**Neo-liberalism, Respectability, and the Romance of Flexibility in Barbados**

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For increasing numbers of Barbadians today, the pursuit of middle class respectability and the desire for new paths of creative self-invention and economic "success" are being sought through entrepreneurship. Many critics see this phenomenon in developing countries as evidence of the manipulation and ever expanding reach of capitalist globalization enabled through neo-liberal policies which emphasize economic flexibility and place the responsibility for economic growth on individual actors and offer minimal state involvement. I aim to bring into ethnographic focus neo-liberalism and its particular embrace of "flexibility", not primarily as an abstract economic model or a philosophical precept within Euro-American discourse of the World Bank or IMF, but as lived cultural-economic practices that are regionally distinctive. I attempt this engagement by examining the pursuit of entrepreneurship in the specific cultural context of the Anglophone Caribbean.

As an organizing frame, my discussion invokes what has been one of the Caribbean region's most powerful (and often controversial) analytical paradigms, that of reputation / respectability, and addresses a new and little- studied local actor: the middle-class entrepreneur in the small island nation of Barbados. Respectability / reputation, very briefly, refers to two dialectically engaged cultural models in the Afro-Caribbean, one anchored in European colonial tradition, the other in New World, "creole" innovation (Wilson 1963, 1974). By embedding my discussion of neo-liberalism and new middle class entrepreneurs in this admittedly contentious paradigm, I aim to make salient another dialectical engagement that has frequently eluded Caribbean ethnography—that of material and affective dimensions of human experience. The middle classes, (subjects often assumed to operate with certain known agendas and to represent an established ideological yardstick for their societies at large) have occupied an ambiguous place within Anthropology as a field. Often ignored, and frequently portrayed as culturally inauthentic and economically exploitative or disloyal, the middle classes have generally been peripheral to the discipline's primary commitment: poor, non-western "others".1 The "entrepreneur" occupies an especially potent place in this discussion, as a figure, at one and the same time, imbued with powerful local historical significance and also seen as a recent artifact of contemporary global capitalist transformations. By emphasizing the local import of this new entrepreneurial middle class, I hope, therefore, to deepen our critical understandings of neo-liberalism by complicating its generic frame.

I want to suggest that the Anglophone Caribbean resides in a distinctive place with regard to contemporary political-economic critiques of the "new world order" and in particular, the primacy placed on "flexibility" as its engine of global capitalist reproduction. A region literally born out of colonialism, export industrialization, and capitalism broadly speaking, for the Caribbean what we now analyze as globalization, modernity, and here, neo-liberalism, have arguably been integral to the region's very self-definition (Mintz 1989 (1974), Trouillot 1992). These political-economic systems have insinuated themselves deeply into some of the region's well-established cultural contours, and these, in turn, have given the political-economic systems a vernacular form. Put simply, the paper argues that like the particular regional embeddedness within capitalism generally, the contemporary pursuit of neo-liberalism—the primacy of the market that puts into perpetual contingency, or "flexibility," relations of production and consumption on a global scale—operates within a fundamental Caribbean dialectic of reputation and respectability that permeates most dimensions of

West Indian life. In other words, neo-liberalism for the Caribbean might better be viewed not simply as a mandate forced from the outside, but as a new twist on old relations, economic and otherwise. Its captivating power, in a large sense, is predicated upon the very "local-ness" of its logic—a logic in which the cultural model of flexibility is highly prized. "Flexibility" therefore is best understood not simply as a borrowed or externally imposed model of economic rationality, but as a local cultural model that finds itself in a state of flux and expansion amid today's expanding capitalist marketplace. The changes and contemporary iterations serve at once to enhance the global project of neo-liberalism, but simultaneously refashion class, gender, race, and intimate relations in the Barbadian context as reflected in changing local notions of "respectability" and "reputation". The primacy of market rationality and the emphasis on entrepreneurial individualism are now simultaneously hailed by the state as part of a global neo-liberal agenda, and re-interpreted as "native" qualities of the Afro-Barbadian majority, celebrated, as I have said, for their predisposition toward multiplicity and flexibility, and implicitly as key markers of "reputation."

The "romance" in the paper's title denotes a play on words, to some degree. I borrow it from Belinda Edmondson's recent book, Caribbean Romances, in which "romance" is used to describe any number of idealized representations or popular tropes relating to Caribbean society"(1999:2). The key "romances" Edmonson signals are those of "carnival" and "cultural hybridity". Like the "gate-keeping concepts" (Appadurai, 1986) of each world area under the critical eye of the social scientist (caste for India; honor/shame for the circum-Mediterranean and Middle East, etc.), these Caribbean tropes are at one and the same time illuminating of cultural difference, and susceptible to simplistic over-extension2. The romance I invoke in this paper is that of "flexibility"—on one hand, a keystone of the neo-liberal project, but also a foundational dimension of Caribbean cultural identity that is deeply embedded in realms of labor as well as sentiment and desire. Creative flexibility, for instance, is hailed as key to survival for female heads of households, just as it is equated with the multiple endeavors Caribbean peoples have simultaneously managed within and across formal and informal economies in order to piece together their livelihoods. On the other hand, "flexibility" in sexual relationships is bemoaned but endured by women caught in a sexual double standard that permits men "outside" relations, and has lead women to employ another model of "flexibility" through which they gamble for economic and loving support from different fathers for their children (Senior 1991; Barrow 1996). The romance of flexibility, then, is simultaneously about sex, love, kinship/household formation, including not only female headed households, "visiting unions," and a newly emerging model of companionate marriage, as well as other economically inspired aspects of sentiment and desire that are intimately tied up in the market. In each of these senses, the trope of flexibility lies at the heart of the entrepreneurial romance I wish to explore.

*Neo-Liberalism and the Caribbean's Renewed Embrace of "Flexibility"*

Independence movements and nationalist movements notwithstanding, Caribbean peoples have always been critically conscious of themselves as constituting a region within a global frame. Regional vulnerability to global markets and the weight of global super-powers has always been a preoccupation in intimate co-existence with the impulse toward creative and distinctive "creole" economies3, institutions, and cultures. At the same time, internal balkanization along linguistic/cultural/political lines as well as perennial squabbles among, for instance, the former British colonies, have precluded and/or curtailed efforts toward regionalisms—whether cultural, economic, or political4. The ill-fated West Indies Federation of the 1950s was replaced by the Caribbean Free Trade Association (CARIFTA) of the 1960s and the Caribbean Community

(CARICOM) and the Caribbean Development Bank of the 1970s, more recently, the Association of Caribbean States, and perhaps most ambitiously the proposed Caribbean Single Market and Economy, ratified in 1993.5

Right Honorable Owen Arthur, Prime Minister of Barbados outlined CSME's rationale in a speech delivered this past summer in Jamaica. Modeled directly on the European Union, the "CSME brings together 14 separate and distinct markets and economies, each governed by their own rules and divided from each other by formidable barriers, to be organized and to be made to operate in the future effectively as one market and one economy, free of restrictive barriers, and governed by common rules, policies and institutions."

Arthur's regional free market mantra departs intriguingly from the Marxist inspired dependency critiques of the post-independence era, which was often tied to the nationalization and protection of major industries (e.g. bauxite, sugar). The creation of a regional market, he argues, provides such little island nations as Barbados a "larger market and a wider set of options…" And adds, the "liberalizing of services especially offers us an opportunity for expanded productivity that can compensate for any loss in commodity production." What he is referring to here is the dramatic decline in manufacturing industries as well as sugar, the island's historical economic base that has in recent years been taken over by foreign interests and yielded to tourism as the island's economic linchpin.6 The language of neo-liberalism— the reign of the free market, and flexibility as its mantra—encoded in Arthur's speech has become so mainstream in Barbados and the wider Caribbean, that the association of sugar and protectionism with an old and unsuccessful model of globalization has been squarely replaced by an assumed equation of services (tourism, off-shore banking, and an array of off-shore back-office work) and perhaps especially, entrepreneurship, with the rationality and flexibility of a new global era. The modern Caribbean citizen conjured in these assertions is industrious, independent, and keenly attuned to a growing and changing market.

