Muslims in the Middle East. Where else in the developed world could there be a serious debate about teaching kids Bible-inspired “creationism” instead of Darwinist evolution?

America’s tastes in sports are often idiosyncratic, too. Baseball and American football have not traveled well, although basketball has fared rather better. Many of the world’s most popular sports, notably soccer, came by way of Britain. Asian martial arts—judo, karate, kickboxing—and pastimes like yoga have also swept the world.

People are not only guzzling hamburgers and Coke. Despite Coke’s ambition of displacing water as the world’s drink of choice, it accounts for less than 2 of the 64 fluid ounces that the typical person drinks a day. Britain’s favorite takeaway is a curry, not a burger. Indian restaurants there outnumber McDonald’s six to one. For all the concerns about American fast food trashing France’s culinary traditions, France imported a mere $260 million in food from the United States in 2000, while exporting to America three times that. Nor is plonk from America’s Gallo displacing Europe’s finest; Italy and France together account for three-fifths of global wine exports, the United States for only a twentieth. Worldwide, pizzas are more popular than burgers, Chinese restaurants seem to sprout up everywhere, and sushi is spreading fast. By far the biggest purveyor of alcoholic drinks is Britain’s Diageo, which sells the world’s best-selling whiskey (Johnnie Walker), gin (Gordon’s), vodka (Smirnoff), and liqueur (Baileys).

In fashion, the ne plus ultra is Italian or French. Trendy Americans wear Gucci, Armani, Versace, Chanel, and Hermès. On the high street and in the mall, Sweden’s Hennes & Mauritz (H&M) and Spain’s Zara vie with America’s Gap to dress the global masses. Nike shoes are given a run for their money by Germany’s Adidas, Britain’s Reebok, and Italy’s FILA.

In pop music, American crooners do not have the stage to themselves. The three artists who were featured most widely in national Top Ten album charts in 2000 were America’s Britney Spears, closely followed by Mexico’s Carlos Santana and the British Beatles. Even tiny Iceland has produced a global star: Björk. Popular opera’s biggest singers are Italy’s Luciano Pavarotti, Spain’s José Carreras, and the Spanish-Mexican Placido Domingo. Latin American salsa, Brazilian lambada, and African music have all carved out global niches for themselves. In most countries, local artists still top the charts. According to the IFPI, the record-industry bible, local acts accounted for 68 percent of music sales in 2000, up from 58 percent in 1991.

One of the most famous living writers is a Colombian, Gabriel García Márquez, author of One Hundred Years of Solitude. Paulo Coelho, another writer who has notched up tens of millions of global sales with The Alchemist and other books, is Brazilian. More than 200 million Harlequin romance novels, a Canadian export, were sold in 1990; they account for two-fifths of mass-market paperback sales in the United States. The biggest publisher in the English-speaking world is Germany’s Bertelsmann, which gobbled up America’s largest, Random House, in 1998.

Local fare glued more eyeballs to TV screens than American programs. Although nearly three-quarters of television drama exported worldwide comes from the United States, most countries’ favorite shows are homegrown.

Nor are Americans the only players in the global media industry. Of the seven market leaders that have their fingers in nearly every pie, four are American (AOL Time Warner, Disney, Viacom, and News Corporation), one is German (Bertelsmann), one is French (Vivendi), and one Japanese (Sony). What they distribute comes from all quarters: Bertelsmann publishes books by American writers; News Corporation broadcasts Asian news; Sony sells Brazilian music.

The evidence is overwhelming. Fears about an Americanized uniformity are over-blown: American cultural products are not uniquely dominant; local ones are alive and well.

3

MIRIAM CHING YOON LOUIE


Sherif Herara and Philippe Legrain highlight the impact of globalization on consumers, but it is also important to examine how it affects workers. Free-trade policies have removed barriers to international trade, with global consequences. An example of such change can be witnessed along the border between Mexico and the United States, especially in the export factories, or maquiladoras, that are run by international corporations on both the U.S. and Mexican sides of the border. In the following excerpt, Miriam Ching Yoon Louie, a writer

1 British slang for cheap, low-quality alcohol. [Ed.]
and activist, interviews Mexican women who work in these factories and explores both the challenges they face and the strength they show in overcoming these challenges. What is the impact of liberalized trade laws on women who work in the maquiladoras? What is neoliberalism, and how is it tied to globalization? Why are women particularly vulnerable to these policies?

**THINKING HISTORICALLY**

According to Louie, how far back do neoliberalism and economic globalization date? How does Louie's assessment of economic globalization differ from the views expressed by LeGrain? How might they both be right?

Many of today's *nuevas revolucionarias* started working on the global assembly line as young women in northern Mexico for foreign transnational corporations. Some worked on the U.S. side as "commuters" before they moved across the border with their families. Their stories reveal the length, complexity, and interpenetration of the U.S. and Mexican economies, labor markets, histories, cultures, and race relations. The women talk about the devastating impact of globalization, including massive layoffs and the spread of sweatshops on both sides of the border. *Las mujeres* recount what drove them to join and lead movements for economic, racial, and gender justice, as well as the challenges they faced within their families and communities to assert their basic human rights.

