

# ENTREPRENEURIAL SELVES



Neoliberal Respectability  
and the Making of a  
Caribbean Middle Class

**CARLA FREEMAN**

ENTREPRENEURIAL SELVES

**NEXT WAVE**

*New Directions in Women's Studies*

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Inderpal Grewal, Caren Kaplan,  
and Robyn Wiegman

**CARLA FREEMAN**

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**NEOLIBERAL RESPECTABILITY  
AND THE MAKING OF A  
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*for Rob, Isabel, and Alice*



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In the long pursuit of ethnography, and in life more generally, we are

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# Entrepreneurial Selves

## AN INTRODUCTION

The main interest in life and work is to become someone else that you were not in the beginning. If you knew when you began a book what you would say at the end, do you think that you would have the courage to write it? What is true for writing and for a love relationship is true also for life. The game is worthwhile insofar as we don't know what will be the end.

—FOUCAULT, *THE BIRTH OF BIOPOLITICS*, 9

*Entrepreneurial Selves* is an ethnography of economy, labor, and affect in a time and place of neoliberalism. This is a story about what it means to be *respectable* and *middle class*, and the manner in which these concepts work in tandem, in ways that are simultaneously gendered and culturally particular. *Entrepreneurialism*, I will argue, is becoming not simply a mechanism of self-employment—a vehicle for income generation, an economic matter of business, that is, entrepreneurship in a narrow sense—but a subtler, generalized way of being and way of feeling in the world. This entrepreneurialism connects market practices with self-making and is predicated upon porous boundaries of public and private life. The self as an entrepreneurial “project” under constant renovation is a key signpost of neoliberalism and its perpetual quest for flexibility in the changing global marketplace (Bourdieu 1998; Rose 1992; Illouz 2007, 2008; Walkerdine 2003). Foucault described four types of technologies by which human beings make sense of themselves, each of which is integral to the entrepreneurial pursuit:

(1) technologies of production, which permit us to produce, transform or manipulate things; (2) technologies of sign systems, which permit us to use signs, meanings, symbols, or signification; (3) technologies of power, which determine the conduct of individuals and submit them to certain ends or domination . . . ; (4) technologies of the self, which permit individuals to effect by their own means or with the help of others a certain number of operations on their own bodies and souls, thoughts, conduct, and way of being, so as to transform themselves in order to attain a certain state of happiness, purity, wisdom, perfection, or immortality. (Foucault 1988, 18)

I am particularly concerned with the last of these: the manner in which technologies of self-making are integral to the entrepreneurial ethos under the precarity of neoliberalism (Hardt and Negri 2004).

In the contemporary neoliberal milieu every aspect of life is becoming subject to regimes of flexibility, quests, and commands for self-mastery and self-examination.<sup>1</sup> The entrepreneurial enterprise constitutes a primary site and central practice of neoliberal self-creation and labor in today's global economy, a dual project in which economic livelihoods and new subjectivities are being forged in tandem. Entrepreneurialism denotes action and imagination, an ongoing process of envisioning and becoming, as opposed to a given position, status, or state of being that is achieved and established through economic means alone. In this dynamic sense, entrepreneurial self-making is always work *in formation*—akin to the processual work of class, gender, race, and culture—and inextricably bound up with these dimensions of identity. Its subtle ontological dynamism is inextricably bound up in new modes of labor and affect, new social relations and ways of feeling. Derived from the early nineteenth-century French verb *entreprendre* (to undertake), an *entrepreneur* is formally defined as one who creates and manages a business enterprise, taking financial risks with the hope of making a profit; a visionary figure, in other words, hailed for executing an innovative idea and, importantly, willing to undertake considerable risk to put it into practice. The entrepreneurial trope—from Henry Ford and Walt Disney to Madame C. J. Walker, Oprah Winfrey, and Steve Jobs—often highlights a restless personality and capacity to anticipate and embrace change, whether technological or social, and, as one of my informants suggested to me, “the tendency toward self-sufficiency; in other words (the entrepreneur is) stubborn and rebellious.”

