

Redefining Consciousness and Resistance:
 Subjectivity and Political Action
 Amongst Malay Factory Women
 in Multinational Capitalist "Development"

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Women working in a factory in Malaysia.



Xerox offers
 the Army
 a more powerful
 weapon.

Senior Project in Social Science
 Stanya Kahn
 Fall 1991

**IBM, Apple Computer Se
 Trade Zone for Displays**

By JACK ROBERTSON
 WASHINGTON — IBM and
 Apple Computer have inde-
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 a foreign trade subzone for
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 10 percent penalty tariffs,
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Introduction

In Spirits of Resistance and Capitalist Discipline: Factory Women in Malaysia, Aihwa Ong defines the "social experiences of Malay factory women in terms of the cultural constitution of a specific 'class sexuality' and the kinds of 'truth' asserted by different groups in the political arena."¹ Her argument is posed within the context of labor exploitation and the social and cultural responses to this by Malaysian women working in the multinational factories. Ong's ethnographic research focuses on the particular phenomenon of spirit possession on the factory floor, and Western capitalist acculturation² targeted at the women's sexualities as a significant force in the women's changing relationships to their communities and themselves, with their entry into wage work and consumer relations as new cultural subjects -- situations which Ong sees as constituting positions of resistance unaccounted for by either feminist or Marxist paradigms of resistance.

Resistance involves the interrelations between social subjectivity and consciousness, and it is the conjunction of these three in practice and in new theoretical constructs which compose my subject in this essay. Building on Ong's work, my thesis argues that political power for oppressed subjects may not most effectively come from the one-dimensional approach of collective organizing under traditional structures such as unions or women's movements, but that there is significant power in a subject who is allowed to assert herself on her own terms. I delineate how I see this subject-power

¹Aihwa Ong, Spirits of Resistance and Capitalist Discipline: Factory Women in Malaysia, (SUNY Press, Albany, 1987), p. 180.

²Acculturation, here, and where it is used throughout the text, refers to processes of forced assimilation to dominant cultural and social codes (here as influenced by the dominant economic imperatives of capitalism): values, lifestyles, behaviors, etc. It is not an equal exchange between two cultures. It is also not total subsumption of one culture into a new culture. People respond to new forces, ideas, ways, and may critically reject them, or interrelate with them through their own constructions, creating new cultures out of the combining of the two, and/or as means of survival.

formed; I raise questions as to the role and forms consciousness take for these subjectivities; I am suggesting that the concept of resistance must be redefined according to variable forms of consciousness as they are informed by various subject positions and identities. Inherent in this assertion -- which I ground in political-economic and anthropological research, socio-cultural criticism, and contemporary feminist theory - - is my contention that resistance takes many forms which can not be conclusively defined in terms of set categories and models, nor can consciousness be understood universally across cultural and historical experiences. I show how this is particularly true with regard to capitalism's increasingly multinational territory and its manifestation of labor and commodity relations more deeply in personal and cultural realms, creating shifting and multi-faceted identities, as its needs for producers and consumers relocate boundaries between the traditionally economic and non-economic.

Ong's assertions, that "the Marxist notions of false consciousness no longer suffices" and "feminist analysis" does not attend to "the daily production and reproduction of relationships according to 'given' male-supremacist principles," calls for a reprivileging of consciousness in resistance. I carry this notion further with more challenges to the paradigmatic closures I see in Marxism and Western feminism, whose hegemonic tendencies over discourses of consciousness and resistance I perceive to be limiting in their scope, and ultimately exclusionary of those subjects of oppression they seek to liberate. In this critique, I explore different views on the construction and role of ideology and the contradictions confronted in efforts to articulate or represent a politic or social contestation, concluding with theories on "differential" politics. Through various analyses of differences in subjectivities and consciousness across gender, race, culture and class, these theories reiterate multiplicity and mobility with the changing faces of social/political subjects, relationships to and shapes of consciousnesses, and sites and modes of resistance. It is in these understandings that I

find though not necessarily resolve, creative beginnings of new methodologies for both theory and practice.

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Part One of my paper consists of two sections, one summarizing information on Malaysia's colonial history up to present social, political, economic, and cultural dynamics, the second describing the contexts of factory work and the effects of labor and consumer socialization practices on young Malay women. Both of these sections rely heavily on information provided by Ong, supplemented by a few others. Part Two, the main section of my paper, develops the thesis and the surrounding issues mentioned above.

Part I: Section One

Women's positions in Malay society must be regarded in terms of Malaysia's successive economic, political, social, and cultural recompositions through the experience of colonization. The post-colonial reorganization of Malaysia in turn must be understood in the context of colonialism's legacy and the continued relationship to world economic and political systems of exchange. The impact of the imperatives of colonial interests have survived as entrenched directives for state bureaucratic development and economic restructuring. As a result, subsistence and the social and cultural configurations surrounding its traditions have been transforming and mutating under the powerful influences of Malaysia's entrance into global economic relations. Patterns of work and leisure change, family and village inter-relationships are upset and shuffled, and gender dynamics are infused with new divisions and imbalance.

Malaysia's economy under colonial rule was largely dominated by European plantation interests in rubber production. Where traditional commodity exchange in tin, sugar, coffee, livestock, and fruit had been initial sites of colonial appropriation, the rubber boom of 1909 replaced these earlier markets as the central cash-crop and had significant effects on local peasant subsistence and production for exchange.³ The colonial government incorporated all "unused" (jungle areas and some dormant peasant farmlands) into their holdings, which were then sold to European entrepreneurs. The land was used for massive rubber cultivation for exportation into world markets. Farmland was in many areas reallocated to the local peasantry and to immigrant Malays under new land laws which restricted small-holding production to traditional subsistence cultivation (mainly fruit and rice) and minimal rubber planting. Village land

³Maila Stivins, "Family and State in Malaysian Industrialization: the Case of Rembau, Negeri Sembilan, Malaysia," in Haleh Afshar, ed., Women, State, and Ideology: Studies from Africa and Asia (MacMillan Press, London, 1987).

(*kampung*) and new holdings were subject to new tax laws under the Torrens system.⁴ Land became an item for exchange, and petty commodity production (in rubber) became a compelling factor in the selling and reshuffling of village land by members of the *kampung* themselves⁵.

The colonial government in conjunction with local elites, however, had an interest in supporting the survival of a local peasant economy. Petty cash from coconut, fruit, rice and some rubber tapping on family plots, along with small rice padis and livestock for subsistence were to maintain a local Malay "yeomanry" which would not interfere with the plantation monopolies on rubber land and would produce food for local consumption. Colonial policies restricting local Malay participation in plantation work, supplied by Chinese, Javanese, and Indian migrant laborers, were instituted under the guise of protection laws to "preserve" local traditions. Aihwa Ong points out that "British policy toward Malays was of mutual accommodation with the royal elite; a structure of colonial administration and preserved royal privilege for the reconstitution and domestication of a peasantry artificially shielded from capitalist disruptions."⁶ By relegating peasant production to petty cash-cropping, but restricting their participation in the lucrative rubber trade, these policies confined village income to a narrow economic margin and a vulnerable dependency on trends in the world market. The price fluctuations for rice, coconut and rubber required the small-holder to devise alternative means of survival, shifting village labor activities to compensate for losses incurred by instability in the domestic economy. Peasant production became a patchwork of household participation in petty commodity production, periodic wage work in agriculture and the growing service sector, subsistence gardening and fishing, and the marketing of small produce at the village level. The allocation of family labor (women, men, children, and

⁴A land registration system set up by the British colonial government.

⁵Ong, p. 18.

⁶Ibid, p. 16.

elders) among various subsistence and cash earning activities did not afford the *kampung* household an accumulation of wealth. While the colonial government and foreign plantation owners benefited from the monopolies on rubber land -- adjusting land, labor, and small-holder trading restrictions according to rises and falls in international rubber prices for their own protection -- *kampung* society was undergoing not only "a shift along the continuum from subsistence production to market specialization ... but a qualitative change in [the] social character [of the peasantry]."⁷

The *kampung* household's ability to adapt to an increasing subsumption into the expanding state system and its malleable relationship to world markets and political economies, became in part contingent on income trajectories set up first first the colonial administration and then by the post-colonial national state apparatus. The combined subsistence and petty commodity production economy of the peasantry under colonial rule continued after independence (1957), but with layers of new income generating activities which inevitably involved *kampung* society in a deeper relationship with state political and social programming. These social and political forces reorganizing *kampung* life were primarily in the form of increased bureaucratic structures being instituted at the village level, as members of the peasantry gained access into civil service positions -- such as teachers, policemen, health inspectors, and some businessmen -- and as "development" programs grew.⁸ While most part-time wage employment available to *poorkampung* members consisted of road crew work, construction and some plantation work for men, and laundry/sewing, childcare and small garden plot produce marketing for women, a small number of men joined the more permanent civil service occupations. The stability brought to families with sons or fathers in salaried positions increased the complexity of class stratification in *kampung* society. While there was a degree of social class differentiation among village

⁷Ibid, p. 23.

⁸Ibid, p. 30.

communities mainly characterized by the wide disparity between a small number of favored elites and the larger population of Malay peasants and immigrant-Malay landless contract workers, the rise of households with steady cash incomes created a middle class of peasant landlords.

Less reliant on farm income, these new state workers began renting out plots to poorer peasants, sharecroppers and landless immigrants. The growing relationship to the state government through this new class of civil servants introduced new social and political institutions into *kampung* society -- in the form of schools, health clinics, family planning agencies, state sponsored training programs, and administrative offices overseeing the "development" and coordinating *kampung* participation in local electoral politics. Meanwhile, landless and small-holding peasants saw little accumulation and rise in status as they competed with the dominance of large agribusiness. As more low income peasants entered into temporary plantation work and contract labor on "development" projects (which grew in number with the arrival of foreign industry), the traditional laborers in these sectors (Chinese, Javanese, and Indian immigrants) were replaced, causing mass unemployment. Land speculation superseded previously protectorate Islamic land right/inheritance customs, contributing to landless and disintegrating *kampung* networks.

These new social differentiations and divisions of labor and their burdensome effects on *kampung* livelihood set a deterministic precedent for the dispersal of rural women and men into the encompassing industrialization agenda of the post-colonial state. The wealth and status differentials imposed between households and between men and women provided labor force divisions easily exploitable by the industrializing needs of state and foreign interests. As Malaysia's independence from colonial rule had been "negotiated for by aristocratic Malay officials,"⁹ Malaysia's

⁹Ibid, p. 34.

industrialization/"development" process was one facilitated by the triumvirate of the national government, official state Islamic leadership and foreign business. The incorporation of the *kampung* into the "the wider economy and state system"¹⁰ and institutional control over *kampung* life by these integrated elements have forced economic, social, and cultural transformations of the *kampung* which have propelled women into factory employment and new, contested roles as a specific "nascent proletariat."¹¹

Although the participation of rural women in wage labor is a recent phenomenon, women in *kampung* society have always been a part of the rural labor force. While carrying out most of the reproductive work of childrearing, subsistence cultivation (family food gardens, maintenance of livestock, etc.) and household chores, women have also traditionally participated in the larger agricultural productive processes of planting and harvesting. Where household and kinship cooperation in village economic activities have formed the bases for divisions of labor by sex and age, women's labor constitutes an integral part of *kampung* livelihood and survival. This *kampung* production structure consisting of intra- and inter-household cooperation provides networks for sharing the labor of domestic or reproductive duties, insuring women against isolation and over-burden in their work loads. The traditional reciprocity in the social and economic livelihood of the *kampung* reflects the undeniable notion that women's work has been both felt and recognized as vital to village life. Women's socio-economic roles and their recognition thereof, however, does not reveal their overall status in the community.

The socio-cultural structures surrounding women's lives and work in the *kampung* articulate their roles and status through belief systems and practices whose relationship to the *kampung* socio-economy shift with specific historical situations. As

¹⁰Ibid, p. 33.

¹¹Ibid, p. 146.

