

Essays

Líderes Campesinas

Nepantla Strategies and Grassroots Organizing at the Intersection of Gender and Globalization

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ABSTRACT: *Based on a collaborative ethnography with Líderes Campesinas, a state-wide farmworker women's organization in California, this essay explores how activists have created multi-issued organizing strategies grounded in family structures and a community-based social world. Building on Gloria Anzaldúa's theory of nepantla, it illustrates how campesina organizers create sources of empowerment from their binational life experiences and new forms of gendered grassroots leadership that navigate the overlapping hybrid hegemonies produced by U.S., Mexican, and migrant relations of power. The author argues that immigrant women's organizing challenges the racialized and gendered forms of structural violence exacerbated by neoliberal globalization and serves as an unrecognized source of transnational feminist theorizing.*

Over twenty years ago, Gloria Anzaldúa (1987) first theorized the space between binaries by naming two powerful and distinct forms of in-betweenness: the borders between nation-states and the borders between categories of power (male/female, straight/queer, Mexican/American) (Segura and Zavella 2007). From the most exclusionary narratives of home, nation, border control, and citizenship, Anzaldúa remapped an alternative sense of belonging and being, one that did not resolve the violence and exclusion of borders but named them as margins and crossroads of possibility (Blackwell 2004a). Many scholars have adopted only one side of her formulation—that of hybridity. I argue that we must also attend to how she emphasized the borderlands as a site of violence that can bring forth new political projects and identities and new strategies for community organizing, or what I refer to throughout this essay as *nepantla* strategies.¹

Nepantla is a word used by Náhuatl speakers during the colonization of Mexico to name a place or space between two colliding cultures. Anzaldúa

(1987, 1993) used this term to describe the specialized set of skills that border dwellers, or *nepantleras*, develop as a result of surviving the violence of being caught between, translating, and hybridizing multiple systems of gendered, sexual, cultural, linguistic, and economic power.²

Based on collaborative research with members of Líderes Campesinas, this essay explores how organized female farmworkers have created nepantla strategies to forge new subjectivities as campesinas (their preferred term), new kinds of political leadership, and new gendered modes of empowerment and community mobilization, all within the conditions of structural violence created by globalization.³ Campesinas are political actors who move within and between boundaries that are rigidly maintained by geopolitical power relations such as the U.S.-Mexico border and by more intimate forms of power regulated through the public and private spheres. How does this inform their practice of gendered grassroots leadership? How can their organizing strategies inform our understanding of power in this era of neoliberal globalization? How might their ways of reading power through the intersections of race, sexuality, gender, economics, and geopolitics contribute to our understanding of how immigrant organizers practice new forms of transnational politics and subjectivity?

Nepantla Strategies: The Art of Resistance in the Neoliberal Age

Anzaldúa's understanding of the cultural and political processes that are produced in nepantla has proven generative, providing an enduring contribution to feminist, Chicana/o, Latina/o, and Latin American studies (Mignolo 2000). Her thinking has reshaped critical conversations within cultural studies (Castañeda et al. 2007; Pérez-Torres 2006), history (González 2007; Pérez 1999), critical theory (Sandoval 1998), theater (Arrizón 2006), education (Burciaga 2007), and the study of sexuality (Pérez 2003). While her theorizing maps in-between cultural imaginaries and names an alternative way of being that can navigate multiple systems of power and meaning, my project here is to illustrate the ways in which

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this consciousness functions in social movements, political organizing, and grassroots mobilization. These forms of consciousness can produce what I call nepantla strategies—strategies based on understanding how power operates in extremely restricted spaces and on adapting tactics that move in and between those confinements to open new possibilities. Nepantla strategies include differential modes of consciousness, hybrid political discourses, and the ability to move and shift between sites of struggle and to traffic meanings and knowledge from one context to another to create new cultural narratives of gender and empowerment.

While many write about nepantla in religious, linguistic, and cultural strategies of syncretism, adaptation, and survival, few scholars have examined how these forms of consciousness might inform the arts of resistance and political organizing, or what Chela Sandoval calls the theory and methodology of the oppressed. Sandoval first defined her theory of differential consciousness (1991) as the ability to strategically use consciousness by shifting like the gears of a car to fit any situational configuration of power. She later drew in a resonant thread of connection to Anzaldúa in her elaboration of differential consciousness and called this capacity “mestizaje as method” (1998). Both generative and dependent on mestiza consciousness, Sandoval’s differential strategy “reads and interprets these technologies and power as transformable social narratives designed to intervene in reality for the sake of social justice” (1998, 361). Emma Pérez has called the ability to move in and between interstitial spaces “third space” feminist practices (1999). I build on this tradition of inquiry to examine how immigrant women’s organizing is also an unrecognized source of transnational feminist theorizing and provides vital coordinates in the worldwide movement against neoliberal globalization.

Líderes Campesinas uses nepantla strategies in at least three ways. First, the organizers create transnational subjectivities out of their own binational narratives and memories to analyze their life trajectories and create new forms of empowerment. Second, they analyze intersectional forms of oppression, specifically the shifting configurations of racial power that are staged on indigenous migrants from Mexico. And third, they engage in a form of community organizing that defies the categories of public and private and challenges the assumption that labor organizing happens primarily in the workplace and is limited to workplace issues, in this case, the fields. This essay investigates how transnational migrant women organizers use tactics such as *teatro*, vigils, and coalition building to move between the local and national levels to seek justice and how they use a social movement

repertoire that centers on their own transnational lived experiences and community formations.⁴

Born out of constriction and marginalization, the nepantla strategies developed by members of *Líderes Campesinas* give us a window into how political actors navigate new critical zones in between the local and the global, zones where differences in power have been exacerbated by neoliberal policies. These interstitial spaces are where postcolonial critics and transnational feminists have theorized old imperial hegemonies, which have become “dispersed” (Appadurai 1990) by new configurations of transnational capital. My analytical approach is to intertwine the global and the local (Alexander and Mohanty 1997) in examining the ways that globalization shapes the daily, lived experiences of women and their organizing strategies beyond the dimensions of women’s economic oppression (Naples 2002).⁵ Denise Segura and Patricia Zavella (2007) theorize the ways in which women migrants are negotiating new social and political spaces from their complex location in the interstices of two dominant national/cultural systems as subjective transnationalism. The women of *Líderes Campesinas* negotiate not just two national cultural systems but also multiple patriarchies—what Caren Kaplan and Inderpal Grewal (1994) have called scattered hegemonies in describing how these multiple systems of power intersect and come to bear on social actors. My analysis names the intersection of local and transnational hegemonic systems and describes the ways in which they shift, overlap, and hybridize in the process of migration. I further identify how differential consciousness is used to create nepantla strategies to negotiate these simultaneously globalized and localized technologies of power.

Neoliberal globalization is a profoundly gendered process. Researchers have underscored the significance of female labor in the global economy (Naples and Desai 2002), the feminization of immigration (Chang 2000; Hondagneu-Sotelo 2003), and the interrelationship between the feminization, flexibilization, and globalization of labor (Moghadam 2005). Yet the relation between gender and globalization cannot be studied in isolation, because transnational capital also relies on histories of colonial and racial oppression or “processes of recolonization” (Alexander and Mohanty 1997, xvii) to perpetuate entrenched economic inequalities in its “race to the bottom” in search of ever cheaper labor (Louie 2001).