*The Reputation / Respectability of Middle Class Entrepreneurship*

It is this neo-liberal vision that has given rise to not only regional free-trade initiatives, but also at the national level, to a host of both private sector and government sponsored programs such as the Small Business Development Center and the Youth Entrepreneurial Scheme, and to a subtly changing profile for upward mobility in Owen Arthur's Barbados. I focus narrowly here on an emerging figure on the national and regional scene, who some economic analysts regard as the quintessential neo-liberal actor—the entrepreneur. And even more specifically, I am highlighting the trope of flexibility within neo-liberal discourse precisely because of its ubiquitous presence in both utopian as well as critical representations (i.e. flexibility is presented as idealized goal or pernicious force) among popular and academic analysts alike.7

From one vantage point, "flexibility" connotes instability, changes in temporal and spatial frameworks, and changes in the nature of economic and social commitments. Flexibility has been associated with vulnerable conditions of labor for an increasingly disempowered body of low skilled employees, as was, in many ways, the case with the off-shore data processors I studied several years ago (Freeman 2000). From another vantage, flexibility engenders the possibilities for new realms of self- invention, social mobility, and self-powered stability in the face of economic flux and change. These are well illustrated by the contemporary figure of the entrepreneur.

The middle class entrepreneurs in my recent research in Barbados signal intriguing historical shifts both in the demographics of and ideologies about business. Once the privileged preserve of a small white family elite and long seen as nepotistic and impenetrable, business is becoming a significant

realm of economic growth and prosperity for a new and aspiring fraction of the Barbadian middle class. Further, business is quickly losing its stigma as a morally tainted or "non-respectable" path for the Afro-Barbadian majority who have historically favored higher education as the route to upward mobility through the professions and civil service. A new "cult" of the entrepreneur and a discourse of entrepreneurship that emphasizes individual motivation, drive, and self-determination, is now on the lips of educators, development officers, government officials, and religious leaders alike. Sermons adopting power-point sales-like motifs are on the rise, and Ernst and Young's "Entrepreneur of the Year" competition nearly rivals in media exposure events surrounding the local Calypso King and Queen competition. Business-ownership is increasingly seen as a viable path to financial success and esteem for white as well as black Barbadians8. Entrepreneurs vigorously embrace "flexibility,"using the term often as well as highlighting its various meanings. Many of them actively choose the path of entrepreneurship as a deliberate departure from a secure post within government or the private sector, foregoing the backing of the trade unions that critics of neo-liberalism have strongly attempted to defend.

Herein lies an intriguing dialectic that I wish to examine through the Caribbean paradigm of respectability and reputation—if "flexibility" lies at the heart of neo-liberalism as a force of destabilization, it also lies at the heart of what many have hailed as the essence of a Caribbean cultural disposition for creative livelihood strategies embraced by all classes of people in the region. By focusing our lens on the historical and cultural specificity of these dispositions, we will see that in Barbados the rise of new modes of entrepreneurship that some might be inclined to bemoan as a necessary adaptation to the quixotic and detrimental economic effects of neo-liberalism, may also be seen to indicate transformations in social class that challenge traditional Barbadian conventions for social and economic mobility and the very subjectivities of "respectable middle-classness" themselves. These competing notions or vantage points on flexibility, then, must be understood as such—sometimes convergent, sometimes oppositional, and grounded within changing subjectivities of class that are simultaneously gendered, and raced.

Countless ethnographies of the region note the pervasiveness of "multiplicity" in everyday life of Caribbean people—in particular in the economic sphere, but also (for men, primarily) in the realm of culture and romance. The salience of "occupational multiplicity," the "simultaneous or sequential engagement in a number of economic activities" by which people demonstrate their ability to "cut and contrive" (to make a living) is a badge of pride among Caribbean people (Comitas, Carnegie, Katzin 1971; Trouillot 1992:23). Further, as Trouillot pointed out, "Caribbean peoples seem to have fewer problems than most in recognizing the fuzziness and overlap of categories and multiplicity is not confined to the economic realm or to the poor (1992:33, italics added). Politicians who are also historians or writers, the fisherman who keep a rum-shop storefront that also rents video tapes, successful Cambridge educated medical doctors who also keep kitchen gardens and raise pigs, office workers and flight attendants who spend their weekends buying fashions and household wares in Miami for resale in living room market places are all well known and prized examples of occupational multiplicity in the Caribbean. Carnegie (1987) has argued that "strategic flexibility" operates as a general cultural model with which West Indians approach most aspects of life. This is rooted in a history of movement, and expressed in numerous ways across the life course, for instance, in circuits of labor migration, the dispersed networks of kin (regionally as well as transnationally) through which families often "foster" their children, as well as through occupational multiplicity across formal and informal economies.

In the realm of kinship, as Barrow has pointed out (1996:459) by the 1970s there was an analytical shift from the negative and pathologizing rhetorics of "family instability" and the "aberrant" matrifocal family (i.e. "denuded, dysfunctional, unstable") to one which redefined Caribbean family forms as adaptive and flexible to suit economically marginal conditions of life. "In Caribbean circumstances of poverty and economic marginality, rigid nuclear family structures with specified roles and relationships were unrealistic and unworkable. If people were constrained by nuclear family expectations, they would not be able to leave their marriages, delegate their responsibilities to others and shift their children in order to take advantage of economic opportunities at home and abroad" (Barrow 1996: 459-60)9. However, it is important to stress that flexibility, as Trouillot asserted above, is not enacted solely by the poor or working classes; these qualities are exhibited and valued as well among men and women who have entered the middle class, and they are by no means irrelevant to sustaining middle class status, as well as nuclear families when they do exist.

In essence, one might argue that this cultural disposition has made the Caribbean ripe for neo-liberalism, with all of its demands for flexibility (including structural adjustment, economic diversification, and increasing mandates that individuals become competitive economic agents). Owen Arthur's celebration of the single market and all of its accompanying expectations for freer movement and fluidity, greater ingenuity and productivity within the region speaks directly to this assumed quality, and to the long historical roots of its enactment. At the same time, the embrace of flexibility signals the adept manner in which capitalism taps into and reconfigures local cultural forms to its desired ends.10

Flexibility and multiplicity are found in the private realm of Caribbean life as well—perhaps most powerfully demonstrated in the formally recognized relationship of the "visiting union"—a fluid romantic union in which partners do not share permanent residence, but whose relationship is recognized and often wears the test of time, bearing the fruit of offspring. Sometimes the visiting union shifts towards a co-residential one, but often these couples retain residential flexibility maintaining separate households. As Yolanda Moses asserts, describing the island of Monserrat, "Marriage is perceived by the majority of working-class women in my study as undesirable because it restricts their alternatives. If they married, they would have to be economically dependent upon and loyal to one man. While this may work for middle-class married women whose husbands have more steady jobs and incomes to help support a family, it would be a 'dead'end' for most young working-class women. They would not be able to form 'friending' relationships with other men nor would they be able to expect a great deal of assistance from their kin groups." (Moses 1981:509). "Visitng is a status preferred by women over common-law unions," Olive Senior writes, "mainly for the freedom it ostensibly affords, especially in household management" (1991:84). The female headed household is also renowned for these qualities of economic as well as sentimental flexibility. Indeed, representing roughly 46% of all households, the Barbadian female household head has become, in many ways, a complex symbol of the nation. Amid her well acknowledged struggle, she is an economic as well as emotional bedrock of society, constantly re-calibrating the economic mechanisms for "making do," often in serial romantic relationships, and adjusting to changing constellations of her domestic unit. She is the icon of "resourcefulness" a central feature of flexibility. But there are other dimensions of multiplicity in Afro-Barbadian life that are seldom analyzed as part of the trope or romance of flexibility. For men of all classes, and as Wilson argued (1973), especially for politicians and other public figures, the well acknowledged and expected multiplicity of sexual partners is yet another realm of expected "flexibility"11

Culturally and economically speaking, then, flexibility is a widely hailed attribute of "reputation"—a concept described by anthropologist, Peter Wilson writing about the island of Providencia, a tiny English speaking Afro-Caribbean island off the Colombian coast, in the 1960s (1969, 1973). To summarize the paradigm very briefly, Wilson argued that the island of Providencia (and the wider Afro-Caribbean) can be understood as steeped within both the structures and ideologies of two competing but dialectically related value systems or cultural models: respectability (the inescapable legacy of colonial dependence through which patterns of social hierarchy are upheld and reproduced) and reputation (a set of responses to colonial domination and the elusiveness of respectability, through which people achieve a social leveling or 'communitas'). "The principle of stratification that subsumes all others in the Caribbean is," Wilson says, "the principle of respectability" … whereas the philosophical principle by which equality is guided, which men 'have in mind' or what some might call the primary cultural model among Afro-creole peoples is that of reputation (1973:9. italics added).