Ong points out, the cultural construction of gender is "rooted in the historically produced interactions between Islam and Malay *adat* (customary sayings, practices, and law) in a peasant economy."¹² At the intersection of indigenous culture and acquired Islamic principles are a complex of (and often contradictory) perceptions of women and their social roles and coded behavior. For example, Islamic teachings place familial authority formally in the father, which coincide with traditional beliefs that see men as more spiritually vigilant than women, while *adat* carries on a matrifocality which finds the mother at the center of household council and grandmothers as "the ultimate source of wisdom and comfort."¹³ That "*adat* recognizes the mother-child bond as more fundamental than formal descent through the father"¹⁴ is reflected by the widespread matrilineal customs of land inheritance (*adat perpatih*) in parts of Malaysia.¹⁵

Meanwhile, the young unmarried woman is "both dominated and feared"¹⁶ in *adat* and Muslim customs. In *adat* she is regarded as the most vulnerable to possession by *kena hantu* (angry spirits), her fertility is seen as the possible site of entrance by *langsuir* (female *hantu* which preys on pregnant women), and her movement within the village is thus highly restricted to protect her from lurking spirits, placing her under the "social monitoring ... and moral custody of father, brother, and other male kin."¹⁷ The Islamic influences which shape marriage and inheritance patterns reinforce the position of male authority, giving religio-legal legitimization to moral and cultural assumptions through the institutional control over the broader realm of social and cultural practices. The systemic breadth of Muslim cultural ideals (and their confluence and conflicts with

¹²Ibid, p. 89.

¹³Ibid.

¹⁴Ibid.

¹⁵ In Haleh Afshar, ed., Women, State, and Ideology (Tavistock Publications, London and New York, 1985), Maila Stivins documents historical struggles by Malay *kampung* women for maintenance of traditions of matrilineal land inheritance, and the various attempts by different state regimes to coopt or replace such customary laws.

¹⁶Ong, p. 89.

¹⁷Ibid, p. 88.

adat) is most apparent when regarded in the context of the indigenous *kampung* society's new placements within Malaysia's growing bureaucratic state system.

In this context we see gender divisions and hierarchies intensified and at once more rigid and flexible, as the needs of the state and the *kampung* transform. The economic dynamics which have projected women into new roles as wage laboreres can be seen more and more clearly in their socio-cultural manifestations as these changes take place. The formation of Malaysia's post-colonial state has included the institutionalization of Islamic religious codes along with modernization policies directed at socializing the vast rural populations into the industrializing national economy. Party politicking and the establishment of foreign (Western and "westernized" Japanese) factories in Free Trade Zones (FTZ's) have brought infrastructural "development" into *kampung* society. Local Malay political parties vying for administrative control, built roads, set up schools and clinics and village administrative bureaus in their campaigns to create new constituencies in the village peasantry. Reflecting a complementary relationship between the Islamic fundamentalist state and its economic interests and identity as a "developing" participant in world trade, these institutions include programs for women which are precoded by notions of women's social marginality.

Taking advantage of *adat's* protectorate rules for young women which traditionally require their prolonged participation in domestic labor and farming assistance beyond that of young men, the new educational systems were immediately most beneficial for boys. Girls are encouraged to go to school, but generally must stop earlier than boys to help with family subsistence as the young men leave the village in search of urban employment. Concurrently, health clinics often become centers for state manipulation of family planning when "development concerns" have prompted contraceptive programs or when (as in 1984) population laws constitute crises in the

reproduction of labor for the expanding economy.¹⁸ The cultural contradictions for rural women inherent in the "development" process become manifold as the state economic agenda invites foreign manufacturing companies into Free Trade Zones set-up in close proximity to village lands.

The FTZ's and the multinational factories they house have contributed to the social "development" planning of the Malaysian state, alchemizing with state-sponsored Islamic fundamentalist programs and an infiltrated and transforming (and yet still resilient and at times resistant) indigenous society, in an effort to supply themselves with the most profitable labor supply. Many factories have joined in the construction of schools, influencing the development of curricula to direct educational processes towards stratified training to track young village Malays into various occupational "openings" (closures?) in the "developing" nation, with a special interest in securing the capital-efficient labor required by the factories' multinational operations. The increasingly marginal viability of the peasant economy (as noted earlier) and its growing dependence on multiple incomes and shared family labor, along with the collusion of traditional and Islamic cultural constructions of gender hierarchy, are the socio-economic and cultural contexts in which young *kampung* women have been channeled into wage labor -- a new position with highly debated status.

While state programs, such as the Community Development Program organized by the Ministry of Agriculture in 1978, emphasized women's roles as homemakers with classes in "childcare, nutrition, general hygiene, sewing, home budgeting,"¹⁹ and some adult literacy courses, mainly for married peasant women, the emphasis in schooling for young girls differs little from this agenda. Aside from the minimal reading, writing and arithmetic skills they receive, schooling provides young girls primarily with increased obedience training and deference to authority. Although it has been noted that girls have

¹⁸Ibid, p. 52.

¹⁹Ibid.

tended to do better in the earlier grades than boys, they are rarely encouraged to pursue a higher education. Needed at home to perform household tasks and subsistence work with their parents, girls do not usually continue their educations beyond age 14 or 16.²⁰ The secondary schools are mainly vocational, focused on preparing boys for "skilled" labor in carpentry, agriculture, and for some clerical jobs. As girls are not expected to become heads of households or enter into careers or permanent occupations, they continue with domestic responsibilities until marriage brings a wage earner or farmhand into the family. Because of the decline in *kampung* cash-cropping and subsistence survival and the flight of young men into urban areas seeking employment, it has become common practice to route young women just out of school into "temporary" work in the factories.

Young, unmarried women (*pemudi*) who complete the lower level of secondary school by passing the Form Three examination are often recruited immediately by factory representatives to apply for assembly line positions. Just after taking the exam, school trips to the local FTZ are frequently arranged, and many "conveniently enough ... [are offered] work as temporary operators while waiting for the results [of the examination]."²¹ Held at the crux of contradictory family expectations and the simultaneous need for the additional remittance supplied by the extra income, these young rural women have come to comprise over 90%²² of the labor force in the electronics firms. In the following section, I will discuss in more depth, the hiring practices of the factories, working conditions and labor discipline in the factories; the impacts of these forces on the women; and management, government, local village, and the wider society's perceptions of these women. This information will provide the

²⁰Ibid, p. 92.

²¹Ibid, p. 93.

²²Linda Lim, "Women Workers in Multinational Corporations: The Case of the Electronics Industry in Malaysia and Singapore", in *Michigan Occasional Paper*(No. 9, 1978).

context for the central focus of my paper surrounding the subsequent reconstruction of young working women's social positions and the ensuing sites of social and cultural ruptures -- breaks which become possible openings for the women's participation in creating new identities in the context of their struggle against isolation and exploitation in the multinational factories.

Part I: Section Two

This section will look at the employment practices of the multinational electronics firms in Malaysia, their impact on women workers, and subsequent social transformations, to provide a basis for the discussion of changing gender constructions in the globalization of Western capitalism and emerging struggles against exploitation by Third World women. The strategies of labor recruitment and worker discipline used by the factories in Malaysia can be seen as specifically designed to take advantage of local cultural and social norms, and at the same time they introduce clearly new and foreign structures into the lives of the workers and their communities. It is this intersection of forces reconstructing women's social and cultural status and identity which lies at the root of my questions and assertions regarding the reconceptualization of Third World women's resistance.

The description here of electronics factory work will emphasize two main aspects of work for women -- labor discipline and management-worker relations, and the women's changing relationships to their communities, themselves and the wider Malay society. The labor-intensive work of electronics parts manufacturing involves tedious and repetitive assembly of the micro-chips found in our answering machines, digital clocks and radios, microwave ovens, calculators, computers, and the circuitry for satellites, sophisticated aircraft, and various telecommunications systems. Vital to the production of such instruments, the small parts assembly of the initial chips fabricated in these "off-shore" production sites requires patience, attention to detail, and skillful manipulation of miniscule tools and materials. The work is considered to be menial, and women are employed with minimal training and "skill" to perform jobs seen to be unsuitable for men and people with higher skill-level and intelligence.

As an "untrained" labor force of "menial" assembly workers, the women are subjected to strict supervision and tightly controlled work regimens. Discipline and

speed are requisites of the labor-intensive, high out-put production, and the hiring practices and management of the shop floor are carefully designed to ensure the most efficiency in production. Such efforts by the companies are manifested in complex socializing strategies reflecting calculated interplay between ideology and cultural manipulation. Evident in the earliest stages of labor recruitment and continuously relied upon as control mechanisms throughout the workers' terms in the factory (and extending beyond this time as well), tactics and policies of social control set the cultural framework within which women's proletarianization is to be understood.

In the highly competitive electronics industry, where technological innovation and fluctuating market demands threaten to destabilize a company's profit margin, the ability to secure sources of cheap and efficient labor is of primary importance.²³ While some researchers suggest that the industry's reliance on technical upgrading and innovation implies a growing trend towards more capital-intensive labor in automated plants requiring a smaller labor pool with higher skill,²⁴ their arguments generally conclude that the shifting back and forth between labor and capital-intensive production processes is in fact cyclical, and that cheap labor continues to return as a priority following periods of employment slow-downs while companies upgrade and develop new technologies (work which is done primarily in the "core" countries).²⁵ Also, the testing of new products and machinery often takes place in the off-shore plants, where minimal labor protection policies accommodate sporadic and brief plant openings and the hiring of

²³Susan Green, "Silicon Valley's Women Workers: A Theoretical Analysis of Sex-Segregation in the Electronics Industry Labor Market," in Nash and Fernández-Kelly, eds., Women, Men, and the International Division of Labor (SUNY Press, Albany; 1983), p. 285.

²⁴John F. Keller, "The Division of Labor in Electronics", in Nash and Fernández-Kelly, p. 357; Soon Kyoung Cho, "The Labor Process and Capital Mobility: The Limits of the New International Division of Labor," in *Politics and Society* (Vol. 14, No. 2, 1985), p. 186.

²⁵Cho, 1985; Keller, Green in Nash and Fernández-Kelly, 1983; Lim, 1978; Fernández-Kelly in Arthur MacEwan and William K. Tabb, eds., Instability and Change in the World Economy (Monthly Review Press, New York, 1989).

workers on a temporary basis.²⁶ Fernández-Kelly and Rachel Grossman both confirm that the increasingly popular practice of hiring female labor in electronics production has shown that "assembly work did not shrink over time, but was reorganized to provide greater flexibility and rapid response to specific markets,"²⁷ thus drawing "a new category of people into the workforce."²⁸ As Susan Green points out, "the primary goal of capital has been to increase social control,"²⁹ an observation which aligns with those of the authors cited above to confirm that because labor is a crucial aspect of profitability for electronics companies, labor management becomes an intensive part of the operations of production.

Labor management of the women workers in electronics is particularly designed along gender and culture lines within the broader dynamics of imperialist relations between First and Third World countries. The practices noted below delineate "sophisticated human relations techniques"³⁰ historically situated in the particular moment of late capitalism and its reconstructions of social placement and identity through multiple layers of socio-cultural assertions born out of its complex economic and political requirements. The operation of such techniques can be recognized in the electronics industries in Malaysia where certain of them are aimed at "specifically exploit[ing] the traditionally defined attributes of femininity ... while creating a factory lifestyle distinct from that of the general society."³¹

²⁶Donna Haraway, in Simians, Cyborgs, and Women (Routledge, New York, 1991), aptly points out: "Our best machines are made of sunshine; they are all light and clean because they are nothing but signals, electromagnetic waves ... [they are] eminently portable, mobile-- a matter of immense human pain in Detroit and Singapore"(p. 153).

²⁷Fernández-Kelly in MacEwan and Tabb, p. 148.

²⁸Rachel Grossman, "Women's Place in the Integrated Circuit," Southeast Asia Chronicle (No. 66, 1979), p. 8.

²⁹Green in Nash and Fernández-Kelly, p. 279.

³⁰Grossman, p. 3.

³¹Ibid, pp. 3-4.

