

DOWN TOWN LADIES

**INFORMAL COMMERCIAL IMPORTERS,
A HAITIAN ANTHROPOLOGIST,
AND SELF-MAKING IN JAMAICA**

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FOR LAMERCIE LAFRANCE & JULIETTE MARIE JAVE

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On art: At the height of the research years, the creative works of Jamaican artists Petrona Morrison, Colin F., and Roberta Stoddart were necessary reminders of Jamaica's past. Stoddart's "God's Bride" and "Learning How to Glide" gave imagery to the visceral that social science too often denies.

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Had I not promised this book to my late grandmother and niece who is willing her own legacy, it would have been dedicated to the motivation I draw from Nesha Z. Haniff's pedagogy of action, Michel-Rolph Trouillot's scholarship, and Evans Young's social justice praxis.

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This book is a libation. The first drop rushes out of a tin cup and will quickly be soaked by the waiting parched earth. I pour it onto the ground with maximum respect and in honor of all of those mentioned (and those whom I forgot to mention) as well as all the saints, all the dead, and the spirits *bo maman'm bo maman'm*.

INTRODUCTION

Toward a Reflexive Political Economy within a Political Economy of Reflexivity¹

"There isn't a foundation that don't have a crack in it... I told them... there's no foundation with no crack in it. We will look for it. If we have to we will wait and look for it. We will find it and we will go right through it."

Mrs. B. spoke these words in response to Jamaican government officials at a meeting in June 2004. They were discussing the implementation of a new customs clearance system that would severely curtail the business activities of Informal Commercial Importers (ICIs). She is a veteran ICI and a former officer of the United Vendors Association (UVA) who has been in this profession nearly twenty-five years. Mrs. B.'s foresight is a telling example of the *savoir-faire* of most ICIs. As she engagingly voiced her opinion, I quickly asked if I could take notes and quote her verbatim, because I knew these words should begin this book. Her statement is as enticing as it is thought-provoking. It captures how this ICI perceives the struggles all ICIs face as a group and how importers have historically dealt with their obstacles. Indeed, Mrs. B.'s analysis of their impending maneuvers through the structures that constrain them is not only apt, but it also evokes Foucault's notion of power and resistance. Her eloquently phrased viewpoint, in that sense, practically renders a Foucaultian analysis redundant. Needless to say, this third world, subaltern female in multiple shadows speaks. She can speak. However, as Spivak (1988) asks, can she be heard or read?

In asking this question, I inevitably implicate myself, the ethnographer as researcher and writer seeking to document various aspects of the lived experiences of ICIs such as Mrs. B. Can I/will I present Mrs. B. and her voice in a manner that does not perpetuate the silencing she and other ICIs often experience in Jamaica? The stereotyping of ICIs renders them hypervisible and causes them to be seldom listened to, let alone read. How do I travel with ICIs' lived experiences, take their tales across all sorts of borders (disciplinary, geographical, physical, national), as Ruth Behar (1993) has done, and tell their lives abroad? The late Jamaican-born black feminist poet June Jordan had addressed my dilemma quite directly when she pointedly said: "and the representative other/not obvious people or poets/worried a lot about just what you should do/if you fall into/such a difficult/such a representative slot" (1997:61).

As a third world subaltern female, I am indeed one of those representative others that Jordan defended. However, I not only represent otherness, but I now have the power as ethnographer to represent others like and unlike myself. This is of concern to me, because this project, in part, stems from my activist politics and from my commitment as a transnational black feminist anthropologist writing about Caribbean black females. Because I was born in the region, I am what the discipline refers to as a native anthropologist. For me, the difficulty of occupying this slot of "representative other" is many-fold. I present it here in terms of two interwoven threads. The first is the politics that brought me to anthropology the second is my position as a so-called native within the discipline.

Facing the Dangers of Self-Erasure

To better explicate this, it is useful to know that, for the most part, I decided to become an anthropologist to eventually contribute to helping my birth country, Haiti. At the mere age of eleven, full of internalized racism, I had naively vowed that I would never return to Haiti until things changed.² However, the more I learned, and began to see the world as a system, the less I blamed Haiti for all of its troubles.

From the doctoral process, I wanted the intellectual tools that would help me better understand and facilitate change in this country. Therefore, while I had some curiosity in the discursive exercises of intellectual inquiry, my primary interest in seeking the Ph.D. was quite action oriented. Consequently, during the course of earning my degree at the Uni-

versity of Michigan, my political interests oftentimes clashed with my graduate training. In fact, in the very first month of my first semester, on September 30, 1991, the elected president of Haiti, Jean-Bertrand Aristide, fled Port-au-Prince, ousted by a military-led coup d'état. My sense of purpose began to fall apart and my heart bled. Even though I had not been to Haiti for fifteen years, there had been talk and excitement about this new president representing a change. Hope. I simply could not turn away, so I got involved. I raised the funds needed on campus and with support from Evans Young, assistant director of the Center for AfroAmerican and African Studies at that time, I organized a dialogue on the coup titled "Haiti: Political Crisis or Social Change?" with sociocultural anthropologist Michel-Rolph Trouillot and then cultural attaché Jean-Claude Martineau. The event was standing-room-only as concerned bodies filled the entire lobby of the building trying to hear these native Haitian intellectuals speak.