Domains and Contours of Respectability / Reputation

| RESPECTABILITY | REPUTATION |
| --- | --- |
| European-derived | African-derived |
| Imitative-mimicry | Authentic |
| White | Black "Creole" |
| Elite, Middle-class | Lower-class |
| Inside, yard | Outside, rum shop |
| Private | Public |
| Work, Formal Employment | Play |
| Formal / Institutional / Hierarchical | Organic / Communitas |
| Production | Consumption |
| Marriage | Promiscuity |
| Church, Home, Work | Rum shop / Street /Stage |
| Stability, sedentarism | Mobility /Flexibility |
| Women (and older men) / femininity | Men / masculinity |
| Family | Friends/crews/mates |
| Discipline, order, obedience | Chaos, bacchanal, vexation |

| Christmas | Carnival |
| --- | --- |
| Future-oriented | Present oriented |
| Economy<br>(sources: Wilson 1973; Burton 1997; Miller1994; Freeman 2000) | Spending |

Reputation, rooted in African tradition, and "authentically Caribbean" according to Wilson, is expressed most commonly in the styles of competitive verbal jousting, displays of sexual prowess, occupation of public space and participation in travel and a form of worldliness most often associated with working class men, many of whom have traveled abroad on temporary labor schemes and have experienced something of the 'wider world'. Reputation, to quote Wilson directly, is "that constellation of qualities by which (a man) achieves a place in the world of others where he is both an equal and a unique person…" (Wilson 1973:150). "Reputation is not just manliness but is also a constellation of skills. Variations in reputation are a function of the number and worth of these skills and the varying degrees of proficiency in them. Nor need these skills necessarily be economic, for among the most important of them are sexual skills and closely allied verbal or expressive skills that takes in musical ability and numerous forms of verbal activity." (Wilson 1973:152.) For a man to be respected, according to Wilson's description, he must engage in acts of reputation. "Even those having prestigious occupations… cannot automatically enjoy respect… a schoolteacher, however learned he may be, will carry little authority unless he fathers children, mixes freely with other men in the rum shop, and can compete with them when challenged"(1973:100.) Central to these practices is a kind of improvisational adaptability—or flexibility—displayed in realms of performance as well as economy, and the salience of these appears particularly pronounced under the conditions of today's neo-liberal market.

Respectability,12 on the other hand, is understood by Wilson as well as his critics largely as a set of ideals, a complex of moral codes and values against which social practice is judged. Those ingredients (as indicated on the table) include such things as formal marriage, formal education, church attendance, maintaining a clean and orderly home, dressing modestly and "smartly"13 and "maintaining sexual propriety and household manners" (Wilson 1973:100). People hold in their heads a cultural model of what constitutes respectability, one that is made conscious most often in instances of its transgression. For instance, the style of dress appropriate for church as opposed to a shopping trip in Bridgetown, or going to the doctor's office, are each encoded in signs of respectability that every woman knows but seldom has cause to articulate. According to Wilson, it is the elites who define what counts as "respectability" "those in the superior position…thereby retain the right to define the conditions of their own identity. For not only must they justify their position, they must preserve it, keeping themselves exclusive" serving the ends of establishing codes of inclusion and exclusion (1973:98). This system divides but does not separate the people of the society. The values and standards that make up respectability are subscribed to, in varying degrees, by everyone..(and) they are emphasized according to particular social circumstances and life-cycle situations" (italics in the original 1973:99). 14 He notes, "a good part of this respectability, of living right, is in fact conforming to a pattern of behavior, of having certain social skills and graces which are 'modern' and 'cosmopolitan'—and white (often derived from living abroad) … where proper

English is spoken, where manners come naturally, where a house is immaculate and furnished in the best taste to the utmost convenience, where sophistication has its roots and modernity its zenith, where God and the church are an integral part of daily life, and where morality is impeccable!" (1973:114-115).

While the precepts of respectability are generally taken to be based upon domesticity and stability, it is clear as well that economic strategy and flexibility are often vital to its maintenance. Wilson noted, as have others, that despite an ideal of feminine domesticity, some forms of paid work for women can garner respectability, and likewise, work doesn't necessarily mitigate against a man's reputation (Wilson 1973:202). However the specific realms of work open to "respectable" women vs. men and the differential effects of transgressing those expectations for them, even in the short run, are significant. For instance, in the lives of Barbados's high-tech off-shore informatics workers, women's distinctive modalities of public display and comportment are facilitated by, but not recognized as resting on, modes of flexibility (i.e. the pursuit of numerous informal economic activities that are vital to the production of an image of "professional" white collar femininity and respectability) (Freeman 2000). The sexual double standard of reputation implies that where for men, positive status can be gained, for instance, by fathering "outside" children and being an active participant "outside" on the street, women must generally make up in the respectable domain for any forays she makes in the realm of reputation. Even for the successful man, as Sobo says, "respectability buys more than reputation" and in practice, both become intertwined forms of status. "Only the poor man concerns himself solely with reputation, for the very good reason that he has no chance of ever gaining 'respect'" (1993:176-8). That said, the preoccupation and priviledge in Caribbean studies with the domain of reputation, is powerful and deserving of interrogation.
One of the underlying premises of Caribbean ethnography influenced by this paradigm has been that while the British colonial elites were the original authors of the code of respectability, it is the Caribbean middle classes who become its arbiters and staunchest defenders. And if the middle classes are the gatekeepers of respectability, it becomes that much more telling that the ethnographic record has avoided making them the subjects of analysis, thereby reproducing the ideological premise without an empirical base. Indeed, the avoidance of the middle class as a subject of analysis in the Caribbean was noted in the 1940s by CLR James15 and by Jack Alexander in the 1970s.16 What is most significant about this avoidance, however, is that it has given tacit reinforcement to respectability as pure, unchanging, and inauthentic ideology mapped onto, in particular, middle class women, while reputation has retained the flesh, blood, and vibrancy of what is construed as authentic Caribbean culture.

The powerful influence of the reputation/respectability paradigm on works of Caribbean ethnography cannot be overstated.17 And, though many important feminist critiques have taken issue with the limits of its parameters, most scholars of the Caribbean have tended to concur with the general ingredients and historical origins of reputation and respectability (see table), focusing their challenges on the notion that reputation, in all of its resistant forms, is off-limits to women. In short, it has been the boundaries around reputation and respectability more than the content and changing expressions of these cultural models that has been the primary subject of critique. What has been missed, however, is the dramatically disproportionate emphasis given to reputation, and concomitantly, a conspicuous loss of the fundamental dialectic. And, at least as striking, this differential but unacknowledged privilege given to reputation is also reflected in the valuation of scholarly endeavors themselves. A focus on reputation is prized within the scholarship on Caribbean culture, just as acts of reputation are celebrated aspects of "authentic" West Indian-ness

(e.g. verbal banter, oratory skill, the critical and lyrical calypsonian, the aggressive cricketer, the street-corner politician, and the all-important sexual acumen and promiscuity, each a proud and powerful sign of masculinity.) On the other hand, respectability, discredited as blind mimicry of British colonial ethics, is rarely deemed worthy of empirical investigation.18 This has been particularly pronounced given the historical emphasis of ethnographic inquiry on the lower classes, and the preoccupation with the female headed household, working-class masculinity and sexuality.

Ethnographies of the Anglophone Caribbean have tended to focus primarily on poor and working-class people and describe their complex economic and social mechanisms of flexibility and multiplicity as evidence of reputation in opposition to the essentially middle-class moral code of respectability to which the lower classes (and especially women) aspire, but are destined never to achieve.19 Even Jean Besson's excellent "reconsideration" of Wilson (1993) bases its challenge on the assertion that peasant women in Martha Brae enact reputation in all domains of life (their Non-conformist church activities, a value placed not on marriage but on conjugal freedom, their adoption of varied household forms, through access to family land, and entrepreneurial practices such as higglering), each of which suggests resistance to the European values of respectability, and their embrace of reputation. However, intact in her formulation is the premise that "respectability" remains static and European, not itself subject to the march of history and the unfolding of creolization. As such, the ideological yardstick of middle class domesticity that forms the implicit basis for noting the particularities of the female headed household remain at the level of the abstract. Further, there have seldom been attempts to probe beyond the ideological investment in the ideal of marriage among middle class Caribbean people, into how the institution of marriage is enacted in practice. And, as I have written elsewhere (Freeman and Murdock 2001), the preoccupation of Caribbean scholarship with the economic underpinnings of social and cultural life as framed by a long tradition of Marxist scholarship, has unwittingly reinforced a scholarly ambivalence towards dimensions of identity and individual experience beyond the economic and the social--love, and sentiment in general, as both internal states and as individually and socially meaningful experiences.

