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Conquering Duppies in Kingston: Miss Tiny and Me, Fieldwork Conflicts, and Being Loved and Rescued

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SUMMARY This is an account of my relationship with Miss Tiny, an informal commercial importer, with whom I worked during my dissertation research project in Jamaica. Our interactions, always fraught with conflict, illustrate the nuances of personal and social negotiations that frame the data-gathering process in the field. This narrative explores the contradictions that arise when using analytical tools and methods that fail to consider the intersections of race/color, class, and gender of the ethnographer and her subjects. This article also is a commentary on the dynamics of working with people like Miss Tiny who have been overstudied.

Yes me friend (me good friend) Dem say we’re free again So don’t try to cold me up on this bridge, now I’ve got to reach Mount Zion—The highest region So if you’re a bull-bucker, Let me tell you this—I’m a duddy conqueror, conqueror!

—Bob Marley


—Des’ree, singer and songwriter

The Duddy and Its Mythic Conqueror

In Jamaican lore, a “duddy” is the shadow of a dead person, a roving spirit, or ghost that can be manipulated through “obeah” for destructive as well as protective spiritual work. Duppies are regarded as being the inverse of everything human. They rest during the day, roam abroad at night, and must find their tombs and graves before sunrise. They never walk with feet on the ground; they talk with a nasal accent, laugh in shrill tone, and cannot count beyond three. Knowledge of the habits and traits of duppies make it possible for the living to maintain their distance by means of ritual (Chevannes 1994:25). By using rituals, duppies can be dissuaded through confusion. According to Chevannes, one ritual uses their love of counting yet their inability to count past three. The practice is to strike three matchsticks but only throw the first two away. The duddy chasing you will spend the entire night looking for the last match in order to reach the count of three (Chevannes 1994:25). According to popular belief, the obeah practitioner who manages duppies must have great strength and insight. This scientist has to possess “four eyes”; that is, he or she must have developed the gift of seeing both the visible and invisible worlds (Murphy 1994:121).

“Duppy Conqueror” is a song written by reggae’s great songwriter Robert Nesta Marley. In this tune, which Marley wrote during the late 1960s after being
Miss Tiny and Me, Saved and Rescued

With Miss Tiny, an informal dissertation research project in, illustrate the nuances of personal process in the field. This narrative mythical tools and methods that fail order of the ethnographer and her antics of working with people like gain. So don't try to cold me up on the highest region. So if you're a conqueror, conquerer!

—Bob Marley

Son. You gotta be hard. You gotta be calm. You gotta stay

—Des'ree, singer and songwriter

ead person, a roving spirit, or for destructive as well as being the inverse of everyday at night, and must find their feet on the ground; they cannot count beyond three. The king for the last match in order according to popular belief, the one great strength and insight, or else she must have developed skills (Murphy 1994:121).

gae's great songwriter Robert during the late 1960s after being released from imprisonment in a Kingston jail on a minor ganja charge, he sings about overcoming obstacles. He warns his adversaries not to attempt to trap him on the bridge that leads to his destination, Mount Zion—the Rastafarian holy land (Africa, Ethiopia). They may try to stop him, but he cannot be deterred. He will triumph over the strongest of forces. With Rastafari as his shield and strength, he can conquer even the supernatural world of duppies.

Throughout the earlier phases of fieldwork and later stages of writing my dissertation, I often identified with the wailing Marley. Like Marley, I was on a journey that looked more like an obstacle course, and what I wanted was to reach my destination. The rather long bridge I had to cross was the fieldwork process and the dissertation in which I would tell the lives and tales of Informal Commercial Importers (ICIs) who I came to know over the years, in a manner that would reflect the complexity of who they are and their everyday realities. To do so, I chose to blur genres using multiple disciplinary approaches and autoethnography. Some of the obstacles I had to confront were anthropology's ghosts, whose shadows loomed over me during fieldwork and the backlash against reflexivity. My "Mount Zion" would best be marked by my desire for the final product to be effective in bringing attention to the plight of ICIs in particular and of Jamaica in general, at a time when the Caribbean has become marginal in anthropological discourses.