In this study of contemporary entrepreneurs and the wider esprit of neoliberal entrepreneurialism, I turn the focus beyond the *business* of

economic independence and self-sufficiency (self-employment) to explore the self as entrepreneurial project inextricable from the enterprise and market sphere. This self is, Rose says, “a subjective being, it is to aspire to autonomy, it is to strive for personal fulfillment in its earthly life, it is to interpret its reality and destiny as matters of individual responsibility, it is to find meaning in existence by shaping its life through acts of choice” (1992, 142). The process of subjectification, as I see it, is *both* individual and social, animated in realms of the imagination and through quotidian practices in private and public life. Importantly, the means by which selfhood is contemplated, crafted, and judged, are not solely *private* or *personal* matters, in the narrow sense that they are simply up to the individual or made possible by sheer grit or “choice.” Rather, new concepts of the self are vital to the broader workings—and power—of the political-economic and social order. At the heart of the entrepreneurial ethos is a vigorous entanglement of *selfhood* and *labor* for envisioning and making one’s self entails particular forms (and a particular intensity) of work. Not only do entrepreneurial labors increasingly exceed the formal boundaries of productive enterprise to include every facet of social reproduction (i.e. work ‘at home’ and work ‘at work’ bleed into one another), they seem to permeate every crevice of conscious (and even unconscious)<sup>2</sup> life.

One element that marks these fluid and intensifying labors is a growing emphasis on *affects*—the embodied expressions of emotions and feelings. Indeed, the means by which affects of care, interest, and joy, for example, are conjured up, repressed, desired, and unleashed, are critical dimensions of entrepreneurial labor and subjective meaning-making. They also constitute a growing medium through which economic, political, and social transactions are made. Citing Berlant’s (2011) *Cruel Optimism*, Sian Ngai (2013) suggests that “unlike the past or the future, the present is what is always affectively *felt* before it can be conceptually *known*.” I suggest that a neoliberal “structure of feeling” (Williams 1961) is not simply a present awash in emotions through which the subject then makes sense of herself and her world, but a present and imagined future that are increasingly entangled in and through an emotional register. For Raymond Williams, the “*felt sense* of the quality of life” constitutes “the most difficult thing to get hold of in studying any past period” (1961, 63). This seems especially true in a period in which an emphasis on affects and affective exchange—the demand that people not only be emotional but that they show their emotions in identifiable and commodifiable ways—seemingly subsumes life from every angle.



It is easy to see that capitalism reproduces itself by virtue of our increasing willingness and subjugation to the entrepreneurial mandate. And it is hard not to notice the dynamic means by which capitalism morphs and seeps into even those recesses of life we might imagine impenetrable to market forces: intimate and family relationships, religious and spiritual lives, etc. However, what is most critical is not merely the inextricability of subjective understandings of the self and the means by which subjectivity and a new affective register become integral to modes of exchange within a larger political economic frame. Harder to decipher are the cultural differences within which these processes unevenly unfold. What are the implications for social, political, intimate, and interior life when this entrepreneurial imperative and its emphasis on self-examination, intimacy, psychological reflection, and cultivation unfold in places without prior investments in such self-enterprise? Michel-Rolph Trouillot (2003) warned us against the malaise of the *déjà vu* in such globalizing times, a caution that bears particular merit here. It is easy to lose sight of this particularity when the manner by which a neoliberal esprit is announced, cajoled, and regulated seems to take such familiar forms. For if there is little doubt that neoliberal discourses of entrepreneurialism reverberate across the world in the interest of global capitalism, the kind of subject being mobilized, the nature of the labor they are performing, the feelings rallied and produced within this supple and unstable system, and the meanings these affects hold cannot be assumed to be consistent. This ethnography explores the meanings and expressions of “entrepreneurial selves” in a part of the world well trodden by many of the relevant tropes of contemporary neoliberalism (economy, enterprise, flexibility, and power) but less inclined toward thinking reflexively about selves, much less about feelings or affective life.