Soon afterwards, several UM faculty members, community organizers who had attended, and I founded the Haitian Solidarity Group. From then on, I led two lives at Michigan. In one, I was a graduate student. In the other, I was a political activist. The year 1991 was a defining one for me as I learned what kind of politics is acceptable for an academic to engage in. I confronted my choices in an embattled conversation with Neshia Haniff, a would-be mentor. I expressed my frustrations at feeling torn between my political commitments to Haiti and an intellectual training that I experienced as disassociating and where I felt completely erased. In addition, I could barely manage my time. She understood me only too well. She stopped me midsentence and plainly asked me what made me think that the academy would give me the space to be politically engaged in the manner that I wished, especially as a black female who, to prove myself, must work even harder. She ended her comments saying: "If you want to work for Haiti while you earn your degree, know that you will always have to do it on your own time." I left her office frustrated and tired. Yet I had accepted that from then on, my load would be even heavier.

I was ambivalent about conducting my research in Haiti. Several months before I had written to Michel-Rolph Trouillot (whom I did not know at the time) about how I could better serve Haiti in the future as an anthropologist. At the time, I was considering conducting fieldwork on black migratory patterns to Scandinavia. His advice was to study another country in the Caribbean, then to work on Haiti. That way, he wrote, I would gain a more complex perspective that I could bring to work there.

Then I would view Haiti as belonging to the region and not an oddity within it, as Haiti has been represented in the past. In addition, he stressed that I would then not make the mistakes that so-called native ethnographers tend to make. I appreciated his advice, though I still did not know where I would work. The 1991 coup, however, made my decision not to work in Haiti final, since I did not want to conduct fieldwork under fire where I would not be safe. I also knew then that whatever project I did undertake would be in the region and, inevitably, would engage the political.

Alter(ed)native Voices

Just how to do this type of work was not always clear to me. In the latter part of the seven-year process, I was exposed to and engaged radical feminists of color whose works confronted dominant racial politics of silencing anti-imperialist activism within and outside academia. These included writers such as Gloria Anzaldua, June Jordan, Audre Lorde, and Cherrie Moraga among others whose "in your face" lyrical offenses to mainstream white feminists demanded responses. I was even more interested in their conceptualization of academe as a site of struggle. I was better able to vocalize my experiences and greatest fears after reading Gloria Anzaldua's "Speaking in Tongues: A Letter to Third World Women Writers." In this piece, Anzaldua called out women of color to challenge patriarchal dominance and existing feminist perspectives that only further restrict us. She urges us to write in ways that would "keep the spirit of revolt and self alive" and "to become intimate with myself and you" (1983:168-169). Her call was about more than visibility. It was also to celebrate our differences in ways that render us fuller subjectivity. This is possible only with intimacy that is necessary to confront the boundary between self and other. Her words liberated me to face a looming threat. I was in danger of losing my voice and losing sight of my activism. From her words, I realized I would remain in danger as long as I did not confront the disjuncture between my training and my political commitments. I was better able to transform my frustration and worries into action, as Audre Lorde instructs, through writing (1984).

At the time, Behar was the sole experimental feminist anthropologist who blurred genres in the department. The dominant tone was one of conventionality and that is how I was trained. In my third year, I returned from the first study-abroad summer in Jamaica and took a course with her

titled "Narratives on the Borderland." For the first time, I dabbled with experimental writing, not in my comfort zone as a spokenword poet, but as a would-be anthropologist. Despite this exposure and my attempts to resist the constraints set to redefine me politically, I still embarked on pre-dissertation and dissertation fieldwork (funded by the Social Science Research Council and the Inter-American Foundation, respectively) based on rather conventional anthropological approaches to political economy and development.

The most drastic of changes in the project occurred during my last year. I encountered Ruth Behar at the airport one Thursday afternoon. We sat together and talked and after I explained what I was working on, she asked me what happened to the women? Miss Tiny? Where are the moments on beautification, clothes, and toughness that I used to e-mail her about? They had been replaced by structures and patterns. There were no people. As I had been trained to, I trivialized these interactions with the ICIs as fieldwork trials that would eventually lead to more substantive information. I did not view these missives as "real" data. I had discarded these moments and wasn't even planning to write about them. A week later, we met in her office and she agreed to advise my project. She suggested I go back to the work I had done with her in another course on ethnographic writing. I switched advisors and began to rewrite my dissertation from a reflexive feminist perspective.

That is when it became evident to me that I was not only in danger of erasing the ICIs whom I observed, but of erasing myself as well. I revisited Anzaldua and, this time, took heed of her warring words: "By writing, I put order in the world, give it a handle so I can grasp it. I write because life does not appease my appetites and hunger. I write to record what others erase when I speak, to rewrite the stories others have miswritten about me, about you" (1987:169).

Although I embarked on this new road, I was still ambivalent about it, because I was often on the receiving end of backlash toward reflexivity. For many critics, reflexivity was too subjective and lacked emphasis on materiality. For others, it was navel gazing and confessional; hence, it was not theory. Barbara Christian articulated my concerns about the political and different ways of theorizing. Also aware of cultural politics, Christian in "Race for Theory," critiques French feminist literary criticism for its silence and erasure of voices of others who theorize differently. The disassociation that she found in their jargon-laden approach was another political maneuver. This was a way for white feminists to marginalize people

of color and, in the process, claim the center, she concludes. Finally, Christian asked the most poignant question, "for whom are we doing what we are doing when we do literary criticism?" (1987:7).