**Growing Up Female and Poor**

Mexican women and girls were traditionally expected to do all the cooking, cleaning, and serving for their husbands, brothers, and sons. For girls from poor families, shouldering these domestic responsibilities proved doubly difficult because they also performed farm, sweatshop, or domestic service work simultaneously.

Petra Mata, a former seamstress for Levi's whose mother died shortly after childbirth, recalls the heavy housework she did as the only daughter:

> Aiyeee, me tell you! It was very hard. In those times in Mexico, I was raised with the ideal that you have to learn to do everything—cook, make tortillas, wash your clothes, and clean the house—just the way they wanted you to. My grandparents were very strict. I always had to ask their permission and then let them tell me what to do. I was not a free woman. Life was hard for me. I didn’t have much of a childhood; I started working when I was 12 or 13 years old.

**Neoliberalism and Creeping Maquiladorization**

These women came of age during a period of major change in the relationship between the Mexican and U.S. economies. Like Puerto Rico, Hong Kong, South Korea, Taiwan, Malaysia, Singapore, and the Philippines, northern Mexico served as one of the first stations of the global assembly line tapping young women's labor. In 1965 the Mexican government initiated the Border Industrialization Program (BIP) that set up export plants, called maquiladoras or maquilas, which were either the direct subsidiaries or subcontractors of transnational corporations. Mexican government incentives to U.S. and other foreign investors included low wages and high productivity; infrastructure; proximity to U.S. markets, facilities, and lifestyles; tariff loopholes; and pilfer, pro-government unions.

Describing her quarter-century-long sewing career in Mexico, Celeste Jimenez ticks off the names of famous U.S. manufacturers who hopped over the border to take advantage of cheap wages:

> I sewed for twenty-four years when I lived in Chihuahua in big name factories like Billy the Kid, Levi Strauss, and Lee maquiladoras. Everyone was down there. Here a company might sell under the brand name of Lee; there in Mexico it would be called Blanca García.

Transnational exploitation of women's labor was part of a broader set of policies that critical opposition movements in the Third World have dubbed "neoliberalism," i.e., the new version of the British Liberal Party's program of laissez faire capitalism espoused by the rising European and U.S. colonial powers during the late eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. The Western powers, Japan, and international financial institutions like the World Bank and International Monetary Fund have aggressively promoted neoliberal policies since the 1970s. Mexico served as an early testing ground for such standard neoliberal policies as erection of free trade zones; commercialization of agriculture; currency devaluation; deregulation; privatization; outsourcing; cuts in wages and social programs; suppression of workers', women's, and indigenous people's rights; free trade; militarization; and promotion of neoconservative ideology.

Neoliberalism intersects with gender and national oppression. Third World women constitute the majority of migrants seeking jobs as maids,
vendors, maquila operatives, and service industry workers. Women also pay the highest price for cuts in education, health and housing programs, and food and energy subsidies and increases in their unpaid labor.

The deepening of the economic crisis in Mexico, especially under the International Monetary Fund’s pressure to devaluate the peso in 1976, 1982, and 1994, forced many women to work in both the formal and informal economy to survive and meet their childbearing and household responsibilities. María Antonia Flores was forced to work two jobs after her husband abandoned the family, leaving her with three children to support. She had no choice but to leave her children home alone, solitos, to look after themselves. Refugio Arrieta straddled the formal and informal economy because her job in an auto parts assembly maquiladora failed to bring in sufficient income. To compensate for the shortfall, she worked longer hours at her maquila job and “moonlighted” elsewhere:

We made chassis for cars and for the headlights. I worked long! I worked 12 hours more or less because they paid us so little that if you worked more, you got more money. I did this because the schools in Mexico don’t provide everything. You have to buy the books, notebooks, todos, todos [everything]. And I had five kids. It’s very expensive. I also worked out of my house and sold ceramics. I did many things to get more money for my kids.

In the three decades following its humble beginnings in the mid-1960s, the maquila sector swelled to more than 2,000 plants employing an estimated 776,000 people, over 10 percent of Mexico’s labor force. By 1985, maquiladoras overtook tourism as the largest source of foreign exchange. In 1996, this sector trailed only petroleum-related industries in economic importance and accounted for over U.S. $29 billion in export earnings annually. The maquila system has also penetrated the interior of the country, as in the case of Guadalajara’s electronics assembly industry and Tepexicán’s jeans production zones. Although the proportion of male maquila workers has increased since 1983, especially in auto-transport equipment assembly, almost 70 percent of the workers continue to be women.

As part of a delegation of labor and human rights activists, this author met some of Mexico’s newest proletarians—young indigenous women migrant workers from the Sierra Negra to Tepexicán, a town famous for its refreshing mineral water springs in the state of Puebla, just southeast of Mexico City. Standing packed like cattle in the back of the trucks each morning the women headed for jobs sewing for name

brand manufacturers like Guess, VF Corporation (producing Lee brand clothing), Gap, Sun Apparel (producing brands such as Polo, Arizona, and Express), Cherokee, Ditto Apparel of California, Levi’s, and others. The workers told U.S. delegation members that their wages averaged U.S. $30 to $50 a week for 12-hour work days, six days a week. Some workers reported having to do veladas [all-nighters] once or twice a week. Employees often stayed longer without pay if they did not finish high production goals.