To some degree, one might argue that the privileging of "reputation" within Caribbean social science over "respectability" reflects this generalized priority of the public over the private sphere. Lisa Douglass reminds us that "feelings such as love carry both ideological power and cultural meaning, and the power in meaning cannot be understood solely in the service of structures With few exceptions (Douglass 1992; Alexander 1977), the lived (as opposed to ideal/structural institutions) practices of marriage and domesticity, and the range of affective experiences and states that accompany them have been so seldom explored empirically in the Caribbean, that we have continued to understand respectability to be a static ideal marred by inauthenticity and false consciousness among those who appear desperate to uphold it.20

In short, the scholarly romance with reputation in the social science of the Caribbean has, on one hand, been obsessed by sex, and in particular (male) sexual promiscuity, and at the same time been oddly devoid of discussions of love and sentiment. Christine Barrow sheds some light on this lacuna through her discussion of "male images of women in Barbados." From her interviews and the wider context of the Women in the Caribbean Project (1986), she characterizes men's understanding as follows, "to love a woman 'is to be foolish and vulnerable' since 'if a woman say she love you, it is something you have that she want'" (Barrow 1986:59-61). This stereotypic image of the Caribbean woman as mercenary, trading sex and romance for economic gain figures prominently in calypso and dub music.21 Coupled with the portrayal of female heads of household

whose serial relationships are understood to be economic survival strategies for deriving support from different "baby-fathers" when others have proved less reliable, these frequent analyses of gender relations often shed little light on love and the complex emotional dimensions of these unions.

"Love in Hiding," one of the titles in a new series of romance novels, Caribbean Caresses, aptly signals these elusive sentiments—in the real lives of Caribbean women and men, in the fictional characters in these stories, and in the ethnographies anthropologists have tended to write about Caribbean culture (Charles1993). However, in this romance series, written specifically for a West Indian market by Caribbean authors, Jane Bryce notes that deliberate efforts have been made to portray gender and romance otherwise. (1998:320-338). Since, as Bryce asserts, "representation is not only a matter of 'reflecting reality' but also an act of reclamation for these West Indian audiences," the heroes and heroines of these romances promise each other, for instance, "gender equality rather than swooning submission" (1998:325) In other words, the characters and relationships portrayed in these novels frequently go against the grain of Caribbean gender relations as described in the social science literature above (e.g. Barrow). Instead, she argues, these authors attempt to subvert the traditional idealization of domesticated, submissive, pure, nurturing, virginal or maternal femininity presented in European-derived notions of respectability, as well as the sometimes simplistic profile of the autonomous and tough Afro-West Indian woman who shoulders the responsibility of family and economy out of sheer grit and determination.

In Wilson's paradigm, unusual for its engagement of the realm of emotion, reputation and respectability are positioned oppositionally when it comes to love and romance—the first encoded in promiscuity and virility (whereby love and desire are either irrelevant or merely instrumental for getting sex), and the other in the institution of marriage, the moral commitment to monogamy and overall restraint, in which love is implicitly equated with duty. Surely, however, these parameters are a great deal blurrier than these portrayals have made them out, and their blurriness calls for more serious empirical investigation. Like occupational multiplicity, the cultural practices of sexual and romantic "flexibility" also reside solidly within the 'reputation' realm of Wilson's paradigm. They are often critiqued from the perch of the local elite and middle classes but at the same time as are seen as recalcitrant, indeed essential, dimensions of Afro-Barbadian life. One effect of the power of these gatekeeping concepts ('female head of household', 'marginal male') as well as the historical dominance of structural-functionalism and Marxism within Caribbean anthropology, is that we know relatively little about respectability as enacted and bartered within lived social, economic, and emotional domains. Many have documented its ideological force without seeing it, like reputation, as a cultural model itself in the process of dialectical redefinition and creolization.22

The romance of flexibility for the emerging middle class entrepreneur embodies economic as well as sentimental sensibilities, and helps us to see the refashioning of respectability within this expanding class fraction. It is, at once, an assertion of economic innovation and, for many, an embrace of companionate marriage in which the business-like metaphor of "partnership" is often used, and a deliberate effort to combine entrepreneurship with a more egalitarian marriage is the goal. It is about self-fashioning, and the desire for self-determination, economic attainment, but also a reconstitution of domestic duty in which marital romance/partnership are facilitated in no small part by the paid labors of hired domestic workers, nannies, and day care centers. Flexibility is both facilitated by and demanded from this new romantic/entrepreneurial "partnership" but is not contained entirely within it, as is evident by the increasing reliance on the market for childcare, for

instance, food preparation and cleaning services. In one sense, married entrepreneurs describe the active roles played by their spouses in providing vital accounting and back-office support at work, and helping more with children's school-runs, and in other ways traditional gendered divisions of labor are upheld by the employment of domestic workers and other paid services intimately tied to the domestic arena. And in turn, these services, so integral to maintaining the middle class household, are reflected in the very entrepreneurial businesses being formed by many of the female entrepreneurs (e.g. food services, daycares, private 'niche' transportation services to collect children from school, etc.) In this sense, the promise of flexibility for middle class entrepreneurs with dependent children hinges upon the stability of lower class employees at home.23

In a country in which nearly half of all households are headed by women, less than 13% (11/85) of the female entrepreneurs in my study fit this profile. Equally intriguing, 54% (46/85) are married. The fact that most of the entrepreneurs (male as well as female) embrace an ideology of companionate or "partnership" marriage did not surprise me—after all, among the working class women I studied in the past, the strongly idealized profile of "respectable" marriage embodied in the nuclear family, romantic and monogamous marriage, and an increasingly suburban image of domesticity, prevailed. What is interesting about this finding is not the high value placed on marriage as an ideal—this has been the case throughout Barbadian history24. What is intriguing is the particular idealization of and efforts to achieve a companionate marriage, in concert with new modes of entrepreneurial livelihood which appear to be redefining "respectability" among the Barbadian middle class. This phenomenon is a departure from the vast majority of representations of Afro-Caribbean family life, which, as Barrow says, are predominantly negative. "Young women of today, in contrast to an 'idealized view of how women were in the past,' are seen as no longer subservient or submissive. Rather, they are 'out fulfilling their own ambitions and desires,' as a result of which they have become 'aggressive, ugly and flashy, no longer deserving of the respect (men) allege was traditionally accorded to women'" (cited in Bryce 1998:326).

Where the lovers of the 'Caribbean Caresses' romances are intriguing, is in their deliberate counter-image to both the subservient and passive mythological feminine "ideal" from the colonial past, as well as to the portrait of Caribbean woman as mercenary, manipulative, and dominating/emasculating. The male heroic figures are also cleverly redrawn, departing from male profile described in the Women in the Caribbean Project studies (1986), and in Senior (1991:166) as almost irretrievably unreliable, unfaithful, and prone to drunkenness and violence. Instead, these romances are largely devoid of the common referents of "outside woman" teenage pregnancy, male violence, and present an "ideal man" who is sensitive, trustworthy, and domesticated (Bryce 1998:329).
Most significant of all, these lovers attain the highly sought fidelity and affection they mutually desire. The heroines are typically professional, independent women who are financially self-sufficient. The heroes' even greater financial success provides them "social and material elevation. Her need for a man is therefore primarily emotional, and to a lesser extent, sexual, but the true heroine, though beautiful, never flaunts herself, and though passionate, never loses control" (Bryce 1998: 334). Is it any surprise, then, that entrepreneurs figure prominently in these stories? The protagonists are typically Caribbean men and women of "ordinary families" who have propelled themselves upward socially as well as economically. Giselle, the dress designer, in "Sun Valley Romance, for instance, is forced to give up her university career when her family can no longer support her, and though she falls back on her own artistic talent, dressmaking is also a traditional feminine skill inherited from her mother" (Bryce 324). "Betty of Heartaches and Roses is attracted

to the hero, who runs a hotel in Tobago, partly because like her, he is a businessperson. His proposal of marriage is entwined with a discussion of how much money Betty would lose if she didn't go back to her flower-shop, and part of what brings them together finally is her skill as an accountant, which enables her to keep the hotel going when he is in hospital after an accident" (335). If presenting Caribbean readers with alternative visions of femininity and masculinity, of work, and family, romance, and love allows not only for fantasy but also for the possibilities of refashioning their own self-understandings, relationships, and practices, there is no doubt that many of these dimensions of middle class life in Barbados are in states of flux. However, the distinctions between "real" and "ideal" that Bryce and others have asserted are so perniciously opposed, both in fiction and in life, appear both more entangled and less irreconcilable in my discussions with middle-class women and men. Entrepreneurship, in fiction, as we see from these romances, and in real life as my study demonstrates, provides new mechanisms for some, for melding "ideal" and "real" gender identities, for tapping into traditional and neo-liberal mechanisms of flexibility, and for dialectically engaging and reworking the contours of respectability and reputation.