Unlike Marley, however, I was pessimistic about the aftermath of my crossing. For my arrival, if you will, not only depended on my chosen route but others' response to it. As black feminist anthropologists continue to point out, given the rampant "exclusionary practices" in the discipline, the path to the peak remains the same. It has already been laid down. Indeed, historically, those who insist on their own way or do not recreate anthropology's own structures of power and representation do not get there. They have been systematically marginalized and silenced.

Until recently, the making of an ethnography has been viewed as a heroic endeavor, one in which a lone researcher arrives in unfamiliar territory, conquers it, and then returns to present his or her findings to the world in the form of a text of one kind or another. Anthropologists who have exposed this conqueror as myth have done so in part through their questioning of epistemological modes of inquiry, and more explicitly by exposing the tensions inherent in participant-observation as the primary method of ethnographic data collection. Many of these critiques have revealed that ethnographers not only go through an often rigorous and continuous process of negotiation to gain their access to data, but that the knowledge gathered consists in fact of situated insights. That is, the knowledge is limited by the multiple positions and intentions of the researcher and the subjects. In this article, I use a reflexive approach to revisit several moments of conflict throughout my fieldwork to reveal the extent to which we too often deny agency to both our subjects and ourselves.

I shift back and forth through time and space between and during different stages of fieldwork to explore the impact of my relationship with one ICI, Miss Tiny, on aspects of the data-collection process. I retrace the development of that relationship as shaped by both of our agendas, our expectations, my cluelessness, and our power relations. I focus mainly on two moments of conflict between us. The first concerns my reluctance to accept beauty practices as fieldwork, and the second revolves around my quest for the ultimate fieldwork experience, which Miss Tiny refused to facilitate. These concerns were aggravated by her own objective to turn me into a lady, and this was further complicated by the fact that in many ways, she was the embodiment of "woman" and "toughness," or "tuffness" in Jamaican parlance.
In a study of the Jamaican family elite, Lisa Douglass (1992) found the social construction of gender to be multifaceted, for the category of female contains the subdivisions of "lady" and "woman." This was a Victorian relic, permanently imprinted in the island's social fabric by British colonialism. Douglass contends that the duality underlies the context within which white Jamaican females make and remake themselves. I also agree with her that gendered identities are influenced by a number of interrelated factors including race/color, and class. The latter often is marked by appearance, behavior, and observance of social and spatial orders, particularly the uptown/downtown divide. Yet by no means is this duality rigid. In my work I reveal the nuances and distinctions that emerge within the categories when these interact with color and class. As is evident in the moments of conflict that I recount below, although "lady" and "woman" seem to oppose each other, they rest on dialectic tensions that inevitably result in a continuum.

A Reluctant Participant: Getting to Know Miss Tiny

During the five years I spent conducting dissertation research on the emergence and persistence of Informal Commercial Importing, Miss Tiny was the primary trader with whom I worked. Most of what I learned about the business came from the time I spent having long conversations with her in the arcade. I refrain from referring to her or anyone else as "informants" because of the politics of this term, as others have argued before me. Furthermore, within a local-diasporic Jamaican context, no one wants to be an "informant." An informant is punished for telling. At the very least they could receive a lick (beating), or death, depending on the depth or extent of their betrayal. I consider Miss Tiny a "coworker on the project."

I first met Miss Tiny in August 1993. I went to the Pearnel Charles Arcade in downtown Kingston to see her, after having called her house numerous times and having literally begged her to meet with me. Her responses were the same: "Mi don't have time to talk" (in the excerpts from fieldnotes, "me," i.e., "I," is written "mi." Other words are in patois to indicate Miss Tiny's use of both languages). I insisted because I expected her to resist me. I had read about Miss Tiny in Nesha Haniff's Blaze a Fire (1988). The author, the University of Michigan professor who had facilitated our meeting, already had warned me that Miss Tiny would challenge me more than any other researcher that Miss Tiny had encountered.

