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Complex Negotiations

Gender, Capitalism, and Relations of Power

Mary Anglin and Louise Lamphere

The essays in this volume demonstrate the importance of feminist ethnographic research in two particularly noteworthy respects. First, the essays illustrate the value of feminist ethnography in documenting the effects of global capitalism at the level of local conditions and women's everyday lives. Moreover, when analyzed through the lenses of gender, race, ethnicity, and class, such ethnographic accounts provide a unique vantage point for understanding the phenomena collectively termed "globalization." Taken as a whole, the essays call for analyses of globalization that are based on nuanced readings of local political economies and the intersecting forces that shape women's experiences in specific settings. Additionally, this kind of ethnographic work necessarily addresses the situated knowledges and specific actions of men and women in local communities. In contrast with the widely held view that transnational processes of economic restructuring and capital accumulation have led—or will soon lead—to economic and cultural homogenization, this volume argues for the recognition of globalization as a highly variable, historically contingent set of processes and for the role of human agency in constructing specific moments, or outcomes, of globalization.

If globalization is not to be construed in deterministic ways, clearly neither can gender relations be viewed as a reflection of static cultural

traditions or one-dimensional forms of subordination. Scholars have, instead, examined the variation and subtleties in discourses about women (and men) and documented the deployment of these discourses in settings throughout a number of different countries in the global North and South. As Desai and others demonstrate, women have been powerfully affected by transnational economic policies over the past 40 years (Benería 2003; Bolles 1996a; Desai 2002; Naples and Desai 2002; Sparr 1994). The task undertaken by this volume is to map a range of globalization's gendered consequences by analyzing similarities and differences within women's experiences in particular social and geographic locations. Following the insights of Mohanty (2003b) and other scholars, some of the essays in this volume provide further evidence of points of conflict, as well as mutual interest, between women in the global South and North. Further, these essays suggest the importance of attending to differences among women within the same nation-state (Sharpe and Spivak 2002:610). In many instances, policies of restructuring have benefited some women, especially those with access to economic and social resources, thus sharpening class differences and further exacerbating the vulnerability of other women (and men) within the same country.

It is important to examine gender relations and processes of globalization in the context of capitalist growth in the post-World War II period. Capitalist strategies have built on trends evident in early historical periods, especially when colonialism shaped the relationship between Europe or North America and the rest of the world. The past 30 years, however, have been a period of massive intensification or scaling up of technologies and practices oriented toward capturing natural resources, including indigenous knowledge, and consolidating productive activities for the First World. Transnational corporations and global financial institutions have been the main vehicles for this consolidation. Because of their scale, transnational corporations have been able to reach levels of greater capital accumulation and distribute profits to a range of recipients worldwide. Even so, transnational firms have been only partially successful in securing global domination. They continue to coexist with local economic practices, noncapitalist and capitalist, including economies dominated by state ownership and forms of investment and those controlled by national elites (Benería 1996; Escobar 2001; Gibson-Graham 1996; Gibson-Graham and Ruccio 2001; Roseberry 1997).

Although global capitalism has made national boundaries more porous and encouraged the migration of peoples across the world, this has *not* led to the demise of states or nationalisms. Brodtkin suggests, to the con-

trary, that contemporary forms of capitalism require massive state intervention with respect to spheres of production and, increasingly, also of distribution. Constellations of state authority have thus changed, not declined, in response to shifting local and international economic conditions and political relations (Brodkin 2000 and Patterson 1999). Accordingly, rather than focus on the entrenched image of the state as a rationalized administrative form, scholars such as Das and Poole (2004:3; see also pp. 9–10, 23) argue that it is more useful to map the power of modern states through the effects of their political, regulatory, and disciplinary practices (Ferguson and Gupta 2002; Roitman 2004). The authors of this volume examine, in detail, two such effects: the consequences of neoliberal approaches to governance and the production of specific forms of ethnicity, gender, and nationalism as manifestations of state authority (Williams 1996).