Just as migrant women negotiate multiple patriarchies, they are also learning to navigate multiple racial hegemonies formed by the merging of transnational, national, and local racial and ethnic hierarchies that

reinforce class oppression. This collision of new and old racial systems of power intersects in turn with gendered forms of oppression, as seen in the racial politics behind the global division of labor and in the role of geopolitics in determining which women enter the increasingly feminized migrant workforce. The complexities of at least two systems of race, gender, and class then hybridize in the process of migration and are compounded by citizenship status. In the same way that growers and foremen have historically used racial/ethnic categories to segment the labor force (Almaguer 1994; Bonacich 1972), gendered discrimination (Nakano Glenn 1985) and sexist assumptions about women's labor have led to new politics of race, gender, and geopolitics in the global assembly line and policies of economic restructuring (Ho, Powell, and Volpp 2000; Salzinger 2003; Zavella 2000).⁶ In addition, racial power is resignified and used to create structures of disempowerment and labor segmentation in ways that rely on the exploitation of indigenous migrants in the increasingly global agricultural industry (Fox and Rivera-Salgado 2004; Kearney 1995; Stephen 2007; Velasco 2000). These racial hegemonies from Mexico that have marginalized indigenous peoples are not just imported; they are hybridized and get mapped on American race and class relations. In this context, both mestiza and indigenous women migrants are reading multiple systems of power and forging new skills of intersectional analysis that may be key to understanding and organizing transnational and migratory labor forces.

Campesina Organizing in the Globalized Context of California Agriculture

California's image is built on a healthy lifestyle that relies on the year-round availability of high-quality fruits and vegetables. Yet those responsible for bringing that abundance to our tables do so in extremely dangerous, sometimes fatal, working and living conditions that do not include basic levels of housing, health care, education, or transportation. This is true even though the state of California is among the top five economies of the world, surpassing the gross national product of some nations. Agriculture is the biggest industry in California, generating over \$26 billion in 2001 with the help of 700,000 farmworkers, 95 percent of them born outside the United States (Agricultural Issues Center 2003). California farmworkers are 96 percent Latino, with the remaining 4 percent primarily Southeast Asian and Punjab immigrants (Rodriguez, Toller, and Dowling 2003).

Women make up 27 percent of California farmworkers (Seif 2008). The women we interviewed were staff and members of the Líderes Campesinas chapters in Salinas, Madera, Merced, Huron, Lamont, Ventura County, Coachella Valley, Watsonville, King City, and Imperial Valley. They performed a wide range of agricultural tasks—picking, cropping, weeding, thinning, packing, and spraying, as well as cleaning equipment and wine barrels. A few prepared meals for other workers when, because of age discrimination, employers would no longer hire them. Some had worked for five years or so picking seasonal crops, while others had a decade or more of experience as packers in the fields or in the chilled agricultural packinghouses. One woman had spent over twenty years picking every major crop grown in California before eventually landing a year-round job in a winery.

This article is based on collaborative ethnographic research with Líderes Campesinas that took place over the summer of 2005 (roughly July through October).⁷ Our team was comprised of myself along with undergraduate researchers from the University of California, Los Angeles. We traveled up and down the state of California to small agricultural towns to conduct participant observation and interviews at meetings in the homes of women farmworker organizers, at the edges of fields, in radio stations, at conferences, and at workshops.⁸ We conducted ten oral histories based on full life narratives with key historical actors, as well as grassroots members and the staff of Líderes Campesinas. We also conducted more than a dozen in-depth semi-structured interviews with members of the base from key constituencies such as youth and indigenous organizers.⁹ The ethnographic research was conducted during our many visits to the main office in Pomona as well as within the California communities where Líderes Campesinas has local committees, including the Coachella Valley, Watsonville, Hollister, Indio, Salinas, Lamont, Madera, Ventura, and Huron, where we stayed in the homes of members who generously hosted our team throughout our collaboration.

Líderes Campesinas (formally known as Organización en California de Líderes Campesinas) is the only statewide organization of women farmworkers in the country. Originally called Mujeres Mexicanas, the organization emerged out of a needs assessment study conducted in 1988 in the Coachella Valley. A group of women farmworkers who were hired to conduct interviews or *charlas* (chats) with other campesinas began the organization based on critiques from interviewees who were frustrated with state, nonprofit, and academic organizations, which did studies “on” them

rather than supporting projects that would foster their own empowerment. The interviewers realized that the campesinas did not need to be clients of any agency or organization: they could organize collectively to resolve their own problems. Longtime executive director Mily Treviño Saucedo explained how participating in the study transformed her:

Before, I saw myself as the leader of my community, but after I saw that I just had a big head. Participating in the study helped me understand leadership differently. The women did not need me to come around and help them. They were asking for information so that they could solve the issues and problems themselves. (2005)

The women who first began organizing in the Coachella Valley under the name *Mujeres Mexicanas* eventually branched out to organize fifteen active local committees in different regions of the state.¹⁰ They also convened five statewide gatherings, or *convivencias*. In 1993 they took the name *Líderes Campesinas* after forming a statewide organizing committee, and they gained nonprofit status in 1997. Today the group has over 500 members who are organized through eight local committees across the state, with a headquarters in Pomona. Each local committee has an elected representative on the board of directors, as does the youth advisory committee formed by the daughters, granddaughters, and nieces of early *Líderes Campesinas* members. The standing programmatic structure covers working conditions, family violence, youth, and women's health.

The mission of *Líderes Campesinas* is to train migrant women farmworkers in California to advocate for their own human rights and to work collectively to solve the problems of injustice in their lives and communities. The organization seeks to change the dismal working conditions in the fields and packinghouses and educates campesinas about pesticide exposure, gender discrimination, sexual harassment, and assault. They organize educational meetings where they use teatro and popular education to raise awareness of the issues of domestic violence, the lack of adequate housing and basic transportation for farmworkers, and women's health and well-being. *Líderes Campesinas* has also attempted to address issues of particular concern to indigenous migrants, who number nearly 70,000 in California and are projected to make up 20 percent of the state's farmworker population by 2010 (Fox 2006). Their outreach program, aimed at the largely Mixtec-speaking indigenous population of rural California, has not been without tensions, and the organization has been challenged to be more inclusive of indigenous farmworkers.¹¹

Líderes Campesinas accomplishes its transformative work through gendered modes of organizing based on in-home community meetings that utilize food, sociability, and information sharing to give women resources in a comfortable environment. These meetings use family and community networks to bring together and organize sisters, mothers, daughters, aunts, grandmothers, *comadres*, neighbors, and girlfriends. At the meetings, Líderes Campesinas uses cultural forms such as *tamaladas* (where tamales are made collectively), theatrical skits, and *novelas* to help women gain knowledge and build capacity as well as develop other forms of sociability and cultures of resistance. Their pedagogy of leadership has taken from the best of many traditions: part Mary Kay (minus the pink Cadillac), part UFW house meeting, part *teatro campesino*, part neighborhood association, and part family dinner or community potluck. This study illustrates how Líderes Campesinas has developed programs that recognize campesina expertise about their own lives and work and how they have employed this knowledge to develop leadership among campesinas who organize their families, communities, and workplaces. Líderes Campesinas has developed modes of leadership and organizing strategies that recognize not only that systems of power are based on race, gender, and class discrimination embedded in structural conditions and institutions but that these relationships of power are created and reinforced in familial and communal structures as well. In response, they employ multivariant organizing strategies and leadership modes grounded in family structures and a community-based social world.