The setting for this unfolding drama is the tiny and beautiful island of Barbados in the eastern Caribbean Sea. If a small and densely populated tropical island seems a surprising place to unearth the nuances of neoliberalism, it bears reminding that the Caribbean region, whose very existence is founded on colonial conquest, has provided a powerful lens for some of the most critical questions of our times: What is it to be modern (Mintz 1985; Williams 1944), and what cultural and economic complexities are bound up in systems of “globalization” (Trouillot 2003)? A former sugar-producing colony once more valuable to the British Crown than its large North American territories combined, today Barbados is known to the rest of the world for its pristine beaches, exclusive hotels, and upscale golf courses; a Mecca for British royals, prime ministers, and pop stars. Green fields of sugar cane still evoke the island’s three-hundred-year plan-

tation history and symbols of British tradition echo through tourism and everyday life, from tea and “rock buns” to cricket fever and even a ritualized changing of the guards in the crimson regalia of Queen Victoria’s day.<sup>3</sup>

The only Caribbean territory to have remained squarely in British hands throughout the colonial period, Barbados’s Anglophile tradition and nickname “little England” evoke both pride and mockery. Barbados’s history of a stable parliamentary democracy and top ranking in the region’s Human Development Index, along with its notably conservative national sensibility, have led to its gloss as a “middle-class” society. Today suburban subdivisions, gated communities, traffic-choked highways and American-style shopping malls increasingly define the island’s landscape, while hotels and restaurants encroach ever rapidly upon the once expansive “windows to the sea.” In addition to these striking visual transformations, other dimensions of Barbadian life and culture that are more subtle and easily overlooked in efforts to chart “development” and twenty-first-century modernity are also in flux. Along with the bold visual markers of middle-class society—the neon signs of new businesses and restaurants, the record number of cars on the road, and the rapidly changing face of mass consumption—what is less visible but equally dramatic are the changes to be found in the hidden recesses of people’s hearts and in their subtly shifting understandings and expressions of selfhood. The questions—who am I in the world? how do I wish to live and feel?—are being articulated in new ways that I see as subtly intertwined with a general entrepreneurial ethic and neoliberal esprit. The significance of these questions, as familiar as they sound, can only be grasped with an understanding of Barbadian history and culture and with questions and modes of analysis that transcend traditional economic measures of development, entrepreneurship, or neoliberalism. Many of these changes in activity, sensibility, and desires appear deceptively common in an era of global capitalism: the rapid growth of fast food and retail chains, yoga studios and gyms, expanding public venues for leisure, extracurricular activities and camps for enriching childhood, and services offering conveniences and interventions for managing the stresses of middle-class working life, to name just a few.

More than ten years ago, I began this project with a focus very different than the one I have written. In collaboration with Katherine Browne, an anthropologist of Martinique, we aimed to capture what appeared to be a growing emphasis on entrepreneurship as a means for economic development across the Caribbean region (2004). Our goal was to examine how the growing international agenda of entrepreneurship would unfold in this balkanized region of different colonial histories (French,

Spanish, Dutch, and English), different linguistic and cultural traditions, and different state structures and political economies. In particular, we were interested in questions about gender and the ways in which women and men would be drawn into and participate in this economic niche in a time of global economic flux. Taking our cue from regional authorities and international development agencies alike, we aimed to track the growth of entrepreneurship and its gendered permutations for a region known for high rates of female labor force participation and feminine prowess more generally, and increasingly dependent upon tourism as local sugar production waned.

The longer I pursued this research the more its footing shifted. One of the most confounding but creative aspects of ethnographic fieldwork is the process by which seemingly peripheral sidenotes to the main research can become central preoccupations. They haunt and intrigue us to the point that they demand closer scrutiny. These captivating distractions and competing narratives sometimes worm their way into, and occasionally overtake, the central plotline. In this case the very premise of entrepreneurship as fundamentally an economic enterprise began to shift toward a broader concept about *entrepreneurialism*, related but not limited to the fact of owning and running a business. In other words, being entrepreneurial, I came to see, was being expressed as much in relation to new forms and fantasies of self-understanding, intimacy, parenting, spirituality, and so on, as it was in terms of “running the shop.” These forms of entrepreneurialism reflect and call upon a rapidly changing cultural milieu in which affective relations—the expression and exchange of emotions—and affective labor are central. Where social relations, labor relations, kinship, conjugality, and other human relationships have been described and analyzed extensively in the region’s social science literature, they are examined predominantly through the lens of economy and through the prism of the Caribbean’s specific history of plantation slavery. The kinds of narratives and concerns I heard expressed in this fieldwork—sentiments and sensibilities surrounding middle-classness, entrepreneurialism, and contemporary life more generally—could not be captured within these familiar structural economic frameworks.

