

## Introduction

While gender has only received scant attention in the studies of globalization, feminist scholars have provided insights on the significant role of women in the global economy, specifying their labor participation in various types of transnational work institutions (Bose and Acosta-Belén 1995; Enloe 1989; Fernandez-Kelly 1983; Leacock and Safa 1986; Mitter 1986; Nash and Fernandez-Kelly 1983; Ong 1987). Moving away from the previous conceptions of global male domination, recent feminist scholars have developed new theories that highlight the continual interaction of domination and resistance (Grewel and Caplan 1994; Pieterse 1994). They underscore that the "gendering" of the global economy involves not simply the inclusion of women as workers in transnational corporations (TNCs) and global export markets, but rather, those organizations' fostering of gendered principles through their ideologies, practices, and policies (Lim 1985; Poster 1998; Ward 1990). Subsequently, the new studies emphasize power structures that intersect with gender, particularly the dynamics of race, class, sexuality and regions (Fernandez-Kelly and Wolf 2001; Poster, forthcoming). While these studies illuminate the complexities of gender in experiencing globalization, by viewing gender as a *category* and, thus, constructed *a priori* the workplace, they fail to consider the workplace and its particular features as a powerful agent to constructing ideologies, practices, and identity around gender. Furthermore, while some feminist scholars have argued that gender, along with other axes of inequality, is not simply an individual characteristic but accomplished in interactions with others (West and Fenkemaker 1995), globalization scholars have not considered this perspective in understanding the gendering process of globalization.

The purpose of this article is to fill this gap in the literature, by examining the gendered work practices of Korean TNCs in the United States and Korean American women workers' responses to them. Because the globalizing workplace, such as the TNC, includes the juxtaposition of different ethnic groups, whose awareness of their own identity is conditioned by their structural positions in the context of the workplace and the labor market, Korean TNCs present not just a cultural setting but a specific work setting that (in)forms identity and practice in a particular way. Based on observation and interview analysis of Korean TNCs in the United States, this paper asks the following questions: How is the TNC workplace gendered? What are the mechanisms by which gender is constructed and reproduced in the context of the workplace? How do Korean American women understand their experiences of the gendered practices in Korean TNCs?

By addressing these issues, this paper takes a step further from considering TNCs as exporting gender ideologies (Poster 1998); it highlights the importance of the particular features of the TNC workplace that facilitate and perpetuate gender stratification in the workplace. Furthermore, by analyzing the ways in which people cognitively construct the everyday work practices to rationalize their behaviors as well as those of others, this paper illuminates the micro processes through which people actively participate in not only shaping the globalization process but also engendering and perpetuating structures of inequality. It extends the current body of literature on globalization by providing empirical findings and illustrative points that highlight the specific mechanisms and conditions under which the globalization process manifests the conflicting tendencies between *homogenization*, the impulse to unify, and *heterogenization*, the desire to remain separate (Appadurai 2000; Lechner and Boli 2000).

## Gender and the Global Economy

The globalization scholars suggest that one major way in which people experience globalization "on the ground" is through the conflicting tendencies between *homogenization* and *heterogenization* (Appadurai 2000; Lechner and Boli 2000). They argue that experiencing globalization is not a one-way process, in the sense that large structural change is bound to overwhelm individuals, but rather people participate and respond in different ways (Brown 2000; Castells 2000; Lechner and Boli 2000). While this view is compelling and has important implications for orders of inequality as it underscores the role of agency and the "bottom-up" (rather than the "top-down") process in making change, it has remained highly abstract and without sufficient empirical evidence. In addition, most studies in globalization have been macro in their analysis, not to mention their scant attention to the power structures (i.e., gender, race, ethnicity, class, sexuality, and region) that are produced and perpetuated through "micro" processes in various transnational settings, such as the workplace.

Feminist scholars, on the other hand, have been focusing on the relationship between gender and the global economy since the late 1970s, not only to confirm the presence of gender but also to demonstrate the complexities of gender and its intersection with different axes of inequality in the workplace (Poster, forthcoming). As researchers of globalization and global economy have recognized TNCs as key in facilitating economic and cultural activities throughout the world (Dicken 1998; Kozul-Wright and Rowthorn 1998; Held and McGrew 2000), feminist scholars highlight the relationship between gender and TNCs. They indicate that the gendering of the global economy involves not simply the inclusion

of women as workers in TNCs, but rather, the TNCs' fostering of gendered principles through their ideologies, practices, and policies (Lim 1985; Poster 1998; Ong 1987; Ward 1990). At the same time, there are findings that indicate that the TNC workplace is shaped by multiple factors of the local context, such as labor shortages, state policies, and preexisting relations of male domination (Ward and Pyle 2000). Moreover, some cross-national studies have shown that local cultural gender ideologies impact women's rates of labor force participation (Clark, Ramsbey and Adler 1991), and levels of occupational sex segregation (Charles 1992). In a study of two TNCs in different regions of Asia, owned by the same parent company, Lee (1995) demonstrated how they developed different styles of gender relations, revealing the locally-specific labor markets and ideologies. Similarly, in a study of an American TNC in India, Poster (1998) found that as TNCs move to different local, national, and regional contexts, gender relations also transform because the cultural and ethnic meanings of gender in those contexts vary. By highlighting the *gendering* process of globalization in TNCs and the ways in which it varies by cultural contexts, these studies have advanced our understanding of the ways in which people actively participate to shape the consequences that are multiple and conflictive during the globalization process. Furthermore, in so doing, this line of research has begun to incorporate an analysis of gender with other categorizations such as race, ethnicity and class (Arrigo 1985; Yelvington 1993).

Notwithstanding their research endeavors, these scholars have not sufficiently examined how such processes affect people in the work they do and how they make sense of their own experience as a result. More importantly, they fail to recognize the transnational workplace itself as an impetus to identity construction, which creates and recreates identities through work relations and practices.