Gender, Migration, Memory: Subjective Transnationalism and the Process of Empowerment

Segura and Zavella's notion of subjective transnationalism describes the ways in which organized Mexican migrant women are constructing oppositional diasporic subjectivities (Pérez 1999) and new forms of consciousness born out of the experience of not fitting in "here" or "there" (Vélez-Ibáñez and Sampaio 2002). For example, campesina organizers use their own binational life experiences as a source of empowerment, illustrating the role of subjective transnationalism in building consciousness. Through critical reflection on their life stories, they name how class and gender oppression in the fields echoes patriarchal structures learned in the family, where women often are socialized to serve others and have internalized the belief that women should know their "place." By sharing their lived experience, organizers have begun to explore how patriarchal and asymmetrical

relations of gendered power in the workplace rely on and reproduce family roles they learned as girls.

The forms of subjective transnationalism woven through the migrant women's testimonies we gathered have been richly theorized by Chicana feminist ethnographer Patricia Zavella (2000) as peripheral vision, and more recently by Lynn Stephen (2007) as bifocal vision. Zavella uses this concept to describe the influence of *el otro lado* (the other side) both on sending communities and on the lives of migrants. As a result of binational experiences, transnational communities experience a new reality between "here" and "there," and this in turn shapes new gendered expectations, codes of conduct, and social worlds. Migrant women use subjective transnationalism to make meaning out of their lived experience. In many cases they renarrativize this experience (Choque and Delgado-P. 2000) to create new sources of empowerment and shift their understanding of their roles as women in "el otro lado."

PARA SERVIRLES (TO SERVE YOU): LA FEA TALKS BACK

In a powerful interview, María Elena Valadez recalled that her family told her that she was *la fea*, the ugly daughter in the family, so her role would be to work in the kitchen to serve others. As the fourth of fourteen children and the second-born daughter, María Elena began to fulfill this role when she was eight or nine years old:

In Mexico, the custom is that the eldest daughter takes care of the siblings and because you are a woman you have to follow your role. My mother was in charge of having children, but I had to raise them. I would have to bring them up . . . I was the little mother for them. First it was my other sister, but she is the beautiful one. I am the ugly one. The ugly has to work for the beautiful one. I was made to believe that I am worthless. My self-esteem was very low. (Valadez 2005)

María Elena made a clear link between her socialization in Mexico and her internalization of the belief that women are only made to serve others, even after working in the fields all day. Her analysis illustrates how discrimination, labor expectations, and oppression against girls translate into the idea that even after experiencing the poor labor conditions of the fields, long hours, and low pay, women continue to perform reproductive and domestic labor when they get home—the double day. For example, when María Elena and her husband would return from working in the fields together, her husband would begin demanding dinner and clean clothes.

“Then I said, whatever, someone has to do this work, and it is me, because I am a woman. Me with no school and nothing else. I had no idea that I had worth, that I was good for anything else but to serve” (Valadez 2005).

EL OTRO LADO: LEARNING THE DOUBLE DAY OF CAMPESINAS

The inequality and the discrimination that women experience in Mexico are replicated and exacerbated by new forms of racism and exploitation of women workers in the United States. The story that María Reyes shared reveals the subjective transnationalism that bisects women’s lived experiences of agricultural labor. It shatters the stereotype that immigrant women’s life stories can be plotted along linear narratives of progress, in which migrant women find modernity and democracy and escape sexism, oppression, and violence by coming to the United States.

María, who generously hosted me while I conducted interviews in the Salinas/Watsonville area, is known for her delicious *nopales*. The skill of tenderly coaxing a deep and rich flavor out a cactus is a metaphor for how organizers draw out the hidden knowledge and abilities of women within the farmworker community. We talked over her kitchen table, where many of the Líderes members came to participate in interviews with me, although I teased María that they were really coming over for her *nopales*. And indeed, with limited resources, she manages to feed the many who pass through her kitchen, which serves as a heart of the neighborhood and as an organizing center for its families. When we finally sit down so she can share her own story with me, I am amazed to learn that María picked almost every crop grown in the state of California in her twenty-plus years of fieldwork before eventually landing a coveted full-time, year-round job in a winery.

María speaks to the silence about labor and “the other side.” When her husband first began migrating to work in *el norte* (the north), he never spoke about the working conditions here. Typically, migrants do not share the hardships they endure on the other side. These silences carried over when María herself left Mexico and crossed the border with her young children to begin working in the fields with her husband. She vividly recalls the first day, when her mother-in-law told her to wake up at four in the morning to make lunch for the family before going to the fields to work. The mother-in-law never explained what the work expectations would be or why she had to make lunches and pack water. María felt forced into servitude and cried after that first day because of the arduous labor, the

blisters that covered her hands, and her mother-in-law's failure to prepare her for the conditions facing a woman working in the fields. These included having no access to restrooms, which can lead to urinary tract infections and other health problems. María's story shows how the silences that are meant to protect often perpetuate or create a culture in which people stop speaking of working conditions.

Becoming a woman farmworker meant learning to perform the campesina's double day, in which wage work is preceded and followed by the unpaid reproductive labor of preparing food, caring for children and husband, cleaning the house, and washing clothes. María reflected that regardless of your work in the fields,

[The work of] women is still the same. The women get up much earlier. One or two, two hours or more. During that time they prepare food. The mothers that take their children to childcare, they have to prepare their bottles—if they still use a bottle—and their clothes for all day. And they still have to prepare their food because there are people who do childcare but request that you bring [the child's] food. Then there is an additional job, right? (Reyes 2005)

María's story reveals the multiple pressures that constrain the lives of women migrants, complicating the assumption that women are liberated when they come to the United States. Migrants are trapped, on the one hand, by the need to repay the economic debt they incurred through migration and by their citizenship status, which renders them vulnerable to control and domination by others. There is the constant threat of deportation, not just for themselves but for family members, who most often have mixed status in relation to their "legality." On the other hand, women migrants' desire to create a better life for themselves and their families and to stave off the hunger of the sending communities through remittances often keeps them in jobs they might otherwise leave.

Becoming an organizer often requires taking on yet another shift of work. Speaking of the labor of organizing, women labor activists in Latin America refer to the *triple jornada* (triple day or third shift). As analysts and activists alike have noted, subjective transnationalism has created new forms of organizing or social movement practices when migrants apply their lived experiences across borders to new organizing contexts. This process, for example, contributed to the revitalization of a dormant labor movement in Los Angeles by Central American organizers (Hamilton and Chinchilla 2001). Another example comes from Florida, where farmworker organizers retooled popular education techniques developed in their sending

communities to help the Coalition of Immokalee Workers (2003) launch an innovative campaign against Taco Bell. In the case of Líderes Campesinas, María Elena Valadez used a form of subjective transnationalism as an analytical lens to understand how her lack of education in Mexico was a source of her disempowerment and continued subservience in the United States. María Reyes named the kinds of silences that migrants keep about labor *en el norte*, especially in relation to women's double or triple day, in order to protect relatives at home from knowing the hardships of migrants' lives and the true cost of the remittances they send.

