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Is Local: Global as Feminine: Masculine? Rethinking the Gender of Globalization

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## Is Local : Global as Feminine : Masculine? Rethinking the Gender of Globalization

**S**everal years ago, Catherine Lutz posed what for me became a profound and troubling question, “Does theory have a gender?” (1995). At the time, I was designing a course called “Globalization and Culture” and was consistently struck by the two distinct categories into which the texts for the course fell: macroanalyses of the history, structure, and expansion of economic forms of globalization and microanalyses of women’s insertion into the global economy as workers and members of third-world countries. Why have so many of the major treatises of globalization in the social sciences been systematically bereft of gender analysis when we have, by now, so many excellent accounts of the central role played by gender in the configuration of global production and global consumption when addressed at the “local” level?<sup>1</sup> In grappling with the implications of these

I wish to acknowledge my students in this course for their crucial role in shaping my thinking on these matters and for convincing me of the necessity of an integrated feminist approach to globalization, both theoretically and methodologically. Close readings by Margot Finn, Robert Goddard, Cory Kratz, Bruce Knauff, Viranjini Munasinghe, Gul Ozyegin, and Jennie Smith have sharpened my ideas on these themes immeasurably, and I gratefully acknowledge their input. Portions of this article have been presented to the Emory Women’s Studies Colloquium and two conferences, “Re-Thinking Transnational Theory,” organized by Karen Fogg Olwig and Ninna Nyberg Sorensen in Santo Domingo, and “Migration and Development,” organized by Alejandro Portes at Princeton University; I thank the organizers and participants for engaged readings and helpful responses. The comments and suggestions of two anonymous reviewers as well as the special issue editors of *Signs* have been invaluable in further revising and rethinking globalization across the disciplinary boundaries of anthropology, cultural studies, postcolonial theory, and international political economy. I thank them for their generous insights, constructive criticism, and extraordinary support and patience as I revised the piece. Also patient have been Taheya Ahmed and baby Alice, who have allowed me to squeeze writing into these early precious months. This article is based on research that has been generously supported by grants from the Fulbright, the Wenner Gren Foundation for Anthropological Research, the National Science Foundation, the Organization of American States, and Emory’s University Research Committee.

<sup>1</sup> The primary texts for the course that led me to this observation include Harvey 1989; Appadurai 1990; Featherstone 1990; Sklair 1991; Robertson 1992; Waters 1995; Hannerz 1996.

patterns we might extend the critique made by Lutz about the more general “gender of theory” to argue that not only has globalization *theory* been gendered masculine but the very processes defining globalization itself — the spatial reorganization of production across national borders and a vast acceleration in the global circulation of capital, goods, labor, and ideas, all of which have generally been traced in their contemporary form to economic and political shifts in the 1970s — are implicitly ascribed a masculine gender. Indeed, two interconnected patterns have emerged: the erasure of gender as integral to social and economic dimensions of globalization when framed at the macro, or “grand theory,” level and an implicit masculinization of these macrostructural models. One outcome of these problems has been the implicit, but powerful, dichotomous model in which the gender of globalization is mapped in such a way that global : masculine as local : feminine.<sup>2</sup>

This article asks what appears to be a simple question: What are the implications of a divide between masculinist grand theories of globalization that ignore gender as an analytical lens and local empirical studies of globalization in which gender takes center stage? How might alternative analytical approaches give rise to new understandings of globalization? As feminists have argued for some time, taking gender seriously not only adds to the analysis at hand but produces a different analysis (Enloe 1990; Massey 1994, 181). By taking up one empirical local case, the example of contemporary “higglers” (or marketers) in the Caribbean, I hope to illustrate that globalization works through many economic and cultural modes and is effected both through large powerful actors and institutions as well as by “small-scale” individuals engaged in a complex of activities that are both embedded within and at the same time transforming practices of global capitalism.<sup>3</sup> The particular case I will describe of contemporary transnational Caribbean higglers demonstrates quite literally that not only do

<sup>2</sup> Recent feminist critiques of globalization discourses and theory demonstrate the need to forge closer links between disciplines whose methodological and theoretical approaches have often made such connections strained. I wish to thank the anonymous reviewers for drawing my attention to recent work by feminists in political science and international political economy and geography whose critical perspectives are resonant with those I am engaging here from the base of cultural anthropology.

<sup>3</sup> The term *higglers* is used first in the literature by Mintz 1955 and Katzin 1959 in their studies of Jamaica’s internal marketing system. Its common usage in the Caribbean refers to people, primarily women, who trade in agricultural foodstuffs, transporting agricultural goods from the countryside and manufactured and imported goods from town. I use the terms *transnational higgler*, *suitcase trader*, and *informal commercial importer* (ICI) to distinguish the more recent rendition of this long historical occupation from its original, agriculturally based version, and the subset of this group I am particularly describing are those women

global processes enact themselves on local ground but local processes and small-scale actors might be seen as the very fabric of globalization. By turning to the gendered qualities of globalization, this discussion aims to rethink the conceptual underpinnings that have implicitly construed global as masculine and local as feminine terrains and practices. As V. Spike Peterson has said, "the binary logic of dichotomies frames our thinking in mutually exclusive categories so that masculinity, reason and objectivity are defined by the absence of femininity, affect and subjectivity. Once we reject the categorical separations presupposed in dichotomies, not only does the boundary between them change but so does the meaning of the polar terms: they are not mutually exclusive but in relation, which permits more than the two possibilities posited in either-or constructions. Moreover, changing the meaning of the terms and bringing them into relation (exposing their interdependence) changes the theoretical frameworks within which they are embedded" (1996, 18). My goal here is to bring into relief several powerful dichotomies in need of dialectical engagement: global/local; masculine/feminine; production/consumption; and formal/informal sectors of the economy.

Perhaps like theory generally, as Lutz implied, sources that have become some of the leading expositions of "globalization theory" have been those hailed for their breadth and scope in grappling with the multitude of factors brought into play in today's era of late capitalism in its most general sense. Whether through evocative renderings of "scapes" within and across which people, capital, technology, media, and ideologies move (Appadurai 1990) or the broad exploration of political economic transformations in changing modes of accumulation as mapped through the "time-space compression" of postmodernity (Harvey 1989), some of the most prominent of globalization's macro theorists offer powerful models of circuits of movement and social and economic changes encompassing our world, but with little specificity about how these are configured in particular places, for particular groups of people, and to what particular ends. Certainly many fine studies have demonstrated the importance of an engagement between macrostructural analyses and the flesh and blood of people's lives as they are bound up within ever-changing localities and cultural and political configurations.<sup>4</sup> By and large, however, many of the works that have become the defining sources of globalization within the social sciences have been macroanalyses that do not engage these linkages.

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whose entry into higglering is tied directly to their employment in the offshore informatics sector in Barbados.

<sup>4</sup> See, e.g., Rouse 1991; Malkki 1992; Basch, Glick-Schiller, and Szanton-Blanc 1994; Hondagneu-Sotelo 1994, 1999; Massey 1994; Ong and Nonini 1997; Sassen 1998.

The point here is not merely to note the absence of gender in many grand treatments of globalization but to probe the ways in which this absence limits our overall understanding of globalization's forms and meanings. A gendered understanding of globalization is not one in which women's stories or feminist movements can be tacked onto or even "stirred into" the macropicture; rather, it challenges the very constitution of that macropicture such that producers, consumers, and bystanders of globalization are not generic bodies or invisible practitioners of labor and desire but are situated within social and economic processes and cultural meanings that are central to globalization itself. Some of the strongest examples of such an approach have been made within feminist critiques. However, achieving the weight of macrotheory that is embedded with local actors, culture, and a keen sense of the gendered, raced, and sexed qualities of these processes is a tall order.