The day before our first meeting I had called her at home. She was more receptive. She asked about my mode of transportation and gave me directions to her arcade stall. She added, "If you can't find it, just ask anyone for Miss Tiny." I recall getting out of the taxi at the front of the arcade and feeling very anxious. The walk from the main entrance to her stall seemed like a mile. I felt awkward and out of place. The arcade was too dark and everybody was staring at me, which reminded me that I didn't belong. I was an outsider. I walked to the first row of stalls and turned left and I kept going. I didn't see Miss Tiny. I turned to the right, all the while feeling I was in a maze. Finally I asked someone, and was directed to Miss Tiny's stall, which was just a few feet away from where I stood. In my nervousness, I had turned one row too soon. The following excerpt is from my journal entry:

Today I went to Pearnel Charles and spent over two and a half hours with Miss Tiny. "Why are you wearing that big dress? Are you pregnant?" she asked, touching my stomach. I had barely entered the stall, still standing in the doorway.

"No, I'm not pregnant. I just like big clothes."
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“Why?” she asked.
"Cause I do," I replied. I noticed her manicure and pedicure and asked if she got
them done for her.
"Of course," she replied. "Every time I go to the salon, I ask for a
mani tack, and I get one. What is it that you get for me?"
"No, she said. "You don't need one. I was just asking because I
wanted to make sure everything is perfect before I leave the
salon.""I will," I replied. "I will do whatever it takes to make
sure everything is perfect." She thanked me and I continued on
my way.

She then asked me if I had read any of her books. "You know
I've read all of them," I replied. "And I love them! They're
so inspiring. They make me feel like I can do anything."
"That's great," she said. "I'm glad you like them. I hope to
publish another one soon."

I asked her about her next book. "I don't know," she replied. "I'm
still working on the story." "What's the story about?"
"It's about a young girl who dreams of becoming a
nurse," she said. "But her family doesn't want her to.
They think she's too young and she's not ready for that kind of
responsibility."

I told her that I was a nurse myself and I could relate to
her story. "That's great," she said. "I'm glad you feel that way."

She then asked me if I had ever written a book. "I've tried," I
said. "But I haven't finished anything yet." "Why not?"
"I just haven't had the time," I said. "I'm a busy person." "That's
fine," she said. "Just keep trying."
"Which night you go?" she asked.
"Dancehall night and International night."
"Do you dance, Gina?"
"I try, but I don't know how to do the butterfly."

She laughed, then said, "Next year you and I go to oldies night and Dancehall night."
I was happy that Miss Tiny expected me to return, as I had said I'd like to continue the research.

"Be careful," she called out to me as I began to walk away. I turned around and shifted the small backpack under my arm so the flap wouldn't be accessible to pickpockets.
"Gina" she called out laughing, "you smart."

That fall, because I was taking classes at the University of the West Indies (UWI), I visited Miss Tiny mostly on weekends, at home. When I first went to her house it was after she asked me, "Why you never come to my house?" I told her it was because she never invited me. "You know where I live?" she asked. I told her, but I had the wrong house number. She corrected me, then invited me over that Sunday. I asked her to make me ackee and saltfish because up until that time I had only eaten the national dish in restaurants. Because we did not set up a time to meet, I arrived early in the afternoon. She wasn't there. Disappointed, that night I called her to ask what happened. She told me she waited for me all morning, but when the time came for her to go to her hair appointment, she left. She said to come at ten o'clock next Sunday.

The following week I took a taxi to her house. I was hanging on the gate fearful of her barking dog until she peered out from the doorway in her housedress. She motioned me to a chair on her verandah and said she would be out in a minute. It took her several minutes before she came out again and asked me how I was. We had breakfast. While I was at her house various people came over to see her. They would greet me, then hand her packets or pouches of money, which she counted, dated the envelopes, and signed. She said nothing to me about it and I felt that it would be rude to ask, so I did not. Indeed, if she wanted me to know, she would have commented. Months later, she would explain that these were members of the several "pardners" to which she belonged. About midday, Miss Tiny told me she was going to get her hair done. She suggested I come along. Of course, once we arrived there was no time to talk, she was busy conversing with the others in the salon. This went on for weeks. Initially, I wondered what I was doing in a beauty salon when I should be conducting research. Moreover, when we arrived she and the others never talked about business. It was all about beauty, dances, shows, fashion, and men.