Christian's answer to this question opened my eyes. She paraphrased novelist and essayist Alice Walker: "what I write and how I write is done in order to save my own life. And I mean that literally. For me literature is a way of knowing that I am not hallucinating, that whatever I feel/know is" (1994:357). I found the legitimacy I needed to claim and make a space for my voice (as a politically driven transnational black feminist anthropologist) and that of the ICIs who theorized their conditions in our conversations.

Contending feminists also critiqued the value of creative approaches. For instance, Margery Wolf argues that such approaches may build academic careers, but they could not change the material reality of subjects (1997). Her statement presumes that it is the task of feminist anthropologists to change the subjects' condition of existence, which may be the case for practicing anthropology, but it need not be the case of all ethnographic research. My aim is to shift or expand the ethnographer as well as the subjects' gaze on the researcher to cause a paradigm shift that has the potential to influence a symbolic change. I wish to disseminate new knowledge about ICIs in a manner that recognizes and respects their complex agency so that others who study them or other black females do not re-homogenize what is evidently textured subjectivities.

For me, reflexive ethnography was the genre that provided a solution for my dilemma within academia in general, and particularly within anthropology. Reflexivity becomes a new mode of academic activism, which seeks to interrupt the problem of ethnographic authority that arises when the focus is only on the subject. It reveals the cracks in the foundation or in the mirror (Ruby 1982). Put another way, by choosing to tell how the ethnographer comes to know what she knows, the tailored suit or monograph is exposed to be not as seamless as it appears. Rather, it is various pieces held together by all sorts of stitches, as a quilt. Reflexivity also allows me to unmask the political content of my encounter—I am there to learn about the region because of Haiti. Finally, this was a method through which I could foreground precisely how numerous individuals like Mrs. B., Miss T., and others contributed to what I write about them. While this may not change their daily lives in Jamaica, it would give them space with me to talk back.

My task was to recognize and engage ICIs as theorists of their experiences. In this way, this ethnography is a counternarrative articulated from

what I call an *alter(ed)native* perspective to the conventionalities of the dominant discourse within anthropology. It is *alter* as in other and *native* as I was born in the region and am ascribed that identity. It is *alter(ed)* because of how my approach to this project has been modified both by my training and by my encounter with ICIs. The term connotes an anti- and postcolonial stance, with a conscious understanding that the continuities of history mean that there is no clean break with the past. With that in mind, *alter(ed)native* projects do not offer a new riposte or alternative view; rather they engage existing ones, though these have been altered. *Alter(ed)native* perspectives are those in which tools of domination are coopted and manipulated to serve particular anti- and postcolonial goals. To be very clear, it is the perspectives of Jamaicans that influenced the ways in which I "flip the script" on dominant discourses concerning "the other" and their worldview. In that sense, reflexivity, to me, would be the maestro. It would connect everyone and everything that gathered within my perception at the crossroads of observation. It would serve as a mediator of sorts, linking aspects of ICIs' public lives and their struggles and successes to me as "native" ethnographer, and all of us to the broader context in which I conducted this work within and outside of the discipline.

The Dissertation as Activism

From then on, I started to reeducate myself, to retool myself, slowly filling the gaps left by my prior academic training. To sort out what it means to be a black Haitian female in the academy, I began to actively seek mentors everywhere I could: in cyberspace, at conferences, and in associations. From their collective advice, I realized that my decision to produce activist work meant that I needed to take another decisive turn as I had that first semester in 1991. This time, it was about my professional career. I chose to define myself as a reflexive anthropologist and transnational black feminist. Even then I was wary of linking the two, as I had no contemporary black role model to follow. Zora Neale Hurston, a pioneer who is usually tokenized, was not even taught in my Traditions courses. She was mentioned in a lecture, but as I have come to learn since I began to teach in 1999, it is the presence of an anthropologist on the syllabus that marks one's work as relevant and legitimate anthropology.

Faye Harrison's *Decolonizing Anthropology* (1991b) was also absent on syllabi. I met Harrison when she came to give a talk at Michigan. After

this, she began to point me in directions that would expand my knowledge of black anthropology. This new trajectory was significant, as it reinforced the complexities of my positioning that made being a representative other so difficult. Furthermore, in making these new discoveries, I gained a deeper understanding of the politics inherent in the complicated act of telling lives, particularly in relation to strategic silencing. While the literature was quick to discuss "partial truths" (Clifford 1986) of white anthropologists in core classes, I was more concerned with the exclusionary practices that discounted the voices of people of all colors.

Thus, the writing culture debate for me was less about issues of representation than it was about position. In other words, who gets to reveal what about whom? The crisis was, in fact, about power. More specifically, as Kamala Visweswaran writes, "the question is not whether anthropologists can represent people better, but whether we can be accountable to people's own struggles for self-representation and self-determination" (1994:32). She puts it another way and asks what would happen to this discipline if the other dropped out of anthropology and natives spoke back as sole author and not object (1994:32). Indeed, historically it is those in power who have told the story (Trouillot 1995). If the powerless spoke, and were heard, what would happen to the powerful? In the past, those who addressed the differences written on their bodies were relegated elsewhere in the name of objectivity. In that sense, a silencing (Trouillot 1995) and disavowal (Fischer 2004) of the past was a precondition to being recognized. When the natives spoke as John Gwaltney gave them spaces to in *Drylongso* (1980), they were rarely heard or read, and especially not within anthropology. This marginalization resulted in the disciplining of representative others as to the ways of the discipline and as to how to tell the lives of subjects if one is concerned with having a career as an anthropologist.

