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The Unionization of the Maquiladora Industry: the Tamaulipas Case in National Context, by Edward J. Williams and John T. Passé-Smith, San Diego: Institute for regional Studies of the Californias, San Diego State University, 1992. XV + 134 p, Reviews/Reseñas/Rio Bravo, 1992, vol. 2, n. 1. Book review by John Barzman
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Shortly after Williams and Passé-Smith finished their book, Mexican federal agents arrested Agapito González Cavazos, the seventy-seven year old head of the Matamoros Union of Journeymen and Industrial Workers, and whisked him off to Mexico City (see James Pinkerton, "Labor Don Under Siege." *Houston Chronicle* 3.29.92, p. 21A). Williams and Passé-Smith explain some of the stakes in the spectacular investigation of the main Matamoros labor union launched in January 1992. The action continues President Salinas de Gortari's clamp down on major unions, a famous episode of which was the arrest of "La Quina," the oil workers' union leader, and is widely seen as an effort to demonstrate to potential investors that the Mexican government is prepared to break with its long-time political allies in order to insure a climate favorable to business in the border industrialization zone.

The question that arises is why the Mexican government was led to take action against the Matamoros union in particular, rather than against any of the other border town unions. The official reason, that a long-standing charge of fiscal fraud finally had to be investigated, is not sufficient: there are obviously many other cases of alleged tax evasion and the federal bureaucracy is not known for the rapidity of its procedures. Passé-Smith and Williams offer some statistics that suggest the Matamoros union was different from its sister unions in other Tamaulipan border cities.

Starting from overall figures of unionization along the Mexican side of the border, the two sociologists are led to distinguish apparently similar union situations by finer criteria describing the varying relations between the unions, their membership, industry and the government. They establish these distinctions through interviews with maquiladora workers and a review of the recent history of city politics.

The state of Tamaulipas first attracted their attention because its three major maquiladora concentrations (Nuevo Laredo,

Reynosa and Matamoros) all displayed very high rates of union membership (close to 100% organized), compared to states further west (Coahuila to Baja California Norte). Although their initial hypothesis was that the three Tamaulipan unions shared the features of a strong labor movement, their investigation led them to separate the Matamoros union from the other two. In Matamoros, the union appeared closer to its membership and more militant in the face of new demands by the employers. By contrast, the Nuevo Laredo union was "slavish" and the Reynosa union caving in to the employers.

The authors frame their case study of Tamaulipas with an extensive overview of recent trends in the Mexican government's policy towards labor in general and maquiladora unions in particular. The many types of relations between unions and management are described and the conclusion examines the somewhat gloomy prospects for labor in the border area.

The authors surveyed two hundred and twenty-one workers. The statistics they construct from this sample are successful in bringing out the general feelings of the workers and establishing the distinction between Matamoros and the other two Tamaulipan towns. Some of the questions asked, however, may have been very sensitive and additional material describing the exact context in which they were asked could shed more light on their significance: were the interviewees chosen through firm employee lists, through the union or through neighborhood networks; how effectively were they protected from retaliation by union leaders and employers; at what stage of contract negotiations were they questioned? Moreover, the reader thirsts for a more complete history of the local labor and neighborhood movements that shaped the social climate in which the survey was conducted. The situation in Matamoros has already changed in many ways since this book was finished. For instance, one wonders, in light of the above-mentioned arrest of "Agapito," whether the Matamoros interviewees would answer in the same fashion today the questions asked them last year about their confidence in the Mexican government.

The book is valuable as an update on industrial relations in the northern border area. The existence of trade unions with the avowed mission of defending the wages and working conditions of maquiladora workers is too often forgotten in discussions of Mexico's

industrialization program and the North American Free Trade Agreement. Williams and Passé-Smith remind us that these unions encompass a wide range of situations and are subject to significant change over time. Their work confirms once again that the real state of labor relations cannot be deducted from overall unionization statistics but requires, to be truly understood, both sociological surveys and a careful study of the historical past and social context. As a detailed picture of the recent situation in Tamaulipas, it is therefore a welcome contribution to a broader study of labor along the border.

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Entre Yerba, Polvo y Plomo: Lo Fronterizo Visto Por El Cine Mexicano, Volumen I & Volumen II. By Norma Iglesias. Tijuana, Baja California: El Colegio de la Frontera Norte, 1991. 156 pp. (vol. 1), 224 pp. (vol. 2).

As interest in the border increases in both the United States and Mexico, so does the realization that the region encompasses a distinct reality that is as much cultural as geographical. Norma Iglesias' two-volume cinematic history focuses on how the border has been perceived and interpreted in the history of the Mexican cinema. Ms. Iglesias, whose previous books have focused on a range of border issues, shows how the *frontera* or border has played a part in Mexican cinema practically since the latter's inception.

The title of both volumes is taken from a movie with the same name (albeit slightly different spelling) and highlights a popular theme in current border films—drug trafficking, with its attendant emphasis on marijuana (*yerba*), heroin and/or cocaine (*polvo*) and melodrama riddled with bullets (*plomo*). This is just one of several cinematic scenarios of the border, and the author's first volume documents the different eras that have attempted to portray—although at times stereotype seems more accurate—the border experience on celluloid.

In addition to a historical introduction to the topic, the first volume aims for a more complex appreciation of the circumstances