In the following months, this Sunday salon ritual became the norm. I would meet her at the house, then we would have breakfast and go to the salon. At first, I saw this ritual as an initiation rite. I believed that I eventually would be allowed to see, hear, and participate in other discussions, but things did not change that summer. Because Miss Tiny often was engaged in discussion with other customers, all of whom knew each other, I became a reluctant participant-observer. I learned later that they were all either actual ICIs or their relatives. Occasionally, someone wore a brand new item of clothing or jewelry that would spark conversation about its origins. This usually meant that an ICI recently had returned from a buying trip to Miami, New York, Panama, or, on rare occasions, Toronto or London.

Eventually, I began to look forward to these opportunities to see another side of Miss Tiny, so I went along happily. Miss Tiny would ask me why I wouldn't spend money on myself. Why did I hide my hair, which was always pulled back, or why didn't I wear makeup and make myself pretty? Within weeks I was getting my hair done as well. I reluctantly participated because at the time I
thought that as long as I wanted data from Miss Tiny, I had no choice. I began to get my nails done weekly, and started to wear makeup. After several months, I stopped the perms. I had been succumbing to this rite on Sundays despite deep personal contradictions about straightening my hair. Given the local class/color hierarchy, I was becoming even more critical of the social and symbolic politics of hair aesthetics in a Jamaican context. This taxonomy was a crude reminder that, despite the black consciousness of Rastafari, this “out of many, one” nation had a particular preference. The question that Carolyn Cooper (a cultural critic and UWI literature professor) dared to ask was, “Which one?” I continued to accompany Miss Tiny, but I would simply get a wash.

Several weeks before leaving Kingston, I went to another beauty salon and barber shop and got the processed hair cut to a low Afro. At that salon, none of the female hairdressers would cut my hair, worried that I would regret it and would later blame them. The barber on duty finally agreed to the task. Days later, when I went to see Miss Tiny, she bellowed, “Why you cut off your tail pretty hair?” My reply was simple: “I want natural hair.” “You a Rasta, Gina?” she asked with concern. “Not really. I just want natural hair,” I replied. Others in the arcade were shocked at what they openly called my “foolishness.”

When I returned to Ann Arbor that Christmas, I was wearing makeup, had my nails done, and was dressed fashionably. I had an encounter with someone who clearly was astounded by this transformation. She cried in absolute shock. “What happened to you? You look great.” Besides wondering just what I looked like before my fieldwork, I remember thinking that if I had gone to Rome, London, or Paris this new look would not have been so surprising. The reaction I had produced serves to support Michel-Rolph Trouillot’s (1992:20) assertion: “The Caribbean is neither ‘Western’ enough to fit the concerns of sociologists . . . nor ‘native’ enough to fit fully into the Savage slot where anthropologists found their preferred subjects.” As a result, the region remains in a state of perpetual liminality. I had been conducting research amongst “market women” in Jamaica, an island in the “Third World.” Indeed, becoming fashion conscious and sophisticated was the least likely expected outcome. I should have returned from the field looking ragged and beaten, if not infested with some tropical disease. Yet, on the contrary, I looked as though I had undergone a complete makeover. I attributed my transformation to Miss Tiny and the culture of femininity that she observed. In retrospect, I realize she orchestrated my enculturation into this way of being because I was something of a protégé of hers. She always complimented me when I abandoned my rebel gear (which consisted of generic sneakers, Doc Martens shoes, T-shirts and linen shorts, and loose Palazzo pants and tunics) for what were to her the acceptable ladylike outfits (more dresses, long flowing skirts or pants with blouses, and high-heeled shoes). Unsurprisingly, Miss Tiny never commented on my rebel gear, which not only gave me comfort but also allowed me to resist what I saw as rather rigid definitions of womanhood that had class/color correlations.

When I went back during the summer of 1994, Miss Tiny asked me, why didn’t I bring her one of the big dresses I like to wear so much? The style had caught on in Jamaica! Before I left, I assured her I would return the following year for a much longer period of time. I asked her if she would talk to me then. “Yeah, man, next time,” she answered. In October 1995 I arrived in Kingston for a year-long spell of fieldwork as prepared as I could, given my earlier experiences. Having learned that dark skin must be mediated with classed signifiers, my suitcases contained various status symbols (clothing, shoes, jewelry, etc.) that would allow me to circumnavigate these obstacles when possible in order to conduct the research. Within a week of my arrival, I went to the arcade to see Miss Tiny. She
was stunned to see me. “You back to do your research. You serious, Gina.” I responded, “Of course I’m serious, Miss Tiny. From the first time I met you I told you I’d do this project. Then I’ll do your book.” I took it as a good sign that she did not say she did not want another book written about her.