The research of Aihwa Ong, Linda Lim, Rachel Grossman and others have revealed a complex of racist and sexist ideologies underlying factory employment policies targeting young Third World women. As mentioned earlier, the young rural women who comprise over 90% of the electronics employees in Malaysia are channeled into factory work between the ages of 15 and 24, many of them straight out of junior high or high school (or approximate equivalent). Coming out of the patriarchal, rural family, women entering work in the factories are already conditioned to defer to authority, especially that of males. Factory employers are well aware of this, and exploit this dynamic in their orientation of new workers to factory demands. The companies are also aware of the benefit of hiring young *kampung* women with little or no experience in wage work or "modern" lifestyles (who are assumed to be less likely to reflect on and contest work conditions, wage rates, etc.), and state their preference for the "inexperienced" in their job announcements.³² The factories in Malaysia prefer unmarried women -- to the extent that many have incorporated this prerequisite into their hiring policies -- because it removes the "burden of maternity benefits,"³³ provides a rationale for low wages based on the assumption that the women do not have families to support,³⁴ and assures a high turnover rate (because the women are expected to eventually leave when they marry a real breadwinner), which prevents upward mobility, wage increases, and skill development in the factory.³⁵ Short term employment also discourages workers from organizing labor unions and forming demands for better wages, conditions and job

³²Cho, p. 207.

³³Lim, p. 12.

³⁴ Information provided earlier in this paper regarding the sexual division of employment (and unemployment) amongst *kampung* women and men supports the understanding that the majority of the factory women's wages contribute significantly to the survival of their families, to whom most of their earnings go.

³⁵ It should be noted that another factor stimulating high turn-over rates is the physical deterioration of the workers themselves as a result of long hours of intensive work. Eyestrain, back pains, chemical burns, headaches, and psychic and emotional breakdowns are common ailments incurred in the work. In *Geography of Gender*, Janet Henshall Momsen and Janet Townsend cite pregnancy complications and infertility as additional physical disorders from electronics production work. (p. 79)

stability. Due to the fluctuating electronics market, companies rely heavily on the flexibility to close down factories on short notice when profitability so demands. The dependent local government accommodates the whims of the industry with pliable Free Trade Zones and policies banning or restricting unions and locking wages,³⁶ a point I will return to in more detail later. On top of these "qualifications" for disciplined, docile and time efficient, high out-put labor, the multinational companies expect a certain amount of dexterity from the women, previously acquired from traditional work sewing and craftwork.

While many of these characteristics may have been developed prior to factory work conditioning, their significance in defining a preferred labor force (female) has set them into stereotypes of the Malaysian woman institutionalized by the foreign companies. The dependent relationship of the Malaysian state on multinational economic "development" plays an integrative part in incorporating the forces of capital's needs into local modernization socialization, systematically reducing women's roles and identifications to realms seemingly more restricted than traditional *kampung* culture allowed. Although there are contradictions for the Islamic state ideology in supporting the entrance of women, especially young, unmarried women, into wage labor,³⁷ the designation of electronics as a "priority industry" has overridden some of the state's traditional ideals and prompted them to support multinational corporate demand for unskilled female labor.³⁸ The following excerpt from a government brochure displays such loyalty to foreign firms seeking "nimble-fingered women willing to assemble integrated circuits for less than U.S. \$2 a day".³⁹

The manual dexterity of the oriental female is famous the world over. Her hands are small and she works fast with extreme care. Who, therefore, could be better

³⁶Lim, p. 16; Ong, p. 148.

³⁷Lim, p. 8; Ong, p. 179.

³⁸Lim, p. 7.

³⁹Business Week (March 30, 1974), pp. 38-39, as quoted in Lim, p. 7.

qualified by nature and inheritance to contribute to the efficiency of a bench-assembly production line than the oriental girl?⁴⁰

In addressing the people, Malaysia's Deputy Prime Minister chastised:

Workers must uphold their dignity and not cause problems that would scare away foreign investors. They should instead be more productive so that the government efforts to attract investors would be successful.⁴¹

Meanwhile, inside the factory, the gruelling 10-16 hour (average) shifts on the small stools, bent over microscopes, or tubs of toxic chemicals are carried out under a strange combination of disciplinary strategies which include constant (male) supervision, few breaks, no talking allowed, and simultaneous paternalistic behavior by managers advising the women to see the company as a "family" wherein they are the cherished daughters. In addition, it has become common practice in most factories to invest in "non-monetary incentives ... aimed at increasing productivity and reducing voluntary turnover."⁴² The women are encouraged to compete with each other for high production rates, enticed with offers of pay bonuses and prizes. Further, "incentive" programs ranging from outdoor recreation events to beauty contests and cosmetics giveaways, effectively become tools for acculturating the young rural women into new positions of submission with the glamorous veneer of (male asserted) Western femininity and its deeper implications of supplication and passivity.

This last point represents key issues regarding women's positions within the "modernization/development" process. The phenomenon of Western culture and gender acculturation through the international industries, widely researched by anthropologists, feminists, and political-economists, is an explicit force of social transformation through the integrated mechanisms of cultural control asserted by essential capitalist interests in labor control. In her article "Women's Place in the

⁴⁰"Malaysia: The Solid State for Electronics," government brochure as quoted in Grossman, p. 8.

⁴¹Grossman, p. 8.

⁴²Lim, p. 26.

Integrated Circuit," Rachel Grossman provides detailed documentation of the gender specific "recreational activities" mentioned above undertaken mostly in the American companies, such as beauty contests, cooking and cosmetics classes, talent contests, and even "guess whose legs these are" contests. Organized by special labor relations task forces and personnel management divisions, the deployment of new sexualities and values within the women's workplace can be seen as attempts at establishing inseparably personal identifications with the factory, new consumer values and interests, and, most profoundly, gender identities complementary to the strict discipline enforced by the male dominated management.

In Spirits of Resistance and Capitalist Discipline: Factory Women in Malaysia, Ong focuses in depth on the use of surveillance, monitoring of workers, and other forms of labor control in the context of understanding the use and abuse of personal dynamics to increase productivity, and, in a broader sense, to ensure control over the workers' subjectivity to the extent that discontent, uprising, etc. is quelled before its inception. In the Japanese factories Ong visited and studied, the women worked under constant supervision by lineleaders, foreman and general supervisors. The overseers, who must regulate work paces to meet the high-output demands of the market, regard the women's work with strict scrutiny, creating a high strung, controlled atmosphere. The women are required to wear (often ill-fitting) factory uniforms, refrain from talking, and must adhere to a battery of petty rules which together create a tightly restricted space within which they carry out the already stressful pressures to fulfill the pre-calculated production targets. While Ong cites the low wages as incentives underscoring the women's complicity with the disciplinary regimens surrounding their work -- where floor supervisors tally individual out-put levels for cash bonus rewards or "micropunishments" (demerits, pay docks, layoffs) -- she makes clear the factory-engineered extension of traditional value systems utilized to extract the most effective obedience from the workers.

Instead of enculturating the workers with new sexualities and values, the Japanese factories Ong studied redesigned the women's already existing relationships to discipline and authority by superimposing appropriated local traditional values onto the fundamentally alien work regimens of factory assembly production.⁴³ The surveillance of the work, the in-factory rules and regulations, and the effort by many of the factories to encourage or require the young women to reside in factory dormitories are structures implemented through expectations about *kampung* women's deference to male authority and pious social and religious values. Relying on families' socialization of their daughters for social control of the workers, the companies assumed the position of an extended family. Implementing their guardianship, however, within the tightly controlled labor monitoring practices of mass production work, the factories create new translations of traditional power relations. Ong's findings suggest that the use of local Malay social dynamics inserted within the worker-control mechanisms of the multinational corporations forms a unique cultural framework, a "nascent," gendered work culture ultimately discontinuous with the women's "native" culture.

The disruptive nature of such disciplinary practices is made clear by examples from Ong's work on worker distress and dissatisfaction. Ong explains that

[The] change from village social contexts, in which women were seldom monitored by someone in their work but enjoyed self-determination in setting the pace of their daily activities, was traumatic. ⁴⁴

One of the workers remarked that:

It would be nice working here if the *foreman, managers*, all the staff members and clerks understand that the workers are not under their *control*.⁴⁵

Another woman, commenting on the strict and rigorous demands of labor management said:

⁴³Ong, p. 174.

⁴⁴Ibid, p. 168.

⁴⁵Ibid.

I hate it if I get orders to do this, do that ... My friends sometimes get angry because of the endless orders to work fast⁴⁶

A co-worker expressed:

We don't want to be shackled as if we were forced to work. If we are being tricked then we must do the work, but if we are not, then don't force us. Sometimes they Pressurize us if production falls. [We are] forced to go beyond the target. It is the management that forces us⁴⁷

While the women were resistant to the pressures applied by the management, they were conditioned to regard their foremen as members in a "family" project. As with the women working in the Western companies, who were encouraged in individualistic attitudes through the competition incurred through the Western feminization programs and yet experienced the generalized subjugation to the aggregate authorities of the management and the seemingly monolithic power of high-tech, modern capitalist culture, the Malay women in the Japanese factories were pressured into deeper subservience by the integration of the dual authorities, familiar and unfamiliar -- expected and objectionable.

In both situations, discipline and subservience are imperatives which dominate the factory socialization processes, and whose implementation is fundamentally motivated by the companies' capital interests. The combination of techniques -- those which work to implant a passive and sexualized Western feminine identity, and those which compound traditional (Islamic and *adat*) hierarchical social relations based on the model of father authority and emphasis, especially for young women, on spiritual vigilance and disciplined adherence to assigned duties -- work as powerful discursive tools for shaping Malay women into ideal workers. Whether these practices are combined within one factory, they eventually intersect in a larger social realm where young rural women's wage work recomposes their relationships to traditional culture and a growing "modernizing," consumer state.

⁴⁶Ibid, p.164.

⁴⁷Ibid, p.165.

It has been the point of this section to emphasize the powerful processes of socialization and acculturation surrounding these women's forced entrance into wage work (and subsequent nascent consumerism). As the authors quoted here have shown, the exploitation of Malaysian women's labor relies on cultural control as well as the broader political and economic vulnerability of a "developing" state, whose own internal contradictions create cleavages for external social intervention by outside corporate interests. Thus a discussion of resistance to labor exploitation in the multinational industries must be located across many converging contexts. In the Part II I will expand on issues raised by Aihwa Ong and others regarding the "discursive" power of factory discipline, the "development" of capitalist culture (and cultural logic), the changing Malay state, and the implications thereof for these new generations of women who are emerging into and creating, directly and indirectly, new social spaces with as yet uncharted trajectories for organization and struggle. A central issue for this discussion will be the phenomenon of spirit possession on the factory floor by numerous Malay women assembly workers.

Part II

This part, as the focal point of my paper, is about rethinking resistance. Based on the information presented earlier about Malaysian women's experiences with capitalism and changing cultural and social constructs, I see a need to redefine resistance according to the new configurations of oppression emerging in the "developing" Third World as late capitalism expands its extraction of resources more deeply into the realms of the cultural and personal. It is my purpose to develop the framework for rethinking resistance by drawing together current analyses of late capitalism, changing subject positions and identities, and expanding strategies and locations of resistance and social change. More specifically, this work will confront the problematics of defining what constitutes resistance, and what, in the form of consciousness and action, is required of "effective" resistance in contexts such as that of the "neophyte" factory women in Malaysia.

Ong's documentation of Malay women's spirit possessions on the factory floor, and Rachel Grossman and Linda Lim's analyses of Malay factory women's changing gender constructions in newly established social and cultural spaces introduced by capitalism and "development" to show that the women's positions as workers, women, and *kampung* daughters, their acculturation, subjectivity, and social identity/placement constitute elements of social/political life which play significantly into the problematics of representations of resistance and oppositional movements. In looking at the exploitation of Malay women working in the multinational factories, and at capitalism's and patriarchy's critics of it, I call into question Marxism and feminism as major paradigms. I undertake such a critique especially with regard to their specific analyses and approaches to resistance, as they are markers inscribing political space with terms designating a relationship between domination and its opposition. The heterogeneous and international division of labor in late capitalism and the culturally complex and specific labor and consumer control tactics of multinational corporations push the boundaries of

conventional and hegemonic discourses of opposition and resistance, forcing us to rethink revolutionary analyses of class consciousness and class struggle and gender oppression and liberation. My interrogation of Marxist and Western feminist discourses will weave through layers of discussion of Malay women factory workers, spirit possession, capitalist acculturation, and post-colonial national and global dynamics. By means of contemporary political and cultural critiques, I will suggest that the theoretical underpinnings of the work by Ong, Grossman, and Lim imply the radical importance of acknowledged difference, self-determination, and autonomy with networked support, as key issues in addressing effective resistance. Ultimately, this project bends reflexively around for me, onto broader issues of political representation and organizing internationally, and more immediately here at home.