*FLEXIBILITY AND THE PURSUIT OF RESPECTABILITY*

Life histories are powerful windows into these processes of flexibility and their enactments, challenges, and restraints amid the contemporary era of capitalist globalization. With the illustration of just one of the narratives from the interviews I conducted with Barbadian middle class entrepreneurs, I am venturing a preliminary inroad into the lived practices and ideologies of respectability and reputation as a lens on Caribbean neo-liberalism and its local manifestations25. I have selected from my research one woman's story which signals several of the key features of entrepreneurship, changing gender and class subjectivities, and clues toward re-thinking the constitution of respectability and the Barbadian middle class. My goal is not to paint a generic or idealized profile, but rather to raise dimensions about the particular path of entrepreneurial endeavors that shed light on some of the ways in which respectability is sought, contested, and is actively re-constituted in the contemporary context.

Sheila is a 25 year old owner of Platinum Services, a small company she started in 1999 after having worked as a marketing manager of a business software company. While traveling across the region marketing software for hotels, she came to realize the vagaries of travel and the fact that delays, poor service or any number of bad experiences can deter repeat tourism, and simply spoil a vacation for a valued tourist or investor. "…travel is very difficult. I mean.. it can either make or break your vacation… and that's what the hotels are realizing… (for instance) if a man looses his luggage.. he had a hard day in customs, and he comes in… and then you don't have his room ready.. you know it just ruins at least 3 days of his holiday so that's what we deal with in Platinum Services; we meet and greet the passenger—it's an airport service, ) we let the hotel know… well.. he's lost his luggage or whatever we want. We send him down to the hotel… arrange the transportation.. make sure that there is something extra in his room for him.. maybe he lost his luggage so they'll probably put like a toothbrush, a t-shirt, swimming trunks.. whatever. Cause the only hotels we deal with are 4 and 5 star.. and villas, so they… they can do that..' Sheila is, for all practical purposes, an upscale tour operator. However, unlike the numerous registered tour operators in Barbados, who now are required by airport regulations to stand behind a yellow line and wait to greet their passengers until after they have cleared customs and immigration, Sheila has a special arrangement for meeting VIP visitors. Having secured contracts with all of the most expensive west coast hotels, utilizing excellent self-promotion skills, and then allowing one contract to snowball into several, she has gained the cooperation of an otherwise dense and notoriously rigid bureaucracy. She is also grossing

BDS$20,000 a month—US$10,000 (more than a well paid doctor would earn)—her only overheads being BDS$3,000/ month for her 2 full time employees and her cell phone bills.

Sheila is an attractive and vivacious Afro-Barbadian woman. Signaling her explicit enactment of 'reputation', she admits that she uses her good looks and flirting acumen to her advantage, saying, "you know.. it got me through the door and they'd be like well you know, lets discuss this, lets, you know, have dinner and alright I'll have dinner and they'll sign the contract and they wouldn't see me again. Every time it's like can I come.. you know would you like to come to lunch, well … you know it's very very… very.. difficult some of them can be really, really, really….(high pressure). .I didn't have a hard time getting myself through the door when it came to men but I had a very hard time keeping it above board, I would say. It became a little easier when …. I was married so you'd put on as many rings as you know… (to say) I'm married and it became a little easier but for a single woman running her business it must be a lot more difficult… being married at least they have a little more respect for you when you're married…. Not a lot, but still more…

Her entry into this line of work and its relation to the rest of her life, family background, and modes of femininity are full of contradiction.26 At every turn, Sheila signals her negotiation of the boundaries of respectability and reputation. Like most of the women I interviewed, Sheila describes her mother's reaction to her leaving a "good –read secure--job" in a private foreign-owned marketing firm in favor of self-employment as one of bemusement and chagrin. Her family is steeped in many of the most valued signs of respectability, especially that of education—her father a doctor, her mother a secretary in the Ministry of Education, an aunt who is a professor, another, a secretary in the Prime Minister's Office. Sheila is the only one in the extended family who owns her own business. Like many others I interviewed (men and women alike), she describes herself as a maverick—a rebel of sorts, in the conservative Barbadian context in which education is emphasized above and beyond all else, en route to a profession or government job. She commented,

> Oh, my God, well.. my mum was more of an academic woman, so she believed that you should go to school and you should have 9 O-levels, and you should have your degree… and my sister was.. a lot like that.. but I wasn't . I … was never one to study very much…I was always wanting to get involved in some form or fashion… and I think that's why I'm in a job like this.. I think it's easy for me. I've always been around people.. I've always been a people person so I think that's what it is.. You have to be a fighter and I am. You have to have a strong personality…and that's how I've always been, and I believe you can tell an entrepreneur from young. You know, I was going through school and going through my early work stages and people were saying but you can't.. you can't work for anybody.. you can't work for anybody.. and it's true! You're born with it. It's something you can't just learn it has to be in you and you have to want it because it starts off very, very hard. You can see it in a child. You can see I this child is going to be a leader… it's a strong personality.. I think you have to have a strong personality. My family… they were just like, oh she is gonna get herself into trouble, she never listens, she's stubborn...' My mum … boy I don't know what she thought I was gonna do. I don't think she thought I was going to do much at all.

Sheila's family's solid middle class base offered her a number of opportunities that she acknowledges as integral to fostering her entrepreneurial success, even as they marked her failures in the conventionally valued realm of academic achievement. Originally, Sheila started her business as a

way of creating flexible hours to care for her young daughter and nephew who she is fostering as her own, and now that the business has grown, she employs a nanny/housekeeper and enlists the occasional help of her mother to juggle her busy work schedule with school pick ups, dinner etc.27 In fact, she described her business as the best form of birth control—both because of the long hours and the attractive (sexy) and professional impression she must make ('in my line of business,' she says, 'how are they going to take you serious with a [pregnant] belly?') Her active social life helped her to gain the social contacts she has needed to make her way, inventing from scratch, a new entrepreneurial niche within the tourism sector. These, in turn, have earned her privileged access in this sector, and speak to her reputation—garnered during long nights in the public space of the airport. She says,

> I don't have to stand behind the yellow line.. no… there's not a place at the airport I cannot go, and that's because I've gained a relationship with everybody at the airport so basically they would see me and they would say.. oh she's dealing with this person or the next person. The rules of the airport are that tour operators have to stand by that yellow line. and that's why I'm not a registered tour operator.. I am the first official airport service there is on the island, so… there is no chapter there is no act that I can follow… tour operators have the travel act or the travel agents have this travel act under the government they have all these rules for what they can and cannot do, and what they have to pay…to be registered.. I don't have that. I bring in clients like.. Mariah Carey ….and, well..Mick Jagger and Prince Andrew…. (and that's it!)

Having married young, and then having one child (in that order), and also through employing a domestic worker, Sheila upholds some key indicators of respectability that were in delicate balance in her own upbringing. Though in the professional realm, education and occupational status brought respectability to her mother and aunts, her father's desertion of the family when Sheila was only 3 months old eroded some of the this status, and invested the realms of education and the civil service with a special prideful value. Sheila grew up without any relationship to her father, and conveys a bitterness and determination to make her way in the world that is shared by a remarkable number of the entrepreneurs I studied who were similarly deserted by their fathers early in life. In Sheila's case, entrepreneurship, especially of the public nature her business takes, is deeply imbued with the marks of reputation. Now Sheila is separated from her husband and is careful not to advertise this fact. She described, with tremendous emotion, the process of going to two banks to apply for a mortgage for a house, to be financed entirely by herself, another of the primary signs of middle class respectability. "Don't tell any of them that you're separated!" she said, however,

> We were still living under one roof but we knew we were going to separate so the plan was that when I bought the house, I would just move out and go into my new home and … you know, he signed the document saying yes, he has no claim on the house.. he has not contributed anything to the house, he doesn't want the house whatever, and they would not accept it. They would not accept it… I gave them my contracts from my hotels which .. my hotels are very good hotels, well known hotels, and they said well I remember the manager saying ..she was saying 'well who's to say that they're going to renew next year'.. well…there's nothing called certain, but I went back anyway and I got my GMs to write her a note saying well we have all intention of this long term relationship with Platinum Services and whatever, and I carried it back to her.. and she was like, 'you know what… we will feel safer if your husband was guarantor.' She said a guarantor was someone who would make sure that you pay the mortgage and whatever, they have no claim. Fine I said, alright. They

> went through. And then, to find out when the mortgage papers came though that they had on Mr. And Mrs. Walther Jones… which is my husband's name… my name was not even on the damn mortgage.. it's Mr. And Mrs. Walter Jones… and I'm not Walter… I am not Walter… I am NOT Walter… I was fighting, fighting, and I would not let it rest, you know. Every time when … they sent back the letter of confirmation and it had on Mr. And Mrs. Jones, I would not sign it because I said that is not my name… I got my lawyer to write them back and they had to change it then… but up to this day when I go to pay my mortgage, it still says Walter Jones. It is not even in my name."