Then she asked, “Where is my dress?” It was a year later and I had forgotten. The next time I went to the arcade I brought her a gift. She opened it, marveled at the different colors of nail polish in the box, said thanks, then put it in her purse that she kept on the table in the corner of the stall next to her chair. She grabbed my hands to look at them and asked why I hadn’t brought her that color too. I was wearing my status symbols, including the Chanel Vamp polish. “I didn’t think you’d like it,” I said.

“No, man, me like it. It a new styles this... The Air Jamaica girls wear it. Bring it fer me next time.”

“I’ll lend it to you,” I said. “I only have the one because that’s all I could afford.” Among the middle and upper classes, this polish was the latest style. The dark blood red was less popular downtown and among Dancehall followers. Lighter and brighter colors were the norm in that milieu where there was even a revival of neon shades. Vamp stood out to some extent because its popularity was spatially ordered. Indeed its value as a form of social currency was obvious in the arcade setting, where this shade reeked of a particular classed aesthetic. Vamp stood out in the downtown context not because it was Chanel or extremely expensive, but mostly because it was uptown. Indeed, recent economic shifts because of booms in all the different aspects of informal economies, together with the lucrative music industry, rendered uptown/downtown patterns of consumption and taste unevenly porous.

I went back to the arcade on numerous occasions, but did not bring the polish. Sometimes I forgot, at other times I simply did not want to. Every time I saw Miss Tiny she reminded me. I had some difficulty reconciling the fact that manicures were going to be part of my field method. I did not want to deal with yet another unexpected turn of events in my planned methodology. Several weeks later, I brought the nail polish for Miss Tiny, who asked me to do her nails for her. Then I asked her where we could get cotton and remover, thinking this would deter her. She sent me to several different parts of the arcade to buy those things. I chose to engage in this activity in part to pass the time. The dailyness, to use Bethina Aphteker’s term, of the arcade can be quite redundant. I sat down and did her nails right there. During that time she told me how bad business had been since I saw her last. “Sometime me come here and me sell one pair of Clarks (British leather shoes). Just one pair me sell.” When I finished, she said I should do her friend’s nails as well. I had met her friend Miss M. once before. In many ways she was the antithesis of Miss Tiny. She was of lighter complexion, always modestly dressed, soft spoken, loving and helpful, and ended every sentence with “sweetheart.” She was recruited by Miss Tiny and had been in the business since 1993. As Miss Tiny’s apprentice, the two traveled together on their buying trips. In the arcade, her stall was two rows left of Miss Tiny’s. I did Miss M.’s nails and went back to see Miss Tiny. “Don’t forget the polish when you come next week,” Miss Tiny said.

“Miss Tiny, I’m here to do serious research. Are you going to talk to me?” I asked her.

“Gina, you is my friend, just bring the polish,” she responded. I went to see her almost every day during the first half of fieldwork. During these times, she began to introduce me to other ICIs who stopped by on their way to their stalls. When I pressured her to introduce me to more people, she warned me: “Be careful... all kind a things go on in the arcade. People don’t know you.”
"But you do, Miss Tiny," I replied.

As I got to know Miss Tiny, it was these beauty practices and manicure sessions that made me increasingly conscious of the subtle expressions and sentiments that are rooted in the political economy of self-fashioning among females in Jamaica. From our interactions, I began to grasp the nuanced interplay of class/color, and how they in turn influence one's self-presentation as a lady or a woman and, most importantly, as a certain kind of lady or woman. From the outset, Miss Tiny had assumed a maternal position in my life. We shared some similarities. I told her years ago that one of my grandmothers was a market woman in Haiti. She was aware that I was a product of the encounter of lower- and middle-class parents. She knew I was eager to experience aspects of Jamaican daily life that she considered to be black. A fierce nationalist, she always commended me for venturing south of the uptown/downtown divide. Often, she loudly stressed that Jamaica is a black country and I have to meet the black people if I want to know Jamaica. The mere fact that I was conducting this work downtown (whereas most local scholars reside uptown) was indication to her that I was interested in the mass or majority population. Yet she urged me, sometimes indirectly, toward an uptown identity. It was one that was unequivocally classed and gendered. Although at times she pretended to ignore my propensity to "cross-dress-across-class," as I called it, from her very first comments to me when I entered her stall in 1993 to the most recent ones in 2000, she remained concerned with my failure to display my social status and express the subtleties of upward mobility.