A major area of analysis of resistance amongst the Malay factory women is the status of consciousness in the forms of in-factory resistance (e.g. spirit possession, work slow-downs, etc.) and assertions of new positions within the social/cultural arenas of family and community already activated by the women. Interpreting the constructions and roles of consciousness in these arenas will involve interpreting the parameters of consciousness possible within the social politics of the emerging capitalist consumer culture in relationship with native social politics, including the traditions of rural Malay society and the "modernizing" Malay state. An important debate which arises as part of this discussion revolves around the paradoxical effects of capitalist "development" for peasant and working class Third World women whose survival often depends now increasingly on wage labor and the growing availability of new technologies (from sewing machines to kitchen sinks), while the deployment of "development" takes place through the agendas of the First World corporate interests and ideologies which

subjugate women through labor exploitation and manipulation of social status and desires with a proliferation of sexist media images.⁴⁸

Because episodes of spirit possession cannot be categorized to determine conscious and intentional resistance to factory discipline, nor can the assertion of independence from the *kampung* families and the participation in modern, consumer lifestyles be understood as explicitly anti-patriarchal and empowered positions -- I propose there is a need for theoretical expansion of sites of resistance and modes of forming identity. It is my contention that the Malaysian factory women are neither fully liberated and empowered subjects nor entirely subjugated and without voice. Instead, their contradictory positions as simultaneously exploited and controlled workers and as wage earners with the power to consume and to a certain extent define new identities create social ruptures through which variable, "differential"⁴⁹ consciousnesses can emerge. Also, the particular physical-spiritual responses to the felt violations of body and spirit within the factory, in the form of spirit possessions, affirm the existence of an internal or personal authority which I think resides as a fundamental resource in the grounding of personal subjectivity, throughout its many reconfigurations in the socius. What I mean by personal authority is not a transcendent and autonomous "self," but a beingness, a primary awareness which responds to surrounding conditions despite the unavoidable forces constructing perception itself. Thus, although the women engaging in factory work and the new social, economic, and cultural trajectories of "development" do not necessarily have a conceptual distance from such experiences, these experiences do get translated through their (and our) specific subjectivities, the uniqueness of which cannot be generalized and which decides the capacity for responding and expressing

⁴⁸ In her article "Sweet Darlings in the Media" in the August, 1983 issue of the Multinational Monitor, Jill Gay provides specific documentation of "How foreign corporations sell Western images of women to the Third World," (p. 19) making clear the profitability of acculturating women to commodity consumption.

⁴⁹ Definitions of "differential" consciousness will be explained in more detail in the later discussion of new theoretical propositions made by Third World feminists.

opposition within the terms of their specific experiences and dispositions. It is this understanding which lies at the root of what Chela Sandoval, bell hooks, Audre Lorde and other U.S. Third World women have termed "differential oppositional consciousness" and which is a hermeneutic tool to break through boundaries set by traditional Marxist and Western feminist hegemony over discourses of oppression, resistance and its articulations.⁵⁰

I will evaluate these circumstances and hypothesize my thesis through profiles of the dynamics of late capitalism as described in works by Michel Foucault, Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari, June Nash, and others, with a return to Aihwa Ong, Rachel Grossman, and Linda Lim's explanations of spirit possession on the factory floor and assertions of new cultural identities by Malay women workers in the multinational corporations. This will provide bases for discussion of theoretical contestations made by Aihwa Ong, Linda Lim, Dianne Elson and Ruth Pearson on contradictions for Third World women in capitalist "development"; Chela Sandoval, bell hooks, Gloria Anzaldúa, Donna Haraway, and Ernesto Laclau and Chantal Mouffe on subjectivity, consciousness, ideology, and resistance.

* * *

Multinational Capitalism

A brief sketch of the present designs in the late capitalist system is necessary to provide a clearer context for discussing the situation of Third World women employed in multinational industries and the reconstruction of social space in the "development" of their societies. In The Condition of Postmodernity, David Harvey describes the advent of flexible accumulation as the predominant mode of surplus extraction and vitality of the industrial capitalist system. Based on the need to generate new markets and to extract the highest surplus value, flexible accumulation and specialization of production involve the

⁵⁰Chela Sandoval, "U.S. Third World Feminism: The Theory and Method of Oppositional Consciousness in the Postmodern World," in Genders (No. 10, Spring, 1991).

rapid manufacturing of a variety of products with the minimal amount of productive complexity. Relying primarily on labor intensive production, flexible accumulation maximizes profit through specialized production of commodities consumable by mass amounts of people. Harvey sees flexible accumulation maintaining the basic formats of Fordist modes of regulating production and consumption through cohering "managerial strategies ... socialization of the worker to long hours of routinized work ... firm connection with Keynesian fiscal policies and state control over pricing and social welfare,"⁵¹ which worked in conjunction with Taylorist techniques of "scientific management" of time and space in assembly line production. But in order to be flexible, capitalist modes of accumulation are expanding out of certain rigidities of the "bureaucratic corporate rationality" of earlier Fordist model. Also, modes of regulation have become more specialized, as seen in the multinational manufacturing industries spread out across the globe today, where the flexible regimes of accumulation are deeply tied in with the adjacent development of specialized modes of regulation as described by M. Aglietta and Alain Lipietz. Examples of modes of regulation, like those alluded to throughout this paper so far, include "non-economic" trajectories such as government restrictions on unionizing, social welfare programs, educational institutions, advertising and military intervention.

Where "economies of scope have beaten out economies of scale,"⁵² with capitalism's "imploding centralization"⁵³ and spread across vaster geographical and social space, this fragmentation does not imply a dis-integration into disorganization, but rather, "tight[er] organiza[tion] *through* dispersal, geographic mobility, and flexible responses in labour markets, labour processes, and consumer markets."⁵⁴

⁵¹David Harvey, The Condition of Postmodernity (Basil Blackwell, Oxford and Cambridge, 1989), pp.134-5, 145.

⁵²Ibid, p. 155.

⁵³Ibid, p. 159.

⁵⁴Ibid.

Thus, capitalism's matrices of power are far-reaching in their "fleeting, ephemeral, fugitive"⁵⁵ and yet structurally consolidated coordinates. Multinational capitalism routes its movements through neo-imperialist political and social relations and as networked alliances between manufacturers and corporate advertising, financial institutions, media, and news agencies. Multinational capitalism employs an international division of labor and an international division of consumers. The incorporation of more and more people into capitalist production and consumption means increased systemic control over vast sections of the world. The effects of this are rapid yet uneven "development" of "underdeveloped" areas into consuming publics. Multinational capitalism, while seeking out productive efficiency, cheap labor, widened access to its fundamental resources, etc (a quest carried out with calculated great sensitivity to flexibility and unfixity, economically, culturally, and politically), can be seen to have a decided "manifest destiny" to acclimate the world to capitalism, to "progress" that it may access the physical and social terrains it requires to survive.

As the preceding analyses explain, production in late capitalism relies heavily on socio-cultural reproduction, to the extent that labor control and consumer control are integrated processes involving a powerful investment in acculturation. Where Marx theorized the interdependent and dialectical connection between economic and social production -- what he termed base and superstructure, theorists and practitioners of a later or neo-Marxism have realized the need to understand capitalism's impacts on culture as structurally different than in earlier moments of industrial and monopoly capitalism. As use value recedes and becomes further distanced from immediate production and consumption relations, our very notions of use and need become manipulated by the needs of capital to expand commodification onto the cultural terrains of lifestyle. Personal representations of identity and the intimacy of transcribing our

⁵⁵Ibid, p. 171.

feelings and notions of self and community become infused with wage labor relations and those of commodity consumption. Thus cultural hegemony, as predicted by Gramsci, is no longer a machination of the dominance of a distinct ruling class' values and ideologies, but a far more subtle and systemic transfusion of practices and perceptions through the intimacy of our daily dependence on capitalist relations of consumption and the subsumption of social, political, and cultural spaces and systems into coalescing relationships of legitimation and reinforcement with the economic and with each other.

While this relationship is evident in core countries where the commoditization of traditionally non-economic realms has erased boundaries separating supposedly autonomous spheres of economic production, culture, and social relationships, the hegemonic force of capitalism as systemic culture is wildly evident in its multinational dynamics. Much of the same phenomena of late capitalism which occur in the "core," surrounding the "destabilization of the 'referent' behind use value -- its breaking down into socio-cultural values, as production and consumption turn into exchange value"⁵⁶ - occur in the "periphery" as well. The impacts of late capitalist imperative on society and culture brought into Third World countries by multinational corporations, however, are transmitted through the additional layers of political and economic dynamics between the First and Third Worlds, and through the language (practices) of "development." The resulting configurations are not necessarily nameable, but must be recognized.⁵⁷ Even in countries such as Taiwan, Singapore, and Hong Kong, where "peripheral Fordism" -- increasing automation in production paralleled with an increasing mass of petty consumers, the rise of political and social institutions, etc. -- is raising their status in world markets as possible "second world" competitors, the imperatives of the

⁵⁶Class notes from "Postmodernism & Late Capitalism", with Professor Donald Lowe, Spring 1990.

⁵⁷ One configuration is that of the new and contradictory situation Malay factory women are in, socially, culturally, and personally as a result of their work in multinational factories and the larger effects of "development"-through-multinational-investment on their society.

dominating First World economies,⁵⁸ their capital and political/military interests, maintain glass ceilings over "development," locking in the dynamics of "development/underdevelopment." Thus, the relationship between production and consumption and new forms of culture, and cultural control in "developing" Third World countries is accentuated by the political, economic, and socio-cultural structures through which the uneven power dynamics between the First and Third Worlds are structured.

Spirit Possession, New Identities, and Subjectivity

The discussion of Third World women's responses and resistances to capitalist "development" must take place in the context of the dynamics of the system described above. However, while the above analyses will provide an essential underpinning for regarding the manifestations of power the women face within the now broad social relations of production, it is inherent to aspects of my theses to undo tendencies towards asserting totalizing projections of their responses according to the effects of late capitalist acculturation assumed within the theories of its Western critics and analysts. Although I will refer to theoretical propositions set forth by Western cultural theorists, these references will be used as frameworks for setting more in depth contexts within which to raise questions regarding acculturation, subjectivity, and social identity/placement.⁵⁹

I am seeing the phenomenon of spirit possession both on its own terms as physical and spiritual subject response/articulation within the context of late

⁵⁸ The main First World economies dominating the flows of global capitalism right now are those of the U. S., Western Europe, and Japan. Although Japan can not be lumped in with the West, culturally and politically, it is Western-style capitalist culture which infuses much of Japan's multinational participation.

⁵⁹ Gyatri Spivak, in "The Political Economy of Women," in Elizabeth Weed, ed., Coming to Terms (Routledge, New York, 1989), p. 227, asks "how these narratives are de-hegemonized and made the site of emergent power in the self- and situation representation of the few female leaders within the Third World proletariat."

capitalism described above, and more specifically as concrete signification of the body and psyche and desire as central to subjectivity -- which I see as central to subjectivity, which is, in turn, central to the redefining of tactics of resistance coming from important critiques of and visioning beyond hegemonic definitions. The issues raised in Ong's book Spirits of Resistance and Capitalist Discipline: Factory Women in Malaysia, initiate explicit, if undeveloped, challenges to traditional structures of organizing and preexisting notions of female and feminist identity. By bringing forth ethnographic material on the marginal and shadowey issues of spirit possession and female resexualization and socialization in adopting Western lifestyles, Ong confronts resistance discourses focused on multinational capitalism and patriarchal domination with previously unseen subjects. I see the relevancy of their social beings and activities as conveyed through Ong's field work as necessitating a reprivileging of agents of change, in spite of the open-ended and difficult implications of such a rupture in discourses of political opposition. The expansion of the territories of resistance into these realms, the vital inclusion of subjects so key to multinational capitalist development and yet so effectively silenced by those forces and by those of national and international anti-imperialist and anti-patriarchal movements, make it an ambiguous and even dubious task of asserting models for praxis to rise forth from this realm. In the nature of my dual agenda here to conceptualize the strategic possibilities within new(ly acknowledged) subject realms and at the same time reverse tendencies toward discursive colonization of their subject dispositions and definitions -- a critical methodology which I think must remain inherent within the first project -- I seek here to extend questions raised by Ong, still without positing programmatic formulas or structural propositions for Malay, and other Third World women's organizing. Where Ong does the work of providing critical interpretive descriptions of Malay neophyte factory women and complex forces of industrialization in Peninsular Malaysia through critical

ethnography, I would like to carry the theoretical questions she raises further, into a rethinking of resistance.

