowledged our differences and openly discussed them. Rather than seeing them as barriers to solidarity, we shared a sense of mutual respect and saw the inherent value of building relationships across borders (geographic and social). I saw myself as a partner with the feminist activists; my job was to listen, learn, and share the knowledge we collectively created. In sum, the possibilities for meaningful relationships based on solidarity between feminist scholars and feminist activists will only serve to strengthen the shared vision of social justice and transformational change.

Recommendations

The turn to market forces to meet basic social needs, close the gender inequality gap, and empower women has failed. Further, it has served to increase global inequality. Even in countries, such as Colombia in which macroeconomics benefit from neoliberal economic policies, the benefits are not evenly distributed. The United States could

sanction Colombia for not enforcing the Labor Action Plan, but that might only serve to hurt flower workers if exports decrease. Global labor standards and trade relationships must instead be based on social justice and equity. The implications of a socially just model mean that rich countries, as a matter of moral obligation, must be bound to an even distribution of wealth through fair trade practices and taxes.[40] My recommendations reiterate what Kabeer (2004) suggests:

> The struggle for labor standards needs to be broadened and made more inclusive by transforming itself into a struggle for a universal ‘‘social floor,’’ so that all workers, men as well as women, urban as well as rural, formal as well as informal, in work and without it, are able to organize for their other rights without fear of jeopardizing their means of survival.
>
> For poor women in particular, it could provide the basis from which they could challenge their dual subordination within the home and at work. It would give them the leverage to challenge the patriarchal contract within the family, a leverage that they have otherwise had to acquire through participation in paid work in highly discriminatory labor markets. And it would promote their leverage vis-a`-vis their employers in the workplace by providing them with resources to fall back on should their struggle for rights at work threaten to jeopardize their jobs. (28)

Moreover, the context of violent repression of labor organizing in Colombia creates an extreme imbalance of power and a culture of fear that prohibits workers from organizing. The United States is complicit in the violence against labor organizers by providing foreign assistance to Colombia and as a trading partner. The violence and impunity must end so that workers' lives are not threatened by expressing their legal right to organize. The grave situation for labor organizers in Colombia and the complicity of the U.S. calls on trade unions and human rights organizations across the globe to demonstrate their solidarity with Colombian workers.

[40] In addition to fair trade practices and taxes, rich countries need to provide debt relief and invest in more diverse economies and non-extractive models.

As Franzway and Fonow (2011) suggest, when interests of labor intersect with other movements that focus on worker's human rights, new spaces open up for transnational solidarity and cross-border organizing. These new spaces of international solidarity also serve as political spaces for feminist activism in which gender is visibilized in the struggle against globalization and basic principles of worker's rights and social justice are embodied (Franzway and Fonow 2011). Feminist participation in the transnational solidarity movement provides an alternative to the ways in which much of the left and progressive politics frames the struggle against globalization as primarily class-based (Franzway and Fonow (2011). Therefore, continued support for organizations like Corporación Cactus, a feminist organization that supports worker's rights in Colombia and establishes solidarity networks with U.S. based organizations such as Witness for Peace, Alliance for Global Justice, Washington Office on Latin America, USLEAP, and U.S. labor is critical in the struggle for women workers in Colombia.

Areas for Further Research

I conclude this thesis with three recommendations for areas to focus further research. The first recommendation is based on the prevalence of health related effects of the flower industry and women's access to quality healthcare. My research revealed that women face challenges with accessing services for occupation health issues within a corrupt privatized healthcare system driven by profit (Cohen 2013). When injured women lose their jobs, they enroll in the state provided health coverage but according to several women in my study, the services are inadequate for the treatment of the chronic illness and rehabilitation they need. The second recommendation would be to explore the impact on the families and communities of sick and injured flower workers. If women are the

engines of production and their families and communities rely on them, what happens when they are debilitated and can no longer work? The third recommendation is one that Olga Sanmiguel-Valderrama, a feminist researcher whom I met while doing my fieldwork, is in the process of doing. In her forthcoming book, Sanmiguel-Valderrama (n.d.) will explore the relationships between militarization, trade liberalization, and human rights violations in Colombia. She will use the flower industry as a case study to look at successive military accords and trade agreements between the U.S. and Colombian governments and how the flower industry has benefited from those accords. Other advocacy groups and labor organizations such as Witness for Peace, the AFL-CIO, and Colombian NGOs have made connections between U.S. military support and its role in violence against trade unionists and human right violations. If we are to build a more equitable global economy based on justice, these connections need to be further explored and contested.

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