“Gendered Blackberry Fields (fruit, not cell phones!): Globalization, Non-traditional Export Production, and the Hidden Costs of Pesticide Exposure”

Donna L. Chollett

Thursday Afternoon Faculty Seminar
University of Minnesota-Morris

May 6, 2010
“Gendered Blackberry Fields (fruit, not cell phones!): Globalization, Non-traditional Export Production, and the Hidden Costs of Pesticide Exposure”

Abstract:
This research examines the recent transition from sugar cane to blackberry production in Michoacán, Mexico. Ethnographic fieldwork situates changes in rural women’s lives as they enter agriculture for the first time as berry pickers within a context of globalization, free trade, and flexibilization of labor. International companies along the “Steinbeck-ienesk blackberry row” reap huge profits as land concentration, male-outmigration, and intensified pesticide exposure ensue. Yet, Northern consumers often remain unaware of the environmental and human costs of this delectible fruit. (JOKERMAN, JESTER) Can read this in 45 min.

Introduction

In the state of Michoacán, Mexico, a decade of economic crisis contributed escalating economic vulnerability for sugarcane growers and fostered the entry of transnational blackberry companies into the region. Between 1988 and 2002, structural adjustment and market competition contributed to the closing of seven Mexican sugar mills (Chollett 2003; García Chávez 1998). Ethnographic research in Los Angeles, Michoacán (1997-2006) reveals that the transition from sugar to berry production coincided with the decline and eventual closure of the San Sebastián sugar mill. I will examine the renegotiation of gender and class relations as cañeros (cane growers) began delivering their cane to the Santa Clara mill, replanted their fields in blackberries, or rented out their land to wealthier blackberry growers, and as women entered agricultural labor in unprecedented numbers.

The intersection of structural adjustment and market opening at sites of production requires rethinking our theoretical models in regard to neoliberal globalization. I draw on Gramsci (1971) to examine the dialectic of power relations as they are worked out on contested terrain among dominant groups who exert hegemony and subaltern groups who contest it in order to provide a window for understanding how power is produced and reproduced and how class and gender realities are lived (Gramsci 1971). Mintz reminds us that culture, region, and community remain relevant
concepts for anthropological approaches to globalization. The process of globalization encompasses actions, negotiations, and struggles in specific places. My analysis encompasses the variegation in class formation and the unevenness of development as relationships are played out dialectically on an uneven field of power (Binford and Churchill 2007). I examine the transition from sugar cane to blackberry production through the lens of gender and class, and add insights into the interweaving of global and local processes. As Roseberry (1989) asserts, the transition from disordered past to disordered present offers a more efficacious means to understand the contradictions in how workers experience incongruent outcomes. My recent publication in *Dialectical Anthropology* situates the topic I present today within the historical context of the region, which time does not permit here.

**The Research Region**

My initial fieldwork (1997) focused on privatization of the two sugar mills in the Los Reyes region. Subsequent research (2004) examined the impact of the San Sebastián mill closure on the research community of Los Angeles. As blackberry production expanded, in 2006, I returned to study changes in the lives of women berry workers. My ethnographic research includes participant observation, interviews with cane growers (n=75), union representatives, sugar mill personnel, blackberry growers, women berry workers (n=33), and managers of transnational blackberry companies. The San Sebastián mill\(^1\) was an important factor in the structuring of gender and class relations in Los Angeles. Cañeros—both men and women—enjoyed relatively privileged positions to mill workers or waged day laborers, given their access to land. Mill workers’ wages were low, yet syndicate membership offered some compensation.

---

\(^1\) Before its closure, 2020 cañeros delivered cane to the San Sebastián mill; 132 were from the Los Angeles ejido (agrarian reform unit).
Waged day laborers lacked similar job securities and low wages barely ensured family reproduction.

