

## Book Reviews

***High Tech and High Heels in the Global Economy: Women, Work and Pink Collar Identities in the Caribbean.*** Carla Freeman. Durham: Duke University Press, 2000; tables maps and figures; vi +334 pages; ISBN 0-8223-2439-3; \$18.95US.

In her ethnography of women working in foreign-owned data processing centres in the Caribbean, Freedman provides a fascinating and insightful analysis of the experience of women on the global assembly line. This book is based on a study of women in Barbados and the Dominican Republic who enter such diverse data as airline tickets and book manuscripts into computers. Freedman argues that while this work closely resembles factory assembly work, women describe and enact themselves as professional, non-factory workers through their dress and behaviour. The clean and air conditioned environment within which the work occurs also serves to distinguish it from traditional manufacturing work. Informatics thus represents a new phase of industrialization.

Freedman makes a number of important contributions to contemporary debates on the global workforce. She demonstrates that global capitalism is not monolithic and that constructions of the "ideal third world worker" are both shifting and context-specific. While other studies have revealed, for example, that young, childless and unmarried women constitute ideal third world women workers, Freedman notes that in Barbados family responsibilities are often believed to make women more committed to their jobs. Contrary to the assumption that multinationals seek a predefined flexible female labour force in the third world, Freedman argues that ideal pools of flexible labour are actively and continuously created. Her book provides an analysis of the process through which the cheapening of women's labour in Barbados is legitimized.

Another important contribution of Freedman's work is the challenge she poses to the

assumption that the labour market is clearly demarcated into "good jobs" and "bad jobs." Her analysis allows for a nuanced understanding of the ways in which women's jobs are both a source of pride and pleasure, and simultaneously a source of stress and dissatisfaction. She challenges assumptions that women in the third world are the passive pawns of multinational capital, and instead focuses on the agency women enact through their work and their lives.

As any thought-provoking book should, *High Tech and High Heels* raises a number of issues which seem worthy of further analysis. The book demonstrates the utility of comparative analyses, and although Freedman mentions some fascinating differences between Barbados and the Dominican Republic (such as the greater prevalence of men in data processing jobs in the latter) the book is based primarily on Barbados and little information is provided about the workforce in the Dominican Republic. In addition, given the proliferation of non-standard work arrangements (such as part-time, contract and temporary work) amongst informatics workers in the United States, it would be useful to extend Freedman's observations about the continuities and divergences in the labour strategies adopted by multinationals in different contexts.

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***Women in the Middle East and North Africa.*** Guity Nashat and Judith E. Tucker. Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 1999; 5 maps; 160 pages; ISBN 0253212642; \$11.95 US.

The first of the two parts of this book is mainly a historical narrative of Middle Eastern women in their Indigenous societies. Here, an