As an alter(ed)*native* who aspires to write about natives, I pondered over how to better engage and represent the partial silences that dominated me and forced me to confront my black feminist politics. I was concerned with two things: how much do I reflect on the processes and how do I problematize my position as both interlocutor and subject (Medicine 2001). In "Anthropology and the Savage Slot," Trouillot (1991) articulated a solution. Though his approach was conventionally disciplined, he argued for further deconstruction of the "native" concept within anthropology. This would inevitably reveal that we are all material and symbolic products, which would pluralize the "native" and in the process begin

to destroy the "savage slot." Second, he stressed that the recent textual turn was rather limiting in its practice of reflexivity as it dismissed the pre-text, con-text, and content, all of which contribute to the reading of anthropological product, as isolated from the larger field in which its conditions of existence are generated (2003:25). Indeed, reflexivity often remained safe with its focus on interpersonal relations between researcher and subjects, thus going only so far. For various reasons, reflections by most scholars only flirted with the professional repercussions of "telling." As Kamala Visweswaran notes, reflexivity is viewed as improper (1994) precisely because, as David Graeber rightly argues, there are some auto-ethnographies that can never be for fear of committing academic suicide (2005:189). Despite the professional pitfalls and more fearful of committing epistemic suicide, I considered a reflexive approach a mediator that would help me become a mediator, given the difficulty of occupying this slot. As Mrs. B. said, "There is no foundation without a crack in it." By going through these cracks, I could look to find spaces through the discipline and not just on the margins from which to write.

Reflexive Political Economy

When I began my research on Jamaican Informal Commercial Importers (ICIs) in 1992, I was interested in development and political economy (narrowly defined). ICIs were an exciting and relevant topic, where development is concerned. They were predominantly females, often of working- and lower-class lineage, who participate in the "informal" economy and circumnavigate state-imposed restrictions, social marginalization, and civil society's disdain. In some cases, many not only succeeded but thrived; hence, they were a prime subject for contemporary research. With more data collection over a seven-year period, I came to understand them as both economic agents who now possessed and manipulated what Neshia Haniff refers to as the hegemonic U.S. dollar, as well as social actors engaged in battles to claim places and spaces in Kingston that they have been historically denied. I could not divide or split these two perspectives, as each informed the other. The articulation of the dialectic between these two positions was fueled by their individual family's history, though always within an even broader social and historical context.

The process of coming to this explication, however, was a tumultuous one that forced me to consider and unpack the multiple tensions that

emerged as I grappled with issues concerning feminist epistemologies, research methods, and the politics of representation. I confronted these questions, as the realities I sought to document required that I cross and transcend disciplinary boundaries to gain a deeper understanding of traders who persistently strived to occupy and go through the cracks of global capitalism. It was after extensive field research that I came to understand the multiple ways that their self-making practices are nuanced responses to the daily-lived impact of global fluctuations. By self-making, I mean the various ways ICIs shape their gendered and racial/color identities through choices that affect how they view themselves and how others perceive them. ICIs' choices are linked and informed by time and place within the context of both Jamaica's broader racial/spatial cartography as well as the island's place within the world. Central to my approach is a reflexive stance that extends beyond representation to delve into material conditions. This perspective also engages the symbolic aspects of social position and location as well as the moral economy of authority and power (Thomas 2001). This reflexive political economy is practiced by the ICIs featured in this study. I elaborate on this concept in chapter 6.

For now, let me note that the reflexive political economy of both the researched and the researcher involves numerous factors and is grounded in a sense of personal history, or what Austin-Broos refers to as heritable identity (1994). This forms the basis of traders' self-perception and self-making practices as related to their place in local, national, and global dynamics. In our numerous conversations, ICIs in this study were constantly reflecting on their children or their parents as indicators of their place. This reflection was central to decision making; it was their motive. They kept one eye on the past and another on the future. In that sense, not only are they people with histories (Wolf 1982), but they also operate their businesses aware of the implications of their various historical connections. In 1992, when I asked two young ICIs why they were in the business, their answer was quite revealing: "because I want to have a house in the hills, too," one said. The awareness that they have been denied is precisely what drives many of them to wish and work for a big house. Most importantly, they seek to have one because others do, so why shouldn't they? It is that same reflection that influences their consumption patterns and where they invest their capital. For many, these constant evaluations reveal how they consider the multiple levels of constraints they confront in the world in which they operate. The limits that determine the course of their activities and lives are still best articulated by the old Marxian adage that man makes history, though not exactly as he chooses.

To consider ICIs' situation from a historical perspective, in their local setting, and to gain greater knowledge of the field that they maneuver, I converse mainly with Jamaican producers of intellectual and popular discourses. Thus, often North American theorists and scientists are eschewed in favor of regional scholars whose concern mirrors discussion in the North or even preceded the publications of North American and European scholars. My aim is twofold: to persist in pluralizing the native, and to frame ICIs within their broader history, particularly as they know and understand it. In *Global Transformations: Anthropology and the Modern World*, Trouillot makes a strong case for engaging locally produced scholarship. He notes, "anthropology has produced not only peoples without history, but peoples without historicity" (2003:136). He elaborates further and explains how contempt for local scholarly discourse often viewed as elitist only allows anthropologists to erase the knowledge that societies produce about themselves. In so doing, he argues, we not only homogenize the native, but also treat her as a noninterlocutor. To this end, I actively engage in dialogue primarily with local scholars. I also interact with the broader internationally produced scholarship that seeks to explicate Jamaican or thematically related conditions. The placement of this work at the center of these discussions has the potential to be illuminating in complex ways.