But we must complicate this scenario further by examining how these class segments became further differentiated. Cañeros may be ejidatarios who hold agrarian reform land or private landowners. Ejidatarios tend to be land poor and have less wealth and power relative to private land owners. Private property had always provided collateral for access to credit, whereas ejido parcels did not. The majority of cañeros in Los Angeles (87.5 percent in 1997) were ejidatarios but a few held both types of land tenure. It is not uncommon for a cañero to also be a mill worker. Contradictory relations can be found within a single household where an ejidatario has interests in paying low wages to workers, yet a wage-earning son may demand higher wages. Cañeros rarely cut their own cane, but turn to marginalized workers for this taxing labor. Indigenous families come from the states of Guerrero, Chiapas, and Oaxaca for the six-month cane harvest; women generally do not cut cane, but child labor is common. Housed in outlying communities in substandard barracks, they suffer both discrimination and substandard wages of about $4.00 U.S. per day.

Although women hold equal rights to land, and 16 percent of cañeros were women, they rarely worked their cane fields but rather depended on male relatives or hired labor. A few women worked as domestic servants, ran small stores, raised animals for sale or household consumption, sold handcrafts, or set up food stalls in the plaza to augment family incomes, but most did unremunerated household labor. The formation of a women’s cooperative tortilla factory in 1983 is one exception to women’s paid labor outside the household. Women in Los Angeles organized to establish the tortillería 15 years before opportunities for berry work presented themselves.
These many permutations illustrate the historically constitutive processes of gender and class formation in the region.

**Context for the Transition from Sugar to Blackberries**

In the 1940s, most of the region was planted in rice and people lived very poorly. Women would have played a greater role in agricultural production of subsistence crops. After this time, the hacienda at San Sebastián converted its *trapiche* into an *ingenio* to produce sugar. Sugar cane dramatically expanded in the 1960s after the U.S. blockade of Cuban sugar. As during the colonial and independence periods, the sugar economy suffered multiple boom and bust cycles associated with crises of capitalism.

Mexico’s oil boom and high oil prices in the 1970s spawned a period of strong, state-led development and excessive spending under ISI (import substitution industrialization). ISI policies offered protectionism, price supports, subsidies, credit, and social benefits to agriculture (Feldman 1992; White et al. 2003). Following a national trend of decapitalization, the two regional sugar mills were nationalized in 1975. The excesses of state-owned mills are well known—inefficiency, over-employment, corruption, and so forth). State mismanagement and the 1970s oil shocks that created Mexico’s 1982 economic meltdown provided fodder for the IMF neoliberal mandate for privatization, free trade, and the retraction of the welfare state. Privatization transferred all state-owned sugar mills into the hands of private capital. Ingenios Santa Clara and San Sebastián were sold to Grupo Porres in 1991. The state redirected its role to paying off its debt and enticing foreign capital investment through favorable investment incentives. As *cañeros*’ situation worsened, retraction of state subsidies to agriculture—when they were most needed—created economic instability for various class segments in rural Michoacán.
Privatization and NAFTA did not always work in the best interests of the industrial class. Massive imports of HFCS under NAFTA and limitations imposed on exports of Mexican cane sugar to the U.S. dashed hopes for the new sugar industrialists to increase their share of the U.S. market. A glutted sugar market hindered their ability to pay off debts for mill purchases and to pay cañeros for their cane. Paradoxically, private industrialists turned to the state for a bailout. Social guarantees had been withdrawn from campesinos and waged workers and extended to the industrialists as a subsidy to capitalist production under the neoliberal model. In 2001, cañeros across Mexico joined in a massive national protest and seizure of government offices for the failure of sugar mills to pay the $500,000,000 dollars owed to cañeros. Some years the Porres mills paid as late as August, when the National Cane Law required payment within 30 days of the harvest (around the end of May). In total contradiction to neoliberal policy, the government expropriated 27 privatized sugar mills, but the Porres mills were not among those expropriated (Chollett 2003).