Indigenous Migrant Women Navigating Hybrid Hegemonies

Indigenous women in Líderes Campesinas are also challenging multiple forms of oppression caused by ethnic discrimination and hatred perpetuated against Mexican indigenous peoples. They confront not only the racial discrimination that Mexicans experience in the United States but also deep-seated anti-Indian prejudice that many foremen exploit to segment the labor market even further. Occupational discrimination and ethnic segregation translate into wage disparities based on whether a worker is seen to be indigenous or not. With migration, racism against indigenous peoples in Mexico carries over into new forms of psychic violence and material oppression on this side of the border. This complex racial formation is compounded by gendered discrimination against indigenous women migrants (Velasco 2000).

Leonor López, a Mixtec organizer from Lamont, said foremen pit mestizos against indigenous workers. She recalled one job where people from Guanajuato and Michoacán were paid \$6.00 an hour while the Oaxaqueños, who are all assumed to be indigenous, were paid \$5.25 an hour. Leonor also described how one foreman that she worked for during the apricot harvest would divide the farmworkers up by their state of origin. Once she got lost and began working with the group from Michoacán, and the foreman yelled at her to go back with the Oaxacans. Another foreman chastised a tall indigenous man for grouping himself with the Oaxacans; even though the man was from Oaxaca, the foreman assumed, stereotypically, that because he was tall he was not indigenous and therefore not Oaxacan.

Several indigenous women discussed how foremen often create employment obstacles for indigenous people. One foreman told Leonor that he

would not hire her if she did not know how to prune grapes, even though he seemed willing to train others. This age-old divide-and-conquer tactic, where bosses divide workers by ethnicity, race, nationality, and language to prevent solidarity and collective action, has a long history in U.S. plantation and agricultural work. As free trade and neoliberal policies have reshaped and reached deeper into rural Mexico, new sectors of the indigenous population have been forced into the migrant stream (Fox and Rivera-Salgado 2004; Kearney 1995). By exploiting these conditions, growers benefit from new forms of labor segmentation and segregation.

Leonor shared her analysis of the working conditions that exist in the fields and how gender discrimination is layered onto this complicated ethnic situation (López 2005). “The life of the indigenous woman is very hard,” she began, as she recalled how she had once attempted to convince a foreman to hire her by proving to him that she could work as hard as a man. During her trial run, the male workers undermined her attempt at gender equity by working even faster than normal to show that women were slower and weaker no matter how hard they tried. While indigenous campesinas endure the same double day as their mestiza counterparts, they face additional challenges. Because the majority of rural indigenous women do not have many educational opportunities, many do not learn Spanish, so this group consists largely of monolingual Mixtec or Triqui speakers. Demanding justice in the workplace or even accessing social services becomes nearly impossible if one does not speak English or Spanish. Leonor noted,

The women from Oaxaca confront many more challenges than those from other states, because the ones from Oaxaca, there are some that do not speak Spanish. For them it is much harder to work, it is much harder to go to a health clinic, and it is much harder to ask for help. All because you don't speak [Spanish]. (López 2005)

The indigenous women in *Líderes Campesinas* have struggled to show how their differences require different organizing tactics for issues like domestic violence. They have had to develop modes of leadership and community organizing that are culturally and linguistically appropriate. Indigenous women who serve as migrant organizers are learning to navigate multiple political spaces of exclusion where they may feel marginalized because of gender inequity in indigenous rights organizations or because of covert racism in mestiza women's organizations—or both. Migrant indigenous women activists navigate complex terrain surrounding language use, and they are finding their footing in settings where their political growth

has been limited by community survival strategies that can isolate women from “outsiders.” They have challenged their own communities to include them in decision-making processes and to respect the work they do when they leave their homes and travel outside their communities to organize.

Maura Salazar (2005) reflected on her sense of isolation within the organization and also within her family, which was not initially supportive of her organizing activities. Confronting cultural values that specify women’s place as in the home, she faced her community’s perception that women who work outside the home and travel away from the community are women of questionable virtue. Maura described how things changed after she was recognized for her work by receiving a community award. After that, her son told her that he supported her and *que sigue adelante* (keep on going). Maura used nepantla strategies not only to bring about external social change but also to transform the complex web of personal relations that must be renegotiated when women become empowered community leaders. Maura measured her success as a leader through her relationships to family and community. When asked how her son’s acknowledgement made her feel, she wept and said that she felt very proud. While Maura’s sons and brothers initially questioned her public activities and civic involvement, they came to see that what she was learning enabled her to develop personally and to make a positive contribution to their community.

Reading these shifting power relationships is an important form of differential consciousness fostered by organizers. These shifts in consciousness have led to nepantla strategies by which migrant women navigate multiple and hybrid systems of racial power and meaning. Many indigenous migrants do not necessarily have indigenous identities before they migrate. But the experiences of racism, cultural difference, and exclusion that occur once they leave their sending communities can often lead to the formulation of new political identities. Organizers are learning to challenge Mexican mestizos who would speak for them or organize in their name. They are confronting a gendered logic of racism that claims that indigenous communities are more sexist (read backward, uncivilized) than mestizo communities (Blackwell 2004b; Hernández Castillo 2001). And they increasingly criticize groups that use funds from foundations or state agencies to address the problems faced by indigenous migrant populations without including members of indigenous communities themselves.

Gender and Grassroots Leadership: Differential Strategies for a Global Age

Líderes Campesinas has created a model of collective leadership that has at its heart a philosophy of individual and community empowerment. The organization's goal is to develop leaders who can help increase the community's knowledge, skill base, and access to resources. Dolores Delgado Bernal's study (1998) of women's participation and leadership in the 1968 walkouts by high school students in East Los Angeles led to a reconceptualization of leadership in the Chicano movement. Building on feminist scholarship on women's grassroots organizing, she observed that grassroots women leaders do not distinguish between tasks of organizing and those of leadership (Brodkin Sacks 1988). Delgado Bernal identified the five aspects of grassroots leadership as "networking, organizing, developing consciousness, holding an elected or appointed office, and acting as an official or unofficial spokesperson" (124). While she did not find these dimensions of leadership to be gender-specific, this broadened concept of leadership more accurately captures the grassroots and cooperative models Carol Hardy-Fanta (2002) documented in her study of Latina leadership in Boston. Furthermore, Hardy-Fanta found that there indeed were gendered distinctions in concepts of leadership: Latinas, she found, do not define leadership as "positions and dominance but [as] the relationship between people" (201).

This study contributes to that scholarship by investigating precisely how and why grassroots leadership is gendered. For example, Líderes Campesinas's philosophy of leadership includes the profound work of inspiring self-esteem by helping women recognize their own inherent leadership skills. When new women enter the group, they are asked, "Who here in this group is a leader?" When the new women do not respond, a facilitator will ask the women, "Well, have you organized a *quinciñera*?" As many women have organized a *quinciñera* (or another large family event), the facilitator will point out, "Well, then, of course you are a leader; you have already demonstrated your leadership skills." Together the group identifies which leadership skills come into play in organizing a *quinciñera*, thereby valuing the knowledge and know-how that women put into practice every day. This simple exercise enables women to view themselves differently.