Ong sees the factory women "caught between non-capitalist morality and capitalist discipline ... [where they] alternate between states of self-control and spirit possession."⁶⁰ At the crossroads of two cultures, spirit possession appears as an articulation of mixed language, generated from the cultural grounds of traditional communication and the impacts of the "culture," or discourse/discipline of the factory. In other words, spirit possession on the factory floor is a new utterance translatable only in relation to its specific context -- the "borderland"⁶¹ of the Free Trade Zone. Thus the questions: How does one interpret spirit possession? Are the episodes oppositional articulations? And if so, what are their effectivity, and how does one measure it? In her section on "Neophyte Factory Women in Malaysia," Ong asks: "Why are Malay women periodically possessed by spirits on the shop-floor of transnational corporations? Does the 'fetishization of evil' in the form of satan represent a mode of critique of capitalist relations? Or do spirit possessions represent cultural protests against acts of dehumanization?"⁶² Without ever directly posing answers to these questions, Ong's research reveals the integratedness of "capitalist relations" and "dehumanization" and unleashes spirit possession as a response to the physical and social constrictions imposed by these forces.

There reoccurs here the common problematic within social science, and particularly anthropological research, of interpreting culturally specific modes of expression. The specific historical and cultural situation within which these possessions are occurring, however, makes a space beyond both local Malay explanations of the

⁶⁰Ong, p. xiv.

⁶¹Chicana feminist theorist and poet Gloria Anzaldúa initializes the term "borderland" in her book Borderlands/La Frontera, to describe the location of consciousness for those "cradled in one culture, sandwiched between two cultures, straddling all three cultures and their value systems."(p. 78)

⁶²Ong, p.141.

phenomenon and those of the factory management for reading of spirit possession. While the frameworks through which the various parties involved place the outbreaks are indelible in defining the social impacts of spirit possession, it is the experiences of the social/subject bodies of the women themselves that I find to be profoundly significant in regarding the subjectivities of this nascent proletariat. The critical framework I am imposing is clearly structured by a critical view of capitalism and gender exploitation. Thus I am creatively speculating, but on the real terms of these women's location within multinational capitalist production. My inquiries are concerned primarily with the need to broaden conceptions of consciousness and resistance, as the Western capitalist and patriarchal systems spread into a myriad of cultures and lives.

In Malaysia, within the violence of industrialization, these peasant women's spirit possessions in the factories, for Ong, speak fundamentally of "social dislocation, draining of their essences, and violation of their humanity."⁶³ Ong clarifies that spirit possessions in the factories were not necessarily "directed ultimately at 'capital',"⁶⁴ which is consistent within her Foucaultian analysis of the power relations within the factory, where "operations of modern power are in fact productive rather than repressive" in that the power/knowledge relation embedded in the physical and social (discursive) disciplinary techniques work to "implant" reworked self-conceptions as to initiate self regulation and repression.⁶⁵ In this understanding of late capitalism's

⁶³Ong, p. 220. Also, Ackerman and Lee in "Communication and Cognitive Pluralism in a Spirit Possession Event in Malaysia," in American Ethnologist, 1981, emphasize the connection between harsh working conditions, overbearing managerial authority, and the lack of collective representation in the workplace and the high incidence of spirit possessions in a shoe factory in Malacca. Lim sees similar connections in "Multinational Firms and Manufacturing for Export in Less-Developed Countries: The Case of the Electronics Industry in Malaysia and Singapore," as reprinted in excerpt in Michigan Occasional Paper, No. 9 (1978). Agarwal also cites "hysteria" and spirit possession in assembly plants as a form of protest, in Structures of Patriarchy (Zed Books, London; 1988).

⁶⁴Ong, p. 202.

⁶⁵Ong, p. 3.

multiple sites of control, especially of the cultural and personal through the constant dissemination of power laden discourses (which become and enact discipline), "class consciousness" is diffuse in its manifestations, as is the discipline power which stimulates it. Thus, spirit possession, while "not directed at 'capital'" as an enclosed entity, may be seen as retaliatory as it breaks imposed regulations and self-repression.

Where Ong speaks of the women's "fundamental humanity," I would go further to describe this humanity as centered in what Foucault terms "bio-power" or "somato-power" (what I have earlier loosely called personal authority) of the subject. Where desire is produced by the discourses/disciplines of labor and consumer relations, there also exists "bio-power", the subject's power to desire, the power to generate power.⁶⁶ As Foucault points out, "individuals are the vehicles of power, not its points of application,"⁶⁷ and "power is strong because ... it produces effects at the level of desire" (which it also produces)⁶⁸. Thus, "they [the individual] are always in the position of simultaneously undergoing and exercising power."⁶⁹ Foucault's claim is that

power relations can materially penetrate the body in depth, without depending even on the mediation of the subject's own representations. If power takes hold on the body, this isn't through its having first to be interiorised in people's consciousnesses. There is a network of bio-power, or, somato-power, which acts as the formative matrix ... within which we seem at once to recognise and lose ourselves.⁷⁰

Power here is both that exerted through the institutions of capitalism and that of personal subjectivity. The interactions between the two take place through the various

⁶⁶Hakim Bey, in The Temporary Autonomous Zone: Ontological Anarchy and Poetic Terrorism (Autonomedia, Brooklyn, 1985), speaks similarly of being "the monarch of your own skin.... [where] the only true conflict is that between the tyrant & the authority of the realized self."(pp.3, 46) He sees the dilemma of the subject, who, while "crawling between the cracks between the walls of church, state, school & factory ... the unveiling of self/nature transmogrifies a person into a brigand-- like stepping into another world then returning to this one to discover you've been declared a traitor, heretic, exile." (pp. 4, 21).

⁶⁷Michel Foucault, Power/Knowledge (Pantheon Books, New York, 1972-1980), p. 98.

⁶⁸Ibid, p. 59.

⁶⁹Op. Cit.

⁷⁰Ibid, p. 186.

trajectories I have described in this paper, "a net-like organization", on both micro [personal] and macro [global, institutional] levels. The dynamics and relationships impacting the lives of young Malay women in multinational work are "the infinitesimal ...subtle ... mechanisms [as they are] invested, colonized, utilized, involuted, transformed, displaced, extended, etc. by ever more general mechanisms and by forms of global domination."⁷¹

In Anti-Oedipus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia, Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari analyze the power of the subject in capitalism also in terms of a complex and phenomenological relationship between the individual, the "socius," and its "reterritorializations" by the the flows of capitalism. In this, they acknowledge the break down between the constructed subject/object splits of self and society, inside [psychology] and outside [culture], human and inanimate object.⁷² If the socius is society as organized in terms of space, state structure, and capital money, and culture flows through all of these by means of representations, and the subject is coded in terms of these representations and their physico-discursive power, then there is no separation or autonomy of the subject from the socius. However, in the fragmented, rapid and forceful coding of needs and desires by capital in this late, multinational moment, signs and perceptions are constantly redefined, revalued, and relocated, creating a "schizo-society."⁷³ In this schizo society, while social and political institutions attempt to fix various subject identities, the stability is constantly undone by capitalism's redesigning of needs and desires. This does not suggest that capitalism's unfixity is liberating and that its discursive powers are unstable, but that through the experiences of de- and

⁷¹Ibid, pp. 98-9.

⁷²Otherwise known as chaos, which "comes before all principles of order & entropy ... a spontaneous ... order ... [which has been] overthrown by ... moralists, phalocrats, banker-priests, fit lords for serfs."(Bey, pp.3, 21, 18).

⁷³The authors analyze reterritorialization processes in different historical moments and corresponding configurations of power. I am focusing here on this process as it manifests in the specific dynamics of late capitalism.

reterritorialization of our bodies (social and physical), we are set in constant production of desire.⁷⁴ And according to Deleuze and Guattari, "desire constantly couples continuous flows and partial objects that are by nature fragmentary and fragmented. Desire causes the current to flow, itself flows in turn, and breaks the flows."⁷⁵ Despite the cultural conditioning of our perceptions by the agencies of capitalism, like advertising, and other prominent modes of regulation mentioned earlier,⁷⁶ the multiplicity of these codings undo earlier repressive fixed positions and let loose the flows of our desiring production, which, as Foucault claims, is the production or engaging of subject power -- perhaps our only power, our only authority, personal authority. The schizophrenic is s/he who cannot locate the ego in any one identity or discourse. Deleuze and Guattari infer that in late capitalism we are all schizophrenic, and so is capitalism.⁷⁷

It is the power of the schizophrenic to deterritorialize which I want to focus on here in the interest of resistance to "the fantastic death instinct that now permeates and crushes desire" (in the form of the temporary but nonetheless powerful codes

⁷⁴"Chaos is continual creation" (Bey, p. 60). Deleuze and Guattari's schizo embraces everything, everything is itself (Deleuze and Guattari, Anti-Oedipus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia (University of Minnesota Press, Minneapolis, 1983) pp. 20-21) crossing boundaries, undermining their authority, the schizo is like Bey's chaotic criminals, agents of chaos, "feral angels who trespass, for they manifest themselves only on forbidden grounds" (Bey, p. 22).

⁷⁵ Deleuze and Guattari, p. 5.

⁷⁶ "The State, its police, and its army form a gigantic enterprise of antiproduction, but at the heart of production itself, and conditioning this production. Here we discover a new determination of the properly capitalist field of immanence.... the presence of antiproduction within production itself." (Deleuze and Guattari, p. 235)

⁷⁷ On this notion, the authors make the important point that: "In brief, the notion of break-flow has seemed to us to define both capitalism and schizophrenia. But not in the same way; they are not at all the same thing, depending on whether the decodings are caught up in an axiomatic or not; on whether one remains at the level of the large aggregates functioning statistically, or crosses the barrier that separates them from the unbound molecular positions; on whether the flows of desire reach this absolute limit or are content to displace a relative controlling of reterritorializations are added to the processes of deterritorialization; and on whether money burns or bursts into flames." (Deleuze and Guattari, p. 247)

momentarily stabilized by the construction and control of new needs and desires by capitalism and as regulated by real economic need, the state and its institutions).⁷⁸ It is "schizophrenization as a process, not ... the schizo as a clinical entity" which "deliberately seeks out the very limit of capitalism: [s]/he is its inherent tendency brought to fulfillment, its surplus product, its proletariat, and its exterminating angel."⁷⁹ Deleuze and Guattari's schizo-subject poses direct challenges to the hegemonizing power of acculturation, like that of Malay women in capitalist "development," through the very means of its repressive tendencies. They claim:

If desire is repressed, it is because every position of desire ... is capable of calling into question the established order of a society ... desire is revolutionary in its essence ... and no society can tolerate a position of real desire without its structures of exploitation, servitude, and hierarchy being compromised ... Desire does not "want" revolution, it is revolutionary in its own right, by wanting what it wants.⁸⁰

Subjectivity and Identity in Larger Social Contexts

The standpoints on subjectivity presented here restore a power to the subject which notions of false consciousness erased or depleted. An understanding which maintains subject power as such seems crucial in regarding Third World women as "the international neo-colonial subject"⁸¹ in multinational exploitation -- "the last colony."⁸² This desiring-production is a generative force I see operating on two coexisting levels in Ong's profile of Malay factory women -- that of self-reconstructing of new social identities and that of the subject-self within the very *activities* of these new realms, most notably here, the exercise of consumer power and sex and gender independence. Their exploitation as workers is clearly felt, as Ong has shown above, and

⁷⁸Ibid, p. 262.