### **Reimagining the "local"**

Discourses on globalization have emerged within roughly two categories — those that emphasize global economics and those concerned with culture.<sup>5</sup> Each has proponents from both critical as well as conservative camps. In the first category, grand theorizing about globalization (works that attempt to trace both its roots and its current forms) has tended to equate contemporary globalization with advanced or fast capitalism whose ever-expanding reach expresses itself in the intensifying (and faceless) transnational flows of capital, labor, and the reconfiguration of global markets (Harvey 1989; Sklair 1991; McMichael 1997). Another set of accounts has focused on the spread of "global culture" through such media as television, the Internet, and the borderless, fast-paced dissemination and consumption of commodities and styles (Featherstone 1990; Waters 1995; Castells 1998).<sup>6</sup> These two approaches have converged within specific accounts of local contexts of incorporation into the global arena. Scholars from a number of disciplines, including sociology, anthropology, and political science, have recently called for greater focus on "the local" contexts of globalization as a way of bringing home the lived realities of these mammoth forces.<sup>7</sup>

<sup>5</sup> Scholte 1996; Youngs 1996; Chang and Ling 2000; and Marchand and Runyan 2000 all articulate a simpler framework within which globalization studies can be characterized.

<sup>6</sup> Other broad theoretical accounts of globalization that suffer from similar unmarked masculinization include Appadurai 1990, 1991; Robertson 1992; and Hannerz 1996.

<sup>7</sup> These discussions raise significant questions about particular modes of inquiry or methodologies and their bearing upon how we conceptualize social phenomena. In a sense, globalization presents social scientists with an increasingly complex field of study that is at once

In addition to humanizing (and thus providing means for both positive and negative readings of globalization “on the ground”) these large-scale economic and social transformations, local studies promise to make clear that the historical and structural underpinnings and contemporary forms of globalization are themselves deeply imbued with specific notions about femininity and masculinity and expectations for the roles of women and men.<sup>8</sup> In the recruitment of labor along the global assembly line, in modes of disciplining and controlling that labor, in the marketing of goods and the creation of consumers, and in the patterns of migration within and across national borders, there are embedded (and sometimes quite explicit) expectations that rely deeply upon ideologies and practices of gender. Close and detailed ethnography has been an integral part of such local analyses, for in order to register and interpret the dialectics of local/global processes and ideologies one needs (quite literally) to have a sense of how, for example, money is made, relationships are fostered, politics are transacted, and goods and services are circulated on the ground. Feminist critiques of globalization that are steeped in ethnographic research have begun to yield important insights into the effects of globalization upon women, men, different ethnic and racial groups and classes, and different regional and national contexts,<sup>9</sup> and they have made clear that macrostructural accounts are insufficient in describing the lived realities of globalization. However, localizing analyses of globalization helps to answer one set of problems

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economic, social, cultural, and spatial. As such, many of the patterns observed in the gendering of *theory* might also be made for *methodological* approaches. In a sense, the masculine profile of globalization theory is counterposed not only to local fields but, in particular, to the practice of ethnography. If, as Lutz 1995 has so provocatively argued, one of the very definitions of theory is signaled by the assumption that the writing reflects a wide variety of instances rather than a single case and most ethnographies, by design, focus on a single locality/case, the implication is that ethnographic treatments of globalization are *not theory*. However, as Abu-Lughod 1990 and other feminist critics have argued, if macroprocesses only take shape through the particular activities of particular people, macrotheory should, likewise, be grounded in the particular.

<sup>8</sup> According to Gibson-Graham, however, rather than find recourse at the level of the local to what they argue have been erroneously construed monolithic scripts of global capitalism, globalization needs to be “redefined discursively, in a process that makes room for a host of alternative scriptings [noncapitalist economic relations] capable of inscribing a proliferation of economic differences” (1996, 147). They argue that only through challenging the ubiquitous model of capitalism can we fully understand (and challenge) contemporary global economic transformations.

<sup>9</sup> See, e.g., Fernández-Kelly 1983; Lim 1983; Pearson 1986; and Ong 1987 for a focus on the incorporation of female labor into global factories. For the effects of structural adjustment policies on women and gender relations, see Sen and Grown 1987; Kaber 1994; and Jackson and Pearson 1998.

while leaving another intact. This is particularly evident where gender is concerned, for the turn to gender on local terrain has inadvertently been the slippery slope on which the equation between local and feminine gets reinscribed. The assertion that we recast our view of contemporary processes we have labeled globalization through the study of the local cannot be a matter of subsuming one to the other, not a privileging of micro over macro, but rather a claim that understanding specific places, with their own particular and changing histories, economies, and cultures vis-à-vis the intensification of global movements (whether of trade, travel, commodities, styles, ideologies, capital, etc.), helps us to better grapple with the essence of these movements and their changing implications.

Where I begin is not to assert the primacy of the local against the generic or homogeneous global but rather, as Akhil Gupta and James Ferguson (1997) suggest, to highlight the “complex and sometimes ironic” processes through which “cultural forms are imposed, invented, reworked, and transformed” in a rapidly global arena (1997, 5). Further, I hope to suggest lines of development toward a framework in which these very cultural processes are themselves understood to be integrally local and global, mutually constitutive, and bound up in modes of gender at all levels. My aim, therefore, is twofold. First, I attempt to challenge the portrayal of the local as contained within, and thus defined fundamentally by, the global.<sup>10</sup> My second goal involves a decoupling of the link that has fused gender with the local and left the macropicture of globalization bereft of gender as a constitutive force. In short, I will argue that seeing the specific dimensions of the Caribbean higgler’s work *as* global processes (not as a result of them) prods us to think more flexibly about the relationship between gender and globalization at large. In particular, the higgler challenges any notion that global spaces are traversed by men and gendered masculine. She also disrupts familiar formulations in which the “third-world woman” is defined either outside globalization or as the presumed back upon which its production depends. Thus, she forces us to reckon with two related problems: the collapse of local specificity in macroanalyses of globalization and the slippery equation between local and women/gender that has effectively eclipsed the latter from the macromodels of globalization. If, as I suggested at the outset, the gendering of space as well as the social and economic processes associated with globalization imply that local and global become

<sup>10</sup> Gibson-Graham make a similar point when they say “localization, it seems, is not so much ‘other’ to globalization as contained within it, brought into being by it, indeed part of globalization itself. . . . A space can be made for thinking globalization as many, as other to itself, as inscribing different development paths and economic identities” (1996, 145–46).

characterized in oppositional terms (feminine/masculine), then critiquing the effects of globalization on local ground can answer only one dimension of this conundrum. What is called for as well, then, is a feminist reconceptualization of globalization whereby local forms of globalization are understood not merely as effects but also as constitutive ingredients in the changing shape of these movements. A feminist reconceptualization of this sort requires a stance toward globalization in which the arrows of change are imagined in more than one direction, and where gender is interrogated not only in the practices of men and women in local sites but also in the ways in which both abstract as well as tangible global movements and processes are ascribed masculine or feminine value. Works by feminist social scientists across a number of disciplinary lines have begun to demonstrate the gains to be made by bringing together shifts in theorizing globalization with close empirical study of specific local contexts.<sup>11</sup>

### **Global theory/local lives: Feminist inroads**

In an astute discussion of the gap between world-systems theory and feminist theory, Joya Misra (1999) concludes that dialogue across these boundaries, rather than integration of one into the other, is the most tenable solution. In her formulation, world-systems theory has as its unit of analysis the globe, whereas feminism's unit remains the individual. The world-systems approach aims to interpret the overarching structures and trends that in turn shape the interrelationships and relative positions of particular nation-states within the world system (Wallerstein 1974),<sup>12</sup> while feminist scholars "attempt to make sense of the micro processes and relationships that both compose and create the world-system" (Misra 1999, 21) by focusing on individuals. While both argue that research must be grounded in specific contexts and engage interdisciplinary approaches to knowledge, the former lacks sufficient attention to the local particulars (events and manifestations of global processes), and the latter risks a lack of engagement with the larger patterns and structures shaping individual experience. I wish to depart somewhat from Misra's framework, in arguing that the power of a number of feminist treatments of globalization has, indeed,

<sup>11</sup> See Ong 1987; Enloe 1990; Massey 1994; Gibson-Graham 1996; Kofman and Youngs 1996; Chang and Ling 2000; Marchand and Runyan 2000.