In addition to common markers of *DIY* culture, I found subtle but resounding referents to new, or at least newly articulated, desires and feelings integrally bound up with this project of flexible self-making. Others have written about the rise of “therapeutic culture” (Illouz 2007, 2008) as part of today’s “regime of the self” (Rose 1990) in which therapy “is not just an adjustment device but an expression of generalized reflexivity” (Giddens

1991, 180). This marks a distinctive shift in late capitalism away from the scientific management of the body and toward an inward emphasis upon feelings and desires. Throughout entrepreneurs' testimonies about their businesses and about their lives, I was as struck by the emotional tenor of their accounts and stories as by the formal content about their paths to becoming an entrepreneur. Accounts of "stress" and emotional longings, efforts to juggle work and family life, and desires for greater inner peace and a sense of "balance" more generally are likely so familiar to a European or North American ear that they would hardly bear comment. However, their emergence holds distinctive meanings in the Caribbean.

These somewhat uneasy fieldwork observations converged several years ago with an invitation I received to participate in an interdisciplinary workshop on the theme of "Love and Globalization."<sup>4</sup> I found myself in a serious quandary as I attempted to bring into dialog the rising economic tide of Barbadian entrepreneurialism with the question of *love*. For after mining thousands of pages of interview transcripts with over a hundred entrepreneurs, life histories, field notes and observations of a growing culture of neoliberalism at large, I found not a single explicit mention of love. Despite the Caribbean's Nobel Prize-winning authors, a rich musical tradition of calypso, reggae, socca, etc., and the romantic lure of the region for honeymooning tourists, the love poem and romantic ballad are few and far between. The popularity of American soap operas and television dramas, and the ubiquitous presence of Hollywood movies, makes these genres of romance ever present in the popular sphere, and yet one is harder pressed to find "talk of love" (Swidler 2001) in what is immediately recognized Barbadian cultural expression or, for that matter, in academic analyses of Caribbean life and culture (Barriteau 2013). Of course the presence or absence of an explicit lexicon cannot be held alone as a barometer of emotion; the fact that little is *said* about love, for example, doesn't imply its absence in people's lives. As Foucault said, "silence itself—the things one declines to say, or is forbidden to name, the discretion that is required between different speakers—is less the absolute limit of discourse, the other side from which it is separated by a strict boundary, than an element that functions alongside the things said, with them and in relation to them within over-all strategies. . . . There is not one but many silences, and they are an integral part of the strategies that underlie and permeate discourses" (1980, 27).

As I discuss in chapter 2, my search for "love" in entrepreneurs' narratives and life histories revealed a different set of idioms of "support" that hark back to a long tradition by which a language of economy has overshadowed and subsumed that of affect. That excavation

prompted my deeper consideration of emotions more generally, and their emerging prominence within the entrepreneurial spirit today. Indeed, what began as a seemingly puzzling silence/absence ultimately alerted me to the proliferation of new emotional discourses, themselves bound up in shifting axes of cultural tradition from one of social hierarchy, propriety and affective reserve to one in which longings and desires could be more readily imagined and expressed. My search for entrepreneurial discourses of “love” forced me to question not just the culturally specific meanings of love but the culturally specific manner in which feelings are being animated by neoliberalism. Changing desires for affective experience and new modes of emotional expression, as I see them, become ever more supple tools by which public and private, market and heart are mobilized by, and in turn expressive of, neoliberal entrepreneurial life.

