

**Briefing of 10/10/2001
on Processes of Global Identity Formation
by
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1. Is Global Identity and Culture Possible?

According to Smith a single cosmopolitan "global culture" is a practical impossibility. Instead we now see the emergence of commercialized communication cultures. A global culture is unrealistic because we lack global experiences and memories. In addition there is the continued presence of pre-modern traditions and sentiments. Because "vernacular mobilization" and "cultural politicization" are tools used by national intelligentsias to legitimize the existence of their specific brand of nationalism, Smith expects intensification of ethnonational conflicts and cultural diversity in the future rather than their withering away. Only the partial mixing of cultures, the growing importance of English as a global language, and wider Pan-nationalism will reduce the political relevance of particularist cultures in the future.

2. The Global Economy's Gender Bias

Bolles analyzes in *"Paying the Piper Twice: Gender and the Process of Globalization"* how household survival strategies of women and the lives of families are affected by male-centered *Structural Adjustment Policies* (SAP) of developing Caribbean economies. SAP's (established in the 1970's) promote foreign investment, export manufacturing and free trade zones by foreign (mostly U.S.) companies. According to Bolles, SAP's affect and exploit workers, poor, and women disproportionately. Non-unionized female employment increased but the islander's currencies were devalued leading to inflation while at the same time subsidies for basic foods were abolished. Women coped with these policies through in-formal employment, illegal migration, and increased home production. Bolles concludes that these policies are not only detrimental to U.S. workers who lose their jobs. They also increase exploitation of the most vulnerable workers (i.e., women) in the Caribbean. The only winners of SAP's are wealthy investors from abroad (U.S., Europe, Asia).

3. Social and Cultural Effects of Global Processes

Carla Freeman provides a more in-depth description of the social and cultural effects of foreign-owned off-shore, data-processing companies on female employment in the Caribbean. She claims the emergence of a new, "pink collar" type of worker, where low-skilled women work in clerical jobs under quasi assembly-line conditions. Caribbean women are attracted to these feminine "global" enterprise jobs because they are already culturally socialized through music, media, advertising, travel, fashion, jewelry, and consumption patterns. And employers like these women because they are supposedly "by nature" and by "cultural" inclination "better suited." The corporate setting and emphasis on "professional" behavior/dress supports the goal to foster self- and external control among the workers. It also gives them an air of superiority and pride in contrast to agricultural or factory work. And it helps to quell the women's frustration with pay, discipline, favoritism, job insecurity, and lack of control over their

labor. Nevertheless, "pink collar" workers continue to be worried about their work stress, monotony, lack of advancement opportunities, pay, and the wish to find a better job or get a better education in the long run. Indeed, against the common faith in long-term employment security, expressed by many female workers, a change may be in the coming soon. Can Caribbean women continue to compete with other countries if new scanning technologies replace data-entry jobs? What happens to them and their families if operations are shifted back to the U.S. or Europe because of the need for higher skilled workers?

4. Questioning the Myths of Free Trade and Globalization

The World Trade Organization has become one of the most important and powerful institutions to influence global trade, environmental regulations, and investment. In reaction to the Seattle protests in 1999, the WTO claimed to be a transparent and democratic institution promoting global benefits to all nations and peoples. But this propaganda is rejected by Smith and Moran. They dissect the myths surrounding a) free trade, b) equitable access to a rule-based trading system, d) democratic decision-making, e) the opinion that the WTO is good for the world's poor, and f) that WTO labor and environmental side agreements can solve the current crisis. Smith/Moran conclude that globalization in its current form of "economic liberalization" is NOT an "inevitable" and "irreversible" process. Instead, it is important that we develop a public discourse and educate ourselves about alternative policies based on social justice, ecological sustainability, and democratic participation.

Pooley also questions the notion that the International Monetary Fund and World Bank policies help poor economies. By lowering trade barriers, raising interest rates, devaluing currencies, privatizing state-owned industries, eliminating subsidies, cutting health, education, and welfare spending the costs of living of many people in less developed countries is in fact driven up and their life is deteriorating. In addition, these policies lead to the destruction of social safety nets and the unprofitability of small farms and businesses. Pooley provides ample examples from Haiti, Bolivia, and Tanzania, where more than fifty percent of the population live in poverty, famine is threatening forty percent of the people, the HIV epidemic is taking huge tolls, and where almost half of the annual state revenue is spent on debt payments. Therefore, Pooley recommends a serious revision of Western-style economic shock therapies and promotes debt-forgiveness by wealthy countries.

5. Questions for Class Discussion

- 1) What are the liberating effects of female employment in the Caribbean? Did it alter women's dependency from male breadwinners, change attitudes about traditional motherhood and sexual relationships, and did it modify women's apathy toward politics and union participation?
- 2) Is concern about fashionable dress expressed by "pink collar" employees a form of female oppression or feminine self-expression, creativity, and mature adult play?
- 3) How is the ideology of Western individualism and feminine docility reinscribed in the Caribbean context as a way of constructing its ideal female work force?

4) Where should the lines be drawn between corporate control, worker consent, worker complicity, and broader cultural customs and traditions?

5) What alternative models and institutions of global trade are feasible? Do we know of alternatives that have worked?

6) How much has the global environment and social justice suffered under the current trading and SAP regime?

7) How can individual citizens influence government policies and WTO decisions?

8) How did the economies of less developed countries get into such bad shape in the first place? Is it only the fault of the IMF, corrupt elites, and colonialism?