With her repeated attempt to claim respectability, in her own name, Sheila's story embodies a struggle that is at once about changing configurations of gender, race, class, marriage and local capitalist relations. Her story highlights the dialectical struggle between reputation and respectability, and the lengths to which women must go to offset their participation in the realm of reputation with the signs and symbols of respectability. She has utilized her well-honed reputation to generate contacts, enhance her business, and secure her own economic base with the respectable goals of home ownership and both economic and emotional security for her children. Her encounters with not one but two female bank managers—themselves, iconic gatekeepers of respectability--remind us, however, of the complex ways in which the moral codes and boundaries of respectability can be enforced to serve the interest of an older (patriarchal) order. Her struggle over her marriage is fraught with tension over maternal duty and a model of companionship and love that eludes her. Instead, she enjoys dinners out with a highly placed and older male "friend," and describes her separated status as her "choice" for now.

> "Well..I don't have to rush home to cook, I pick up something quick on the way for my kids or my mom would give them something to eat, but ummm when you have a husband then you have to think of quality time, what time am I spending with this husband… and it's hard for a woman, a mother, and being an entrepreneur and a mother and a wife you just don't have that… it's hard, you just can't break yourself away whereas my husband used to travel all the time with his business and he would just come and he would say, well you know, Sheel…I'm goin… I'm going to be away from Thursday to Saturday, he would not have to make provisions for (the baby), what to do with her, whatever. When I'm going away, it's like.. I have to start contacting the nanny, I have to make sure somebody picks her up and somebody washes her clothes, somebody does this, somebody does that, make sure he knows what he's to do… but when he's traveling he just comes and says, well, you know I'm traveling…I'm going to be out of the island. Now, she is with me, and I obviously have to make all these provisions, how she's going to get to school, how she's gonna get home and men just don't seem to do it that way…. Men always think well you know … you have to arrange the children...the children are your responsibility so you have to work around these children… nobody seems to realize , 'well hey, they're half yours too' but we always have to make arrangements and work around our children's schedules… …. Next time I want to come back as a man…"

Sheila's juggling of social/duty-filled/domestic/ maternal, as well as individual/desire-filled/entrepreneurial agendas signals her adeptness and flexibility in combining of elements of respectability and reputation and in so doing, acts to re-define their terms within the context of this newly emerging middle class. The self-invention she can muster, however, is always constrained by the social forces around her.

Interestingly, along with the demographic and ideological transformations I have indicated as changing the face of business in Barbados, there appear to be other symbolic transformations at work. Business is opening up new spaces in which it is possible to achieve, and simultaneously redefine the contours of, respectability within as well as outside the boundaries of marriage. When Sheila's marriage no longer conformed to the "partnership" she expected, separation was a natural solution, and as she described it, in emotion-less terms, a business-deal gone bad, with divorce and shared custody the natural conclusion. The division of labor, and in particular, the labor of managing child-care and domestic responsibilities, as opposed to the emotional labor of the relationship, was the primary focus of her concerns. For Sheila, the attraction to entrepreneurship was much to do with the pursuit of "flexibility." Leaving a secure and well paid job with an established private firm due to its demands for travel and her difficulties juggling her responsibilities to her marriage and young daughter led to an entrepreneurial path that has brought about its own new demands and constraints. In essence, she has traded off the discipline requirements of a former corporate employer for her own self-disciplined entrepreneurship, managing the inherently unstable demands of her particular business in the up-scale tourism sector. The "flexibility trade off" this has entailed, like that of so many other entrepreneurs, hinges upon the less visible but stable fixture of a class of female domestic workers, whose own family juggling acts and employer demands for "flexibility" (i.e. stability/availability) are all too easily lost in the picture of an emerging entrepreneurial middle-class fraction.28

Having gained success in her business, and many of the material markers of respectability (her own home, a nanny, a nice car, cell phone, etc.) she sought in her marriage an unfulfilled partnership whose demise led her instead to opt for a less respectable but more flexible "friending" relationship with an older well established man who can help her with her business, and who asks little of her time in return. In so doing, however, she is in the process, along with others like her, of re-charting the very definitions of "respectability" and "reputation" and the nature of their dialectical engagement. The very fact that this entrepreneurial path is being sought over and above other more 'stable' paths of civil service and established private sector firms, and can lead to evident economic success as well as visibility in the public arena, confers onto entrepreneurship new dimensions of respect in which Afro-Barbadians and women in Barbados are increasingly able to maneuver in ways that were formerly off limits to them.

The vernacular embrace of "flexibility" is, as such, simultaneously embedded within late-capitalism and its thrust toward free market globalization, but also within three centuries of local/regional/and transnational markets in which flexibility and multiplicity have been central cultural markers. Analytically, this observation demands that we generate not a synthetic distillation of "flexibility" in the Caribbean as grounded fundamentally in either reputation or respectability but rather that we preserve the dialectical tension between the local cultural logics in which it operates. Not only are there flexible modes of enacting and re-defining gender and selfhood (in Sheila case, femininity), in part through the tools of class, but in turn, class, and in particular, the entrepreneurial middle class, is being redrawn through the pursuit of flexible gendered labors and sentiments.29 The intersectional dynamics of race and gender are born out in these transformations, not only in re-defining business as an increasingly attractive and achievable pursuit among Afro-Barbadian men and women, but also presenting a new realm of economic opportunity and independence for a minority of white Barbadian women as well.30

Certainly the conventional Barbadian high valuation of economic security through a civil service or established company job continues, but these are increasingly seen as "old fashioned" preferences of an older generation. Simultaneously, the emphasis on marriage as a necessary ingredient for female respectability, and the de-emphasis on work outside the home, are upheld and contested (in that order) among this emerging entrepreneurial class fraction. Intriguingly, the Barbadian entrepreneurs in my research—male as well as female—adhere strongly to the high valuation of marriage and church going, on one hand, and on the other, blend in their businesses, unmistakable dimensions of reputation, and openly admit to the greater flexibility offered, for instance, to unmarried female entrepreneurs, able to "call their own shots" and "make their own schedule." For women, risk taking, innovation, travel, adopting changing market niche specializations, and other aspects of "flexibility," become integrally connected to those practices more frequently associated with conventional respectability (saving, re-investing in the company, relying on family networks and support). They utilize modes of reputation to gain economic resources with which to procure some of the key markers of respectability, but in some cases, like that of Sheila, no matter how successful she might be, there are still challenges to the dual achievement she seeks. She may have solidified her middle class standing economically, but to maintain her status as a respectable "lady" she confronts other deeply contradictory constraints set by more traditional forms of patriarchy. The female bank manager makes these demands painfully clear with the literal denial of her separated/divorced marital status, her hard won economic independence, and her very name itself. And as Peter Wilson cautioned, "a concern for respect, for one's good name, is always smoldering…'He who steals my purse steals trash, but he who steals my good name steals everything'" (Wilson 1973:19). If the local inscription of neo-liberalism fits neatly into Caribbean traditions of flexibility in the domain of reputation, and opens up spaces of opportunity and mobility that also transform the contours of respectability for the Barbadian entrepreneur, so too are there limits and constraints economically as well as in the formation of new subjectivities. The contradictions this presents are unsettling just as they are freeing,31 for the new opportunities open under the aegis of neo-liberalism to Barbadian entrepreneurs coincide with downsizing and job losses in other sectors enmeshed in neo-liberal pressures toward flexible labor. They open up new avenues for middle class livelihoods and certain uncharted self-inventions embedded in the romance of flexibility, at the same time as they tap mechanisms of patriarchal exclusion, a sexual double standard, and the critical reliance on lower class female labor to subsidize the flexibility enjoyed by the emergent middle class. How these new businesses and new partnerships will wear the tests of "flexibility" wrought by the demands of the market and the emotional/intimate labors and pleasures within, remain a fertile realm of further investigation.