Racing Caribbean Gendered and Classed Notions

My attempts to engage in this conversation highlight some of the gaps in regional discourses that need to be filled. Through this engagement, I have come to recognize that Caribbean social scientists' notions of gendered subjectivities remains bound by theoretical gatekeeping concepts derived mostly from political economy and development paradigms. More specifically, in the last three decades, Caribbean studies on females have undergone a significant shift, from women to gender. Prior to the mid-1980s, the focus on women was ad hoc within the social sciences. There has been a consistent production in Caribbean literature and arts where such gendered productions are already categorized as feminine as feminist scholarship remains marginal and illegitimate.

In the work on Caribbean patterns of social organization, there have been numerous attempts to explain local class and racial hierarchies in relation to social and cultural pluralism (Brathwaite 1971, Smith 1965). The limits of these concepts have led others to argue that social stratification

systems vary within the region. While many of the Caribbean societies may have rigid class systems, race and color were not always determinants of class, though in other cases these were correlated (Lowenthal 1972, Hoetink 1985).³ Stuart Hall discusses how race is categorized in the Caribbean. He notes:

In the Caribbean even where a strong white local elite is present, race is defined socially. Thus it enters into the mechanisms of social mobility and stratification via registrations: physical characteristics, pigmentation, in some indeterminate way, "culture." Of these colour is the most visible, the most manifest and hence the handiest way of identifying the different social groups. But colour itself is defined socially: and it too is a composite term. (1977:171)

Hence, the distinction between European and African features is ranked on the basis of a European standard. However, Hall continues, when these characteristics are combined with other systems of stratification (education, wealth, occupation, lifestyle, taste, appearance, values), they can socially "lighten" an individual. Others have focused on the saliency and social value of color and its meaningfulness as a category of analysis.⁴ According to Lowenthal, the social value placed on color makes it a crucial determinant of status among the middle class and suffuses most of their relationships (1972). Since the majority of the population of Jamaica is black, the middle class occupies a liminal space because the hierarchical social order has been based on correlations between class and race/color. Recent disruptions of this order have exacerbated the fragility of their position. As a result, tensions between the lower and middle classes have manifested in numerous ways, particularly over definitions of class and gendered identities and other cultural productions.

The formulation of class that I employ here is a relational one that considers neo-Marxist perspectives.⁵ According to Carl Stone, the "traditional Marxist emphasis on an inherent conflict between owners of production and wage labor is not appropriate [to the Jamaican case because]...of the fragmentation of interests based on differential benefits that accrue to various categories of wage labor and the owners of property" (1973:20). Stone maintains that there are multiple classes engaged in two levels of conflict. The first is conflict between institutionalized labor and management conducted through mass unions. The second and more explosive one "derives from the alienation of the more materially dispossessed segment of labour from their marginal relationship to the means of

production... Both levels of conflict are centered around the distribution of social and material resources rather than ownership and control of the means of production" (1973:21). In her work on the fictional Oceanview, Harrison deconstructs the lumpenproletariat and finds that it entails more class refractions with porous and arbitrary boundaries (1982). These groups are in constant re-formation given the articulation of the capitalist market. For that reason, I am partial to Bourdieu's (1986) deconstruction of capital, which posits a theory of various forms (social, cultural, and symbolic) that can be acquired, exchanged, and even converted. As Bourdieu's limited analysis clearly delineates, such transactions are not equally available to everybody, nor are they simply reducible to economic determinism (Bennett, Emmison, and Frow 1999, Goldstein 2003, Skeggs 2004). In spite of its neoclassical roots that emphasize a rational actor in constant pursuit of different forms of value through economization and maximization, Bourdieu's emphasis on the immaterial and non-economic is useful for me to make a different point. More specifically, it allows me to explain the refractions in raced and gendered experiences of class or how ICIs' complex positioning and uneven power inform their negotiations. In his analysis of Trinidadian factory workers, Kevin Yelvington asserts that "configurations of embodied social capital then both facilitate and preclude the acquisition of other forms of capital, including various forms of social capital, embodied and generalized" (1995:32). Similarly, I argue that it is the use and exchange of different types of capital, often for nonmaterial gain, by ICIs that forms the basis of their reflexive political economy. Thus, class as I present it here is intrinsically linked to race, gender, sexuality, and nationality. Or as Robin D. G. Kelley puts it, class is lived through race and gender (1997:109).

In the Jamaican case, class categories are far from definitive; they are no longer as specific to race or color as they used to be, especially because of social, economic, and political changes in the past decades. Nonetheless, the black majority of the population comprises the lower class among this group. The traditional or inherited middle class is comprised mostly of a brown population. This stratum also includes the Chinese and East Indians⁶ as well as blacks. The upper class includes whites, browns, and Chinese, and the elite consists primarily of descendants of the plantocracy, other white immigrants, and Syrians and Jews, who have become honorary whites. Diane Austin-Broos (1984) attests to the way the white power structure of the colonial era has been replaced by a brown structure. This new dominating group controls the clientelist state system, which places

emphasis on education, meritocracy, and achievement. The culture of each class is distinct, as these are characterized by the primary organizing principles of "inside" and "outside." Both of these class distinctions are ruled by a commitment to mobility. In many ways, the juxtaposition in this book of uptown and downtown Kingston as oppositional extends Austin-Brooks's work. The key difference is that this work focuses almost entirely on the public lives of the traders. It examines their lives outside of their homes, in the open arenas in which they move. Thus, I raise fundamental questions concerning the relationship between gendered identity and spatial orders.