<sup>12</sup> In more recent work, Wallerstein has focused on the household and its role within wider economic relations; as such, he has engaged gender. However, the more general point here is that "world-systems" approaches tend to map with a broad brush pictures in which local experience and sociocultural dynamics can be attributed largely to the workings of higher level cross-national political and economic relationships.



been their integration of macro and micro levels of analysis. These typically do situate the local particulars in the broader political-economic context of the globe, whether focusing upon production in a transnational industry, consumption of imported media, fashions, or transnational migrations.<sup>13</sup> They do so not solely by focusing on the level of the individual, as Misra suggests, but by examining relationships between and across the analytical levels of individual, household, community, race, class, and nation. In such works, the integration originates from the vantage point of the local, not merely as a point of response to crisis or predicament generated at the top, or global, level but as a site dialectically engaged. In other words, the processes of globalization do not only work themselves out in local contexts, in which people must cope with conditions out of their control. Global processes are simultaneously shaped, limited, and redefined by these very sites and actors, even if in small ways.

Marianne Marchand and Anne Runyan (2000), for example, have asserted that culture, social systems, and gender must be made integral to international political economy. What they call a “critical” or “second-wave” literature on globalization rejects the narrow economic accounts and postulates “global restructuring” over “globalization” to signal the indeterminacy of these processes and “the notion that we are dealing with a set of multidimensional, multispeed, and disjuncted processes” (2000, 7). J. K. Gibson-Graham<sup>14</sup> (1996) employ the metaphor of rape to describe discourses of globalization as a masculinist script of heteronormativity in which capitalism is monolithic in both form and meaning.<sup>15</sup> Globalization scripts and rape scripts share not only language (e.g., the shared terminology of “penetration” and opportunities to tap “virgin” markets/territories) but also “the ways a scripted narrative of power operates in both the discursive and social fields of gendered and economic violence . . . [and] normalizes an act of non-reciprocal penetration. . . . After the experience of penetration—by commodification, market incorporation, proletarianization, MNC [multinational corporation] invasion—something is lost, never to

<sup>13</sup> On transnational industries, see Fernández-Kelly 1983; Ong 1987; Ward 1990; Wolf 1992; Safa 1995; Pena 1997; Freeman 2000; on media, see Abu-Lughod 1995; Das 1995; Mankekar 1999; on transnational fashions, see Freeman 2000; Hansen 2000; MacGaffey and Bazenguissa-Ganga 2000; on migration, see Hondagneu-Sotelo and Avila 1997; Sorenson 1998; Mahler 1999; Pessar 1999.

<sup>14</sup> J. K. Gibson-Graham is a pen name for Julie Graham and Katherine Gibson, feminist economic geographers who author jointly under this amalgamated name.

<sup>15</sup> Runyan 1996 also uses the analogy of global restructuring as “date rape.” This analogy has long roots as well, dating from early discussions of imperialism. See also Tiffany and Adams 1985.

be regained” (Gibson-Graham 1996, 124–25).<sup>16</sup> For the developing countries in the world, in other words, there is only one possible path—being subsumed by the limitless expansion of capitalism. The local, in other words, is always the victim of global capitalist domination. Gibson-Graham’s goal is to articulate a framework in which to “make space for thinking globalization as many, as other to itself, as inscribing different development paths and economic identities” (146). This would involve, they argue, “denying the inevitability and ‘reality’ of MNC power over workers and communities [and that of capitalism generally] and exploring ways in which the hard and penetrating body of the MNC can be seen as soft, fragile, and vulnerable. . . . Drawing upon feminist retheorizations of sexual identity, the naturalness of capitalist identity as the template of all economic identity can be called into question” (147). They call for both a recognition of and support for alternative or noncapitalist economic relations and modes of enterprise as well as an assertion that capitalism is not as all encompassing as we have been led to believe. As such, they provide a useful space for imagining new ways of interrogating globalization as plural, malleable, and multidirectional and thus for seeing capitalist penetration as potentially feminine.

Kimberly Chang and L. H. M. Ling (2000) articulate another feminist critique of the processes of global restructuring through the formulation of two typologies, “techno muscular capitalism” (TMC) and “regimes of labor intimacy.” The former includes those public expressions of globalization in which the “integrated world of global finance, production, trade and telecommunications . . . valorizes all those norms and practices usually

<sup>16</sup> Though provocative, the metaphor of capitalism as rape ironically risks reinscribing an equation between capitalism and masculinity without imagining an alternatively gendered model in which femininity and victimhood are not necessarily linked. Despite their attempts to imagine breaking the “victim role” through alternative rape scripts, the analogy breaks down when Gibson-Graham assert that “penetration of Asia by foreign MNCs has borne unexpected fruit. Both upstream suppliers and downstream users of semiconductors have sprung up in a regional complex of indigenous firms in south-east Asia, including technical training facilities, centered in Thailand. This development counters the image of the sterile branch plant in poor countries, which repatriates profits and contributes only to underdevelopment rather than industrial growth. *The development of the locally-owned semiconductor industry in south-east Asia has been extremely dynamic and relies increasingly on high skilled local workers. It appears that the economic ‘rape’ wrought by globalization in the Third World is a script with many different outcomes. In this case we might read the rape event as inducing a pregnancy, rather than initiating the destruction and death of indigenous economic capacity*” (1996, 131; emphasis added). Although their point is a vital one—that globalization is not predictable—it is also difficult to imagine any woman made pregnant from a rape considering that pregnancy a creative act.

associated with western capitalist masculinity—deregulation, privatization, strategic alliances . . . —but masked as global or universal” (2000, 27). They describe the regime of labor intimacy as a second mode of global restructuring, a hidden, private, “intimate other” to TMC. Their discussion centers on the ethnographic context of Filipina domestic workers in Hong Kong, whose incorporation into these modes frequently involves a form of indentured servitude and sexual exploitation. In addition to demonstrating modes of resistance to these forces (e.g., domestic workers’ adoption of a homosexual identity they call *tomboyism* to combat the sexual harassment and accusations of sexual promiscuity they are otherwise subjected to), they illustrate dramatically how gender and sexuality are enacted through globalization. On the one hand, they present the masculinization of high-level global restructuring (ascribed to both male and female cosmopolitans of TMC and characterized by “high-tech mobility, autonomy, and challenging opportunities” [2000, 34]), and, on the other, they locate the feminization of subjects within the regimes of labor intimacy (those males or females operating, and sometimes incarcerated within, low-wage jobs with enforced intimacy) (Chang and Ling 2000, 34).