By recuperating respectability as a lens on the changing meanings and practices of social, cultural and economic life, and ethnographically engaging this emergent entrepreneurial middle class, we can examine changes afoot across and between public and private realms that make plain not only new dialectics of reputation and respectability but also newly emerging fractions of the middle class. On one hand are structural retrenchments within and shifting ideological privilege away from the public sector, long the bedrock of the middle class. On the other, are new choices of female headship as well as reconfigurations and changing expectations of marriage that imply not simply the formal "respectable" nuclear patriarchal family of duty, but a companionate "partnership" in love and in labor. Just as entrepreneurship is envisioned increasingly as a new ream of possibility, self-invention and success, we see from Sheila's case that these self conscious choices of household and union forms are evidence not simply of historical continuity, but of change and redefinition. Sheila's middle class status allows her to test the limits of, and in effect re-define respectability in ways that

include her own female household headship. When her own marriage failed to live up to her expectations, she relinquished the traditionally derived respectability conferred by being "Mrs. Walter Jones", and opts for the greater flexibility she sees in being separated, and unhampered by a husband's expectations, and aided instead by an attentive older 'friend'. In so doing, she relies upon other long standing systems of support within female headed households—her extended family (mother) and the paid domestic help of a "nanny/housekeeper". Meanwhile, she gains compensatory prestige through her hard-won business success, contacts in the upper realm of the tourism industry, and up-scale suburban home-ownership, not to mention her motherhood status. Choosing to divorce and to head her own household has become an integral part of her strategy of entrepreneurial flexibility, and as such, her middle class status confers new meaning upon this age-old household form such that supposedly necessary relationship between respectability and marriage is being revised. What Sheila and the other entrepreneurs signal is that defining who is deemed "respectable" and middle class in Barbados, and likely much of the developing world, is not cemented in a static European colonial ideology, but rather, like "reputation" is taking shape within upon contested and changing terrain. As such, what is at stake is not simply a matter of challenging the necessary ingredients of "respectability" but the very nature of the concept of "middle-classness" itself. For the 19th century European middle classes, according to George Mosse, "it was above all the ideal of respectability which came to characterize their style of life…, based as it was upon frugality, devotion to duty, and restraint of the passions, as superior to that of the 'lazy' lower classes and the profligate aristocracy. Thus, the definition of the bourgeoisie…arises out of the growth of respectability itself" (Mosse 1985:4-5). Respectability is, likewise, at the heart of the emerging entrepreneurial middle class in Barbados, but its contours are contested and being redefined in this creole context of a new millenium. And this process of redefinition hinges upon a number of dialectical relations, between the economic and symbolic, the material/affective, and that of reputation/respectability itself.

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[1] For recent ethnographies focusing centrally on the middle class, see Beattie 2003, Colloredo-Mansfeld 1999; Gewertz and Errington 1999; Liechty 2003; MacGaffey 1987; Ortner 1998, 2003; Potrzeba Lett 1998; Raj 2003; Skeggs 1997. For works within Caribbean ethnography, see Alexander 1977,1984, Austin 1984, Douglass 1992, Sobo 1993.

[2] Intriguingly, the import of these tropes has grown even more complex as they have moved from the realm of academic and scholarly discourse to wider popular parlance. It is not uncommon, therefore, to find popular media reports adopting "hybridity" "creole" and "carnival" as well as "flexibility" in ways that both overlap with and depart from scholarly uses, and in turn, academic analyses that conflate as well as distinguish popular and scholarly understandings of these concepts. Interestingly, Trouillot (1992:25) claims that due to the Caribbean's unique colonial history and heterogeneity, as a region, it has not given rise to the gatekeeping concepts that have otherwise framed social analysis in anthropological works. Indeed, he specifically claims that despite "the glut of kinship studies", these "did not lead in turn to enduring gatekeeping concepts" since the "heterogeneity of the ensemble precluded the domestic unit, the matrifocal family, or the allocation of gender roles to generate theoretical simplifiers, in spite of a flow of publications recycling a restricted number of themes."

[3] Katherine Browne uses the expression "creole economics" to describe some of these new-world dynamics in Martinique in her new ethnography with the same title (2004).

[4] Carifta was formed 1968—a Caribbean wide free-trade pact which removed tariffs on intra-regional goods produced within the region; The Treaty of Chaguaramas created and CARICOM in the 1970s which sought higher integration of trade through a common market, adding a common external tariff , and attempted to coordinate economic policies, but made no provisions for free movement of people and skills.

[5] As Girvan recently said, "Capitalist globalisation and the ideology of progress are being questioned, as was imperialism 100 years ago. But so are the legacies of ideas and institutions of the political movements of the 20th century, such as national sovereignty and its expressions of nation-state, national development, and regional (inter-state) co-operation. Sovereignty and identity are being detached from a defined physical space; while culture and common interest are emerging as important frames of reference. To be sovereign in the age of global community will be less a matter of formal state authority and more a matter of developing the capacity for autonomous and proactive strategies at all levels, beginning with the community. To be regional will imply discovering shared identity and interests and acting in function of those." (Girvan 2001: 18-21).

[6] Arthur makes explicit the connection between the contemporary regional single market initiative and earlier efforts of regionalism by invoking the Federation period statesman, Jamaica's Norman Manley.

[7] Bourdieu (1998) asserts that the "essence of neo-liberalism" is its **"**absolute reign of flexibility…" "the easy hiring and firing of employees, constant corporate restructurings, internal competitions established within as well as between firms, and most dramatically, the internalization of these tactics at the level of the individual him/herself, " simple wage labourers in relations of strong hierarchical dependence, are at the same time held responsible for their sales, their products, their branch, their store, etc., as though they were independent contractors. This pressure toward "self-control" extends workers' "involvement" according to the techniques of "participative management" considerably beyond management level. All of these are

techniques of rational domination that impose over-involvement in work (and not only among management) and work under emergency or high-stress conditions. And they converge to weaken or abolish collective standards or solidarities."

[8] It is notable, that the negative valuation of business as non-respectable, even among the elite white community, is still alive and well. For instance, as one of the Afro-Barbadian male entrepreneurs I interviewed pointed out, entrepreneurship/business was the path for the "dummies". He proceeded to point out that several of the island's richest and best known businessmen had not completed school (2ndary) or had been known to be "dumb" when it came to "book learning". The ideal route, even for white elites with family business backing, was and continues to be today, to a lesser degree, the path of higher education and the professions. As in many other parts of the world in which the public sector has experienced retrenchment (either by forced IMF restructuring measures or otherwise), government jobs offer neither the stability nor prestige they once did, and as such the shift in ideology toward the private sector as the reservoir of creativity, and success appears to be a growing phenomenon (Birdsall et al. 2000).

[9] As some have noted, significantly, this historical characterization of the Caribbean family referred exclusively to the Afro-Caribbean populations, and tended to leave unexamined other groups (e.g. Indo-Caribbean, Chinese, etc.) Reddock 1994; Barrow 1996).

[10] Anchored in both Marx and Foucault, Aihwa Ong describes the dialectics of flexibility and its simultaneously repressive and creative manifestations, whereby contemporary globalization allows for freer movement on one hand, and on the other, strict state interventions through which "political rationality and cultural mechanisms (which) continue to deploy, discipline, regulate, or civilize subjects in place or on the move" (1999:19).

[11] Though seldom acknowledged and socially taboo, the common practice of covert bi-sexuality would represent yet another dimension of "flexibility" vs. stasis in the private or sexual sphere. Widespread male sexual promiscuity is frequently explained by men to reflect a demographic imbalance of men to women in the Barbadian population, due to the out-migration of male labor, and "the need for men to have more than one woman". Interestingly, though this demographic imbalance was the case during the building of the Panama Canal, when many men migrated temporarily, the population has long since stabilized to a roughly equal proportion of males/females. Nonetheless, the rationale persists, and was offered to me on numerous occasions by lower and middle class men alike as a matter of fact.

