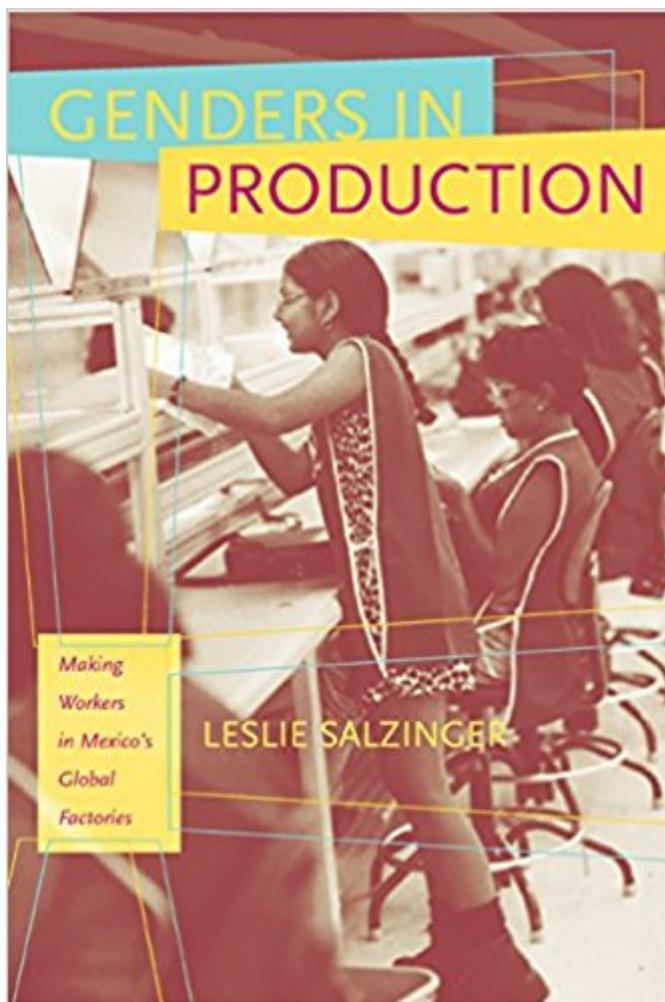


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# Genders In Production: Making Workers In Mexico's Global Factories



## **Synopsis**

In this engrossing and original book, Leslie Salzinger takes us with her into the gendered world of Mexico's global factories. Her careful ethnographic work, personal voice, and sophisticated analysis capture the feel of life inside the maquiladoras and make a compelling case that transnational production is a gendered process. The research grounds contemporary feminist theory in an examination of daily practices and provides an important new perspective on globalization.

## **Book Information**

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"This is a book Border Studies has been waiting for--a pathbreaking study of the gendered meanings and identities at work in the transnational assembly plants that dominate the social landscape of Ciudad Juarez, Mexico.... It will surely become a classic in the field." "Through case studies of employment and management in four different factories, Salzinger beautifully demonstrates the variability, and flexibility of concepts of masculinity and femininity, the fact that they are context-dependent performative behaviors. The ethnographically based empirical data, as well as the sophisticated mastery of theory, make this book an unusually rich contribution to the fields of international labor and gender studies." "[Salzinger] launches a new phase in the study of women employed in offshore production, with significant implications for women in factories generally."

"The title of this book has a double resonance: it refers to the ways that factories on the

U.S.-Mexican border both structure gendered labor forces and, in so doing, produce gender itself. Through case studies of employment and management in four different factories, Salzinger beautifully demonstrates the variability and flexibility of concepts of masculinity and femininity, the fact that they are context-dependent performative behaviors. The ethnographically based empirical data provided, as well as the sophisticated mastery of theory, make this book an unusually rich contribution to the fields of international labor and gender studies."; Joan W. Scott, author of *Gender and the Politics of History*"This is an archeology of gendering. Salzinger brilliantly traces the specificities, variability, and contingencies in the emergence of gendered subjects across different production environments, moving from femininity as attribute to femininity as generative. In so doing she launches a new phase in the study of women employed in off-shore production, with significant implications for women in factories generally."; Saskia Sassen, author of *The Global City*"This is a book Border Studies has been waiting for;a pathbreaking study of the gendered meanings and identities at work in the transnational assembly plants that dominate the social landscape of Ciudad JuÃ¡rez, Mexico"; It will surely become a classic in the field."; Pablo Vila, author of *Crossing Borders, Reinforcing Borders, and Ethnography at the Border*

"Genders in Production" by Leslie Salzinger is a groundbreaking study about production processes in Mexico's maquiladoras. This fascinating book should appeal to academics, feminists, labor activists and others who may be interested in learning about the dynamic processes by which globalization exploits gender for profit. Importantly, Ms. Salzinger's keen insight and analysis helps open the door to imagining a world where gender stereotypes could be transcended and labor rights accorded more respect. Ms. Salzinger's meticulous ethnographic work at four maquila factories helps her obtain an insider's view of how sexual identities struggle for recognition and reward on the shop floor. The author discusses how the "trope of femininity" deludes investors into locating factories in places where it is believed that female laborers will passively accept routinized work for low wages. However, as the facts on the ground depart from this fantasy, the struggle between capital and labor is observed to be gendered but nonetheless highly variable and contextual. Ms. Salzinger dedicates one chapter apiece to her experiences at four manufacturing plants in northern Mexico. She cleverly assigns pseudonyms to describe the salient characteristics of each plant. For example, "Andromex" is a factory where male and female workers become almost androgenous through the development of similar work habits; "Anarchomex" is noteworthy for its embattled masculine workers conflicting both amongst themselves and with female co-workers to create nearly anarchic

conditions of production; and so on. The writing in these chapters is vivid, engaging and intelligent, imparting glimpses into both the worker's daily struggle for survival and the logic of the managerial systems that controls and exploits these workers. I found it interesting (if not disheartening) to learn that capital's strategy of dividing the working class by gender has proven to be remarkably effective. By redefining production as primarily women's work, employers can pay below-subsistence wages and offer scant benefits, job enrichment or advancement opportunities. As made clear through Ms. Salzinger's field research, these diminished career expectations deprive the working class of Mexico with the hope of achieving a better life and are frequently used as a threat to drive down wages in the U.S. and other industrialized nations. In the final chapter, Ms. Salzinger draws on feminist writings to connect the trope of femininity with cultural norms that tend to devalue women through their association with domesticity. By discovering that gendered meanings in the workplace can be flexible, however, the author suggests that subjectivity may be contestable. If structures of power are a "concatenation of common-sense understandings" about women's perceived role in the home, she argues, then the reality of changed meanings forged in the crucible of workplace production may point the way in time to new, empowered definitions. I highly recommend this book to demanding readers who may be interested in an original and thought-provoking thesis about gender and globalization.

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