When the Santa Clara and San Sebastián sugar mills were privatized in 1991 after two decades of state management, cañeros entered into an entirely new relationship with mill managers and the national state. The CNPR leader described the change: “It was very drastic. The private owners arrived and changed the politics; we can’t accommodate very well and they don’t accept the politics of the cañero either.”

Management had invested little in the San Sebastián mill and breakdowns were frequent. At the same time, cañeros were required to replant new varieties of cane. Reductions in credit passed on the substantial expense of replanting to growers. Some selected to leave cane production for lack of funds to replant and those who borrowed often found themselves in debt. Interviews and analysis of end-of-harvest statements
revealed a new form of neo-debt peonage. By 1996, 170 (9 percent) of *cañeros* that provisioned the mill had abandoned cane production. At the time of privatization, Ingenio San Sebastián employed 700 workers; Porres reduced the work force to 350, expelling many of these into the informal economy or migration streams.

Los Reyes was known for its very strong union organizations. Union leaders and *cañeros* often attributed the closing of the San Sebastián mill to its frequent strikes and labor agitation. At San Sebastián, the cane growers’ union faded away with the mill closure. For mill workers, governed by Art. 123—one of the strongest labor laws in the world—Mexico’s move from a nationalist/protectionist government to neoliberalism weakened their position. The retraction of union activity may have provided incentive for blackberry companies to move into the region. Indeed, Caraway’s (2007) cross-country analysis demonstrated that women's employment is higher in countries where male labor has been excluded from political power. Loss of union membership and marginalization through the process of labor fragmentation has undermined organized class struggle in the region.

**Closure of the San Sebastián Sugar Mill**

Porres closed Ingenio San Sebastián in 2002 to consolidate production in a single mill at Santa Clara. The union leader informed that only 32 workers transferred to the Santa Clara mill. By law, laid off workers are entitled to severance pay, yet in 2004, none of the San Sebastián employees had received their payments. Most unemployed workers joined the landless *campesinos*, and obtained work from remaining *cañeros*, found waged work with berry companies, or entered an already saturated informal economy. In an already glutted labor market, many chose to migrate. The poorest group of cane cutters also saw a decline in jobs. Both mills had employed 2400 cutters and by 2004, only 1300 were employed in the two zones.
After the mill closed, Antonio informed, “People were mortified because how could it be that they would close it? The mill was here all our lives.” He delivered his cane to Santa Clara in 2004, and bitterly complained of his poor results. He pulled out his cane payment statement, but was unable to read it. He shook his head in disbelief as I read off the various charges deducted by the mill. These totaled over $100,000 pesos, including $46,000 for planting a new variety. The interest alone was $16,679. The mill had charged $5,532 for canals, but his field lacked an irrigation canal. His 206 tons of cane, valued at $54,191, were insufficient to pay the debt. Angered, he concluded, “Now I’m going to rip out the cane and rent the land. Lots of people have quit because they are robbing us.” Even though Anacleto had small earnings, in 2004 he planned to replant his cane in blackberries. Since the mill would no longer accept his older cane variety and gave insufficient credit for replanting, he explained, “They don’t give the same help. The people choose to rent. For that, many prefer to migrate. That is the problem of Mexico.” His four sons had all migrated to the U.S.

With few exceptions, the 2004 sample consisted of older cañeros, for many younger individuals had migrated in search of better wages in the U.S. Many households in Los Angeles survived on remittances and pensions. Since remittances take up the slack for withdrawal of state support, the extraction of surplus value from Mexican immigrants in the U.S. is a part of state policy to alleviate the economic disaster thrust on the countryside (Rubio 2006). With an aging cañero population, rental of land seemed a more logical option. Economic exigency forced many to rent their land to blackberry growers. Paradoxically, by limiting credit to cañeros, the mill was encouraging expansion of blackberry production—which continued to threaten survival of the Santa Clara mill as the provision zone declined.
From Sugar to Blackberries