[12] Several others have taken up the powerful concept of respectability in other regional/national contexts and historical eras (Beverly Skeggs discussing working class women in the North West of England as "one of the most ubiquitous signifiers of class…and usually the concern [rhetorically and otherwise] of those who are not seen to have it…[ for these working class women in her ethnography,] respectability is always an issue (1997:1). Mike Huggins (2000) interrogates the boundaries of respectability and non-respectability in the leisure pursuits of middle class men in Victorian England, and certainly much of the Latin American literature that addresses the dynamics of public and private space through the idiom of "cassa/calle" describe variations on the theme that respectability has functioned as a moral code—a device for setting boundaries to contain and discipline, in particular, lower class, immigrant, non-white, and/or women's otherwise assumed impulses toward disorder, laziness, and sexual excess. Engels, for instance, described the mandate of "respectability as 'a most repulsive thing,' a 'false consciousness bred into the bones of the workers' (quoted in Skeggs 1997:3).

[13] In other words, fashion is not itself off-limits within the confines of respectability, but the cut, style, and fabric would all contribute to determining one's degree of conformity to measures of "appropriateness."

[14] Although Crab Antics (as Wilson called the dynamic, as well as his book) has elicited a great deal of critique, few have argued with the general ingredients of "respectability" or "reputation" or refuted these domains as powerfully gendered. Domesticity, for instance, the primary domain of respectability, is associated with order, cleanliness, and modesty—clearly a feminine preserve. Lace doilies covering sofa arms and backs, dresser tops, and television sets, echo the layering of modest clothing— the nylon stockings and slips worn underneath dresses, and in earlier times, the corsets, long undergarments and petticoats, vests, starched shirts, and formal outer coats worn by the plantation elite when dressed for dinner—propriety never giving way to the tropical heat. Likewise, the main ingredients of reputation—verbal banter, sexual promiscuity, musical or other modes of public performativity—are seen predominantly as masculine pursuits (the calypsonian, the storyteller, the political pundit, the "crews" or groups of young men one sees in virtually every Caribbean island, gathered around rum-shops, or in other public settings, generally with alcohol to be consumed).

[15] "Who and what are our middle classes? What passes my comprehension is that their situation is never analysed in writing, or even mentioned in public discussion. That type of ignorance, abstinence, shame, or fear, simply does not take place in a country like Britain. There must be some deep reason for this stolid silence about themselves, some deep underlying compulsion…" (C.L.R. James 1962:80).

[16] James' observation is all the more perplexing knowing that he himself went to live in a lower class 'yard' much like an anthropologist conducting ethnography, in order to capture the lives and voices for his novel, Minty Alley, but he himself did not turn a literary lens on the middle classes, nor have the majority of other Caribbean writers in the 20th century. Evelyn O'Callaghan, personal communication.

[17] Besson 1993; Brana-Shute 1979; Burton 1997; Douglass 1992; Freeman 2000; Miller 1994; Olwig 1990; Pyde 1990; Sobo 1993; Sutton 1974; Wardle 2000;Yelvington 1990.

[18] I quote Wilson at some length here to make plain the general perniciousness he attributes to "respectability".and his insistence that the future of the region depends upon stamping it out. "Respectability is the moral force behind the coercive power of colonialism and neocolonialism. Evident… for example… in the professional standards and moral expectations that Euro-American institutions, firms, hotels, and employers impose on their employees, beginning with standards of dress and address and going deeper by nurturing ambitions and setting the terms by which those ambitions might be realized, including a 'respectable' outlook on life and business. To the extent that companies do this, they invade the value system of the Caribbean, and the more powerful they are, the more successful their invasion. The same may be said of the bureaucracy and government services, in that so long as they perpetuate the standards of respectability in the demands they make, they thwart the integrity of a truly Caribbean society" (1973:233). "Respectability is inherited," according to Wilson, "primarily from one's mother and the household she maintains, (and one's respectability) remains unchanged unless one goes away from the island." (1973:112) thereby gaining the anonymous capital that can be translated into status back home.

[19] Jack Alexander (1977, 1984), Lisa Douglass (1992), and Elisa Sobo (1993present notable exceptions in their work on race, gender, and class in Jamaica.
[20] Outside the mother-child relationship, there is relatively little ethnographic exploration of affection and love that goes much beyond a structural description of "union forms".
[21] Bryce refers to this as the female stereotype of the "Sexual and Economic Exploiter" (1998)
[22] Jean Besson (1993: 21) has argued that the destruction of African marriage traditions by the harshness of plantation slavery, gave rise to new, "Creole transformations of European legal marriage and social stratification based on Eurocentric respectability." These adaptive creole forms included "a dynamic conjugal complex, bilateral kinship networks, and cognatic family lines." Each, she argues, "is a continuance of proto-peasant cultural resistance." Helpful though this argument has been toward re-thinking the boundaries of respectability and reputation, and demonstrating later on, for instance that through market higglering and other entrepreneurial ventures, women in Martha Brae 'earn reputation too' it falls short of probing how and in what form "respectability" is also being redefined. How, for instance, do those married subjects in her study exhibit the forms of "creole transformations" she mentions? My aim is to link Besson's historical note, "In the 19th century when slaves were allowed to enter legal Christian marriage, they transformed this European institution to symbolize proven conjugal commitment among the oldest slaves" to contemporary attempts among middle class entrepreneurs to arrive at new articulations of "respectability" that may include marriage, but in ways that depend upon a host of other signs of flexibility.
[23] . Interestingly, due to a well used tax loophole, pay for domestic workers is deductible from any registered business, and every entrepreneur in my study who employed one (as well as a gardener or nanny) deducted these wages from their businesses.
[24] Virtually every study of women in Barbados notes the powerful ideal of marriage among women. See Barrow 1986b, Senior 1991, Freeman 2000.
[25] I conducted interviews with 115 entrepreneurs in Barbados, including 35 men and 85 women, identified through a snowball (convenience) sampling. A structured survey and open ended, tape recorded interviews were held on the business premises. In addition to the entrepreneurs, interviews were also conducted with a small number of salaried professional women (10) in order to develop some hints toward understanding choices of salaried vs. entrepreneurial career trajectories among middle class women in Barbados. In conjunction with ethnographic and archival material collected on the history and changing face of business in Barbados, these testimonies and surveys form the primary data for this project.
[26] This enactment of coquettishness or "pussy power" as it is often locally called, implies flirtation without actually having sex—flattery and a chase that is all about sex without actually performing the acts. In essence these expectations are well known among women as a way of deploying sexuality in a reputation-like manner to enhance their power in otherwise constrained contexts.
[27] Greenfield points out in his early ethnography of Barbados that employing a domestic worker is an important sign of middle class status (Greenfield 1966)
[28] Where divisions of labor in the home are upheld by shifting them from wife/mother to paid female domestic worker, rather than shared between spouses, changes in the gender of power are clearly constrained by the limits of class (see Chaney 1989, Rollins 1985, Hondagneu-Sotelo 2001 and Ozyegin 2001 for excellent discussions of these issues of gender and class surrounding domestic work.)

[29] Just as a number of social critics (Michael Omi and Howard Winant on race; Saskia Sassen and Lisa Lowe on immigrant/ethnic categories, etc.) have pointed to the racial formations underlying class politics, defining certain categories of workers as well as certain occupations in a racialized matrix, we are called upon to investigate these relationships empirically, and not merely state the intersections. However, as Julie Bettie points out in her ethnography of Mexican-American and White working and middle class girls in California (2003), seldom have perspectives interrogated class within ethnic and racial categories along feminist lines—and where, she asks, is there a working-class feminist analysis through which one might explore the linkages across class that might work against racial axes? Class must be understood not as primary or as primordial –not as a privileged axis of social formation, nor as the given location one is born to or defined into by virtue of relations of production, but as a lived culture and an embodied form of subjective identity that informs and shapes particular expressions of race and gender that in turn is reformulated through these other dimensions of subjectivity.

[30] Several white women in my study described similar sentiments about business as formerly off limits to them, except in the shadows of back room book-keeping for male owned and/or family businesses. In white Barbadian society, they describe a long tradition of discouraging girls from pursuing higher education, and together with their minority racial status, in which the civil service has been seen as 'off limits' along racial lines, their occupational pursuits have been limited. Entrepreneurship for them represents a welcomed path of possibility for redefining their place as more visible economic actors.

[31] Michel Rolph Trouillot has said so aptly for this part of the world, "What appears to some as divided political, economic, or social loyalties has a long history on the frontier" (1992:33).