To address this complex subject, I use an interdisciplinary approach influenced by Michel-Rolph Trouillot's penchant for historicity. He insists that the contemporary Caribbean must be looked at through historic lenses that consider how the past manifests in the present (1988, 1991, 2003). As Trouillot has done in his study of Dominican peasantries, my aim is "to analyze the relations between contemporary market women and capitalism... [by taking] equally into account systematic features and historical particulars" (1988:286). In applying this methodologically, I critically engage culture, history, political economy, and feminisms. To date, there has been no substantive anthropological study of Jamaican ICIs. Indeed, as many have noted, the Caribbean lacks empirical work on independent international women traders (Le Franc 1989, Witter and Kirkton 1990). This book not only introduces these traders, but it also investigates the cultural complexities of linkages among local-national-global connections, politicoeconomic relations, and national and group identities. In the process, it reveals how sociocultural identity formations, which are responses to political, economic, and cultural structures, generate the local within the context of the global. In its consideration of self-making, this project departs from the literature on women and work, particularly in the informal economy, thus intersecting with recent Caribbean feminist questions. These call for nuancing discourses, which are based on essentialist notions of gender and power, particularly as these relate to identity, position, and location (Barriteau-Foster 1992; Mohammed 1994, 1998; Lewis 2003).

Within the social sciences, however, the feminist work in the English-speaking Caribbean employs a universal category of female: one that considers differences in class, race, ethnicity, and, to a lesser degree, color as well as other indexes. My work both builds on this literature and extends from it by stressing the importance of differences within gendered identities; specifically, by emphasizing the categories of lady and woman. I high-

light the everyday impact of these social constructs through the processes by which they can be mediated. I emphasize the role of self-representation as a mediating factor in this dichotomy. In turn, I reveal the limits of local definitions of identities and how these affect individuals who exist inside, between, or outside of the borders of these distinctions. By foregrounding the concepts of lady and woman, this study further problematizes the differential impact of race/color, class, and gender on individuals at different moments in time and within various contexts.

Disciplined/De-sexualized Female Subjects

In Caribbean scholarship, the lines demarcating social sciences and literature and the humanities are quite rigid. Deconstruction of gender occurs in arts and literature and in political economy in the social sciences. Since the goal of this book is to both highlight and decipher the historical and contemporary codes that are written on the bodies of importers and that impact their movement, the category of ICI must first be deconstructed along the lines of gender. Inevitably, any in-depth analysis of gender ought to also examine sexuality. While I do not interrogate sexuality, I pay attention to the role that sexuality, or lack of sexuality, plays as a component in the performance of gendered identities in the world of ICIs. I point to its absence in part because I see the anti-gay and antilebian sentiments in Jamaica as related to the intolerance of particular sets of raced and classed bodies. There is a general rejection of difference from an established norm that is best articulated in the discourse on sexuality. Whereas gays and lesbians cause gender trouble (Butler 1990), ICIs represent what I refer to as class trouble. To show the extent of this disruption for Jamaica, I advocate a corporeal approach to deconstructing the black female body (Grosz 1994) to expose its classed elements particularly in comportment. The theoretical common ground that I propose is that ICIs are othered like any other group that causes trouble in the order of things. Indeed, the very position of ICIs (as black working- and lower-class female participants in informal economic activities) in the local-global system cannot be understood without their deconstruction along the lines of the various categories they embody. In studies of the body, the emphasis is often on the discursive; here I use this approach as a foundation that materially grounds me to highlight the various ways that bodies are encoded with race, class, and gendered notions (Hall 1997a).

Ultimately, this project is about embodied intersectional identities and the deployment of capital. It focuses on and attempts to capture the moments in the lives of ICIs when color, race, class, and gendered meanings occur. These articulations demand analysis that argues for the significance of context. I shift between the historical past and ethnographic present, native and ethnographer, uptown and downtown, local and transnational to situate the work within the cracks in the foundation and on the margins (Behar 1993, Tsing 1993, 2005) and to provide a critique. In so doing, I intend not to view the lives of ICIs through a holistic lens, but rather to take a kaleidoscopic approach, like Weismantel (2001), to reveal the dynamics of the business, its participants, and the rhythm of the research across time. By viewing the traders from these multiple perspectives at different moments in time and in different spaces, I interrogate issues of location, position, and subjectivity. It must be noted here that in combining these approaches, it is to be expected that contradictions and tensions among them will be heightened, of which I am only too aware. Throughout the remaining chapters, the nuances of these theoretical approaches are further developed and interwoven with the ethnographic material.