The recent work of Aihwa Ong (1999) includes another explication of globalization that engages the macropolitical economy with locally specific cultural meanings in ways that foreground the centrality of gender in these processes. Turning her attention to the Asia Pacific region, she uses transnationalism to describe “the conditions of cultural interconnectedness and mobility across space—which has been intensified under late capitalism” (1999, 4) and explores these global processes by placing cultural logics and human practices at the center of analysis. Drawing on Michel Foucault, Ong understands human agency to be a form of cultural politics embedded in particular configurations of power (1999, 4–5). She is thereby able to work between and across multiple levels of analysis—the individual, the family, the state, the region, and beyond. Ong argues that, “while mobility and flexibility have long been part of the repertoire of human behavior, under transnationality the new links between flexibility and the logics of displacement, on the one hand, and capital accumulation, on the other, have given new valence to such strategies of maneuvering and positioning. *Flexibility, migration, and relocations, instead of being coerced or resisted, have become practices to strive for rather than stability*” (1999, 19; emphasis added). Flexibility, furthermore, entails gendered expectations in virtually all realms of life. “Family regimes that generally valorize mobile masculinity and localized femininity shape strategies of flexible citizenship, gender division of labor, and relocation in different sites” (20).<sup>17</sup> Moving beyond the struc-

<sup>17</sup> See also Nonini 1997.

turally defined patterns of globalization (Harvey 1989; Waters 1995) and probing deeper than the local-global articulations approach (Appadurai 1990), she argues that “a model that analytically defines the global as political-economic and the local as cultural does not quite capture the horizontal and relational nature of the contemporary economic, social, and cultural processes that stream across spaces” (1999, 4).<sup>18</sup>

Such feminist critiques have begun to challenge the ways in which, wittingly or not, accounts of globalization have frequently reproduced a model of locality and movement not unlike the public/private formulation of social space long familiar and much debated within feminist social science.<sup>19</sup> This model has depicted women and femininity as rooted, traditional, and charged with maintaining domestic continuity in the face of flux and instability caused by global movements that, explicitly or not, embody a quality of masculinity. To paint the picture rather crudely, there is a way in which the fluidity and flux of today’s globalization is assumed to have pushed women into otherwise masculine realms of travel, migration,

<sup>18</sup> For this reason, Ong adopts the language of *transnationalism* to analyze these movements, their underpinnings, and their effects and meanings rather than *globalization*, which she uses to refer to “the narrow sense of new corporate strategies” (1999, 4). Although I am persuaded by Ong’s characterization of transnationalism as a means to capture “the *transversal*, the *transactional*, the *translational*, and the *transgressive* aspects of contemporary behavior and imagination that are incited, enabled and regulated by the changing logics of states and capitalism” (4), I am also struck by the hegemony of the more structural models over the concept and treatment of what has widely been discussed as globalization. Globalization, like transnationalism, its equally problematic close relation, is a macroconcept likely to continue to gain currency rather than lose favor in the wider arena of social science, news media, and popular culture at large. Indeed, all indications point to its persistence in precisely the manner I have sketched thus far. Rather than limit its usage, as Ong suggests, I propose here that the model itself be tackled and redefined in ways that make explicit not simply nation and class formations but also the gendered and often racial matrices in which these processes are embedded. As such, I have opted not to abandon the term; instead, through the case of the Caribbean higgler, I hope to begin to challenge the structural binarisms (global economy/local culture; global men/local women; and global theory/local lives) on which the prevailing macromodels of both globalization and transnationalism have implicitly been anchored.

<sup>19</sup> Beck 2000; Marchand and Runyan 2000, 15; and True 2000 draw our attention to ways in which feminist critical theorizing about public and private spheres is not applicable within transitional or postcommunist states of Eastern Europe, in which the private realm for many women offers a larger space for agency (entrepreneurship, consumerism, individual expression) than the public, which is associated with surveillance and mistrust. Clifford 1998 more generally has noted that the binary oppositions between local/global, like those of home/abroad and staying/moving, need to be more thoroughly interrogated. He writes, “These oppositions have often been naturalized along the lines of gender (female, domestic space versus male travel), class (the active, alienated bourgeoisie versus the stagnant, soulful poor), and race/culture (modern, rootless Westerners versus traditional, rooted ‘natives’)” (84–85).

and labor. As such, these forays are considered anomalies bound up in the demands of global capitalism, where global forces realign local cultural practices and norms, sometimes inventing whole new gender profiles that equate young women with ideal workers (and migrants). In the realm of global production, as both Ong's and Patricia Fernández-Kelly's ethnographies demonstrated over a decade ago, women were recruited out of the realm of rural communities and patriarchal households and wooed into the alien world of the multinational factory and urban free trade zones. Where traditional femininity may entail nonwaged family-based labor, marriage, and motherhood, new forms of global femininity demanded by transnational corporations, for example, introduce the primacy of wage earning (still for the family, but enjoyed individually as well) and often spawn suspicion and wariness toward women's increasing physical independence. Such autonomy for women is closely associated with accusations of sexual promiscuity<sup>20</sup> and has been accompanied by rising rates of violence against women. Travel, with its embodiments of worldliness, adventure, physical prowess, and cultural mastery, is widely constructed as a male pursuit.<sup>21</sup> The circulation of women within the global arena as migrant domestic workers, factory workers for transnational corporations, and "entertainment" workers is viewed in many parts of the world as a recent challenge to the traditionally gendered configuration of space and motion.

What distinguishes the gendered mapping of Ong's and Chang and Ling's cases from that implicit in earlier masculinist models of globalization is their very interrogation of the empirical circumstances at the local level. At the local and regional levels of Asia Pacific, they critically examine the configuration of stasis and movement as feminine and masculine practices, and they critically engage the relationships between space, movement, and gender. Each of these feminist approaches demonstrates in different ways that,

<sup>20</sup> Fernández-Kelly 1983 and Ong 1987 note this pattern of wariness and suspicion surrounding women's sexuality in Mexico and Malaysia, respectively.

<sup>21</sup> In his fascinating discussion of travel, James Clifford (1998) mentions the work of Amitav Ghosh and his characterization of every man in the Egyptian village he studied as a traveler, "drawing attention to specific, largely male, experiences of worldliness, intertwined roots and routes" (4). Clifford goes on to ask, "Do the women in Ghosh's village-cum-transit-lounge travel? If not, why not? What is the mix of choice and compulsion in the different mobilities of men and women? Are there significant class, racial, ethnic, or religious factors cross-cutting gender? Does a focus on travel inevitably privilege male experiences? What counts as 'travel,' for men and women, in different settings? Pilgrimage? Family visiting? Running a stall in a market town? And in those cases—common but not universal—where women stay home and men go abroad, how is 'home' conceived and lived in relation to the practices of coming and going?" (1998, 6).

to theorize and describe the vast and complex workings of globalization, gender matters. Where Ong, Gibson-Graham, and Chang and Ling each disrupt the gendered mapping of global/masculine space, I hope as well to demonstrate through the case of the transnational worker/higgler that several other gendered dichotomies are simultaneously being reconfigured.