Transitions in the sugar industry interfingered with the entry of NTAE production to the region beginning in 1995. It is in the context of privatization and mill closure that NTAE production found fertile ground. By 2006, 3000 of the 10,000 hectares of sugar cane in the supply zone of the two regional sugar mills had been converted to blackberry production. The leader of the local cane growers’ union at the Santa Clara mill, remarked, “The competition with blackberries is very difficult. I fear that if the sugar mill fails, it will be because of the lack of land.” From a region where relations were mostly dominated by the state and national management of the primary industry, now growers and workers confront international capital. In 2006 there were nine berry companies operating in the Los Reyes region: three were Mexican (El Molinito, Exifrut, Expofrut), two were Chilean (Hortifrut, Sun Belle), three were from the U.S. (Driscolls, Hursts, Sunny Ridge) and one was a Chilean-U.S. joint venture (VBM-Giumarra).

The transition from cane to berries contributes to economic differentiation. Unlike union-won social guarantees in the sugar sector, berry workers lack unions, access to health insurance, and retirement benefits. The industry made $46.7 million in profits in 2006. Large-scale, wealthy growers from Los Reyes receive preferential treatment from companies willing to loan startup costs. As the Hursts’ manager explained: “The zone is like an industry. I am not going to risk it. They have to be successful first. This is a business. We are not like Santa Claus!” Contract production allows companies to maintain quality control, while transferring the risks of production to the growers. For those who lacked the financial means to plant berries, construct tunnels, and establish packing sheds, rental appeared a more lucrative choice than delivery of cane to Santa Clara. The Los Reyes growers rent three-fourths of the berry fields in Los Angeles,
which contributes to concentration of land in fewer hands and reduces access to productive land for poorer *campesinos* to support the family economy.

Some Los Angeles *cañeros* did make the transition to berry production, and all berry growers in the community of Los Angeles are former cane growers (Chollett 2009). Women who pick berries and work in the packing sheds fall at the bottom of the wage scale.

Now I will examine the shifting fields of power in the transition from a mostly male-dominated sugar economy to the recently established blackberry regime where women make up a major portion (80%) of the work force. It is essential to understand that social inequalities are embedded in commodities such as sugar and blackberries (Collins 2003). A container of blackberries or bag of sugar is of little interest. What interests us is its representation of a particular historical moment in which production shifted from sugar cane to blackberries and transformed social relations in the region.

Gendered divisions sharpened as growers switched from cane to berries and women came to comprise the primary agricultural work force. Growers lower their own costs through employment of women at substandard wages. Moreover, women’s berry work is seasonal (October to May), so much of the year they lack this income.

Almost all berry growers are men. Among the berry growers interviewed in 2004, Miguel had converted his 3.5 ha. of cane to blackberries when the San Sebastián mill closed. He employs 20 workers, 15 of whom are women because “men don’t like that kind of work.” Jorge also quit cane and planted berries after the mill closed....
He too, regards berry labor as women’s work and hires 10 women and two men. Calixto rented land to grow blackberries and hires 16 women and only two men because “men charge up to $200 per day.” Women average $120 pesos per day ($10.77 U.S.), in contrast to $150 for men. Adán, for example, pays 30 women $120 and five men $150 per day during the harvest. Women make up 80% of the waged berry work force.

It would be wrong to assume, however, that men are privileged and that their lives do not need to be problematized. The incorporation of women into subaltern positions in the labor market also has implications for men’s subaltern positions. The decline in the sugar economy caused many men to lose a more secure source of income, and seek jobs in the berry industry that incur greater extraction of surplus value. Male berry growers earn more than males they employ as waged berry laborers. Women who pick blackberries in Los Reyes earn more than male cane cutters. Yet, all subaltern groups are exploited via low wages, and the surplus value they create accrues to transnational NTAE agribusinesses.