When I returned to the field during the summer of 1997, she asked me if I was finished yet. "Why you wait? You have to get married and have children. What you waiting for, Gina?" she asked me. "You think you find a man like that doctor lady friend? You is black. You don't have her nose, her mouth."

"Miss Tiny, the only man in my life is my work," I replied. "I have to finish." She laughed at me and said, "You must finish so you can be a doctor lady." As I have discussed in greater detail elsewhere (1999), the dynamics of color, class, and gender are rather kaleidoscopic in articulation. Because of racial proximity, dark-skinned, middle-class individuals must not only overtly display their economic positions, but also strictly observe social norms. Indeed with regards to myself as a dark-skinned black female, in Miss Tiny's eyes I still needed the ultimate symbol of being a lady; that is, marriage, even after acquiring the degree. Yet she made sure to remind me that even with education, my phenotype limits the possibilities of marriage in Jamaica, especially because across-class individuals still seek to "lift up" or maintain the color of their children.

With her economic freedom, Miss Tiny bought a house in a middle-class area. Yet her neighbors rarely acknowledge her presence and in some cases never have spoken to her at all. Out of place, she lives and experiences the boundaries of class and color daily, but she is proud of her achievements. She often talks about having surpassed her mother's expectations; she has done well for herself considering her background. In conversation, she refers to herself as a woman, and her tough behavior is characteristic of "woman" while she observes a culture of femininity. Although she cannot make claims to be a lady and would not be recognized as such by the middle and upper classes, with me her gendered identity took on greater dimensions. She lives as a female member of the new dark-skinned middle class negotiating her economic agency and the limits imposed by the gatekeepers of social status. In her everyday life and interactions, she consciously aims to fulfill her mother's aspirations and her own desires to have a better life and, in her own words, not "let the system beat her down."
Embodying Tuffness and Stoosh

A great number of females like Miss Tiny, who historically have sought to keep the system from beating them down, disproportionately head their households and are of the lower classes. Due in part to the prominent role of females in the private sphere, Jamaica has been wrongly described as a matriarchal society. As a result of this emphasis, such females have been ascribed strength that actually surpasses human ability. This myth of the black superwoman, as UWI Professor Maureen Warner Lewis notes (personal communication, April 1996), denies the simple fact that no human being can be or remain so strong for so long. To survive the harsh realities of histories of gender, class, and color oppression with their spatial discrimination, individuals are creative. Part of that creativity is the embodiment of “tuffness” and is best described as follows: the face registers an imperceptible sneer or no expression at all. Chin is held up high. Shoulders are hoisted slightly and pushed back. Chest is forward. The walk is languid yet always with a sense of purpose. It is an attitude that is equivalent to a mask reinforced by a suit of steel.

I learned that this tuffness was a survival mechanism, a protective shield of sorts worn mostly in public, especially on the street, to rebuff or even discourage commentaries from men hanging out on street corners posturing or involved in vending activities. This armor, which is identifiable once you realize its existence, distinguishes the tourist from the local, the soft from the tough, the lady from the woman, the approachable from the unapproachable, and the harasable from the unharassable. This tuffness is also a class marker of sorts. It is more characteristic of females who must occupy the public sphere in their everyday lives. I became aware of it in the context of street harassment. Indeed, in Jamaica there are females who are unharassable, and these include young schoolgirls. By this I mean that even though men would leer and gaze at them, they were less likely to comment on them loudly. For if what these men said was heard, these women would respond with a cut eye, stupe (kissing their teeth with distaste), or cast their eyes directly on the man in question. They would deliver a riposte of expletives, which either would silence him or force him to recant and apologize. In the worst-case scenario, he could get angry and shower the individual with insulting remarks, and the two would fence with words.