### **Globalization across formal and informal economic frontiers**

The higgler in the Caribbean context is an age-old figure. Defined as a market intermediary, she is a buyer and seller, traditionally of produce and goods purchased from rural growers and sold in the town market. The country higgler has been a powerful figure in Afro-Caribbean history, a woman who symbolizes local economic ingenuity and female independence. Traditionally, she traveled from country to town and back again, buying and selling agricultural produce for manufactured and imported goods available in town, and, in turn, making these commodities available in rural areas. Her historical importance has been multifaceted. From the days of slavery, the higgler was integral to establishing the internal marketing systems that have come to define much of the Caribbean region (Mintz 1955; Katzin 1959; Le Franc 1989). Her role under slavery was profound, both symbolically and practically. By transporting and making available a wide array of produce, herbs, and root crops, grown by slaves on provision grounds during their “free” time, and by providing the dietary staples for slave and planter alike, she both subsidized and developed autonomy from the plantation system (Beckles 1989; Bush 1990). Traveling between peasant producers in the countryside and emergent urban areas, the higgler helped to establish a predictable national diet that has characterized West Indian life across class and racial boundaries. Over nearly two centuries, she also came to embody a figure of womanhood in which physical movement, travel, and business acumen were defining characteristics. In contrast to the plantation mistress, whose life was circumscribed by the limits of domestic duty and propriety and who was expected to inhabit the interior spaces of home and church, the higgler operated in the public space of markets and roads at home and in her travels to neighboring islands. She has been defined more by movement than by stasis, more by vivacity and grit than by a demure Victorian demeanor.

In the Caribbean, flux and movement have characterized models of livelihood and existence more than stasis and sedentarism. This is not surprising given the region’s very invention as a global endeavor of colonialism. Perhaps out of the ashes of its bitter legacy of forced migrations of slavery and indenture emerged a cultural predisposition for flux and change (Mintz

1989, 1996; Trouillot 1992).<sup>22</sup> The country higgler was the key bearer not only of produce and other consumer goods between country and town but of news, information, and gossip (Katzin 1959). Her style of banter and prowess over modes of negotiation are well-known and admired traits of West Indian womanhood. Indeed, this particular expression of femininity—of strength, size, and autonomy—has formed a powerful counterpoint to that of a more middle-class, European model denoted in the region’s well-known concept of “respectability.”<sup>23</sup> This figure has been one of the most highly commodified images of West Indianness generally. The colorful country higgler, wearing a head tie and printed skirt, proudly balancing her bountiful tray of fruit atop her head or nestled beneath her generous bosom, has become a synecdoche for Caribbean womanhood and even nationhood. Her image is produced for touristic as well as local consumption, on postcards, key chains, tea towels, as well as finer artistic renderings. She signifies a femininity that is at once that of a mother and a worker, a provider and a consumer, at one and the same time the definition of locality and of movement.

Today, a new form of higgling has expanded in the region, in which women travel on commercial airlines, rather than on trucks, buses, or ba-

<sup>22</sup> Further, where in the Chinese case emigration to locales across the Asia Pacific region and the United States has been marked by a pattern of “localizing the women at home, where they care for their families, thus freeing the men to work abroad” (Ong 1999, 20), patterns of migration and travel within the Caribbean have been gendered differently. Caribbean migration history does include mass movements of men seeking work abroad, most notably during the building of the Panama Canal. However, in the past half century there have also been large numbers of West Indian women recruited for domestic labor, nursing, and other services to Britain, Canada, and the United States.

<sup>23</sup> First proposed by Peter Wilson (1969), the duality of respectability/reputation has held wide currency in scholarship of the region. His formulation proposed that two cultural models have framed Caribbean societies: one modeled on white European norms of respectability, in which propriety and decorum are emphasized through practices of marriage, monogamy, and the tenets of Christianity, and women are described as the main bearers and arbiters of respectability residing largely in the interior realms of home and church; the second, reputation, refers to those African-derived cultural practices and beliefs that foster *comunitas*, or a leveling of social hierarchy. Forms of verbal jousting and of display, in which small groups gather in exterior, public spaces, are said to be practiced more by men. Numerous critiques of this formulation have been articulated (e.g., Sutton 1974; Barrow 1986; Besson 1993; Miller 1994; Yelvington 1995; Freeman 2000) challenging various dimensions of the starkness of this proposed duality. Nonetheless, virtually every ethnography from the region takes up this paradigm in one form or another. As such, its heuristic value has been great, and it is in this spirit that I engage it here to counterpose Wilson’s version of feminine respectability with another equally strong version of powerful, black womanhood embodied in the figure of the higgler. See Freeman 2000 for an expanded discussion of competing feminine ideologies and portraits in the context of the transnational informatics industry in Barbados.

nana boats, buying clothing and other consumer goods, rather than mangoes or provision crops, and reselling these in an active (and illegal) informal market at home.<sup>24</sup> Otherwise called “suitcase traders” or “informal commercial importers” (ICIs), Caribbean higgler are a well-known and much-discussed, but little-studied, group.<sup>25</sup> The suitcase trade (named for the large bags carried abroad empty and returned full upon the higgler’s return home) is an international phenomenon witnessed in many of today’s major metropolitan areas as well as in third-world cities within Africa, Latin America, and the Caribbean. These informal commercial importers represent a growing dimension of an expanding informal sector in Barbados and the region at large. Today, the transnational higgler travels not only beyond the rural/urban loop of her agricultural counterpart but to cities in other parts of the region and, quite significantly, to places outside of the traditional interregional boundaries that colonialism established centuries ago.

Local governments and state development planners hail contemporary transnational higgler for their ingenuity and bemoan them for the illegality of their trade.<sup>26</sup> Informal commercial importing, or transnational higglering, is, in all of its forms, a vexing mode of entrepreneurship in the eyes of the Barbadian state.<sup>27</sup> On the one hand, it cannot be denied that this

<sup>24</sup> Although women are known to predominate in this form of higglering, like in its agriculturally based antecedent, men represent an active minority in the trade. Some women in my study reported that men are more likely to import electronics than housewares and to tie their trips to other forms of migrant labor, such as temporary agricultural work in North America.

<sup>25</sup> See Witter 1988; French 1989; Quinones 1997; and Ulysse 1999.

<sup>26</sup> During the early period of my fieldwork, in 1991, the then minister of trade made a desperate plea asking “patriotic Barbadians” to boycott illegal suitcase traders. His call was made in support of local clothing manufacturers and store owners who claimed that the overseas trade by ICIs was severely curtailing their businesses. More recently, in an interview with a local boutique owner, this complaint was echoed with despair. This shopkeeper has had to shift her market exclusively to tourists, selling Barbados t-shirts and related beachwear, facing the simple fact that “Bajans could get their clothes and shoes cheaper from the suitcase traders.”

<sup>27</sup> A wide array of people perform informal importing in the Caribbean, in varying degrees of intensity and aimed at varying markets. Flight attendants on the airlines are one group, e.g., who have long utilized their access to frequent travel to buy and resell goods within local networks. Middle-class women may perform occasional shopping trips abroad with lists for relatives and friends, covering the cost of their travel and accommodation by charging additional small fees. Others, keen to identify themselves as entrepreneurs, and earning substantial income from their sales, sometimes specialize in particular goods such as shoes or children’s clothing. The local government increasingly pressures those higgler who travel regularly and perform these trips as the basis for their livelihoods to “regularize” their trade by selling in



trade is an expression of innovative enterprise concentrated in the hands of women who represent the highest proportion of the nation's unemployed and underemployed. On the other hand, the fact that these marketing transactions elude taxation and duties and compete aggressively with local shopkeepers' sales makes them a source of great contestation. Despite attempts by the state to crack down on the suitcase trade, however, there is little doubt that it contributes in significant ways not only to providing income to the formally unemployed and underemployed but also to supplementing the low wages of many situated within the transnational industries in free trade zones across the region.