Rubio (2006) opined that the defining characteristic of globalization is social exclusion. Devastation of the sugar economy through structural adjustment, privatization, market opening, and mill closure augmented informalization of labor and long-standing out-migration of men. In turn, more women are being abandoned and left to care for dependent children at the very time that government support for rural communities has practically disappeared. It could be argued in this region that men’s loss of work in the sugar sector was women’s gain in new work opportunities outside the home. For women, it often meant social inclusion into the labor market at even further depressed wages. As informal labor replaces full-time contract employment in rural Mexico, women and children’s labor is underpaid 30-40 percent compared to that of men (Zermeño 2008).
The Wages of Unequal Pay

As women enter waged berry work, gendered discourses are constitutive of gendered inequalities in the workplace and serve as a *material force* for maintenance of a low-waged labor force (Collins 2003). A Marxian labor theory of value is essential in accounting for women’s paid and unremunerated work, as well as their contribution to global capital accumulation. Wright (2006) foregrounds the dialectical contradiction between women’s generation of value for capital and their loss of value as disposable workers. Paradoxically, even as a woman worker depreciates in value, she generates value and contributes to the materialization of global capital.

Berry companies in Los Reyes usually pay women by the box, on a piece-rate basis. As workers pick the berries, they fill 5.6-ounce clamshell containers that already bear the company label and electronic price code. Workers receive approximately $1.09 dollars for each box of 12 containers, or nine cents per container. The average worker can pick 10 boxes (120 containers) per day. When I informed women that a six-ounce container sells for approximately $4.00 dollars in the U.S., they reacted with shock. Clementina remarked, “Well look, they are exploiting us really pretty!” The inadequacy of women’s wages can be measured against the fact that a family of four in Mexico requires $183.24 pesos daily to survive. Moreover, indigenous women from Tarascan communities to the north of Los Reyes often have their boxes undercounted. Since most are illiterate, they sign the ledgers with an “x,” unaware that they are underpaid. They also suffer cultural discrimination.

The wage differential associated with this gendered division of labor clearly distinguishes “women’s work” from “men’s work.” Men engage in agricultural tasks of clearing the land with a machete, operating mechanical equipment, constructing

---

2 This statistic is based on Collins’ (2003) assertion that a family of four requires 4-5 minimum wages to meet basic needs. Using the conservative 4 minimum wages, the 2006 minimum wage was $45.81 (International Solidarity 2006).
tunnels, and fumigating with herbicides and pesticides. These are defined as “heavy” tasks that women lack the strength to manage. The perception of men as more “brutish” and thus stronger prevailed in many discussions. After itemizing the tasks that men do, one berry grower added, “All of this, the woman can not do.” I prodded for an explanation; he replied that when fumigating, the chemicals penetrate women’s skin more easily, and added, “I am not going to put a woman at risk.” The Sun Belle manager, explaining why women would never spray pesticides, crossed his arms over his chest with an air of drama, exclaiming that, “For me it is an ethical issue, it is somewhat moral. The woman is more delicate. The man is brusquer.” One grower remarked, “A man charges more because the work is harder.” As Leacock long ago asserted, “hierarchy becomes written into human physiology” (1983:435).

Almost without exception, company officials and local growers regard women more properly fit to pick berries than men. They considered these tasks to be “easy” and “light,” thus rationalizing their lower wages. A Hursts’ manager informed me that women have more ability to pick berries. When I asked why that might be, he replied, “I don’t know why, it is natural.” An Expofrut manager bluntly stated, "The man is clumsier. Men can pick berries, but they mistreat the fruit.” An executive at VBM asserted, “We employ more women because of the sensitivity of the fingers they possess.” Inevitably, when I asked men why women were chosen to pick berries, they would raise their hands and wriggle their fingers, imputing the tactile sensitivity and agile dexterity unique to women. These discourses diminish women’s skills and capabilities as less valuable and therefore, deserving of lower wages.

Women’s work includes picking berries, pruning bushes with lawn sheers, lifting and weaving the branches into the bushes as they grow, and weeding by hand or with a hoe. Each branch is heavy-laden with half-inch thorns and women bear the scratches of
thorns on their faces, arms, backs, and legs. As I quickly learned through participant observation, tiny thorns remain embedded in the finger tips for several days.

