



# Stitching Identities in a Free Trade Zone: Gender and Politics in Sri Lanka (Contemporary Ethnography)

*Sandya Hewamanne*

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Anthropologist Sandya Hewamanne spent time in a Sri Lankan free trade zone (FTZ) working and living among the workers to learn about their lives. "They were poor women from rural areas," Hewamanne writes, "who migrated to do garment work in transnational factories of a global assembly line. Their difficult work routines and sad living conditions have been examined in detail. When I was with them I often wondered whether anyone noticed the smiles, winks, smirks, gestures, tones of voice, the movies they saw, or the songs they sang." Hewamanne deftly weaves theories of identity, globalization, and cultural politics throughout her detailed accounts of the workers' efforts to negotiate ever shifting roles and expectations of gender, class, and sexuality.

By analyzing how these workers claim political subjectivity, Hewamanne's *Stitching Identities in a Free Trade Zone* challenges conventional notions about women at the bottom of the global economy. The book offers a fascinating journey through the vibrant subaltern universe of Sri Lankan female migrant workers, from the FTZ factory shop floor to boarding houses, from urban movie theaters to temples and beaches and back to their native rural villages. *Stitching Identities in a Free Trade Zone* captures the spirit with which women confront power and violence through everyday poetics and politics, exploring how female workers construct themselves as different while investigating this difference as the space where deep anxieties and ambivalences over notions of nation, modernity, and globalization get played out.

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