It is to this latter group I turn attention here — those women employed within one of the region's newest and fastest growing industries, offshore informatics, who find themselves propelled into the additional pursuit of weekend higglering and whose lives, as such, have become intimately bound up with a multitude of dimensions of globalization. I focus on this particular subcategory of higglers as a way of highlighting a number of hidden relationships within processes of globalization. In most cases for these women, higglering is not an explicit identity or form of work. Instead, it represents an economic strategy for supplementing their low formal wages or, as many women say, just a little extra way of "making do." Even more so than the traditional higgler dealing in produce and traveling across national and regional spaces, the informatics worker/higgler is multiply embedded in global processes, albeit in an unmistakably Caribbean form. The hyper-high-tech quality of the work they produce (transmitted in electronic form via satellite technology) and its inextricably global configuration, together with their transnational sojourns for profit and for pleasure, place this group of higglers in a category of their own. Though as global producers and as higglers their historical roots are deep, they demonstrate some of the convergences across structural spheres (culture/economy, production/consumption, and formal/informal sectors of the economy) that the globalization literature has narrowly (and separately) portrayed. Further, each of these realms and their dynamic intersections demonstrates the integral place of gender in the dialectics of local/global processes.

Like globalization literature more broadly, in the Caribbean region most of the past decade's research on globalization has centered on the general theme of economic development and, specifically, upon three related phe-

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stalls in central markets in Bridgetown. In the latter case, the Barbadian government has made attempts to regulate this trade by setting up market areas in Bridgetown and thereby providing mechanisms for taxing these entrepreneurs on their businesses.

nomena: the neoliberal emphasis on the expansion of exports, the proliferation of the informal sector in these societies, and the central participation of women within both of these arenas.<sup>28</sup> The expansion of the informal sector has often been described as a by-product of export-oriented industrialization, and patterns of labor migration are often linked to the specific configurations of these two economic realms. Recently, there has been some speculation as to the linkages not only between these two sectors institutionally (Portes and Walton 1981; Harvey 1989; Portes, Castells, and Benton 1989) but also at the level of the individual, where increasing numbers of people are simultaneously engaged in formal export industrial labor and additional informal economic activities (St. Cyr 1990; Freeman 1997; Quinones 1997). In my fieldwork among informatics workers in Barbados, I quickly discovered that, as demanding as these jobs were in terms of sheer discipline and the rigor of the labor process as well as expectations for overtime, most of the women operators simultaneously engaged in one or more forms of informal income-generating activity "on the side," including baking and decorating cakes for special occasions, hairstyling in their kitchen "salons," and buying and selling clothing and accessories to networks of kin, friends, and workmates. This last form of informal work, what I am calling here *transnational higglering*, is tied in intriguing ways to women's formal jobs in informatics.

Offshore informatics is a recent expansion of global industry and refers to the transnational movement of information-based service work for U.S., British, and other corporations outside metropolitan centers and into developing countries, where new, low-waged labor forces now perform it. As with other transnational production ventures that have shifted production operations "offshore" to the developing world, the draw of Barbados and some other Caribbean locales for offshore informatics is quite simple: comparatively lower wages; a well-educated, "disciplined," and English-speaking labor force (thanks to the legacy of British colonialism); and various tax and infrastructure inducements that the Barbadian government provides.

As in several other industries along the global assembly line (e.g., garments, textiles, electronics), informatics is a highly feminized arena. Nearly every computer cubicle of the dozen or so informatics "open offices" currently operating in Barbados is occupied by a woman between the ages of eighteen and thirty-five, who enters electronic data from airline ticket stubs, insurance claims forms, or legal briefs. Even a cursory glance at these women and their officelike production floors raises questions about their

<sup>28</sup> See Massiah 1986; Safa 1991, 1995; and Momsen 1993.

embeddedness in globalization. Operators commit to memory the place names and various associated data codes of North American cities to which they are electronically linked; they participate in American management practices such as “total quality management” (TQM) that British business consultants teach their Barbadian managers; they buy imported accessories displaying the logos of designers from Europe and the United States (jewelry, underwear, handbags, and the like); they rent pirated videos of movies taped from U.S. cable channels from mobile stalls parked outside their industrial zones during break times and between shifts; and many, on their vacation time or long holiday weekends, engage in transnational higglering trips to purchase the very goods (clothing, shoes, and accessories) that demarcate them visually from their sisters and neighbors working in a range of factories nearby.

Informatics employers directly foster these trips in a fascinating matrix involving corporate prescriptions for “professional” and disciplined workers, a reward structure in which airline tickets are exchanged for exceptional levels of productivity and commitment, and women workers’ desire for new and reasonable fashions to further their workplace “professionalism” (and afterwork wardrobe) and for the opportunity to earn money through travel abroad. For example, Barbados’s largest informatics employer (of over one thousand women workers) offers “thank-you cards,” or productivity rewards, in the form of travel vouchers on American Airlines, which is owned by the same parent company as the informatics firm. These coupons enabled many of the women in this company to travel abroad for the first time in their lives. Again reflective of the youthful and feminine profile corporate managers held of their employees, these awards included companion tickets for a female family member chaperone. Networks of kin and friends living overseas influenced women’s destinations, as did the limits of their coupons (e.g., two are required for a trip to San Juan, American Airlines’ regional hub, and three are required for New York). In a more indirect way, a number of other factors have influenced employees’ participation in the suitcase trade. I have argued elsewhere that the company’s dress codes and emphasis on “professionalism” foster both discipline among the workers and a determination to distinguish themselves from other “ordinary” factory workers through particular modes of adornment and style. In order to do so, women go to great lengths to make, commission, and purchase new clothes and accessories that mark their nonfactory status. The suitcase trade represents one of the major sources of this distinctive attire. In this case, the demand for new styles and new consumer goods is integrally tied to the particular formation of a “pink-collar” worker within the informatics sector, a process configured by

a complex set of factors including foreign and local modes of discipline and surveillance, gender ideologies, and aesthetics (Freeman 2000).

The fact that these high-tech working women juggle formal and informal sector work is not in itself remarkable in the history of Barbados nor the region more generally (Comitas 1964; Carnegie 1987; Senior 1990).<sup>29</sup> However, the particular linkages, both structural and symbolic, between the formal transnational export sector and the emergent trade in consumer goods by suitcase traders remains unexplored as a dimension of (simultaneously) globalization, local culture and development, and identity.

### **Gendering globalization across production/consumption frontiers**

While new literature on globalization has begun to distinguish itself from earlier structural economic analyses by focusing on the realm of culture and meaning, there remains a strong privileging of the realm of labor and production. Part of this tradition has been a paradigm that has historically situated production in opposition to consumption. There has also been a deeply gendered dimension to this dualism, both in terms of actors (men produce, women consume or shop) and a differential valuation of production (masculine and serious, even if performed by women) versus consumption (feminine and trivial, even if performed by men).<sup>30</sup> What we miss in such polarized analyses are the ways in which, taken together, globalizing modes of consumption and modes of production may have ironic and potentially transformative effects for those engaged in them. In this regard, the informatics worker/higgler is a particularly intriguing figure, since her labor is deeply bound up in changing practices of consumption, for herself, her family, her community of customers, and potentially for the nation at large. More than the average consumer, however, she epitomizes the argument that consumption is itself a form of economic activity equally important to production. Indeed, while the case of the informatics worker-cum-higgler is not a neat illustration of Gibson-Graham's argument for the coexistence of capitalist globalization (e.g., the offshore informatics industry) with noncapitalist globalization (e.g., entrepreneurial activities outside

<sup>29</sup> Carnegie 1987 extends Comitas's earlier concept of "occupational multiplicity" in the Caribbean by arguing that "strategic flexibility" is a more general cultural model with which West Indians approach most aspects of life. This is rooted in a history of movement and expressed in numerous ways across the life course (e.g., migration, kinship, occupation, etc.).