Blackberries and raspberries must be of the right color, firmness, and ripeness to meet the stringent quality requirements for export. The picker, then, must distinguish the ripeness of each berry. Picking requires continual stooping and stretching to reach berries at various heights and depths within the plant, causing many women to complain of back pain. Blackberry plants grow uncontrollably. As the women adeptly work to lift the branches off the ground and weave them back into the vine, the thorns catch their clothing, requiring them to loosen themselves from the grasp of the thorny plant. Early in the morning, the plants are quite wet and after a few hours of work, the women’s clothes become soaked. Since berries require frequent doses of pesticides (Chollett 2009), they may be soaking themselves with toxic chemical residues. Weeding is done either on hands and knees and by hand, or with a hoe. Removal of the thick, deeply-rooted weeds around the base of the plant requires substantial bending and workers frequently complain of backaches from being bent over all day. Women also work in the packing sheds receiving and inspecting the berries delivered by pickers. The work women do in the berry fields is indeed arduous, invalidating inequitable wage distributions between men and women.

My UMM anthropology field school student discovered in his research project that blackberry production requires increased chemical use relative to sugar cane. Many pests have developed resistance to these chemicals, entrenching this industry in a pesticide treadmill. To export, companies strive to comply with EurepGAP (when exporting to Europe) or the USDA’s GAP (Good Agricultural Practices). Companies recognize the importance of food safety, yet compliance is voluntary and safety precautions are based more on marketability of the fruit than on health of berry
workers. Rejection of fruit at the border was a common complaint of Los Angeles berry growers; in 2006, the FDA rejected berries from Sunny Ridge due to excess chloramphenicol, a chemical that causes aplastic anemia and is fatal. It refused entry of Hursts’ berries from Los Reyes five times in 2004 for excessive pesticides.

- **Leobardo**: “They said the fruit arrived with mold. God knows! How would we know? When the packing company receives our fruit, then it is the company’s responsibility. That is what we said, but they denied that. What could we do?”
- **Alicia**: “Hursts was good at first, but they began to reject the fruit. They were saturated with growers. I had to work under the hot sun, with the thorns of the blackberries. That made me very angry. They returned a mountain of boxes—60, or 70, or 80, sometimes all of it. It made me mad. It was a pretext.”

Interviews revealed that none of the women knew what chemicals they were exposed to. Women often complained of the foul odor of agrochemicals. Guadalupe commented, “It smells awful. When they fumigate, my stomach churns. I don’t know what they are spraying—many things.” When I asked Alejandra about fumigating, she replied, “The smell is strong. Some women get sick and vomit.” María stated, “My eyes burned and I couldn’t stand it. Many vomit and have headaches.” Evangelina pointed out: “Sometimes when they fumigate it smells very strong and I get dizzy. The truth is I don’t know [what chemical they are spraying].”

The sister of one of my interviewees and her co-workers were sent to the hospital when a methyl bromide tank exploded on a Sun Belle field. Unable to breathe, their lives were at risk. Another berry worker miscarried while working in the field. The long-term impact of agricultural chemicals remains unassessed. Because men do the spraying and rarely comply with safe handling (masks, gloves, boots, etc.) they are more directly affected and numerous reports among villagers attest to illnesses and even deaths caused by pesticides. Although male fumigators are directly at great risk, exposure of
women to these dangerous chemicals poses the invisible health risk of women’s berry work that remains unaccounted for in the costs of production. Martínez-Salazar (1999) noted the hidden oppressive realities that lie behind the perfect, exported fruit or vegetable. Like collateral damage, pesticides are one of the externalities of NTAE production, hidden in the electronic price tag on the supermarket shelf. Northern consumers fail to discern that their own consumption contributes to miserable wages and exposure to toxic pesticides, while companies remain unaccountable for creating unsafe work places. To expose women and men to these dangers contributes to their materialization as disposable workers.