Facilitators might also ask new members to recall a time when they helped out a neighbor, co-worker, or family member. Through this exercise, the women come to see that they already possess advocacy skills. Líderes

Campesinas demystifies leadership and naturalizes it in the social worlds of their members. While many of these qualities and experiences are associated with traditional gender roles, Líderes Campesinas takes these roles as a point of departure for empowerment and transformation. They illustrate how women demonstrate leadership “naturally” through the material, affective practices of everyday family and communal life, through their roles as wives, mothers, sisters, comadres, friends, neighbors, co-workers, and community members.

Campesina organizers in California deploy nepantla strategies to navigate complex layers of racial systems and power that are both old and new. Using old strategies to undermine labor solidarity, employers have modified practices of racial/ethnic labor segmentation to take advantage of the increasing presence of indigenous migrants and their lower status relative to other workers. The sections that follow illustrate how nepantla strategies require reading power in complex local/global configurations in order to create social change in multiple scales of power. Describing the ways in which Líderes Campesinas organizers move between sites of power in the home and workplace, between public and private spheres, and into the realm of national legislation, I illustrate how nepantla strategies help create new spaces of participation in the very limiting confines of intersecting oppressions based on gender, poverty, race, ethnicity, and citizenship status. One of the most powerful things about the organizers I spent time with is how they challenge the multiple forces of inequality and exclusion in their lives by beginning from the ground they stand on and by transforming many gendered daily roles and spaces into sources of female empowerment.

SCALES OF ORGANIZING: NEGOTIATING LEADERSHIP AND EMPOWERED FAMILIES

For many women, their husband’s resistance, which was initially an obstacle to participation, was a catalyst for the development of their leadership skills. An early participant in *Mujeres Mexicanas* and longtime organizer for Líderes Campesinas, Virginia Ortega, served as the assistant coordinator for the organization’s family violence program at the time of this study. Although nowadays she routinely tackles issues of domestic and sexual violence, her first organizing experiences in the fields were challenging because she had to hide her activities from her husband, who did not approve. She worked in the grape fields and gathered signatures by ducking low between the rows of vines so he could not see what she was doing (Ortega 2005).

While in many cases family members and partners have become part of the process of women's empowerment and leadership, other relationships have ended because of a woman's participation. A few husbands refused to tolerate the shifts in their wives' time and attention due to participation in *Líderes Campesinas* when it meant that their dinners were not cooked and served at the usual time. Nor are single women exempt from these pressures. When I asked María Inés Catalán, a former member of the board of directors and one of California's first Latina organic farmers, about the obstacles to becoming an empowered women, she said that one challenge was being single because it was hard to find a man who did not regard the work as threatening. We joked that *Líderes Campesinas* should start a progressive single men's dating service.

One of the key principles of *Líderes Campesinas* is that organizing begins at home. Members have many experiences of success in both family-based mobilization and multi-generation organizing. Mily Treviño Saucedo learned to organize with her father and brothers in the California fields as the whole family participated in campaigns for the United Farm Workers (UFW). She has mobilized her brothers and their families many times over the years to support *Líderes Campesinas*. Catalán (2005) identified the ability of the family to work together as the single most important factor in the success of the organic farm she runs just outside Salinas. I saw these systems of accountability and support on the day of our interview. As we were driving to our appointment—youth member Hermelinda Guzmán accompanied me to help with the documentation process—we got lost on the small roads between farms and arrived late. When we arrived, the whole Catalán family was harvesting tomatoes—even kids who had come directly from school—in order to bring in the harvest in time to take to the farmer's market in Santa Cruz early the next morning. As we conducted our interview, they kept looking at us as the sun sank lower; finally we concluded the interview and joined them to finish the harvest (fig. 1).

In addition, there are several powerful teams of mothers and daughters who participate together in the organization. For example, Hermelinda Guzmán, who served as the board president at the time of this study, joined with the encouragement of her mother, Maria Castro, a former officer in the Watsonville chapter (fig. 2).



Figure 1. María Inés Catalán with her father on their family farm. Photograph by Maylei Blackwell.



Figure 2. María Inés Catalán (left) and Hermelinda Guzmán (right). Guzmán was president of the board of directors of Líderes Campesinas at the time of this photograph. Photograph by Maylei Blackwell.

BEYOND SOCIAL MOTHERHOOD: BLURRING THE BOUNDARIES BETWEEN PUBLIC AND PRIVATE LEADERSHIP

Most scholarship on labor organizing among farmworkers in the postwar period has focused on César Chávez and the United Farm Workers (see, for example, Ferriss and Sandoval 1998; Kushner 1975; Matthiessen 1969; Taylor 1975). There have been only a few examinations of organizational and labor experiences among women farmworkers (Rose 1998), as well as some important testimonios (Leeper Buss 1993; Soto 2001; Weber 1999). More recently, Hinda Seif (2008) has conducted an important study of the gendered circuits of political power generated by the organizing efforts of undocumented (im)migrant women. While many feminist scholars of women's labor and community activism have shown how women's roles in the private sphere animate their public sphere activism, this research illustrates how *Líderes Campesinas's* brand of gendered grassroots leadership profoundly transforms intimate relations of power in the private sphere.

Líderes Campesinas builds on traditionally gendered roles to organize families and communities while simultaneously challenging the ways in which these traditions limit women's participation, agency, and empowerment. While *Líderes* members use family structures to organize, they challenge patriarchal norms and family expectations that lead women to believe that they were born to serve others, submissively endure abuse, and work at the cost of their own health, education, and full development as human beings. This shifts the paradigm. In one of the few essays on women's participation in the UFW, Margaret Rose theorizes women's participation based on the roles of Helen Chávez, the wife of César Chávez, and Dolores Huerta, co-founder and longtime leader of the UFW. Rose posits two models based on the history and contributions of these two women: one is a supporter, playing a key role but remaining behind the scenes and rarely speaking publicly, while the other plays an active, visible leadership role (Rose 1990). Her analysis presents a framework in which women have to choose between either supposedly traditional or untraditional roles, both of which are based on conventionally defined gender roles. This framework does not imagine women's organizing that works toward social transformation in both the public and private spheres in ways that blend women's familial and community roles with new public leadership roles, or that challenge the ways patriarchy, racism, and class bias have limited *campesinas's* full democratic participation in their homes, workplaces, communities, and societies. While most studies acknowledge that grassroots women's organizing blurs these boundaries, few examine how activism in turn transforms power relationships within the home.¹²