It is precisely to these convergences that I shall return. For I see one of the most interesting and vexing aspects of my field research as a paradox between a globalizing culture of neoliberalism with its emphasis upon flexible self making, introspection, *feeling*, or what Illouz (2007) calls “emotional capitalism,” and a culture historically grounded in the plantation system in which life and self have been solidly rooted in structural relations of kinship and economy and where, quite simply, the emotional register has been narrowly contained and seldom analyzed. One of my research informants expressed this observation boldly and succinctly: “*Feelings* in Barbados” are the preserve of “the priest or the bottle.” That is to say, they can be expressed in church (for women) or in the rum shop (for men). The tension, therefore, between a current global climate that appears increasingly saturated in emotion (Reber 2012) and a place renowned for its rather severe, respectable and controlled conservatism offers an evocative locus to examine the affective nuances of neoliberalism. And it is within the middle classes, perhaps those groups most intensely invested within ideological, economic, and cultural articulations of neoliberal entrepreneurialism, that I see these tensions to be especially dramatic.

As I mined my narratives more closely, I came to see that while the explicit lexicon of love I was looking for was absent, the strong desire for a newly imagined intimacy, self-understanding, and new ways of feeling and expressing emotion figured throughout entrepreneurs’ testimonies. I found an ever-increasing swirl of affects, whose display and exchange was demanded most visibly within the mushrooming service sector, but that resonated across all spheres of life. An awareness of these changes and their manifestations in the contexts of entrepreneurial work, leisure, religion, kinship, intimate relations, parenting, and virtually every domain

of life gradually moved from the fringes to the center of my story. For it is in the combined longings and labors such affects entail, and the cultural specificity of these desires, feelings, and practices, that I see some of the most powerful and dramatic implications of neoliberalism today. Their increasing significance within the entrepreneurial milieu of Barbados in the early twenty-first century became at once unavoidable and dangerously seductive.

The changing landscapes of work and paths to middle-classness among the entrepreneurs I have been studying are both evidence of and active agents in the production of a new affective climate. I discovered not simply a growing array of new businesses offering services and goods that were brand new in the Barbadian context, but was led by my research subjects into whole new fields of leisure and therapeutic treatment, new-age and alternative churches, gyms, and holistic healing centers that signal radically new venues and domains of experience for this Caribbean island. The story of entrepreneurship, aspirational middle-classness, affect, and the powerful concept of respectability is a difficult one to narrate, for all of these elements are intertwined, mutually constitutive, permeable, and dynamically in flux. Entrepreneurship, it is true, constitutes a newly attractive means for livelihood, economic enterprise, and middle-class belonging. But it must be read simultaneously as a new way of being in the world that signifies not just a particular path of income generation and consumption but also a new way of living and feeling that is shaped by and simultaneously giving new expression to gendered, classed, and racialized subjectivities.

The unfolding entrepreneurial drama of neoliberal Barbados is complicated ironically because of the deceptively familiar, even mundane, quality these themes suggest to a North American or European reader. For here is a picture in which global economic forces and a local and national embrace of neoliberal flexibility set the stage on which entrepreneurship is presented as a new path, a new profile of possibility. This entrepreneurial impetus is emerging in part because the state and private sectors are shrinking and reconfiguring themselves such that long-standing expectations for stable, secure jobs with clear ladders of mobility are both less available and, according to many, less desired. We are well acquainted with this narrative of late capitalism. Equally familiar, it might seem, are the forms that many of the new entrepreneurial enterprises are taking—a growing array of services from event management and corporate consulting to personalized care and treatment of the home, body, and mind. In these new businesses, we witness a familiar centrality of electronic media,

“immaterial” computer-generated work, and, for a small island, the critical importance of a global marketplace and supply chain made possible in part by the Internet and digital age.