Unquestionably, the nature of globalization has been strongly influenced in the past two decades by the neoliberal formulations advanced by the International Monetary Fund (IMF), the World Bank, and the World Trade Organization (WTO). Such formulations are characterized by market triumphalism and focused on trade liberalization, decreased state expenditures for social programs, the privatization of industry, and the deregulation of labor markets (Kingfisher and Goldsmith 2001). However, neoliberal policies have been implemented inconsistently throughout the global North and South and are the subject of social protest, even in the United States, with its close ties to the World Bank, IMF, and WTO (Cohen et al. 2002; Goode and Maskovsky 2001; Harrison 2004b; Naples and Desai 2002; Nash 2005). In addition, the perspectives and practices of neoliberalism have been rejected in transnational fora, including “Encounters with Humanity” in Chiapas, Mexico (2001), the UN conferences of the 1990s—including the 1993 World Conference on Human Rights and the Fourth World Conference on Women in Beijing, China (1995)—and the Latin American and Caribbean Feminist Encuentros, which were first convened in 1981 and have continued for the past 30 years. (Alvarez et al. 2003; De Angelis 1998; Friedman 2003; Global Exchange 2001). It is, in other words, vital to speak to both the material effects of neoliberal policies and locally and transnationally orchestrated resistance to their imposition. Kingsolver (chapter 12, this volume) provides a further example of such contestations through the plurinational organizing efforts undertaken by women living and working on the economic edge in Mexico, Sri Lanka, and the United States as the result of neoliberal trade agreements and other free market policies.

As Desai (2002:16–17) observes, notable consequences of neoliberal policies have been the formation of a racialized and gendered global labor force, with the concentration of women's employment in poorly remunerated service sector work; women's increased involvement in the informal sector, for which there is no government oversight; ever greater reliance on women's unpaid labor for services once provided through public programs; and environmental pollution, as well as the depletion of local natural resources on which women and their families rely for subsistence, especially in the global South (see also Bolles 1996; Brodtkin 2000; Harrison 2004b; Naples 2002). Discourses of gendered and racial inequality have often colluded with the interests of global and local capitalisms to render certain segments of the population superfluous while disciplining others as members of a poorly remunerated workforce, whose usefulness is measured, in part, by the willingness to undertake waged labor in difficult working conditions (Mills 2003).

Chapters in this volume further document the adverse impact of globalization on women, whether they are women whose countries have suffered from the impact of neoliberal policies or new immigrants who have had difficulty fitting into the economies that beckoned them without treating them as potential citizens with full civil rights. Thus, according to Sutton (chapter 8, this volume), the adoption of neoliberal policies in the 1990s and subsequent collapse of Argentina's economy resulted in high rates of unemployment and the literal embodiment of poverty when women and their families could no longer afford the basics of subsistence. The economy of the Philippines has become ever more dependent on remunerations sent back by Filipinas, who outmigrate in staggering numbers—more than 2,500 women per day—to find global employment. The Filipina domestic workers interviewed by Parreñas (chapter 9, this volume) described their status as that of “placelessness.” Racial and class stratification in the host countries of Italy and the United States meant that many Filipinas engaged in socially useful, poorly remunerated domestic labor but were made to feel transient and unwelcome, even when they were eligible for permanent residence. Nonetheless, economic conditions in the Philippines made it impossible for these workers to return “home” except for brief and infrequent visits.

In some instances, it is very difficult for women to develop strategies to resist, or alter, their circumstances. Women often face patriarchal situations at home and in the workplace, or they may be forced into more restrictive roles in exchange for higher status. As an example of the first situation, Gunewardena (chapter 3, this volume) describes young women

employed by transnational corporations in Sri Lanka who found themselves in a double bind created by patriarchal relations: they simultaneously had to contend with repressive managerial practices on the factory floor and cultural practices within their families and communities that denied respectability and the potential for marriage to female wage laborers. Moran (chapter 5, this volume) addresses the second situation in her analysis of Liberian women as their situation evolved throughout the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. To retain the cultural value and dress that distinguish “civilized” from “native” persons, Liberian women were unable to participate in trade at the local markets or publicly engage in other forms of enterprise. Rather, they were forced into the role of housewives dependent on husbands and male kinspeople, for whom there were no comparable restrictions.

Notwithstanding the “appearance of sameness” in gendered hierarchies, considerable variability has been documented in terms of the discursive forms, material practices, and histories informing local regimes of labor in the late twentieth century (Mills 2003:43–44). Thus, in contrast with Moran’s account of women accorded cultural value but denied economic opportunities in Liberia, Darkwah (chapter 4, this volume) writes of elite Ghanaian women who drew upon their social standing and access to financial resources in developing new strategies for accumulating wealth and status as traders of global consumer goods. As Darkwah’s ethnography of Ghana illustrates, middle-class and elite women may experience greater success than their compatriots in putting together viable economic strategies. These strategies may benefit them or push them toward gendered activism, but may also blind them to the situation of women in other class and racial positions.

