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Johnelle Luciani
Salve Regina University, lucianij@salve.edu

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Nandini Gunewardena and Ann Kingsolver (Editors): *The gender of globalization: women navigating cultural and economic marginalities*

Santa Fe, N.M. : School for Advanced Research Press ; Oxford : James Currey, 2007, 356 p.
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Reviewed by Johnelle Luciani, RSM, MSW, PhD, Chair & Professor: Social Work Department, Salve Regina University.

From the fabric of individual lives emerge the stories of women who have carved a place for themselves amid a series of social and economic processes known as “globalization.” Their stories might well have gone untold had it not been for the artful work of the anthropologists and sociologists who contributed the studies in this text. Their ethnographic research and credible presentation of findings form fibers with intricate patterns that, when woven together by the skillful hands of the editors, create a compelling tapestry.

Organized into clusters, the first set of articles explores the importance of considering production, distribution and consumption in one’s analysis of globalization. A second set of articles focuses on the intersection of race and gender as played out in policies that govern economic relations. Another group of articles examines lower-end service jobs and what that tells us about the marginalization of women. A fourth cluster of articles explores contributions that have been made to affect positive change and alternative global coalitions. Individually, each article brings the reader into the lives of women forced to make do with the circumstances in which they find themselves. Taken as a collective, the text offers the reader a unique opportunity to study the similarities that exist across the globe when examining the plight of marginalized women, while also providing an illuminating discussion of changes in gender equality transnationally.

The complexities of the issue are illuminated through the work of such contributors as Akosua Darkwah, a sociologist from Ghana, who does a creditable job of examining the changes in price-bargaining techniques of those who trade at the global, versus the local, market level. In the local market women were able to use bargaining techniques that were fairly flexible whereas in the global market the techniques were far more rigid. Another example is Sandy Smith-Nonini’s discussion of union maids in San Francisco and the impact of their reality on her while attending an American Anthropological Association meeting. It is through a series of individual tales of the human condition, and the writers’ reflections on those conditions, that the reader is transported to a place where one can witness the emergence of what qualitative researchers call “grounded theories.” In fact, the richness of the text rests in the power of each contributor to offer the reader an inside look at the realities of a group of women, while providing a meaningful discussion of the socio-economic and historical context, thereby helping the reader to fully appreciate the multifaceted nature of the impact of globalization. What is surprising is that while the contributors are almost all anthropologists, there is a balance of discussion with globalization being justifiably credited where appropriate. The credit for that goes to the editors, who have been able to take the fine work of various feminist ethnographic researchers and weave them into an anthology that ties together many of the individual strands of socio-economic realities plaguing women throughout the world.

To say that this text would be a useful addition to any library and a rich resource for students in anthropology, women's studies, social work and sociology would be an understatement. If for no other reason than the fact that it fills a much needed void in the literature addressing the economic marginality of women as a result of globalization and the text does so with well documented academic research, this text should be read by students with an interest in globalization. What is also true, however, is that this text serves as a starting point for several discussions – ones that ought not to be confined to those in disciplines with an expressed commitment to address the inequalities in race, class or gender. This is a text that would benefit students aspiring to understand the lived reality of globalization, whether they be business, economics, or finance majors. Without such a text, offering insight into the impact of globalization on women through personal accounts and individual interviews, business education would be limited and biased. It is time that university curricula expand the academic vision as much as our globalized economy has expanded the need to understand its full impact.