Girls as young as 12 and 13 worked in the factories. Workers were searched when they left for lunch and again at the end of the day to check that they weren’t stealing materials. Women were routinely given urine tests when hired and those found to be pregnant were promptly fired, in violation of Mexican labor law. Although the workers had organized an independent union several years earlier, Tepexicán’s Human Rights Commission members told us that it had collapsed after one of its leaders was assassinated.

Carmen Valadez and Reyna Montero, long-time activists in the women’s and social justice movements, helped found Casa de La Mujer Factor X in 1977, a workers’ center in Tijuana that organizes around women’s workplace, reproductive, and health rights, and against domestic violence. Valadez and Montero say that the low wages and dangerous working conditions characteristic of the maquiladoras on the Mexico-U.S. border are being “extended to all areas of the country and to Central America and the Caribbean. NAFTA represents nothing but the ‘maquiladoraization’ of the region.”

Elizabeth “Beth” Robles Ortega, who began working in the maquilas at the age of fourteen and was blacklisted after participating in independent union organizing drives on Mexico’s northern border, now works as an organizer for the Servicio, Desarrollo y Paz, AC 520 (SEDEPAC) [Service, Development and Peace organization]. Robles described the erosion of workers’ rights and women’s health under NAFTA:

NAFTA has led to an increase in the workforce, as foreign industry has grown. They are reforming labor laws and our constitution to favor even more foreign investment, which is unfair against our labor rights. For example, they are now trying to take away from us free organization which was guaranteed by Mexican law. Because the country is investing in Mexico and is dominating, we must have guarantees. The government is just there with its hands held out; it’s always had them out but now even more shamelessly... Ecological problems are increasing. A majority of women are coming down with cancer—skin and breast cancer, leukemia, and lung and heart problems. There are daily deaths of worker women. You can see and feel the contamination of the water and the air. As soon

[Ed.]

Workers, especially exploited ones is a Marxist term derived from Latin for lower classes.
as you arrive and start breathing the air in Acuña and Piedras Negras [border cities between the states of Coahuila and Texas], you sense the heavy air, making you feel like vomiting.

Joining the Movement

Much of the education and leadership training the women received took place “on the job.” The women talked about how much their participation in the movement had changed them. They learned how to analyze working conditions and social problems, who was responsible for these conditions, and what workers could do to get justice. They learned to speak truth to power, whether this was to government representatives, corporate management, the media, unions, or co-ethnic gatekeepers. They built relations with different kinds of sectors and groups and organized a wide variety of educational activities and actions. Their activism expanded their world view beyond that of their immediate families to seeing themselves as part of peoples’ movements fighting for justice . . .

Through her participation in the movement, [María del Carmen Domínguez] developed her skills, leadership, and awareness:

When I stayed at work in the factory, I was only thinking of myself and how am I going to support my family—nothing more, nothing less. And I served my husband and my son, my girl. But when I started working with La Mujer Obrera I thought, “I need more respect for myself. We need more respect for ourselves.” (laughs) . . .

. . . I learned about the law and I learned how to organize classes with people, whether they were men or women like me.

4

BENJAMIN BARBER

Jihad vs. McWorld, 1995

Not everyone views the world as coming together, for better or worse, under the umbrella of globalization. Benjamin Barber, a political scientist, uses the terms jihad and McWorld to refer to what he sees as the two poles of the modern global system. McWorld is the force of Hollywood, fast-food outlets, jeans, and Americanization. Jihad (the

Arab word for “struggle”) is used to symbolize all fundamentalist, ethnocentric, and tribal rejectionist forces. Barber’s argument is that these forces have largely killed all culture and that despite their opposition to each other, prevent the development of a global society and demand that Barber, in what ways do both Jihad and McWorld promote development? What do you think of his argument really be divided into these two groups? What some Barber predicts?

THINKING HISTORICALLY

Barber argues that Jihad originated in opposition to the two play off each other in a way that gives substance and support. Which is a greater force than the other? Does Barber see Jihad and McWorld as paired against each other? Does he think that economic forces? How is Barber’s view of the two play off each other in a way that gives substance and support for the view of the previous author.

History is not over! Nor are we arrived in the world promised by the futurologists. The collapse of the Soviet bloc delivered people to a safe democratic haven, and the West was discarding its cold war, still the horizon of old is visible. Our horizon of cold war is the horizon of old is visible. And they declare that nothing has changed. They prophesize commercial and technological utopias, and they proclaim that everything is and soon will be possible. Observers seem to consult different almanacs and different visions of contrarian planets.

Yet anyone who reads the daily papers can read a page accounts of civil carnage as well as the battle for control of the superhighway and the Great Wall. Anyone who has not been caught between what [Irish poet] William Butler Yeats called the two entities of race and soul: that of race reflecting on itself and soul anticipating the cosmopolitan future. Our

1 This is a response to the argument of Francis Fukuyama that with the downfall of communism, there were no more wars. But the universalization of liberal democracy was not necessary.

1 Technology. [Ed.]