The anthropologist is primed to observe and explain what is different, but she is less well trained to interpret phenomena that look and sound familiar. The challenge before us is to resist the numbness and unease that emerges from apparent similitude. I see the confluence of entrepreneurial elements of culture, economy, and selfhood as simultaneously expressive of the global marketplace and also means by which new social relations and ways of imagining and enacting personhood are being communicated in this small island in the Caribbean Sea. New desires for flexibility and self-mastery spoke of a globalizing neoliberal discourse and also evoked the Caribbean concept of reputation—those rebellious and creative modes of expressive “creole” culture that have long been mapped onto lower-class culture, masculinity, African-derived tradition, and, most importantly, an oppositional, anticolonial esprit—as I will discuss in detail in the next chapter. At the same time, other dimensions of flexibility, a flexibility of selfhood and relatedness, including interior exploration and the pursuit of intimate emotional connectedness and recognition, emerge without a similarly established cultural tradition on which to rest. The heart of my account lies in this convergence between global and local discourses of neoliberalism and reputation, entrepreneurship and respectability, spawned in very different historical moments but today intertwined and mutually transformative in the lives of new entrepreneurial middle-class actors.

This is an especially poignant story because Barbados, and the Caribbean more generally, represents a cultural sphere that is not new to forces of globalization and the penetration of cultural and economic agendas and imperatives brought from elsewhere. What has made the Caribbean of such great interest and importance in recent efforts to examine globalization is the fact of its formation some three hundred years ago precisely out of the force and combination of *other* nations and peoples. This is not a story of virgin lands or pristine cultures grappling with the recent penetration of foreign goods, ideologies, and modes of economic restructuring, but a place that has been created and developed precisely out of such mammoth processes centuries ago. This is a region largely without “natives” in the traditional sense. Its populations are immigrants and their descendants—enslaved, indentured, and free. What is “traditional” or “authentic” here, in other words, is best understood not as some set of practices and beliefs that stand in opposition to the “foreign” but as a supple capacity to

incorporate influences, practices, structural forms, and institutions and give them relevance and meaning in a West Indian idiom steeped in the historical legacy of colonialism and plantation slavery and always in a process of dynamic change. Indeed, it is the tension between those cultural attributes and institutions derived from British colonial influences and those spawned in the New World that has fostered the region's most enduring conceptual frameworks (creole, hybridity, marronage, respectability, reputation, etc.), some of which have been widely borrowed and "globalized" with due attribution or not.

For the Barbadian case, I interpret these political and economic transformations as bound up in the process in which the local cultural model of *reputation*, long understood to stand in opposition to colonial order and capitalist interests, is becoming ascendant and intimately conjoined with the neoliberal capitalist agenda. Where a British colonial cultural model of respectability was encoded in bureaucratic hierarchy, order, and the propriety associated with institutions such as the Anglican Church, the civil service, and the "proper" feminine domestic sphere, a counterideology of reputation could be found in the lively domain of the public sphere in which Caribbean folk, especially those of the lower classes, have enacted a vibrant culture of *communitas* and an ethic of anticolonial social leveling through creative performance, wit, and guile (Wilson 1969).

Examining these processes offers not simply an opportunity to elucidate the "local" and the "global" as some might have it but also to highlight what is at stake in glossing *neoliberalism* or *globalization* too breezily, too all-encompassingly. While there has been a critical political impetus to see the familiar tracks of market-driven global economic flux as homogeneous and threatening, to limit our analyses to formal similitude risks losing the nuances and complexities of life and meaning that ethnography is especially well poised to unearth. In other words, in what may look to be merely tropical ripples in the tides of American or global trends, I see new cultures of enterprise, consumption, leisure, intimacy, and selfhood unfolding in the Barbadian context. And the importance of unearthing these developments is not only that they shed light on what is distinctive about this moment in time for a small and seemingly marginal Caribbean country but also that these distinctions invite us to ask how history and culture give specific meaning to some of our most potent concepts: capitalism, neoliberalism, middle-classness, respectability, and so on. My goal is not just to illustrate the manifestation of new modes of flexible labor and neoliberal self making and class making through entrepreneurship, but also to explore how specific dimensions of Barbadian culture and history



reframe globalizing neoliberal techniques and affective culture and, in so doing, give them new meanings.

