

## *Book Review*

Caitrin Lynch (2007) *Juki Girls, Good Girls: Gender and Cultural Politics in Sri Lanka's Global Garment Industry*. Ithaca: ILR/Cornell University Press. ISBN: 978-0801473623

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Under familiar pressure to liberalize the economy, in 1977 Sri Lanka established an export-oriented garment industry, locating factories mainly in urban areas near to the capital Colombo. In 1992 the government pushed industrialization into rural areas under a program called 200 Garment Factories Program (200 GFP). Caitrin Lynch's well argued and ethnographically rich study shows how and why the program was promoted by the state, how it was received and contested by different segments of Sri Lankan society, and especially, how the women who came to work in rural factories attempted to live and actively negotiate their identities as respectable women.

Many studies have detailed the lives of women in global factories. Lynch's ethnography is distinctive in its attention to national debates over the use of women's labour for economic development, showing how contested ideas about women's morality can be used to advance nationalist agendas. Taking factory jobs presented contradictions for rural women. They provided critical resources for poor families. But women also ran the risk of being viewed as Juki girls; the term for garment workers that became derogatory shorthand for urban women workers reputed to engage in behaviour morally inappropriate for Sinhala Buddhists. Insightful autobiographical essays by women workers, commissioned by Lynch, interleave the chapters and show women's complex agency in navigating difficult terrain.

The 200 GFP was initially promoted by United National Party President Premadasa to dispel unrest among rural youth. In the context of extremely violent political conflicts, especially in rural areas, the program was put forward as a way to reduce the chance of revolts like those of the 1970s and late 1980s by young *Janatha Vimukthi Peramuna* (JVP, People's Liberation Front) supporters. Though seen by some as fiercely nationalist and anti foreign investment, these revolts were widely viewed as due to young people's 'frustration' with growing disparities between urban and rural Sri Lanka. Lynch analyzes the discursive strategies used to promote a program that, by shifting women's place in village society, was as likely to provoke dismay as applause. As part of a broader nation-building and nationalistic agenda, the President invoked 'glorious village traditions' that romanticized the pre-colonial period, advancing a version of capitalism consistent with Sinhala Buddhist values.

Within months of being established the program turned attention away from youth problems and toward the behaviour of rural women. The contradiction that the JVP was composed primarily of men while it was women employed in the factories was explained by state representatives and factory owners and managers as due to women's greater suitability

for garment work. But rural unrest would be prevented, they claimed, because women were improving the standard of living for their male relatives.

The nation's preoccupation with the behaviour of women garment workers becomes Lynch's central focus. She shows how the tension between morality and modernity was played out through a national debate over rural women's labour, and how women responded by fashioning identities that strike a precarious balance between the two. In its substantive chapters the book explores the complex dimensions of morality for women factory workers. Chapter 3 analyzes the opposition's critique of 200 GFP that 'our innocent girls are sewing underwear for white women' (92); a statement that deftly conjures the immorality of western women's practices while connecting those to the loss of propriety of Sri Lankan factory workers. Chapters 4 and 5 explore the meanings attributed to rural village life and how those contributed to an alternative narrative – Good girls – counterposed to the immoral Juki girls, that operates to serve in different ways the interests of factory owners, the state, women's families and the rural women themselves. Chapter 6 addresses how paternalistic practices are used to achieve workplace discipline and further the economic objectives of the state and capital. Finally, in three ethnographic vignettes Lynch shows how in the context of paternalism workplace conflict is defused and sometimes displaced as workers keep trying to make sense of change in their lives and communities.

One of the major contributions anthropologists have made to the analysis of global processes is to insist that globalization is not simply imposed on communities and nations, but rather is interpreted through a local lens and made culturally understandable. Lynch skillfully shows this process unfolding, as President Premadasa developed strategies for localizing the meanings of global production and global labour.

*Juki Girls, Good Girls* will be rewarding for graduate and specialist readers in globalization, work, gender, nationalism and identity. The book's attention to popular culture issues such as the influence of soap operas, media scrutiny of women's lives, and the representation of social issues in film, together with Lynch's ethnographic eye for the importance of everyday details, will make it accessible and engaging for an undergraduate audience.

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