⁷⁹Ibid, p. 35.

⁸⁰Ibid, p. 116.

⁸¹Gyatri Chakravorty Spivak, "The Political Economy of Women," p. 223.

⁸² Maria Mies, Women: The Last Colony (Zed Books, London, 1988).

labor organizing is severely repressed by state and corporate policies as well as by various social and cultural pressures. Spirit possessions, work slowdowns, and manipulation of patriarchal gender ideologies by the women in order to secure small relief in the straining work, outline subject assertions against the constraints on them as workers.⁸³ Ong sees alternative empowering subject activity in the assertion of new identities by the factory women who find themselves increasingly existing at highly contested borderlands between cultures.

In the larger Malay society, and within sectors of their communities, the young factory women are looked down upon for their indulgences in new lifestyles of consumption and independence. It is common for many of the women to spend parts of their income on cosmetics, Western clothes, and going out to movies and night clubs in the growing urban areas. Many have been challenging traditional marriage expectations by dating more informally. While much of this acculturation can be seen as extending the women's exploitation, subjugating them further to new patriarchally defined gender roles, it is important to regard these transitions in their specific context, and not one dimensionally from a totalizing Western feminist viewpoint. Not only do these breaks away from traditional expectations signify new assertions of self-identity for the women -- especially in the face of heightened State-initiated Islamic fundamentalism, which has tended to ignore the women's positions as laborers in the State's "development" agenda and simply criticize their impiety -- but they are expressive of an assertion of power by a new class of women subjected to multiple contests for their construction and subsequent control⁸⁴. When seen in terms of the "women workers seek[ing] to express

⁸³ Ong noted the common advantage taken by the women of the factory management's overt conceptions of the women's "femininity" in such strategies as claiming feminine problems to get more breaks, crying, etc. (Ong, pp. 165, 203).

⁸⁴Ong cites "an operator [who] revealed the anguish caused by bad publicity, and her complicity in greater social control: 'I feel that society views us with contempt because we are factory workers. Factory women sometimes associate in an unrestrained (*bebas*) manner....released from the custody of the parents.... Society only knows how to criticize (*caci*) but does not know the significance of our work in the factory" (p. 185)

new identities, to empower their relations with men and the wider society, and to diminish control by dominant structures,"⁸⁵ their entrance into consumer relations as new wage earners cannot be criticized solely on the basis of false consciousness and complicity with the dominant structure of capitalism, which undoubtedly "constrain[s] them.... while promising social emancipation."⁸⁶ The women's self-conceptualization and remaking in the vortex of external power plays for their allegiance,⁸⁷ must be seen as "desiring-production" rising out of "a quest for self-determination against agencies of power and capital which treat human beings like raw resources, disposable instruments, and fractured sensibilities."⁸⁸ With this I think we can understand the women's resistance to traditional values not merely as divisive and as a sign of cooptation by Western capitalism because the latter also does not have a privileged position in their new identities, the very subject-power of which exists in the margin of cultural inbetweenness -- a space of its own made up of the colliding cultural fragments but not "of," in essence, any one of them.

Ong's position makes a much needed step outside of the longstanding debates between feminist researchers around the benefits, detriments and contradictions in Third World women's proletarianization. The understanding of the complex construction of a *class* sexuality (and gender identities) by these women dilutes the essentializing potency of both the argument that women's participation in "development" and wage labor betters their situations, and the counter debate by Marxist and socialist feminists which focused only on the total exploitation and oppression of Third World women workers. Ong's work, as well as that of Fernández-Kelly expose deep complexities and

⁸⁵Ong, p. xv.

⁸⁶Ibid, p. 180.

⁸⁷Another form of self-assertion for some of the women in this contested arena has been to zealously embrace strict religious practices-- something Ong sees also as "attempts at constructing their own gender identity" (p.191), especially in the face of foreign modernization pressures (closely associated with factory work) to shape their sexualities.

⁸⁸Ibid, p. 221.

contradictions within women's lives in multinational expansion. They begin the unravelling of overdetermining interpretive logics which have ultimately displaced these women and have obscured the power latent within the subjectivities constructing new lives at the junctures of competing forces and their own imperatives for survival.

Inherent in my rethinking based on the work of Ong, Fernández-Kelly, and others, is the issue that although the multinational corporations are undoubtedly "bearers of gender"⁸⁹ in their "gender ascriptive" dividing of labor, their practices have variable determinations on the gendering of women to specific identities. In other words, as the situation in Malaysia makes apparent, the factories and the proliferation of Western cultural values and lifestyles do not necessarily produce stable and homogeneous, acculturated women, but alchemize with local definitions, and most importantly the subjectivities and self-perceptions and needs of the women themselves, producing unpredictable and variously gendered subjects. This definitely poses a significant problematic for feminist and socialist-feminist political theorizing, through a constructive and necessary one. For example, in part of her analysis of spirit possession, Aihwa Ong follows through with her insistence to rethink both "notions about an inherent logic in capitalist relations and labor resistance ... [and] assumptions about class 'self-making'" as well as "feminist analysis [which tends to focus on] the male bias of 'ideological' constructs without attending to the daily production and reproduction of relationships according to 'given' male supremacist principles."⁹⁰

When Ong adds the element of the aggressively asserted male authority of factory foremen and managers to the configuration of oppressive conditions perplexing women into spirit possession, she does so critically and cautiously. She acknowledges that the women are already socialized to patriarchal relations, but regards the gender dynamics

⁸⁹Diane Elson and Ruth Pearson, "Nimble Fingers Make Cheap Workers': An Analysis of Women's Employment in Third World Export Manufacturing," in *Feminist Review* (No. 7, Spring 1981), p. 11.

⁹⁰Ong, pp.178, 180.

within the factory in the schema of oppressive controls in very specific modes. Her data and analysis incorporate the pressures of gendered relations into the profile of capitalist/imperialist domination, but also warn:

In looking at the complex relation between sexuality and gender, it is necessary to eschew the assumptions of received concepts such as 'women's roles', 'sexual inequality', and 'patriarchy' either in their implied sense of 'achieved status' (Williams 1977: 11-20) or as suitable points of analysis ... [In the episodes of spirit possession there was no coherent articulation of exploitation in class or even feminist terms ... At issue is not a conscious attack on commodity relations but rather the self-constitutions of a new identity rooted in human dignity.⁹¹

To me what this implies is that, although Malay women are gendered in native Malay and Islamic traditions, and again by capitalist divisions of labor and mediated consumerism, the gendering of their subjectivities in the mixed dynamics and locations of these strains takes place across the grounds of their very humanity, their entire subjectivity, which cannot be separated into a gendered section of it. Out of their multiple positions as female labor, *budak budak* (daughters, maidens), and "modernizing" women, emerge self-generated sexualities and gender identities, patchworked and yet distinct. Consciousness in these transformations is not necessarily class or feminist consciousness, but a self-consciousness rooted in the multifarious and interconnected aspects of their realities.

Redefining Consciousness and Resistance: Paradigms, Problems, and Possibilities

This distinction and detailed analysis of Malay factory women's subjectivities not only reflects important information about the extensive power of multinational capitalism but also defines more specifically the lives in question when we talk about strategizing opposition to capitalist exploitation and oppression. Such understanding seems vital when issues of "development" are so fraught with contradictions. Growing bodies of research on neo-imperialist capitalism and "development" in Third World countries reveal "class antagonism, oppression and exploitation at their worst ...

⁹¹Ibid, pp. 4, 196.

nowhere are the differences and separations between the privileged and the dispossessed, the White and the non-White, and men and women so vehemently and persistently felt."⁹² Third World women in particular are carrying much of the burdensome effects of capitalist expansion and receiving the most meager share of its benefits.⁹³

For example, while Linda Lim argues that electronic factories supply women with much needed incomes, with better wages than local industries, and cleaner working conditions,⁹⁴ she concurrently acknowledges the overriding setbacks the foreign investment policies incur in the women's lives, from the weak and unstable employment positions for women in multinational factories to the divisive effects on their social status with the conflicting cultural interests modernization imposes on local communities.⁹⁵ Because these contradictions are surfacing similarly in many Third World countries, I have found it important to focus on Ong's differential approach to these dynamics as adding a new momentum to the difficult but necessary pushing through the constraints such contradictions can place on visioning empowerment and change. The growing attention to cultural specificity in "development" research contributes to this momentum. Fernández-Kelly's work on women in the industrialization of Mexico's border with the U.S. is an example of this effort, in which the author takes on the *maquiladora* women's (workers in assembly plants) shifting relationships to their families, communities, and selves as they sustain highly contested positions as primary wage earners in the multinational industries and as daughters, wives, mothers, and community leaders. Fernández-Kelly, like Ong, makes clear the need to acknowledge the

⁹²Edna Acosta-Belén and Christine E. Bose, "From Structural Subordination to Empowerment: Women and Development in Third World Contexts," in Gender & Society (Vol. 4, No. 3, 1990) p. 300.

⁹³Kathryn Ward, ed., Women and Global Restructuring (ILR Press, Ithaca, 1990); Barbara Ehrenreich and Annette Fuentes, Women in the Global Factory (South End Press, Boston, 1983); June Nash and Maria Patricia Fernández-Kelly, Women, Men, and the International Division of Labor (SUNY Press, Albany, 1983).

⁹⁴Lim, 1978; 1983 in Nash and Fernández-Kelly.

⁹⁵Lim, 1978, p. 44.

trajectories of local and foreign systems of patriarchy while seeing how the realities of women's lives and social positions challenge assumed gender role ascriptions, redefining the structures and bounds of patriarchal demands. Explicit in her work is the challenge to Western feminists to expand their understandings of women's power and notions of feminist consciousness.

In the cleavages made by new women's anthropological research, where the work of Helen Safa, Eleanor Leacock, Mina Caulfield, June Nash, Mona Etienne, Leith Mullings, Lourdes Benería, Haleh Afshar, Bina Agarwal and others have shown the wide variance in women's roles and identities in pre-capitalist and pre-colonial societies (and those in "transition"), women in post-colonial contexts are increasingly represented in explorations of late capitalism and "development." The "schizophrenization of the periphery"⁹⁶ is an experience Third World women and U.S. women of color have long been familiar with. Their contestations of hegemonic definitions of women's oppression are crucial in pushing open both traditional social science paradigms of interpretation and Marxist and feminist critiques of capitalism and patriarchy.

While Ong's work, and my focus here, fleshes out women's active subjectivities as workers and consumers, empowering them beyond a relegation to positions as one-dimensional victims of capitalist exploitation and false consciousness, there is not a denial in these assertions of the pressing and problematic oppressiveness of multinational "development." The issue of "class consciousness" (in its by now expanded scope) remains as central dilemma in the question of organized resistance. Where June Nash puts forth "the hope that the new international division of labor will engender consciousness of class interests on an international scale,"⁹⁷ Ong, in the same volume, reminds "the need to go beyond convenient rubrics like *labor aristocracy* and [to] analyse the details of classes 'in the making,'" when "casual laborers, peddlers, car

⁹⁶Deleuze and Guattari, p. 232.

⁹⁷Nash, in Nash and Fernández-Kelly, p. 33.

attendants, waitresses, paupers [and nascent consumers are] as much a product of the transnational corporations as were skilled operators and skilled industrial workers."⁹⁸ As many researchers are documenting the rise in numbers of women working in the socially and politically unrepresented "informal" sectors, the "feminization" of factory work (and thus its unrecognition by unionizing efforts),⁹⁹ and of consumption as shown in Ong's work, also multiply the sites for the production of consciousness, and complicate its definitions.

This complication is both positive and difficult. The multiplicity of positions women exist in in the world, and the acknowledgement of this by social critics forces more rigorous work on those organizing for change. Invaluable insights into the strategies of oppression and control by dominating systems issue forth. New voices and lives are prying open discursive and policy closures and squatting reclaimed social and political territory as well as creating their own. But this action is taking place with variable denominators of consciousness in the traditional sense. In Mexico and in South Korea, for example, women working in multinational factories have organized unions and made links with already existing local political groups.¹⁰⁰ There have been similar attempts at labor organizing by women working in multinationals in Taiwan, Singapore, Thailand, Philippines, India, Sri Lanka, and in the Silicon Valley of Northern California.¹⁰¹ The strikes, work stoppages, walk-outs, and unionizing which has characterized the opposition posed by these women have been carried out through culturally and historically specific styles and taken place with varying degrees of

⁹⁸Ong, in Nash and Fernández-Kelly, p. 436.