#### **A NOTE ON METHODOLOGY AND THE RESEARCH PROCESS**

Studying the middle classes not only suggests certain analytical ambivalences as I allude to above but also presents a different set of methodological conditions and challenges. For me, having conducted fieldwork in the island's informatics industry in the 1990s, studying middle-class entrepreneurs first meant an even more mobile undertaking. If the informatics sector implied a mode of ethnography that departed from the tradition of village-based anthropology of an earlier era, middle-class entrepreneurship took me even more dramatically into the rhythm of diffuse suburban living, shopping, leisure, and the tangle of traffic in an increasingly car-focused society. While concentrated in the most densely commercial parts of the country, such as the busy south coast, my "field site" was virtually the whole of the island, wherever these businesses were located and wherever these entrepreneurs lived and found recreational respite. These venues stretched from the airport to the countryside, beach and sea to urban and industrial sites. I conducted almost all of my interviews on the business premises generally after having toured the operation, and then retreating to a quiet (or not so quiet) and mostly air-conditioned office space. With some entrepreneurs, whom I got to know better over time, our conversations continued in their homes or other venues such as local cafés, beaches, cultural events, and social gatherings. In addition to my more purposeful follow-up meetings with entrepreneurs, frequent visits have allowed me to follow more informally the changing entrepreneurial landscape of the past decade. It bears reminding that Barbados is a small and densely populated island (fourteen miles wide and twenty-one miles long; population 260,000). Its size gives its social organization a particular complexity as well as intimacy. Almost daily, whether in the grocery store, walking, driving, going to the beach or the movies, attending public events, art shows, or university lectures, I encountered familiar faces, whether from my earlier fieldwork, the university community, networks of friends and family, and of course my many entrepreneurial informants. These encounters were a constant reminder of the complex social niches of this small society. I also became aware of new commercial sites, recreational venues, and public spaces that were bringing these groups increasingly into contact. During my first fieldwork from 1989 to 1992 I discovered the nuances of the Barbadian social landscape that do not map simply onto race or class boundaries. One might assume, as I did twenty-five

years ago, that the small white community of less than 5 percent of the population represented a fairly homogeneous group who would likely know each other. The class and social diversity of this group were among my more surprising discoveries. In some senses Barbados has the feel of a small island where everyone seems to be “family” to everyone else. On the other hand, this is a society with intricate class, racial, kin-based and geographical complexities with linkages to many other parts of the world. And it is precisely the intensity of this simultaneously global and local dimension that makes it a fascinating place to live and study.

Over more than a decade I combined historical accounts and archival research on popular representations of business, entrepreneurship, and middle-classness, surveying newspapers, magazines, advertisements, and help columns, with interviews and life histories of contemporary Barbadian entrepreneurs of all ages. My ethnographic research included participant observation in shopping malls, restaurants, cafés, movie theaters, churches, the new south coast boardwalk, salons, galleries, beaches, and other popular venues for middle-class life. I listened to the island’s ever-popular radio call-in programs, and attended cultural performances, lectures, and events featuring business promotion and youth entrepreneurship. I interviewed government officials and NGO representatives involved in supporting entrepreneurship on the island, as well as bank managers and consultants, about their views on the growth of the contemporary entrepreneurial landscape and the roles of gender and race in shaping the nation’s entrepreneurial profile. I pored over census data about education, employment, and income to try to make sense of the meanings of *middle class* within this shifting arena of contemporary entrepreneurialism.

Between 1999 and 2009 I interviewed 107 entrepreneurs (seventy-two women and thirty-five men), some of whom I interviewed multiple times during those years. With the help of a university research assistant, I used a “snowball” sampling method whereby each of the entrepreneurs I met was asked to suggest others who might be interested in participating in the study. Identifying Barbadian-born owners of registered, midsized businesses (with at least one employee) was not difficult. Almost every interviewee gave me names of friends or acquaintances to interview. Indeed, their interest in the study and my findings was often so strong that our interview quickly became more of a collaborative discussion in which I both honed my questions and shared my initial impressions. My goal early on was to survey as wide a swath of entrepreneurs as possible, especially those entering “nontraditional” areas of enterprise—women in heavy construction or other physically demanding and more conventionally

masculine arenas, men in fashion and food-related areas that have been commonly associated with women. I sought out entrepreneurs embarking in fields tied to brand new media and technology in the Barbadian context, and those offering new kinds of services and products suggestive of changing social mores (e.g., from yoga to personal fitness, nutrition counseling to holistic massage). I also deliberately included women and men in conventional fields: women running boutiques, flower shops, and food establishments, and men in plumbing, contracting, and business consulting. Roughly one quarter of the sample was in business partnerships, ten named their spouses as their partner, three others named other family members. With only one exception, a man who had taken over his mother's business, each of the entrepreneurs I interviewed was the primary (or co-)visionary and proprietor.