To maintain a reflexive stance as I connect various disciplinary approaches, I weave narrative and analysis throughout the chapters. The theoretical questions posed by this study stem primarily from U.S. feminist studies in anthropology, literature, and Caribbean political economy. I also draw from cultural studies and practice theory. While I emphasize the role of ICIs as agents and actors, I also consciously abstain from reading their actions as resistance (Abu-Lughod 1990). I do this to avoid obscuring the complications in their actions. My interest instead is to tease out the complex and contradictory ways that ICIs go through the cracks in the foundation to explain how their identities are formed and the various institutions and mechanisms that reproduce these. In that same vein, I also do not refer to them as feminists, as this is an association that they would not readily welcome, let alone embrace.

However, I do want to stress that what I am doing is engaging in a transnational black feminist analysis that seeks to reveal the persistent power of race and the political economy of racism (Harrison 1995, Girvan 1991). It is an analysis that is rooted in the politics of daily life, which views all oppressions as interconnected and driven by local-global capitalist systems. This perspective remains best articulated by the Combahee River Collective statement, which states that "if Black women were free, it would mean that everyone else would have to be free since our freedom

would necessitate the destruction of all the systems of oppression" (Hull et al. 1982:18).

Central to this radical feminist perspective is an emphasis on the interconnections among multiple forms of oppressions. Bodies, which are marked by or fit into multiple categories, experience oppression in complex ways that reveal how their various identities interlock. Cherrie Moraga and Gloria Anzaldúa also took up this explication of oppression from the perspective of Chicana feminists. According to their theory, in the flesh, "the physical realities of our lives, our skin color, the land we grew upon, our sexual longings—all fuse to create a politics born out of necessity. Here we attempt to bridge the contradictions in our experience" (1983:23). As outsiders on the basis of race, gender, sexuality, and ideology, they experience even greater need to name themselves and tell their stories.

Given the significance of self-definition in black struggles, and knowing the power of representation and the politics of publication, my academic pursuits inevitably clash with my political yearning. My wish that ICIs speak for themselves is impeded by my scholarly obstructions. So, I apply traders' code-switching words and theories of themselves as dynamic and mobile Caribbean agents that further debunk static and romantic notions of the category local (Hall 1991, Kahn 2001, Wilk 1996). As a result, in many instances, we have partial dialogues. That this is significant to the ICIs was evident to me when I told several traders the current working title. "Yeahh it nice" they said. *Downtown Ladies*. Indeed, this title evokes both recognition and respect while it does not attempt to dislocate or relocate them.

Mapping out the Crossroads

My interest in this work stems from a *realpolitik*, yet the project itself is being made within the academy. This is a contradiction. In that sense, from its inception this book began occupying a space at the crossroads. As I seek a balance between these two sites and motives, I make references to and raise numerous issues that I do not pursue outside of the purview that is outlined below. These unexplored concerns are, at this point, beyond my proposed scope of this project, which simply seeks to introduce the topic of ICIs and, to paraphrase Mrs. B., to reveal how they go through the cracks inherent to all foundations. My goal is not to produce

an all-encompassing study that reveals details of ICIs' business activities, explains how their work informs debates of production and reproduction or aspects of their personal lives, or shows how they can be subjects of economic "development." I consciously abstain from pursuing these topics, as they do not belong here. Rather, my focus is on the making of subjectivities. More specifically, I capture and explicate moments within which ICIs make themselves and find meaning in their lives as they collide with historical continuities and discontinuities at home and abroad. In that sense the subjects, this topic, and even the arguments therein are also in constant formation. They are being formed and transformed parallel to the changes occurring in the trade and the broader context that informs it. Hence, my hope is to weave a narrative that will not become yet another totalizing trope that poses the real danger of encapsulating ICIs into a slot of my making.

To keep this focus, in content and in form, I connect and disrupt various traditions to form a prism that will allow me to capture events in ways that mirror the topic and the subjects. Though my arguments flow throughout the text, I cross theoretical traditions that deepen my understanding of the terrains that ICIs traverse. These often clash. I do not attempt to resolve these tensions, as my purpose is to use them to create and frame moments of critical ethnographic engagement (Abu-Lughod 1990). Similarly, the chapters fluctuate between the ethnographic past and present and have their own closings. Indeed, while the positions and identities of ICIs persist, how traders deploy these do not. Likewise, the physical text would remain, while various aspects of my arguments have limited validity and would reflect their time. For these reasons, I refrain from writing a final conclusion, as there are cracks everywhere. An attempt to recast a foundation or freeze the frame would serve the purpose of providing ethnographic and theoretical coherence, which would only reinscribe the hegemonic concept of culture that I write against. Therein lies Audre Lorde's dilemma, of playing with the master's tools (1984). Finally, as this work is concerned with the politics and consequences of visibility both inside and outside of the academy, I take the liberty to randomly name and position all of my academic interlocutors (foreign and local). I do so in part to bring attention to our tendency to naturalize the presence and entitled power of the unmarked. In so doing, my hope is to highlight another significant point. The making of this ethnography stems from intersections of various intellectual, methodological, and inscriptive traditions. Hence, despite my political intention and dedication to the decolonizing

anthropology project, this work is situated at the crossroads where the colonized, unevenly positioned, confronts the colonizer in conversation. Below, I outline my order of things.

In the first chapter, "Of Ladies and Women: Historicizing Gendered Class and Color Codes," I chronicle the significance of class and color codes in the construction of gendered identities, jumping back and forth between slavery and the present to show the continuities and discontinuities in the articulation of these codes. Based on analyses of historical examples of self-making and popular representations of females in various arenas, this chapter examines the historical connotation of the concepts of "lady" and "woman" as oppositional racial and color categories to argue that this dichotomy underlies how gender and class have been historically performed in the region, and in Jamaica in particular. I focus on how color, in these contexts, operates as a form of capital and decipher its rather complex value. This further highlights the impact of the class- and color-coded lady/woman continuum on the ICI—a construct that I argue has rendered her "out of place" in this larger gendered field, which she mediates through reflexive consumption practices, including what Douglass (1992) aptly calls a "culture of femininity."