Documenting and theorizing the work of the Mothers of East Los Angeles, Mary Pardo's (1998) critical study explores how women activists sometimes see community-based organizing and environmental justice struggles as extensions of their traditionally defined gender roles, including their roles as mothers. Their mobilization transforms and empowers them and changes how family and community members view them, although it does not necessarily challenge the confines of their gendered roles. There is a rich theoretical debate on how Latin American popular women's movements have blended immediate daily survival issues with broader agendas for social change in a way that bridges the private sphere with broader political, economic, and social concerns. This form of activism has been studied extensively in Latin America, where the theoretical debate has engaged the distinction between practical gender interests, conceptualized as forms of activism based on the extension of women's gender roles, and strategic gender interests, or those practices that challenge gender hierarchies and gender-based discrimination.¹³ Many social movement scholars have critiqued how this formulation creates a false dichotomy between forms of organizing based on practical and strategic interests, between nonfeminist and feminist approaches, and between private and public issues in ways that do not accurately reflect the range of women's political practices.¹⁴

Líderes Campesinas cuts through this theoretical conundrum about women's activism by blurring the boundaries between practical and strategic, public and private, and by blending traditional and nontraditional gender roles. Nancy Naples's work on multiracial grassroots women's organizing developed the concept of activist mothering to describe the everyday practices of community workers and "the myriad of ways these women challenged the false separation of productive work in the labor force, reproductive work in the family, and politics" (1998, 112). Both Pardo and Naples emphasize the importance of understanding work, family, and politics as interlocked social spheres and sites of working-class women's mobilization. While their studies focus on how women's roles and mothering break down the public/private dichotomy and transform women's political organizing, my research builds on that tradition of scholarship by illustrating how women's activism transforms power relations within the private sphere, empowering women and entire families. In fact, when we asked women how they measured the impact of their political organizing work and leadership, they almost uniformly responded in terms of how it had transformed their families. Crossing the porous line between public and

private, women's activism in the public sphere transforms private life and blurs the lines dividing these arenas for political action and transformation.

While layers of oppression shape the living, working, and organizing conditions of the members of Líderes Campesinas, these same layers of oppression have the potential to become layers of empowerment illustrating the nepantla strategy of moving between public and private sites of transformation. When leadership begins at home, it contributes to a shared understanding of empowerment within families—between husbands and wives and parents and children. Esperanza Sotelo reflected on how working with Líderes Campesinas changed her and enabled her to stop violence and coercion in her home. She said that sharing what she learned with her partner empowered her within her most intimate relationship:

Since I began participating with Líderes I brought back what I learned to my house. Then my life began to change emotionally, financially, and sexually. I no longer had domestic violence problems. Everything changed when I joined the organization. I changed completely. I became empowered and I said, "No longer will you abuse me, ever." I have the power to decide what I want. The person who contributed to these changes is my *compañero* [partner]. He has always appreciated education, even if it was the education that I was bringing to him. He has changed so much. That was the first step and being in the organization changed my life. My home life changed since the first moment I decided to stop the abuse. (Sotelo 2005)

Esperanza's experiences of activism, which transformed her individually, also had a profound effect on her children. She states, "My life has changed in this organization, because not only did I empower myself, I also showed my daughters." Esperanza's fifteen-year-old daughter Eunice is an active member of the youth network and a vibrant participant in our study (fig. 3).

In its organizing, Líderes Campesinas simultaneously reinforces and transforms "traditional" family and community roles. It ruptures expectations of women's traditionally gendered roles, even those maintained by social scientists, because these organizing strategies positively reinforce and build on women's centrality in community life to create leadership. The gendered grassroots leadership of Líderes Campesinas builds on traditional organizing tactics of the farmworker movement such as involving entire families in organizing and holding meetings in homes, but it contests the ways in which these strategies have often enforced patriarchal assumptions about male supremacy and leadership. While these strategies should not be read as inherently subversive to gender hierarchies—indeed some leaders of



Figure 3. Eunice, Esperanza Sotelo's daughter (far right), organizing with family and friends in Coachella at a vigil to stop violence against women. Courtesy of Líderes Campesinas.

the organization state openly that they are not trying to be feminists—they do point to how gendered forms of sociality are used to openly discuss forms of gender discrimination such as unequal pay for women, as well as other critical issues such as reproductive health, pesticide exposure, or labor safety. As each region holds house meetings and educational sessions to discuss these and other issues, the space of the home is used to inform and organize members. In turn, members bring the information they have acquired back to their own homes and families, where the transformative impact is multiplied. Making visible the more hidden forms of oppression like sexual harassment in the fields, domestic violence, and the double and the triple day is even more important given the rise of transnational motherhood (Carrillo 2007; Hondagneu-Sotelo and Avila 2003) and the chain of care across borders. These transformations reveal another kind of nepantla strategy—that of trafficking knowledge and strategies across the boundaries of rigidly defined spheres (like public/private) or spaces (like nation-states).

Borderland Strategies for Creating Change in the Age of Globalization

When our team was asked to show what kind of action the organization takes and how we could measure impact, Sylvia Berrones (2006), one of the original members of *Mujeres Mexicanas* and a staff member of *Líderes Campesinas*, commented, “Our work is hard to measure because unlike that of the UFW, it is more than just how many new members we have registered.” A former UFW organizer, Sylvia said that the *Líderes Campesinas* approach reflects a deeper, more holistic kind of social change work. The organization recognizes that campesinas are not only workers but whole people who operate in multiple contexts of power outside of the workplace. While this kind of labor militancy is not easy to measure, because much of the work is not visible in the same ways, the *nepantla* strategies employed by *Líderes Campesinas* recognize the disadvantages that workers face as rural, often undocumented, women. Yet they allow for innovative ways to create social change—individually and collectively, and at the micro and macro levels.

My analysis of *nepantla* strategies among organized campesinas in California draws upon a tradition of scholarship on Chicana and Mexicana workers from a Chicana feminist perspective. This scholarship has broken with masculinist labor studies to understand working class women’s organizing not only within the context of workplace but also within the larger social worlds they create and inhabit (Duron 1984; Milkman 1985; Mora and Del Castillo 1980; Ruiz 2000; Segura 1991; Soldatenko 2000). My research echoes the findings of scholars who have consistently identified the dialectic relationship between Chicanas’ experiences in the workplace and in the community and family, and who argue that social networks of neighborhoods and churches often form the foundation on which Chicana labor militancy is built (Ruiz 1987; Zavella 1987). Expanding on this tradition, I also point to *nepantla* strategies that enable women to navigate the challenges of organizing a migrant civil society in a context of flexible labor and production.

While some scholars point to the mobilization of women as one of the unintended consequences of neoliberal economic politics (Moghadam 2005; Segura and Zavella 2007), others have noted the challenges confronted by many women workers organizing in this current global labor market. Seeking justice in the face of capital flight and the relocation of production has reshaped and made activists rethink tactics (Mendez Bickham 2002). Similarly, members of *Líderes Campesinas* define a “win” as securing a change in working conditions while retaining their jobs or

getting hired for the next season. While *Líderes* engages in a wide range of actions for social change, many of the tactics that workers and organizers described would be considered “under the radar.” These include organizing women workers to advocate for their basic labor rights without entering into direct confrontation with employers or foremen. These strategies push to ensure basic human rights through the limited means available to immigrant women organizers.

