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[Review of: C. Freeman (2014) *Entrepreneurial Selves: Neoliberal Respectability and the Making of a Caribbean Middle Class*]

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- *Entrepreneurial Selves: Neoliberal Respectability and the Making of a Caribbean Middle Class*, by Carla Freeman. Duke University Press, 2014.

Although the anthropology of entrepreneurship, i.e. the use of sociocultural theories and ethnographic methods in the study of entrepreneurship, has steadily risen since the 1990s, there still exists a lack of interaction between anthropological and entrepreneurial research. Carla Freeman's *Entrepreneurial Selves* aims to fill at least part of this gap by turning the spotlight on the work practices and lifestyles of entrepreneurs on the Caribbean island of Barbados. The result is a very valuable addition to our understanding of the workings and meanings of neoliberalism in postcolonial settings.

In the opening sentence of the book, Freeman introduces her study as 'an ethnography of economy, labour, and affect in a time and place of neoliberalism' (p. 1). Expanding the focus 'beyond the *business* of economic independence and self-sufficiency', she sets out to address the context of identity formation and to explore 'the self as entrepreneurial project inextricable from the enterprise and market sphere' (pp. 2-3). In other words, how do entrepreneurs work, live and feel about their work/life in the current age of global capitalism and neoliberal flexibility? To answer this question, Freeman draws on extensive fieldwork spanning more than a decade in Barbados, including archival research, participant observation and numerous interviews with entrepreneurs, all 'owners of registered, midsized businesses (with at least one employee)' (p. 13) active in a variety of industries ranging from food and retail to construction, financial services, health care, fashion and technology.

Freeman considers Barbados, and the Caribbean more generally, as a good case study for examining neoliberalism and its 'project of flexible self-making' (p. 6) due to its constant negotiation between global integration and local responsiveness. She reminds us that the Caribbean region is historically formed in and shaped by forces of globalization and colonialism and therefore 'in a process of dynamic change' (p. 11) ever since Columbus sailed into the Carib-

bean in the late fifteenth century. The enduring tension between the global and the local, and the colonial and the anti-colonial, has provided many of the key concepts to understanding the region and the process of globalization more generally. In her book Freeman takes up and develops two of these concepts, i.e. (colonial) *respectability* and (anti-colonial) *reputation*, to demonstrate the changing nature of work/life dynamics in Barbados under neoliberalism.

Following the introduction, *Entrepreneurial Selves* consists of five chapters in which the 'entrepreneurial drama of neoliberal Barbados' (p. 9) is unfolded. In the first chapter, 'Barbadian Neoliberalism and the Rise of New Middle-Class Entrepreneurialism', Freeman discusses the specific contours of neoliberalism on the island, including her proposal to recast Wilson's (1969) influential reputation-respectability model, and argues that the emergent entrepreneurial middle class brings in new articulations of class, gender and race into contemporary Barbadian society, not only in the work sphere, but also, and significantly, in many other dimensions of life. In the following three chapters, 'Entrepreneurial Affects', 'The Upward Mobility of Matrilocality' and 'Neoliberal Work and Life' respectively, the author turns the focus on these dimensions, illustrating how the neoliberal spirit creates new visions of marriage, kinship and family within the entrepreneurial middle class in Barbados. Finally, in the fifth chapter, 'The Therapeutic Ethic and the Spirit of Neoliberalism', Freeman addresses the growing appeal of new forms of personal and spiritual care among Barbadian entrepreneurs (p. 169), which she sees as intimately connected to the neoliberal ethic and the practice of 'affective labour as a form of life' in particular (p. 181).

Altogether, *Entrepreneurial Selves* provides a historically nuanced, theoretically sophisticated and empirically detailed account of the emergence of neoliberalism and the rise of the entrepreneurial middle class in Barbados over the past ten to fifteen years. Freeman's anthropological approach to the study of entrepreneurship is refreshing and innovative (including her self-reflexive ruminations), and vividly demonstrates the importance of moving beyond the familiar economic frameworks into the realm of identity practices and the construction of entrepreneurial subjects along the lines of gender, class and race. Moreover, Freeman's consideration of the cultural specificities of entrepreneurialism within the Caribbean, notably through the changing discourses of reputation and respectability, shows that neoliberalism is always being 're-made' in local contexts.

However, here some of the less effective parts of the book come to the surface as well. First of all, it seems Freeman tries to explain all social structures and cultural patterns through the reputation-respectability model, which at times feels somewhat artificial or at least arbitrary, as other explanations could be (more) relevant as well. At the same time, many of the characteristics of entrepreneurial work/life that are assigned to the specific Caribbean context sound quite familiar from other local contexts around the globe. This is perhaps one of the reasons why the chapters become quite repetitive, though this is also

due to the structure of the book (with many references to previous and coming chapters).

Last but not least, there remains the question of whether the rise of the entrepreneurial spirit in the Caribbean should largely be seen as a positive or negative development. In the conclusion Freeman argues that it represents both ‘pleasures and burdens’ and can ‘unleash new desires and also become sources of alienation’ (p. 212). However insightful this may be, it would have been productive to further substantiate the critical assessment of the neoliberal agenda – especially since entrepreneurship is, both in the Caribbean and elsewhere, increasingly and often problematically being touted as the mantra of development. However, in spite of these concerns, *Entrepreneurial Selves* offers a significant contribution to the literature, one that strikingly confirms that contemporary entrepreneurialism ‘is not about business per se’, but has, indeed, ‘become a mode of labour and a way of life’ (p. 16).

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Note

Wilson, P. (1969), Reputation and respectability: A suggestion for Caribbean ethnology. *Man* 4(1): 70-84. <http://dx.doi.org/10.2307/2799265>