In the second chapter, "From Higglering to Informal Commercial Importing," I provide a social history of the development of female market trading practices in Jamaica. It frames higglering within a broad political-economic context to elaborate on various aspects of the business and its subsequent official categorization as informal. This reveals higglering as a site of contestation since its very inception; it requires participants to constantly negotiate their activities with government, the formal sector, and civil society at large. This background sets the stage for understanding the position of the ICI as a new type of trader who emerged during the crises of the 1970s. I pay particular attention to the rise of neoliberalism in the 1980s to create an extensive field within which to view and assess the process by which ICIs were brought under state regulation. This series of policies includes the establishment of the paradoxical title of Informal Commercial Importer in 1982. I also discuss efforts by vendors to organize in response to these constraints. In conclusion, I argue that ICIs are not only misnamed, but their professional identities (based on stereotypes of race and class) are continually (re)formed through a series of government policies that are floating signifiers.

Chapter 3, "Caribbean Alter(ed)natives: An Auto-Ethnographic Quilt," outlines the larger social setting within which the study was

undertaken through the ethnographer's maneuvers. I revisit Delmos Jones's "native anthropology" to foreground the transnational black feminist aspects of the work, by positioning and deconstructing myself, the researcher as a *regional native and local outsider* who is "out of place" in a range of classed uptown and downtown contexts. This placement is used to emphasize the coevalness, to use Johannes Fabian's term (1983), shared by the researcher and the researched. With a series of interwoven reflections on where one lives, hairstyles and clothing choices during fieldwork, I create a "polyrhythmic, non-symmetrical and non-linear" narrative that is more characteristic of African-American women's historiography through quilting (Barkley-Brown 1989). This quilt is used to tell a story that reveals the hidden material and symbolic meanings that are buried in anthropological methods that reinforce constructions of the other and therefore of the savage slot (Trouillot 1991, 2003).

Chapter 4, "Uptown Women/Downtown Ladies: Differences among ICIs," records profiles of ICIs from across the class and color structure. I classify these independent international traders on the basis of their selling location, particularly to demonstrate how visibility impacts upon traders' movements. I argue that the state-recognized category of ICI is an oversimplification based on an anachronistic image of traders from the late 1970s that has since become a stereotype. This chapter contributes to the larger debate on the impossibility of formalizing the informal economy through analysis of classed strategies (for example passing through customs) used by ICIs to circumvent state requirements (such as taxes and duties) that constrain their activities. I also consider the significance of this aptitude for border crossing within the context of mobilities and immobilities.⁷

In the fifth chapter, "Inside and Outside of the Arcade: My Downtown Dailies and Miss B.'s Tuffness," I take an in-depth look at the everyday activities of two ICIs, who sell inside and outside of the arcade where most of the research was conducted. I focus on different forms of gendered survival strategies, especially the embodiment and performance of tuffness (toughness) as a response to the symbolic violence of masculine domination (Bourdieu 2001), both uptown and downtown. The chapter also explores traders' relationships with each other and with the various organizations that represent them, both independent and state sponsored. I deconstruct the racial and social politics of space (Massey 1994, Rahier 1998): first, through a discussion of the emergence and maintenance of local arcades (built especially for ICIs to sell their goods) as spatial entities

that reflect the larger class struggles that exist within Jamaican society; second, through an analysis of the place of the arcades within a social topography of downtown Kingston; and third, through the way in which several ICIs and I code switch between different self-made habitae by charting and navigating existing gender- and class-based spatial restrictions. The focus on this part of the capital city reveals it as an area that has been historically marginalized and is ruled by a class-specific racialized spatial order.

In chapter 6, "Shopping in Miami: Globalization, Saturated Markets, and the Reflexive Political Economy of ICIs," I document an ICI buying trip to Miami and use it as background to examine how traders transgress their "out-of-placeness" as they navigate the ins and outs of the world of import and export and international travel. I demonstrate that such negotiations are crucial to ICIs' self-making as certain kinds of modern black women and ladies who are distinct from the more traditional higglers. The buying patterns and apprenticeship systems that influence the continuous expansion of the trade and the saturation of the local market become the point of departure for a discussion of what I call a reflexive political economy, which in turn points to the social meaning of exchange among ICIs and between them and the broader world they occupy.

In the last chapter, "Style, Imported Blackness, and My Jelly Platform Shoes," I explore the deployment of personal style as what Bourdieu calls a "strategy of distinction" in the mediation of gendered class and color dynamics in Jamaica. I use a revelatory auto-ethnographic moment around a pair of jelly platform shoes to consider the author's self-presentation as disruptive to locally observed performances of color, class, and gender. I analyze the impact of such sensibilities on different patterns of consumption, distribution, and self-making among ICIs and their customers. I expose the liminality of new black middle-class status through discussion of ICIs' roles as distributors in rapidly changing trade. I conclude with an examination of local responses to the global flow of goods in terms of the impact of ICIs.

In the afterword, "Brawta," I speculate on ICIs' futures.