Organizers must be able to read the context of power in a given situation—in this case, the restrictive organizing conditions for a marginalized and in some cases largely undocumented labor force (a key difference from the early days of the UFW). They shift as necessary between liberal/reformist, radical/reformist, gendered nonconforming/conforming, and culturalist/communitarian forms of consciousness. Sandoval’s original formulation of differential consciousness described four kinds of feminist consciousness: liberal/equal rights, revolutionary, supremacist/cultural nationalist, and separatist. She identified a fifth mode of differential/mestiza consciousness that has a mobile, retroactive, and transformative impact on the other four (1991, 1998). In my application of Sandoval’s concept, I expand the aspect of differential consciousness to show how campesina organizers decipher complex and hybrid technologies of power and shift strategically within often limited options. This is perhaps best illustrated by the differential or nepantla strategies used to combat violence within families and communities and to advocate policies to curb this violence. *Líderes Campesinas* uses many different tactics in its work on domestic violence, such as direct action (protests and vigils), culture and education through novelas and teatros, and more liberal strategies such as advocacy, lobbying, and promoting new legislation. For example, to increase awareness, the organization will put on a teatro skit that illustrates domestic violence, sexual assault, or sexual harassment. As a result of this education, members often take action on the individual level, advocating for or partnering with women in attendance who are ready to address violence in their lives.

While much of this advocacy involves referring campesinas to other agencies, these seemingly micro actions have allowed *Líderes Campesinas* to make vital contributions toward collective legal protections. For example, by providing legal assistance to individual battered women and referring them to community resources, the organization has called attention to the predicament of many abused women who are undocumented and the partners of U.S. citizens or legal permanent residents. By demonstrating the ways in which abusers use citizenship status to retain control and maintain

silence about abuse in a relationship, Líderes Campesinas, alongside other immigrant women's organizations, was able to provide documentation to Legal Momentum so that the organization could make sure that later versions of the Violence Against Woman Act dealt fairly with the issues that migrant women face.¹⁵ In turn, Líderes Campesinas feels not only that it has helped to craft a better piece of legislation but also that they can be better advocates because many members now know the ins and outs of this law because of their participation.

Líderes Campesinas is the first group to organize collective actions for Domestic Violence Awareness Month in October in small agricultural communities throughout California (see fig. 3). These actions include press conferences, marches, and vigils in each community. Farmworker women are invited to give public testimony describing the abuse they have suffered, how they gained the courage to stop it, and what steps they took to do so. These demonstrations have brought attention to violence against women within communities and have created visible advocates. For example, on three different occasions when women were murdered by their abusers in Madera, Coachella, and Lamont, the families contacted chapter members of Líderes Campesinas, who then worked with the families to hold public vigils for the victim in order to call attention to the fact that the murder was the result, and most extreme form, of domestic violence. In the process of organizing the vigils, family members learned that making violence public and taking public action can prevent violence from happening to others. From there, many of these family members went on to join the organization. Líderes Campesinas treats domestic violence as an extreme form of men's power and control over women, but it also puts this violence into a larger context of unequal power relations in the home, workplace, and larger society. Questions of migration, work, and gender discrimination must be dealt with effectively in order to work toward a broader vision of healthy women, families, and communities.

Given capital flight, globalized food production, and a policy environment that promotes anti-immigrant attitudes, Líderes Campesinas recognizes that confrontational, direct action may not always be the best way to pressure large structures and institutions to change. Members often use a coalitional politic that marshals support from regulatory agencies, nongovernmental organizations, and other social movement organizations, many of them larger and better financed, in order to build alliances that can bring pressure while minimizing the risk (Seif 2008). To illustrate, Líderes Campesinas intervenes quite directly when agencies or other organizations

implement programs that do not take into account the needs of campesinas. It has a history of using an explicit strategy of educating and pressuring other organizations and agencies to hold them accountable to serving the needs of campesinas. They do this by asking them to attend sensitivity training, by “partnering” with them to help them be more relevant to the community, or by pestering them until they make their resources accessible to campesinas. This strategy is described on the Líderes website as cultural competency training:

Líderes Campesinas believes that active involvement (not mere token representation) of diverse private- and public-sector entities is essential to program success. Its projects/programs are designed to place the professional and “the people” on a more equal footing—as partners—promoting a grass-roots or “bottom-up” decision-making process rather than a “top-down” approach where “experts” determine the community’s agenda and new initiatives. For example, collaborating health care providers are expected to train Líderes Campesinas members/staff on the causes, symptoms, complications, and risk factors of certain diseases. In turn, Líderes Campesinas members/staff train collaborating providers on how to deliver more culturally and linguistically appropriate services to the Latina farmworker community. Collaborating providers are also required to undergo a review process of their written materials by Líderes Campesinas members/staff with respect to format, language, context, and outreach appeal. Moreover, Líderes Campesinas also “broker” the client-provider relationship by building community confidence to seek services from collaborating providers.¹⁶

When an organization or agency is unresponsive, Líderes Campesinas will find out who their funders are and lodge a complaint directly with their funders, using their strong reputation to leverage influence. When I asked Mily Treviño Saucedo about these tactics, she said, “We can be *calmadas* [calm] but we can also be *cabronas* [confrontational].” The organization attempts to achieve its objectives in the least confrontational fashion before moving on, when necessary, to more forceful measures.

Conclusion

In this essay, I have described the ways in which campesina organizers in California are creating new forms of leadership capable of negotiating what Anzaldúa calls *nepantla*, the “liminal state between worlds, between realities, between systems of knowledge” (Anzaldúa 2000). They are using subjective transnationalism by employing a form of memory that moves

back and forth between their life experience on both sides of the border to narrate their stories of empowerment or their processes of coming to consciousness. Illustrating the ways in which gender and racial systems of power generated in Mexico intersect with how power is organized in the U.S. agricultural industry, migrant women's organizing strategies critically navigate these nepantla spaces where hegemonic meanings of race, gender, class, and citizenship are mixed with mobile, migrant cultures—both of which are transnational and hybridized. Furthermore, this case explores the ways in which differential strategies function in and between public and private spheres of politics and how actors situated at the local/global nexus shape national policy and legislation from their relatively marginalized position.

As immigrant women working and organizing in conditions deeply shaped by processes of globalization, the members and staff of *Líderes Campesinas* have developed strategies to gain rights within this complex political and social context. They are thus frontline warriors who can provide important strategies for resisting neoliberal globalization.¹⁷ Unfortunately, the media and academy have identified the mass protest against the World Trade Organization in 1999, known as the Battle in Seattle, as the beginning of the anti-globalization movement, rather than examining earlier efforts made by grassroots Latina organizations (Louie 2001). These frontline warriors include *Fuerza Unida*, the collective of Mexican American women in San Antonio who fought shop flight in San Antonio in 1991, and organizations like *La Mujer Obrera* in El Paso, a community-based worker organization founded in 1981 to organize women workers displaced by regional integration and global restructuring, which has successfully shut down commerce on the border as a form of protest (Navarro 2002). This shortsighted view obfuscates how immigrant women organizers, like those in *Líderes Campesinas*, have been devising multidimensional strategies of empowerment and forms of gendered labor organizing that are multi-issued and multi-sited (in the fields, homes, and communities).