<sup>30</sup> As Finn 2000 points out in a fascinating account of eighteenth- and early nineteenth-century English diaries, there has been an undertheorizing of male consumers (perhaps related to the implicit mapping of femininity onto consumption) as well as of consumption more generally.

the market), these complex and interconnected sets of economic practices do stand outside the conventional forms of what is typically understood to be a “univocal” “market/commodity/global capitalist totality” (Gibson-Graham 1996, 145). Citing Roger Rouse’s work on Mexican migrants, Gibson-Graham write, “Even immigrant workers who may be wage laborers in metropolitan capitalist economies cannot be seen as ‘subsumed’ in any complete sense [when they] manage two distinct ways of life, maintaining small-scale family based farms or commercial operations in Mexico. Money received as wages in the U.S. is siphoned into productive investment in noncapitalist activity in the Mexican economy” (1996, 142).

By contrast, the pink-collar worker in the offshore informatics industry in Barbados takes her wage (and her corporate thank-you card) and invests it in the purchase of goods abroad, with the eventual goal of reselling them in informal networks back home. The challenge to a singular script of globalization, however, can be made not solely in the economic bases of production but by turning to the realm of consumption and, more generally, to cultural dimensions of these processes. Because the contemporary higgler’s primary goal is the provision of consumer goods to such markets back home, she faces the task on her sojourns of translating tastes and desires between “home” and “host” cultures as well as managing her own relationships and movements on foreign territory, to a large extent through modes of consumption. In this sense, her consumption is both an individual personal practice carried out as she travels abroad and as an entrepreneur back home as well as a social practice that bears on the circulation of goods and, potentially, on their gendered enactments more broadly. For herself and her family, the transnational higgler is primarily involved in the pursuit of income and her own self-fashioning; but at the same time she is deeply engaged as an arbiter of styles and taste for the customers she supplies with goods. Her own embodiment of femininity—the particular ways in which she occupies and traverses spaces, her adoption of new styles, modes of comportment, and articulation of “professionalism”—is conveyed through goods and her own expressions of self to her customer networks of family, friends, workmates, as well as to the community at large. These practices, in turn, present possibilities for redefining gender and for redrawing conventional boundaries of class (Freeman 2000) and race (Ulysse 1999). How the higglering movements of contemporary Caribbean women help us think differently about the gendered relationships of production/consumption, locality, and globalization may be read in part through Danielle’s story.

Danielle was employed in one of the largest informatics firms in Barbados when I first met her in 1989. She was open then about her simultane-

ous pride in and boredom with her job as “materials controller.” She spent her day on slippered feet, handing out pages of text to sedentary keyers who entered the text electronically for foreign publishers. Text pages were “double keyed” for higher accuracy, and Danielle’s job involved keeping track of who had which pages and which pages needed to be double-keyed, all the while not keeping any of the typists waiting, as their pay depended upon fast and accurate data entry. Likewise, she was on-call to answer questions, interpret key-codes, and assist the supervisors and shift managers. While she complained about the boredom and frustration of being squeezed between keyers’ demands and supervisors’ mandates, she enjoyed the regular paycheck. “It helps me budget better and plan for things.” Even in the early days of our meeting, she let on that her real ambition was to open her own business and “be my own boss.” During those months, she perfected her sewing and made skirt-suits for herself and her fellow workmates on commission. Learning how to cut her own patterns by hand, she could soon turn out a simple suit in a matter of an hour or two. Soon, Danielle was supplementing her formal wage in informatics with fairly regular income earned informally as a needle-worker.

The relationship between her sewing pursuits and her formal job revolved closely around the conventions and expectations for professionalism—to dress and comport herself as an office worker in a transnational firm. In addition to seamstressing, transnational higglering trips had become a widespread practice among many of Danielle’s workmates, and she and several friends arranged a trip together to San Juan over an Easter holiday weekend. As is typically the case, Danielle arranged a package ticket with a local travel agency, including ground transportation to a reasonable motel (costing roughly \$55/night for a double room). On these trips, she travels with her friend and previous workmate, Marcelle, who has worked her way up in the informatics industry to a managerial position in a new firm. Their trips are planned so as to accommodate Marcelle’s work schedule, and she arranges a day or two away from her formal job in order to extend the weekend over four days. Their husbands and other female relations take care of their children (two each), and these trips are eagerly anticipated with the simultaneous dimensions of profit-seeking work and pleasure-seeking escapade. They board a plane out of Grantly Adams International Airport, each woman having checked two large empty suitcases. Danielle carries with her ticket a wish list of orders to fill for herself, her family, and her customers.

On their last trip to St. Lucia, they were met by Danielle’s cousin’s husband, who has lived and worked in Castries for many years. Their four-day trip included a busy combination of shopping in reasonable retail stores

for jeans, children's clothes, and casual leather shoes, an excursion to see the famous Pitons and dramatic waterfalls, and evenings out at popular nightclubs. They speak about being off on their own and out at night with an air of excitement, for these are activities they would be less likely to carry out at home. In the shops, Danielle straddles the roles of consumer and eventual broker and balances the requests on her list against prices, availability, and the new styles she ventures her customers will like. In her display of snapshots from this trip, which followed the familiar convention of posed portraits in front of national sites as well as inside the stores, one would be hard pressed to decipher this higglering journey as anything but a long weekend tourist excursion away from Barbados.

The particular meanings of Danielle's ventures are significant precisely in their multiplicity—they are opportunities for generating income but equally for seeing new sites, enjoying themselves, feeling fashionable and adept at finding "good deals," and in constructing forms of femininity that defy some traditional boundaries that are both gendered and formulated along the lines of class. Danielle and her friend Marcelle are both married women, mothers, and working women—one in a high prestige industry in a position with responsibility, the other now having quit her job in informatics and running a bar/convenience store out of her home. They go to church with some regularity, and they could generally be described as straddling the upper-working/lower-middle classes. Their higglering pursuits when seen amid their wider relationships and responsibilities powerfully exemplify the false dichotomy of the persistently gendered paradigm of respectability and reputation. They are neither the "uptown ladies" nor the "downtown women" of Gina Ulysse's Jamaican paradigm (1999). They move easily between "proper," "respectable" etiquette of middle-class family life and work, facilitated by new modes of consumption they now enjoy, and the "reputation"-like practices of foreign travel, nightclubbing, bold bodily display, and self-fashioning formerly construed as masculine practices (Wilson 1969). The special combination of economic goals along with social desires (profit making and cost saving with pleasure seeking) gives these trips a dimension of both credibility as well as suspicion in the eyes of the women's husbands and boyfriends, and women are known to capitalize on the former to allay the latter. In short, they challenge the reputation/respectability dichotomy in many of the ways critics have asserted—by simultaneously enacting behaviors previously imagined to be the preserve of *either* men or women, middle or lower classes, white, brown, or black. Through modes of dress and travel that are tied both to their role as producer (higgler/informatics worker) and consumer, they are engaged in global processes that are locally distinct. They are incorporated into the

international division of labor just as third-world women factory workers are in other countries; however, their incorporation is not generic nor is it in isolation from other modes of global activity and agency.