Gender and Households

My research also addresses household relations and women’s empowerment, but unfortunately time does not permit me to present it here. Very briefly, women who labor in the berry fields represent a wide age range (13-67), and a diverse assortment of married women, female-headed households, abandoned and widowed women, and single mothers. Age, marital status, life cycle, and economic status among berry workers shape the internal differentiation of households in Los Angeles. I found that many very young women dropped out of school in order to earn wages. Some teenagers had the liberty to spend their earnings as they wished: Rosa, age 16, exclaimed, "The first week I was dizzy with the money I earned! I couldn’t believe it!" Yet others worked to help support their families. When her mother was abandoned and left to provide for five children, Marta, age 13, began to work for Sun Belle. Marta was the only source of support for her family. With increasing out-migration, abandonment is common; 15% of my sample consisted of abandoned women. Francisca and her husband grow their own berries and were able to purchase a new automatic washer and dryer with their earnings. In contrast, Irma and her husband both work for Hortifrut.
Ironically, Irma must wear the quintessential badge of labor flexibility—an electronically coded identification card. Even with their dual income, she and Rafael live in a tiny, one-room house with no running water, stove, or refrigerator. Because the company offers no medical insurance, Irma spends her entire earnings on medical expenses for their chronically ill daughter. Sophisticated electronic systems that facilitate flexible accumulation for transnational capital intersect with the low wages that compromise women’s economic well-being.

An Uncertain Future

Ominous challenges lie on the horizon. Cane production declined at Santa Clara from 600,765 tons in 2007 to 467,410 in 2009 (Casillas Mendoza 2008, 2009). That year, all three Michoacán mills showed the sharpest production decline in a decade. At the end of the 2009 harvest, yet another Michoacán sugar mill stopped operation. Ingenio Puruarán offers but one illustration among the five closed mills I have researched over the past decade of the unevenness of neoliberal globalization. A six-year counter-hegemonic struggle followed the mill closing in 1992. Cañeros, mill workers, and community members illegally seized the factory and put it in operation. Repression of the movement brought further conflicts among state, industrial, and productive sectors, and a second mill seizure in 1996. For 12 years, from 1998 to 2009, the community operated the mill on the fringes of neoliberal hegemony, providing jobs and income that had been denied under the neoliberal model. Ultimately, mismanagement of the cooperative-run mill resulted in bankruptcy in 2009 and the community is once again without a source of work. No such struggle followed closing of the San Sebastián mill. However, compared to Puruarán, the impact was somewhat ameliorated by the encroachment of alternative NTAE crops in the area that offered at least partial alternatives to cane production.
Nonetheless, a decline in price in 2008-09 led blackberry growers to abandon 30 percent of the land planted in berries (Gil 2009). The region now faces an uncertain future.

Conclusions

Northern demand, transnational agribusiness, and household arrangements in the Global South are bound in a network of dialectical contradictions that require the marginalization of some for the enrichment of others. The Northern corn farmer who sells his/her overabundant crop for processing into HFCS, in turn contributes to industrial decline and restructuring of class and gender in the Global South. The Northern consumer who purchases a $4.00 container of blackberries on a cold winter day will not realize that those berries were picked by the hand of a woman, who labored in the hot sun and earned nine cents for her labor. Agro-chemical giants reap immense profits as companies export the perfect fruit from fields of underpaid labor, while both men and women are exposed to agro-chemicals that endanger their health.

Global processes, including free trade agreements and the mobility of capital are fundamental to transformations in sugar and NTAE production. NTAE expansion substitutes for the higher incomes and social guarantees that the berry industry displaced from the region. More women have jobs, but fewer men do so. Women’s wages fall at the bottom of a chain of profit that transfers millions of dollars outside the region, to the countries of transnational agribusiness interests. Waged berry labor for women is essential to, and an integral part of, flexible accumulation in the global economy. Blackberry agro-industries, berry fields, packing sheds, and households form a web of dialectical relations that are constitutive of emergent class and gender differentiation and shifting hierarchies of power.