⁹⁹Ward, 1990; Karen Hossfeld in Ward, 1990; Fernández-Kelly, *For We Are Sold, I and My People: Women and Industry in Mexico's Frontier* (SUNY Press, Albany, 1983); Susan Tiano in Ward, 1990; Naomi Katz and David Kemnitzer in Nash and Fernández-Kelly, 1983.

¹⁰⁰Fernández-Kelly, 1983; Maud and David Easter in *Multinational Monitor*, 1983; Cynthia Enloe in Nash and Fernández-Kelly, 1983; Ehrenreich and Fuentes, 1983.

¹⁰¹Ehrenreich and Fuentes, 1983; Agarwal, 1988; Hossfeld in Ward, 1990; Katz and Kemnitzer, Green, Keller, in Nash and Fernández-Kelly, 1983.

community support, formal political backing, and experience in labor organizing. The different colonial histories and national climates in each of these areas effect the mode with which resistance is articulated and the shape of consciousnesses behind it. However, part of the reason why we even know about these protests is because they were enacted to a certain degree, in forms recognizable by Marxist and feminist researchers. Smaller scale and more mundane forms of resistance often escape the gaze of these social critics, while their effectivity does not always go unnoticed by those who are their targets¹⁰².

Paradigms such as traditional Marxism and Western feminism, as universalizing languages, recognize resistance movements expressed in the terms of their particular canons of domination and opposition and from this basis seek to facilitate broad networks of solidarity. Nevertheless, these movements question "true" class and/or feminist consciousness when resistances and their demands reflect perhaps basic needs which remain within certain bounds of capitalism and "patriarchy" and outside of total structural challenges to the systems as wholes. Forms of resistance which take place on daily and mundane levels by people not organized in any formal groups are often go totally unseen. This is not a new criticism, and I can not hope to offer new categorical solutions for organizing here. But with each specific case brought out into the open, especially shadowed ones like that of the Malay factory women, these issues must be raised and again reexamined.

Another recurring dilemma for the politics of women and capitalist exploitation is the rifts between Marxist and feminist organizing. In some of the cases mentioned above, such as in parts of Mexico and in Silicon Valley, women have come up against male domination of unions and labor movements, where their specific issues are neglected or

¹⁰²Work slowdowns, machinery and product sabotage, and breaks for "feminines problems," for example, hinder, if in small but accumulative ways, by company production goals.

given secondary priority.¹⁰³ Norma Chinchilla has written about Nicaraguan women's struggles to hold the Sandanista revolution accountable to women's needs and issues and the breakdown of patriarchal tendencies.¹⁰⁴ Similarly, feminist movements have shown reluctance in supporting women's resistances to capitalist oppression when their strategies have included the men of their communities, and households as locuses of strength. As I mentioned earlier, however, some efforts to broaden Western feminist perspectives and definitions of "feminist" consciousness have been made by researchers exposing women's multiple fields of struggle; the focus of Carmen Diana Deere, Anna Rubbo, Florence Babb, Lynn Bolles, and Maria Mies on grassroots organizing Latin America, India, and the Caribbean help create new understandings of "feminist" empowerment and colonized women's relationships to gender differentiation and community.

Mutually exclusive recognition of struggles against capitalism and struggles against male domination by Marxist and feminist movements has been a significant obstacle for solidarity but is not the only deficiency I am pointing to here. As Ong infers, feminist Marxists and Marxist feminists alike have remained largely captive to cultural frameworks bound up in historical materialism and definitions of feminist consciousness which obscures the complex dimensions of women's subjection to capitalist and patriarchal controls and their/our variegated powers and sites of authority in late capitalism. By discussing Malay factory women as workers *and* consumers, as subjects in a dialectical experience as both sites and agencies of identity production, I have tried to bring the extremely marginalized further into the center of socio-political discourse. I think this "migration" decenters the hegemonizing power of stabilized political standpoints in a progressive move towards understanding that only the "schizophrenic"

¹⁰³Fernández-Kelly, 1983; The Global Assembly Line (film, PBS, 1986); Hossfeld in Ward, 1990.

¹⁰⁴Norma Chinchilla, "Women in the Nicaraguan Revolution," in *Nicaraguan Perspectives*, (No. 11, Winter 1985).

(in Deleuze and Guattari's definition), the people in the "borderlands" (Anzaldúa), can deterritorialize capitalism's territorializations of our bodies and consciousnesses faster than the latter can de- and reterritorialize.

The critical approaches to political analysis and imagining by Third World women, U.S. women of color, and other "cyborg" citizens (Haraway) are forging methodologies for expanding and strengthening praxes of resistance based in some of the frameworks described above.¹⁰⁵ The problems of defining consciousness and (effective) resistance are not resolved in these works but are addressed in crucial steps in continuing political struggle. One possible strategy for liberating praxis from closed definitions of consciousness and resistance developing in current international feminist dialogues is the centering of "differential" consciousness based in the differential experiences of women across class, race, nationality, culture and sexuality. Concerned especially with the increasingly multiple forces shaping women's lives in terms of the dissemination of dominant codes based in these categories, new critical feminisms do more to "include" female constituencies into feminist and oppositional solidarity than any previous totalizing theories of women and oppression. Because this new theorizing reprivileges requisites of consciousness from the grounds of intellectual understanding or leadership by an intelligentsia, to the authority of the subject in her terrains of experience and her assertions of power in manipulating codes for her survival, the rural Malay woman, as nascent proletariat and consumer, with her enigmatic social sexuality and gender identity, has a place in feminist oppositional visions.

Who Trinh T. Minh-ha has named the "inappropriate/d other", Audre Lorde "sister outsider," Patricia Hill-Collins "the outsider within," Gloria Anzaldúa "la nueva mestiza", Gyatri Spivak "the subaltern", and Donna Haraway "the cyborg," are women

¹⁰⁵Too huge a project to take on here, a historiography of feminism(s) would reveal its lineage of contest, of making and remaking, breaking down and rebuilding which can only be alluded to here with reference to contemporary debates.

living at the crossroads of multiple meanings, discourses, and social and cultural structures, embraced by and excluded from all in alternating moments, speak in tongues and perceive through fractured lenses. Like the Malay factory woman in Ong's analysis, she can exist in and thus see from many vantage points and identities; she is the "schizophrenic" and the "cyborg" capable of taking on rapid transformations and fragmentation of realities.¹⁰⁶ She has a "differential consciousness" which is "mobile ... in select[ing], engag[ing], and disengag[ing] ... [with and from] points of orientation determined by [dominant] social order[s]."¹⁰⁷ She too questions, like Sojourner Truth, "aren't I a woman?"¹⁰⁸ while at the same time undermining all previous definitions. In this construction, she "denies any one ideology the final answer" in methods of opposition¹⁰⁹; her ability to "break with ideology" (an ability which has become forced necessity) is her "means to control ideology"¹¹⁰ and signifies "the power to seek new ways of being in the world ... and ... to act where there are no charters" ¹¹¹ (e.g. spirit possession and self-assertions at new cultural junctions, etc.). Thus, for most of the authors just cited, her social empowerment is created not only through her mobile and "productive" (in the Foucaultian sense) subjectivity, but in the development of a self-consciousness of this.

While the dynamics of personal authority, as described in this paper, reroute some of the absolute power generally relegated to politicized consciousness, questions of its [personal authority] effectivity remain in terms of the needs for collective resistance to the coalesced powers of local state apparatuses and multinational firms and

¹⁰⁶She is an "agent of chaos ... Avatars of chaos act as spies, saboteurs ... neither selfless or selfish ... chafed with obsessions, unemployed, sensually deranged, wolfangels, mirrors for contemplation ... pirates of all signs and meanings". (Bey, p. 4).

¹⁰⁷Sandoval, pp.11-12.

¹⁰⁸See The Norton Anthology of Literature by Women, (Norton, New York, 1985), p. 252.

¹⁰⁹Ibid, p. 14.

¹¹⁰Ibid, p. 2.

¹¹¹Audre Lorde, in This Bridge Called My Back, (1979), as quoted in Sandoval, p. 15.

"the global system in which they compete."¹¹² Ong does not disclose whether she sees consciousness in the Malay women's actions and choices; in her depiction, consciousness is relocated, but to where is unclear. The role of consciousness and of ideology, in "effective" resistance, is not necessarily identifiable, but the frameworks for its construction are explored usefully by Chela Sandoval, bell hooks, Hill-Collins, Donna Haraway, and others. For instance, Patricia Hill-Collins, in writing on "The Sociological Significance of Black Feminist Thought," questions definitions of "activism" and asserts that "women who in their consciousness choose to be self-defined and self-evaluating are, in fact, activists."¹¹³ For her, "consciousness can be viewed as one potential sphere of freedom,"¹¹⁴ especially when one is oppressed within a system (like that of slavery for African-Americans) which imposes its own views of your character on you. This can be related to the Malay factory women in their self-defining actions both within the factories and their communities. But the range of the constitution of their particular consciousnesses is not totally clear, and may perhaps be better defined (by Sandoval) as "an activity in which opposition to oppressive authorities is achieved in a highly technologized and disciplinized society ... a realm in which ... one experiences the violent shattering of a unitary sense of self ... [but] which allows a mobile identity to form."¹¹⁵ Sandoval's definitions of differential consciousness and oppositional activity make room for spirit possession which can be seen in her analysis (although she does not refer specifically to this phenomenon) as "a mode of consciousness once relegated to the province of intuition and psychic phenomena, but which now must be recognized as a specific practice."¹¹⁶ In fact, Sandoval "define[s] differential consciousness as a kind of

¹¹²David O'Connor and Chia Siew Wong, in Multinational Monitor, (1983) p.15.

¹¹³Patricia Hill-Collins, in Fonow and Cook, eds., Beyond Methodology: Feminist Scholarship as Lived Research (Indiana University Press, Bloomington and Indianapolis, 1991), p. 46.

¹¹⁴Ibid.

¹¹⁵Sandoval, p. 23.

¹¹⁶Ibid.

anarchic activity (but with method), a form of ideological guerilla warfare."¹¹⁷ I find this to be an illuminating expression of the propositions I have been referring to-- like those alluded to by Ong and those developing from where she begins-- to break the disciplinary effects of hegemonized ideological paradigms of resistance.

Also arguing for the dissolution of ideological closure, are bell hooks and Donna Haraway. Sandoval, while arguing for an open-ended differential consciousness which seems to incorporate a wide spectrum of activities and experiences, nevertheless privileges a political self-consciousness by marginalized "others" in a move towards developing a "science of oppositional consciousness" which she claims would indeed be "another form of ... ideology."¹¹⁸ In a similar vein, bell hooks in Feminist Theory: From Margin to Center, maintains that "feminism is a *movement* to end sexist oppression ... with a keen understanding of women's political reality ... [because] broader perspectives can only emerge as we examine both the personal that is political, the politics of society as a whole, and global revolutionary politics"(my emphasis).¹¹⁹ Like Sandoval, hooks simultaneously agrees (here, with Susan Griffin in "The Way of All Ideology"), that

when a theory is transformed into an ideology, it begins to destroy the self and self-knowledge ... It organizes experience according to itself ... To invoke the name of this ideology is to confer truthfulness ... No one can tell it anything new. Experience ceases to surprise it, inform it, transform it. It is annoyed by anything that does not fit into its world view ... Begun as a way to restore one's sense of reality, now it attempts to discipline real people¹²⁰

Thus, while "the feminist dream of a common language"¹²¹ is broken down as a hegemonic and imperialist dream, by emerging voices from the margin, the argument for comprehensible articulation retains importance in theorizing differential opposition. Sandoval and hooks give ideological articulation new meaning though,

¹¹⁷Ibid.

¹¹⁸Ibid, pp. 2-3.