Moreover, Parreñas (chapter 9, this volume) warns against feminist approaches that imagine a dichotomy between patriarchal cultural traditions in the global South and the emancipatory potential of Northern modernity (Mohanty 2003b; Muratorio 1998). In Parreñas’ study, Filipinas experienced more entrenched forms of gendered and racial discrimination in the global North, where they were economic migrants, than in the global South. Conwill (chapter 7, this volume) engages a similar logic when he argues against the popular assumption that working-class African American communities are simply patriarchal and exploitative of women. Conwill attributes the high rates of domestic violence experienced by African American women *not* to racialized traditions of gender inequality, but instead to neoliberal policies that foster conditions of racism, poverty, and psychosocial stress within communities of color in the United States

(but see Crenshaw 1991; King 1995; McCall 2005; Mullings 2005; and Mullings and Wali 2001 for alternative readings of these concerns).

On a more hopeful note, several contributions emphasize women's strategies for fighting back or for carving out a niche for themselves that gives them some distance from the transnational corporations that dominate developing economies. Bolles (chapter 11, this volume) argues that the "turbo-charged" industry of Caribbean tourism is fueled by twin histories of colonialism and neoliberalism that result in the exploitation of poor women as unskilled and undereducated laborers. Advertisements for Jamaican tourism, she notes, rely on stereotypic images of "natives" that erase the distinction between sex work and women's labor in the service sector. Smith-Nonini (chapter 10, this volume) likens service sector work in the hotels of North America to plantation labor, framed in this instance by twenty-first-century practices of gendered and racial segregation. Women are active agents in resisting these trends. Bolles finds the "race to the bottom," fostered by neoliberal policies and corporate tourism, to be partially slowed by a small number of Jamaican women operating family enterprises on quite different terms. Likewise, Smith-Nonini juxtaposes the failures of corporate accountability with the 2004–2005 struggle for a new contract in San Francisco by UNITE-HERE (a recent amalgamation of apparel/textile and service unions) and the increased awareness of anthropologists about our unwitting reliance on convention hotels with problematic relations to union labor.

Dahl (chapter 6, this volume) takes up the complex task of analyzing relations of gender, globalization, and modernity through an account of her native Jämtland, a geographic region that remains partially isolated from the rest of Sweden. Dahl found that global discourses of gendered equality and neoliberalism coexisted with masculinist traditions of cultural conservatism in this "northern periphery" of the EU. Yet, the "progressive feminists" studied by Dahl were no less racist or elitist in their interactions with Thai immigrant women than were the "traditional men" of Jämtland. In this respect, Dahl's account resonates with Parreñas' findings on racialized and gendered hierarchies in Italy and the United States.

Like Dahl, Pandey (chapter 13, this volume) returned home in her study of tribal women from Orissa, notable for being the poorest state in India. Yet, whereas Dahl's is a cautionary tale about the technologies of race and gender, as well as the limits of Northern feminism (de Lauretis 1987; Mohanty 2003b), Pandey provides a quite different view of contemporary feminism and gendered alliances in India. Her essay illustrates the ways that Kond women have created an indigenous feminism that is partly

based on local cultural tradition and also draws upon the collective efforts of men and women, from multiple generations, against the “benevolent” repressions of the Indian government (see also Channa 2004).

In sum, while demonstrating the value of ethnography for the study of women’s lives in the late twentieth and early twenty-first centuries, the essays force us to reconsider local and global capitalism, social inequality, and agency as historically informed, uneven processes. The paradox, as illustrated by these essays, is that the construct of “globalization” becomes more useful through the recognition that it is neither unitary nor deterministic, but a way of calling attention to the particularities of transnational political, economic, and social relations in the twenty-first century. Finally, by refusing to reproduce North–South distinctions discursively in accounting for specific settings and conditions, these analyses of racialized, classed, and gendered differentiation make evident the scholarly and transformative potential of feminist ethnography.

About the Authors

Mary Anglin is an associate professor in the Department of Anthropology and a faculty associate in the Gender and Women’s Studies program, in addition to holding joint appointments in the School of Public Health and the College of Medicine, at the University of Kentucky. From 2003 to 2005, she served as president of the Association for Feminist Anthropology and, with Nandini Gunewardena and Ann Kingsolver, co-organized the advanced seminar “Gender and Globalization,” which convened in April 2005 at the School for Advanced Research. Her research interests include feminist perspectives on health and social justice, as well as ethnographies of gender, ethnicity, race, and class in Appalachia.