### **Conclusions**

The case of the informatics worker/higglers helps to illustrate how through changing modes of production and consumption these social actors have become multiply “territorialized” across a global arena and, in the process, have become agents of globalization. They are local subjects living across and within a globalized terrain both within Barbados (as informatics workers as well as in numerous other forms of consumption and contact with global goods and culture) and on their higglering sojourns abroad (as consumers and marketers of goods and as “tourists” engaged in the consumption of other languages, people, and cultures). In a sense, they are rooted in Barbados, and their Barbadianess is increasingly defined and sharpened though new modes of production, consumption, and travel in ways that link Barbados with numerous other sites along the global terrain. Their notions of themselves as feminine, sexual subjects — as women, as members of the working/middle classes, and as Barbadian, West Indian, Caribbean, and black — are, not surprisingly, increasingly defined in relation to others they encounter through their travel and their relationships forged as higglering. Higglering, then, as a form of labor and consumption and as such the nexus of social, economic, and cultural relationships, becomes a realm in which identities (national, regional, class, racial, gender, and sexual) are articulated and redefined.

While the activities of the Caribbean higgler, straddling production and consumption through the medium of travel, might transgress gender norms in many parts of the world and even other parts of the region, for Barbadian women, these travels might be seen as quintessentially feminine. First, very simply, travel and physical mobility in general have never been off-limits to them. Second, the purchases they make work both to reinforce as well as to challenge notions of traditional or respectable femininity. The consumption practices in which the higgler engages are directed toward the feminine body (clothing/fashion), children’s needs (clothing and toys), as well as the domestic space (curtains, sheets, small kitchen appliances, and clothes) — all reinforcing her roles (and her female customers’ roles) as mother and homemaker. Thus, if some of the fashions and materials she purchases transgress respectable femininity at home in Barbados, others are the very foundation upon which conformity to codes of professional style is constructed.



As a third-world female producer/consumer, the informatics worker/higgler represents an intriguing dimension of globalization in which participants within the informal sector and in global factories are themselves enacting new modes of globalization; they are not merely its effects. It is precisely their agency in doing so, as well as their mutually reinforcing engagements across formal and informal economies and across transnational spaces in which they produce and consume, that both the macro-models as well as many of the feminist ethnographic local accounts fail to illuminate. These engagements in production and consumption as they are configured across space and time have taken shape in ways that foundationally depend upon and redefine femininity and masculinity. As such, they make plain the gendering at work within modes of globalization and the limitations of interpreting such movements solely within the framework of masculinist models of capitalist expansion.

There is a dialectical process at work that begins with the informatics worker/higgler's first recruitment into her transnational firm. At this point, she is an instrument of multinational capitalism, and her incorporation is a gendered one. Her youthful and disciplined body and temperament are tapped and molded within this high-tech global production zone in a manner that fosters a form of professionalism such that she seeks other income sources and symbolic mechanisms for fostering her new feminine demeanor and appearance.<sup>31</sup> The imperative for this new image quickly comes to be articulated both from above (management) and below (her fellow work-

<sup>31</sup> The informatics workplaces were feminine spaces not only by virtue of hiring predominantly women but also in the particular modes of incorporation and discipline utilized in the labor process itself. Young men were typically located in special work areas designated appropriate either because of the physical strength (lifting heavy bags of airline tickets, for instance) or higher skills (computer programming) they required. Even without higher levels of education or skills, the few men who were hired as data-entry operators were often quickly promoted out of the data-processing floors and into special and less visible areas in which they were trained to perform specific jobs. In some of the same ways as the women workers, they too adopted aspects of respectability and professionalism that are coded as feminine in the Barbadian context—their dress was conservative (slacks, buttoned and usually white, unembellished shirts, optional ties, and “hard” shoes) and their hair worn short. The discourse of the workplace as a whole was geared toward a particular set of prescriptions for femininity and emphasized dress, comportment, and professionalism through workshops and demonstrations on makeup, dress, office demeanor, talent shows, and so forth, as well as in the ordinary, highly disciplined labor process, which required precision, punctuality, and high levels of surveillance, in which maleness, masculinity, and “reputation” were largely written out. As I describe at length elsewhere (Freeman 2000), young women's competitive sartorial display was a source of tension for the industry managers, and official newsletters and dress codes emphasized more conservative, understated, and “respectable” modes of attire and comportment.

mates), and this image reflects not only corporate demands but also the creation of a new pink-collar identity she works hard to maintain. On buying trips to San Juan and Miami, the purchase of clothing and accessories is not only an act of consumption but of production — of new images, new modes of comportment, and new subjectivities in a transnational symbolic order. This production of self, while symbolic rather than material, has an economic value as well as a cultural one, as it is a vital dimension of the successful marketing of her goods back home. Through these complex practices, she is simultaneously imbricated in a dialectic of shopfloor production (albeit in an officelike setting), the consumption of clothing and style, and the production of new feminine selves. At each node of this imbrication, there is an exchange of economic as well as symbolic value. Significantly, in this process, she is transformed from being primarily *instrumental* in the forces of globalization (as an employee of a MNC) to becoming *agentive* when others pay for her privileged knowledge and attractive goods. In other words, disciplined and remade in the formal workplace of informatics, she further embellishes this new sense of self on her buying trips, through which she becomes a new agent of globalization. Her agency challenges us to rethink models of globalization more generally in which the local is construed as a space in which the heavy hand of the global makes its marks.

The informatics worker-cum-higgler is embedded within processes of globalization in multiple ways that are not unidirectional, just as Marchand and Runyan observe more generally (2000, 7). She demonstrates not only that local actors are resilient in *responding* to the demands of global capitalism (i.e., not only coping with low wages and a highly disciplined labor process but also redefining transnational prescriptions for “ideal” labor in light of local historical traditions of women’s simultaneous expectations for wage work and motherhood) but also that they are involved in crafting multiple modes of global capitalism itself. Ironically, perhaps, she is involved not in “countering” global capitalism, as Gibson-Graham’s model might be inclined to hope, but in intensifying its reach and, in a sense, democratizing its rewards. She gives a new shape to a long-standing female tradition of Caribbean marketing, and yet she continues its particular expression of femininity in which movement, sharp wits, and business acumen are vital ingredients. She capitalizes upon her formal wage-earning (and often exploited) status in the global informatics industry by turning productivity inducements (travel voucher rewards) into profit-making ventures and by utilizing her networks of workmates as a captive market for her imported wares.

In what way might we derive generalizable lessons from the story of

a transnational higgler such as Danielle? She is distinct from Caribbean transnational higglers or suitcase traders who make their entire livelihood from this informal trade, as well as from agriculturally based higglers who continue to peddle their produce in the local marketplaces. In an effort to challenge tendencies within globalization literatures to make invisible local actors and their particular interventions in or initiations of global practices, one can run the risk of romanticizing as well as overplaying their significance. While no one would claim that transnational higglers influence the direction or form of global production or consumption in the same ways or on the same scale as do more powerful global actors (e.g., finance capitalists or heads of multinational corporations), their roles as transnational informatics workers and marketers (travelers/tourists, consumers, producers, and arbiters of taste and styles between local and foreign sites) represent forms of global action on local stages whose significance affects directly the ways in which they and their customers live their lives and define themselves. They are significant in illustrating that globalization works in multiple and changing ways that are at once steeped in history, culture, and gender and that operate in and emerge out of local contexts in a relationship that is dialectical and in flux. They push us to challenge not only the dualisms of local/global and ethnography/theory but also the implicit gendered categories within them—local/ethnography as *feminine*: static, traditional, homebound, informal, and consumption oriented; and global/theory as *masculine*: mobile, modern, cosmopolitan, formal, and production oriented. The task before us, then, is not to disregard her as exceptional to the mainstream of global effects nor to ignore the ways in which globalization denies agency to many in its wake but to attune our critical gaze to the range of actors and practices on the global stage and thereby rethink the very concept of globalization itself—its roots, its forms, and its implications. In so doing, it will become more and more clear that broad theory and macrostructural models that do not attend to or account for such incursions and articulations are increasingly limited in their descriptive and explanatory power.

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