Each of these sources of data, especially my survey and interviews, led me to pursue the intersecting themes of middle-class self making and affective labor that constitute the heart of this book. I highlight in close detail selected entrepreneurial cases of individuals whose experiences and trajectories illustrate these most boldly and compellingly. These rich emotional narratives were often layered in longing, sadness, desire, joy and determination. When conversations continued over several years, they included retrospective reflection about structural as well as emotional changes over time—the reformulation of a business model, the birth of a child, an illness or divorce, feelings of optimism, hope, fear and anger. The individual biographies of these entrepreneurs and sometimes the unusual nature of their businesses are such that, on a small island, they could be easily recognizable. In attempting to protect their anonymity, I offered them the opportunity to “name themselves” with pseudonyms, and I have sometimes taken creative license in changing minor biographical elements or recasting a dimension of their enterprise that might make individuals less easily identifiable while preserving the central outlines of their lives, business trajectories, and sentiments. One woman entrepreneur with whom I discussed this conundrum and shared much of my analysis laughingly stated, “Well, the truth is, you could call me *George* and people on this island would still know me!”

Anthropologists have long been concerned with issues of representation and ethnographic positionality, and in some senses studying the middle classes might mask these concerns since even when studying “others” we may find ourselves among field subjects very much like ourselves. In my own case this project brought me into close ethnographic encounter with familiars. A large network of extended kin and friends I return to

each year in Barbados permeated the research. I learned of many new businesses from these networks, and indeed everyone I know on the island shared their ideas and commentary about the research. Unlike the years in which I conducted my first project there, on a subject few knew much about, everyone had thoughts about entrepreneurial life. This made the boundaries separating when I was “working” (doing fieldwork) and not working always blurry. Perhaps this blurriness sharpened my own attunement to the work/life seepage in the entrepreneurial lives I examine.

With a central interest in the gender of entrepreneurship, and what Bruni, Gherardi, and Poggio (2005) see as the simultaneously entrepreneurial aspects of gender, I was intent on studying entrepreneurial femininity and masculinity broadly, and women and men in all stages of the life cycle—single, in conjugal unions of varied forms, married, separated, divorced, with and without children, young and middle aged—from all ethnic groups, and from all class origins. While sexuality was not an explicit dimension of recruitment, I was interested in the life stories of several non-heteronormative entrepreneurs. Although these individuals never explicitly identified their sexual orientation or described themselves as gay or lesbian, their lively interviews were illuminating of many of the general social patterns I explore.<sup>5</sup> The overwhelming majority of these 107 entrepreneurs are Afro-Barbadian (who represent 90 percent of the population at large): fifty-eight women and twenty-eight men described themselves as “black.” I also interviewed ten women and five men who described themselves as “white,” two men and four women who described themselves as “mixed” or “red” Barbadians, and one “Indian” man. Given the strong association of “business” with the local white population, I was also interested in interviewing middle-class entrepreneurs (i.e., not the big corporate conglomerates on the island, but small to mid-sized business owners) from this segment of the population. They offer a small window into the little-examined cultural world of white Barbadians, and in particular that of white women, a group long imagined to hold the reins of middle-class respectability but rarely if ever the focus of empirical study.

As a further point of comparison, I also interviewed a small subset of ten salaried professional women. These individuals shed light on aspects of middle-classness and the occupational hierarchies and trajectories today, as well as on the particularities of entrepreneurialism as a chosen path. I was curious as to why these women had chosen *not* to become entrepreneurs, opting for more conventional positions of respectable middle-classness: a bank manager, a permanent secretary in the government, an accountant, a government health professional, and so on. Were