Louise Lamphere is a distinguished professor of anthropology at the University of New Mexico and past president of the American Anthropological Association. During 2001–2002, she was a visiting scholar at the Russell Sage Foundation in New York City. She began her writing in feminist anthropology with the publication in 1974 of *Woman, Culture and Society*, co-edited with Michelle Zimbalist Rosaldo. She has studied issues of women and work for 25 years, beginning with her study of women workers in Rhode Island industry, *From Working Daughters to Working Mothers* (1977). She also coauthored a study of working women in Albuquerque titled *Sunbelt Working Mothers: Reconciling Family and Factory* (1993) with Patricia Zavella, Felipe Gonzales, and Peter Evans and co-edited with Helena Ragona and Patricia Zavella a collection of articles titled *Situated Lives: Gender and Culture in Everyday Life* (1997). Her most recent book is a biography of three Navajo women titled *Weaving Women’s Lives: Three Generations in a Navajo Family* (2007).

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Navigating Paradoxical Globalizations

Ann Kingsolver

Globalization is often spoken of in contradictory terms, or in terms of a paradox. Farhang Rajaei, for example, uses the metaphor of a two-edged sword:

Globalization operates as a two-edged sword. It emancipates but also represses, and it brings together and unites but also divides and forms new hierarchies.... In the areas of culture and politics... the role of globalization is not very clear. At one level, it advocates passive consumption of cultural products and prefers to turn individuals into loyal spectators of the political status quo. At another level, it enables individuals and groups to voice their cultural and political grievances by providing them with more efficient and accessible modes of communication. [Rajaei 2000:96-97]

The authors of the work in this volume recognize and document the ways that structural binaries are powerfully employed in arguments about globalization. Yet those interpretations and experiences of oppression are contextualized within much more multifaceted understandings of power: the matrix of domination (Collins 1991), for example, and Foucaultian (see 1979) concepts of relational and capillary power. This project is situated within a larger intellectual and activist project of understanding the myriad ways that power is asserted and contested in relation to economic,

social, and symbolic resources. Claims about the global status (and inevitability) of capitalist projects need to be examined critically (Gibson-Graham 1996; Tsing 2000).

As gender-based discrimination in workplaces informed by “free market” strategies increases, racialized discrimination is also intensifying. This structural violence, as Harrison (2005) argues, is a human rights issue. Globalized rights discourse itself is ironically hegemonic while discussing liberatory projects (Cowan, Dembour, and Wilson 2001:1). Morgen (2005) has suggested that there is a need to focus more specifically on economic rights because maintaining basic subsistence is increasingly challenging for a growing number of people in the world under trade liberalization policies. Gendered effects, and contestations, of global economic changes are refracted through so many circumstances that an ethnographic approach is particularly useful. A historical approach is also vital, as Mary Moran and Lynn Bolles argue; each demonstrates the necessity of looking at historical divisions and cultural constructions of labor in understanding current labor recruitment. As the authors here (and researchers beyond this volume) point out, gendered globalization is not a unified experience of male dominance and female subordination and resistance in capitalist-organized milieux. National leaders implementing neoliberal policies that economically marginalize many in their nations are occasionally women, as we have seen, and some of the sex workers who are beaten or ostracized for providing the very services demanded in the global economy are men and boys. A full consideration of gendered globalizations, then, requires an array of vantage points and collaborations.

In discussing plural globalizations and marginalities, the authors represented in this volume resist the tendency to reduce many (not always coherent) strategies and experiences of economic and power relations to a single expression of “globalization” but recognize the ways that globalization may be employed as a rubric in ethnographic interviews and activist analyses. When heuristically separated (though fused in lived experience), plural globalizations may be thought of in terms of various discourses that rely on assertions of universal legitimacy: for example, structural adjustment discourse imposed upon and within states in the context of transnational trade and debt relations; “globalized” religious or moral discourses; narratives and counter-narratives regarding the history, purpose, and future of capitalist development; and discourses of global resistance, or of alternatives to national and transnational projects of neoliberal economic globalization. In the remainder of this chapter, therefore, I summarize some of the contradictions of globalization noted by the authors in discus-

sions of how individuals such as Dammi in Sri Lanka and Fanny in Argentina have navigated these and other paradoxical discourses of globalization.

Several authors point out contradictions experienced by women in association with the structural adjustment policies that are part of neoliberal economic globalization. Annapurna Pandey points out that hierarchies among women can be intensified within a nation in association with neoliberal economic change, as she has observed in India. Akosua Darkwah describes the way that structural adjustment policies may allow women (especially elites who already have some capital, such as the Ghanaian traders she discusses) to enter the market as transnational traders, even as the currency devaluation associated with those same structural adjustment policies makes their businesses high-risk and unstable. Lynn Bolles describes how some women benefiting from structural adjustment policies end up employing other women in more marginal economic positions, as was the case for women opening tourist facilities in Jamaica, but also how those local managers have difficulty sustaining their businesses (holding on to their property, for example) because of the high taxes imposed under these policies.