¹¹⁹bell hooks, Feminist Theory: From Margin to Center (South End Press, Boston, 1984), pp.24-25.

¹²⁰Susan Griffin, in "The Way of All Ideology," as quoted in hooks, p. 9.

¹²¹Haraway, p. 173.

reminding us that political ideology and praxis coming from subjects whose identities form "between and amongst"¹²² cultures and modes of oppression will "function on an altogether different register ... demanding alienation, perversion, and reformation in both spectators and practitioners."¹²³ Other voices I have found poignant in debating the use and abuse of ideology are those of Donna Haraway and Ernesto Laclau and Chantal Mouffe -- in their work I see vital efforts at reckoning with the roles of subjectivity, consciousness, and ideology in resistance, as they acknowledge its changing contexts. For Donna Haraway, in Simians, Cyborgs, and Women, a "feminist science" of resistance for new "cyborg" subjectivities "requires not sorting consciousness into categories of 'clear-sighted critique grounding a solid political epistemology' versus 'manipulated false consciousness', but subtle understanding of emerging pleasures, experiences, and powers with serious potential for changing the rules of the game."¹²⁴ These understandings would not be articulated through "a common language, but ... a powerful infidel heteroglossia."¹²⁵ Cyborgs are "wary of holism, but needy for connection -- they seem to have a natural feel for united front politics, but without the vanguard party."¹²⁶ Although "cyborgs are the illegitimate offspring of militarism and patriarchal capitalism, not to mention state socialism ... illegitimate offspring are often exceedingly unfaithful to their origins. Their fathers, after all, are inessential."¹²⁷ With this profile, Haraway explains that "There is no drive in cyborgs to produce total theory, but there is an intimate experience with boundaries, their construction, and deconstruction."¹²⁸

¹²²Sandoval, p. 23.

¹²³Sandoval, p. 3. See also Hakim Bey, who says: "Agents of chaos cast burning glances at anything or anyone capable of bearing witness to their condition." (p. 4)

¹²⁴Haraway, pp. 172-3.

¹²⁵Ibid, p. 181.

¹²⁶Ibid, p. 151.

¹²⁷Ibid.

¹²⁸Ibid, p. 181.

I see inherent in these analyses an understanding of the paradoxes of ideological construction of consciousness and forming cohesive, if multiple and differential, organized resistances. There is an acknowledgement of ideology's vulnerability to being coopted by dominant forces and to rigidification into Foucaultian disciplinary sciences at the same time that it is maintained that its articulation provides stability and guards against invisibility. I think these notions of differential ideology are a hopeful challenge to this dilemma and are also fragile in the face of strong historical tendencies of appropriation of theory, practice, ideology.

In Hegemony and Socialist Strategy, Laclau and Mouffe further this discussion by explicating a "radical democratic politics" in the name of reclaiming "articulatory practices," structure and ideology, for averting the disappearance of the political. The authors argue for a positive exploitation of the inevitable diversities emerging in the fragmented, multiply reterritorialized social spaces of late capitalism, where a radical plurality of political subjects and their articulations are autonomous but connected, "equivalent symbols ... balanced by the demand for *liberty*."¹²⁹ They say that "the terrain which has constituted their discursive conditions of emergence cannot be subverted if social movements [are not] disconnected one from the other ... [--because] if the identity of each movement can never be acquired once and for all, then it cannot be indifferent to what takes place outside of it" (unlike the ideology Griffin warns against).¹³⁰ Laclau and Mouffe understand that hegemony relies on a dualism of internal/external. Social/political movements which reclaim the power of multiplicity, of the "borderlands," can undo this logic. With this, the concentration of power in one place is safeguarded against because "the multiple social logics ... [will be] constantly recreated and renegotiated."¹³¹ These social logics, the articulations/"ideologies" of

¹²⁹Ernesto Laclau and Chantal Mouffe, Hegemony and Socialist Strategy: Towards a Radical Democratic Politics (Verso, London and New York, 1985), pp. 182, 184.

¹³⁰Ibid, p. 141.

¹³¹Ibid, p. 188.

plural social/political movements, would be formed in the interactions and antagonisms between their autonomous spheres, but which would not result in a competition of "in a game in which the identity of the opposing forces is constituted from the start,"¹³² because their positions of "radical unfixity" pushes [the Left] to dissolve "structural determinations,"¹³³ to relinquish "assumptions of a privileged point of access to the 'truth'"¹³⁴ -- a move which "forc[es] the myth of a rational and transparent society to recede"¹³⁵

Conclusions

These theories of politics of difference, of multiple and various identities, subject positions, and sites and means for struggle and empowerment, have strong implications for conceptualizing global networking and organizing between Third World women working in the multinational industries. Because of the networks of forces organized against their self-determination and basic rights as women and as workers -- in the form of collaborating multinational corporations, multinationally mediated cultural values, U.S. military interests, national ("host") governments, local religious authorities, and the ambivalences of their own communities -- the only base of support may be each other. The criticisms raised here, as to alienating effects of the social, political, and cultural closures of centering a struggle around a singular position, like class, or gender, or nationalist opposition, reveal the many obstacles these women face

¹³²Ibid, p. 170.

¹³³Ibid, p. 48.

¹³⁴Ibid, p. 192.

¹³⁵Ibid, p. 191. Hakim Bey also affirms the power of unfixity, multiplicity, and the potential for radical democracy. He warns that "any attempt to precipitate a crystal of ideology would result in flawed rigidities, fossilizations, armorings & dryness which we would like to renounce, along with all 'purity'." (p. 59) He comments further that "we refrain from advocating any specific diet, lest we offend the Sacred Multiplicity & the Divine Subjectivity.... we interest ourselves in *life*, not 'lifestyles'." (p. 54) Based in an understanding of the reality, and power, of chaos, (mentioned in earlier footnotes in my text), Bey's anarchism "knows no dogma" acknowledging that "Chaos cannot be mapped." (p. 53)

in forming strategic consciousnesses and resistance movements. In her introduction to Structures of Patriarchy, Bina Agarwal notes the composite factors of civil and political life confronting organization and representation of opposition: military dictatorships, ruling theocracies, "the exacerbation of class and other inequalities, and people's rising aspirations for material gain ... in the face of increasing competition for limited opportunities and economic and physical resources."¹³⁶ Third World women's resistances are situated within contexts of "crisis in major proportions -- variously of economy, ecology, polity, and national and group identity."¹³⁷

Perhaps those able to recognize their specific needs and positions are each other and other women internationally in similar situations. Perhaps only the eventual coalescing by these different communities of women will shape an articulation that can and will be heard by the dominating forces and by other oppositional movements. Indeed, evidence of such consciousness and solidarity is emerging, in the more microcosmic forms I have pointed to here, but also in broader efforts like those mentioned earlier. (p. 42) In the film *The Global Assembly Line*, we see women multinational factory workers both in Tennessee, Silicon Valley, California, Mexico, and the Philippines, organizing to keep their jobs, secure wage raises, and better working conditions. In *Bringing it All Back Home*,¹³⁸ a film on multinational workers in "underdeveloped," peripheralized areas of Western Europe, and their industry "sisters" in Sri Lanka, a network was actually set up by the women in West Germany and Sri Lanka, through which the exchanging of information regarding wage rates and product prices provided bargaining arsenal in the Sri Lankan women's strike. Not united by particular ideological standpoints or determined consciousnesses, these women, like those in Tennessee, Silicon Valley, Mexico, and the Philippines all had differing relationships to their communities

¹³⁶Agarwal, p. 23.

¹³⁷Ibid.

¹³⁸Bringing it All Back Home (film, Sheffield Film Co-op, 1987).

and societies as women, but shared an immediate understanding of their fundamental exploitation as female workers. Kumudhini Rosa, a Sri Lankan lecturer in development studies at a West German university, saw that "the women [in Sri Lanka] eventually confronted the socially constructed images of themselves and then they move very fast ... faster than the men [move to organized]."¹³⁹ Similarly, Swasti Mitter, also a lecturer in development studies at Brighton University, understood the differential challenges of women, especially Third World women, in organizing, where traditions of labor movement have been "based on the experiences of the white male working class."¹⁴⁰

When I suggest that perhaps those able to recognize their specific needs and positions are each other and other women in similar situations, I am saying that there are potential commonalities amongst "borderland" women, cyborgs, for solidarity, especially in creating articulations based on shared positions as Third World women factory workers. This kind of networking is clearly not a sufficient means to an end of their oppressions by itself -- the models of organizing this kind of solidarity are still very much informed by traditional movements, such as the labor movement Mitter refers to, which are not designed on the basis of the experiences and needs of Third World, female, nascent proletariats. Indeed, I have pointed out the contradictions embedded in the notion (and activity) of forming unifying oppositional languages (and movements) as they tend to compromise some aspects of the lives of the subjects of oppression. The "powerful heteroglossia" that Haraway imagines, and Sandoval's projections of an ideology which will "demand alienation, perversion, and reformation in both spectators and practitioners," I think, can only come out of the local activities and power of the "borderland" women.

As my arguments in this paper suggest, because Third World women factory workers are already outside of many of the imperatives defining consciousness and

¹³⁹Rosa in Bringing it All Back Home.

¹⁴⁰Mitter in Ibid.

resistance tactics set up in aggregate organizing efforts such as union activity and other collective mobilizations around class and even gender issues, the obstacles inherent in these forms have not definitively limited the continued, "other" resistances by the women, which rise out of necessity. It has been the thesis of my work that resistance takes many forms, and that its manifestations are directly linked to the consciousness which rises out of or through specific subject positions and reflexive identities. Thus, based on the delineations presented here of subject development and its vast variations and mutability, women working in the multinational factories live in "borderlands" which afford them the ability to shift their locuses of identity, consciousness, and resistance strategies. Their "differential oppositional consciousness" creates resistance tactics which are mobile and specific, potent in their grounding in the women's own realities and perceptions of oppression. The "confrontation with the socially constructed images of themselves" that Rosa speaks of may happen through a variety of processes and in a variety of expressions across cultures and social and political environments, and levels of capitalist "development," which cannot be predetermined, universalized or expected. As Ong has shown, young Malay women confront these constructions dialectically (but without a tendency toward "resolution" per se of the contradictions), entering into a social consciousness of themselves through the confrontations with opposing cultural demands on their identities, as they take on forces of acculturation. Where Ong does not concretely analyze these assertions in terms of their overall effectivity on the oppressive forces of multinational capitalism, etc. -- something which I think concerns most activists' minds reading her work -- I would argue that collective efforts and networking may be required in certain instances, but perhaps will come forth in shapes devised by the specific felt realities, consciousnesses, subject-identities of the women themselves. This means that the formats may be collaged articulations whose directions will be made up of multiple needs and whose actions will be mobile and shifting from locus to locus, village to factory to dormitory to urban institutions, etc.

This would be (and is, where its already happening) "differential consciousness" manifest, through multiple consciousnesses enacting differential politics ... "Anarchic activity" whose mobility and clandestine (to the paradigmatic gazes of both capital management and the traditional Left) identities has great insurrectionary potential.

The dynamics within the particular processes regarding the assertions of the subjectivities of the Malay women in work and social relations (especially of consumption) have been informative for a more general understanding of power, oppression, acculturation and subjectivity, and in turn have further developed my approach to consciousness, its social/political representations, and organizing resistance on its grounds. As an activist, this project serves doubly, my approach to politics/pain/pleasure/power here at home, and my awareness and visioning of organizing on a global scale with the "anarchic activities"¹⁴¹ of multiplicity, celebrated difference, mutual respect and autonomy, called for more now than ever as capitalism, technology, and militarization shrink our world as they compress time, space, and culture. This project attempts to deal with recurring and pressing problematics of forming effective resistances, of identifying common interests and needs, and articulating political standpoints I face in work with coalitions formed across multiple social, cultural, class, and political positions and identities, and especially in my activism around women's issues. I have taken on this project in an effort not only to increase my own political understanding and effectivity, but also to use my privileges as a student and someone with (some!) time and means to communicate at length and electronically in reproducible print, to give indirect voice to those who have been silenced. So it is for me, my growth and strength, my degree, and ultimately, a contribution to a struggle much bigger than my individual life.

¹⁴¹Sandoval, p.23.

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