In contrast, this essay situates *campesinas* as actors who are multiply marginalized by new processes of economic globalization yet utilize nepantla strategies that differentially shift according to the contours of the often restricted spaces they operate in. Their organizing contributes to new thinking about transnational and cross-border feminisms, a project that is concerned with how gendered, sexual, economic, and racial power is articulated at the junctures of the local and the global—spaces made inseparable by the worldwide reorganization of capital under neoliberal

policies (Shohat 1999; Staudt and Coronado 2002). The nepantla strategies I describe above enable campesina organizers to negotiate and navigate the materiality of power in their “fixed” positions. In so doing they counter the ways in which Anzaldúa’s work specifically and borderland criticism in general has been appropriated and misinterpreted as so fluid, mobile, and hybrid as to make materiality ephemeral. *Líderes Campesinas* illustrates how social movements that employ nepantla strategies transform the psychic and material conditions of gender and the borderlands.

Notes

This research is the result of an ethnographic study titled “*Líderes Campesinas: Grassroots Gendered Leadership, Community Organizing and Pedagogies of Empowerment*,” a documentation project of the Leadership for a Changing World program at the NYU Wagner Research Center for Leadership in Action. I would like to thank Mily Treviño Saucedo and Devra Weber, who served as advisers to the project, and the members of *Líderes Campesinas* who shared their stories and analyses with me. I am grateful to the Center for the Study of Women at UCLA for a faculty grant to conduct follow-up research, to Carol Stack for her feedback on the original report, and to Denise Segura, Patricia Zavella, and Grace Kyungwon Hong for their invaluable feedback on this essay.

1. For other ideas about nepantla, see the essays by Pat Mora (1993) and the creative works of artists Yreina Cervántez and Miguel Leon Portilla. The epistemologies that are produced by these ways of reading power are also richly explored by bell hooks (1984).

2. AnaLouise Keating (2000, 5) notes that Anzaldúa worked through her ideas on nepantla “as both an expansion and a revision of her well-known concept of the Borderlands” in interviews she gave before her untimely passing in 2004. Anzaldúa was consciously reclaiming the indigenous roots and historical experience of this word. I interpret this as her way of trying to untangle the psychic violence of mestizaje, first theorized by José Vasconcelos in postrevolutionary Mexico, as a racial project of whitening and ultimate erasure of indigenous peoples and ways of being.

3. Anzaldúa herself labored in the fields as a child and later taught migrant education (1999). Using her experience, she learned to pick words and cull ideas to become an educator, a creative writer and scholar, and a cultural theorist.

4. *Líderes Campesinas* has participated in a few transnational networks, including a forum on indigenous women migrants held in the sending communities in Mexico, as well as the NGO Forum of the World Conference Against Racism held in Durban, South Africa, in 2001. It was at the latter event that I first met organizers from *Líderes Campesinas*: we traveled in the same delegation, organized by the Women of Color Resource Center in Oakland, California. Because the group’s

transnational connections have been only occasional, the local and national levels of organizing are more closely examined in this work.

5. This research bridges two fields of scholarship and activism: 1) transnational feminist scholarship that has worked to reveal the gendered impact of global economic restructuring and the local forms of gendered organizing that have arisen in response, and 2) the work of transnational social movement analysts who explore how neoliberal globalization has led to new forms of oppression while simultaneously creating new sites and practices of resistance. Furthermore, I put the scholarship on transnational feminism and social movements in conversation with research that examines the impact of transnational migration on community formation, family, cultures, and political processes (Vélez-Ibáñez and Sampaio 2002).

6. Some of the classic gender assumptions underwriting the feminization of global labor are that women workers in the global south have nimble fingers, are more docile, or are supplementary earners rather than the heads of households.

7. I was invited to be an ethnographer for the organization as part of a documentation project that was initiated after executive director Mily Treviño Saucedo received the prestigious Leadership for a Changing World Award. More information on Leadership for a Changing World and the full text of the ethnography are available at <http://leadershipforchange.org/insights/research/ethnography.php>. We also made a collaborative presentation on the documentation project, "Community-Based Collaborative Research," with Líderes Campesinas members María Elena Valadez, María Inés Catalán, Hermelinda Guzmán, Esperanza Sotelo, and Silvia Berrones at the Mujeres Activas en Letras y Cambio Social Summer Institute in Santa Cruz, California, August 2–5, 2006.

8. Participant observation took place in a variety of venues selected to provide insight into the range of organizational capacities, leadership styles, and modes of organizing. They included a *reunión educativa* (educational house meeting) in the Coachella Valley, several local committee meetings throughout the state, and a meeting of the board of directors in Huron. We worked throughout the summer at the headquarters in Pomona, observing events like the Youth Institute as well as cooking, working in the newspaper and photo archives, and interviewing members. Throughout our collaboration, undergraduate researchers on our team partnered with members of the youth network of Líderes Campesinas to share information on access to higher education. As part of this effort, youth network members attended the 11th Annual Chicana/Latina Conference of the Raza Womyn de UCLA on March 4, 2006, and were hosted by the MALCS de UCLA chapter, which arranged their transportation and lodging with the UCLA students.

9. Janyce Cardenas, who served as the project's research assistant, and I carried out most of the interviews. These conversations were conducted in Spanish unless the person being interviewed was English-dominant. With several of the youth members, the interviews reflected their mixed speech patterns, moving fluidly between English, Spanish, and Spanglish.

10. The original committees included Coachella Valley, Oxnard, Imperial Valley, Merced, Coalinga/Kettleman City, Delano, Santa María, Madera, Salinas, Stockton, Yuba City/Colusa, Paso Robles, Palo Verde Valley, Buttonwillow, and Farmersville/Porterville.

11. The organizer of the indigenous women's program, who was the staff indigenous rights specialist within the organization, was fired for insubordination during the period of our fieldwork. She felt she was dismissed because of a comment she made when questioned about attending an immigrant rights rally as part of an indigenous organization rather than as a representative of *Líderes Campesinas*. Her comment, "indigenous people are nobody's mascots," reflects a critique by indigenous rights activists of organizations and agencies that use them as window dressing. Instead, they would prefer direct participation in building programs that meet their needs and interests. After a mixed review of a workshop on domestic violence for an indigenous migrant audience, *Líderes Campesinas* continues to work on making presentations more culturally relevant for indigenous communities.

12. One exception is Kathleen Coll's study (2005) of how some members of *Mujeres Unidas y Activas*, in San Francisco's Mission District, transformed their perceptions of relationships within their households through what she calls "domestic citizenship" (405).

13. The original distinction between female and feminist consciousness was elaborated by Kaplan (1982), and Molyneux (1995) worked from this formulation to theorize strategic versus gender consciousness. Studies that effectively used this formulation include those by Alvarez (1990).

14. For critiques of this dichotomy see Schirmer (1993) and Stephen (1997).

15. For example, Mily Treviño Saucedo reports that when they first began to participate in this coalition in 1998 and 1999, the members felt that rural and migrant women would not benefit from the law because reporting violence often would mean losing the family sponsor for legalization. She says it is a triumph that the 2005 version of the law includes a provision that allows women who are victims of stalking, assault, or trafficking to apply for a special U visa or T visa with proper documentation such as a police, crisis center, or shelter report.

16. <http://www.liderescampesinas.org/english/marketing.php>.

17. Although their lives are shaped and circumscribed by globalization as they migrate for employment and send home remittances and goods, they are also challenging the inequalities produced by neoliberal policies and economic globalization.

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