Another paradox described by the authors is how women's increased movement and consumption may be facilitated by processes associated with neoliberal economic globalization, yet that mobility and increased consumption may be disempowering. Rhacel Parreñas, for example, shows how Filipina domestic workers' increased earning power and knowledge of transnational spaces are linked to increased marginalization in both their nation of origin and their nation of employment (for example, as their movements are restricted to isolating workplaces). Migration itself, Parreñas argues, is seen as an opportunity for consumption but ends up reinscribing differences and further marginalizing the domestic workers within gendered national and global economic contexts. Barbara Sutton points out another irony of consumption. As women in Argentina consume images of the body dominant in a global capitalist market and desire to embody those images, their diminished health care and wages, and demanding working conditions, distance them simultaneously from the advertised body ideals they are consuming. Nandini Gunewardena discusses the paradoxes of consumption for garment factory workers in Sri Lanka whose attempts to distance themselves from their identities as workers and producers by performing as consumers further necessitate that they earn enough to consume. She raises interesting possibilities for considering the agentive aspects of consumption through her ethnographic analysis of *how* the women make choices in their consumption.

Just as consumption and globalization may not mean the same thing to individuals in different contexts, feminism and womanhood are not understood and employed as concepts in universal ways. Annapurna Pandey refers to a specifically Indian feminism, which she sees as constructed with some different concepts, priorities, and organizing strategies than those used in feminist traditions in the United States and Europe. She found women organizing for social change, including gender-based concerns, in collaboration with men; I have often found similar collaboration in agricultural contexts in which I have interviewed women about their organizing strategies. Ulrika Dahl, writing about gender and development discourse in Sweden, says that a dominant global definition of womanhood and feminist rights discourse is imposed in state contexts, reconstructing gender in local policy discourse. She notes that "gender equality" discourse tends to marginalize discussions of other forms of inequity, such as racialized oppression.

William Conwill discusses the need to consider economic rights and the consequences of ignoring them in neoliberal policy regimes, based on his observation that economic oppression is a stronger factor than racialized oppression in domestic violence, as the structural violence of economic disparities makes its way home. This links to the criminalization of the impoverished that Barbara Sutton observed under neoliberal economic policies in Argentina. Through legal actions, assertions of the state and of marginalization are mobilized (Das and Poole 2004). Religious moral discourse is another venue through which devalorization of the most marginalized workers in a globalized economy is often justified (even as many of those discourses claim empowerment or liberation for the most marginalized). Nandini Gunewardena describes Sinhala Buddhist constructions of women working in the Free Trade Zones as immoral. Similarly, neoconservative Christian moral discourse has been used to justify the marginalization of low-wage workers in US contexts and to assert their responsibility for their own marginality.

Words such as *freedom* and *flexibility* in neoliberal economic discourse may be enticing, but experience contradicts the language. Parreñas points out that the rhetoric of freedom is often an impetus for women who migrate transnationally in search of increased earning power and consumer choice through domestic work. Instead of finding freedom, though, many women find reinscribed and differently inscribed oppression. Sandy Smith-Nonini notes that "flexibility" and "community" are contradictory for low-wage workers. We might argue, then, that the "global community" itself is a contradiction, navigated in very different ways by those most mar-

ginalized by neoliberal economic policies than those envisioning that capitalist economic community as policymakers. As Rajaei (2000) notes, global technologies of communication facilitate communication of global strategies; some of those strategies are intended to oppress low-wage labor, and some of them are strategies of resistance, as when social movements mobilize international support. But global communication does not mean, of course, that concepts are being employed or interpreted in the same ways. Annapurna Pandey concludes that women are navigating the contradictions of globalization by using local and national compasses, such as the concept of "swadeshi" in India, rather than through universal understandings of economic organization or marginality.

About the Author

Ann Kingsolver, associate professor of anthropology at the University of South Carolina, has been interviewing men and women about their views on globalization since 1986 in the United States, Mexico, and, most recently, Sri Lanka. She wrote *NAFTA Stories: Fears and Hopes in Mexico and the United States* (2001) and edited *More Than Class: Studying Power in US Workplaces* (1998). She is general editor of the *Anthropology of Work Review*.