In 1993, I began to embrace this armor when I finally admitted that surviving Kingston depended upon my adopting the attitude, or a version of it, as long as I continued to use my feet as my primary mode of transport. As it was, I was continuously harassed on the streets daily, from the moment I stepped out of my gate to the time I returned home. I became quite anxious about being on the streets. Hound this continuous commentary disturbing and emotionally exhausting. However, I knew that the mere fact that I considered the approaches as assaults reflected a particular subjectivity, with classed and even national dimensions. My North Americaness and all of its nuances were showing. For many of the females in Kingston, such comments were rebuffed with the “attitude” or disregarded with shrugs—or even welcomed.

I had countless conversations with Althea Gibson, a student-researcher at UWI, about how we felt on the streets of Kingston. We shared the belief that outside on the streets a female loses claim to her body, as it becomes the property of men who occupy this space. The female body became their text, if you will, a map onto which the boundaries of the class dimensions of the spatial order can be demarcated. This is why Althea dresses as she pleases and cuts her hair so low. Let any of them even try to say something, anything, about it, she dares.
I, on the other hand, had taken another route. I covered myself up. In the beginning, even Miss Tiny teased me about my “big clothes.” It began as a question of taste, then the clothes became a form of resistance, and later they were actually my shield. However, they could also be easily read as signs of a classed conservatism, which is more characteristic of uptown ladies and those who aspire to be uptown, or of a religious affiliation. Moreover, these coverings reconfirmed my position as outsider or foreigner, and even ascribed me stoosh status.

According to Caribbean performance artist and playwright Joan Small (personal communication, March 1996), “stoosh” is a term used to describe an individual or group who assumes the dress, verbal and nonverbal language, and general behavior of a higher or more acceptable social class in order to create distance from their humbler origins. Though this term has different meanings for various groups, Small notes that “stoosh” always has a negative connotation. There are many ways to uphold this distance. Having transportation is key. The public sphere must be avoided at all cost. Having a personal vehicle, a boyfriend with a car, or a network of friends who carpool will spare one these interactions and maintain these classed boundaries. Indeed, during fieldwork, I rarely observed middle-class individuals walking or on the bus unless they were facing hard times or perhaps sought to reconnect with Jamaica. That type of transportation distinguished the foreign student, tourist, or Peace Corps volunteer from the locals. By walking, I crossed class boundaries; hence, I had to face the consequences. The outcome of this transgression was a loss of power, which had to be openly negotiated in part through the attitude. I argue that the embodiment of the attitude in turn implies yet another class and subjective transgression: that is how a lady must become a woman in order to endure the streets of Kingston—best described by the lyrics of Des’ree, “You gotta be,” given as an epigraph at the beginning of this article.

In its many variations, this veneer of toughness is comparable to the stoosh behavior of the aspiring and traditional middle class. But unlike the dismissive stoosh behavior, this attitude is much more engaging or interactive. It is one of the key tools used to negotiate the occupation of public spaces such as the streets. It is meant to prevent or counter the threats of violation or violence, no matter how small or symbolic these may be. Hence, part of the response is almost always “in your face.” Class taboos forbid a man to physically manhandle a middle- or upper-class female, but he will grab one of the lower or working class. In that sense, the attitude, like stoosh behavior, is also meant to demarcate personal space. Indeed, nowhere else are these limits more necessary than in public spaces such as the streets, which predominantly are the domain of men.

Female higglers or street vendors who historically have shared this outside space with men have to be unharassable. They have to be tough; that is a prerequisite for working on the streets. This is one reason they are viewed by the middle and upper classes as mannish. Tuffness is a necessary strategy for survival in the market or the arcade. It became even more significant during the 1990s as the gender composition of the arcade rapidly changed, with a consistent influx of men and younger women who entered the business for multiple purposes, including drug trafficking. As the social violence increases and drug trading permeates more aspects of informal commercial importing, traders are facing newer risks and they have to be even tougher. Tuffness is one of the characteristics that Miss Tiny continually used to reveal the boundaries between herself and me. This was most apparent in my quest for Falmouth, the ultimate field experience that she refused to facilitate. In her eyes, I was a young lady. And black ladies, in particular, don’t always go to market.
Of Ladies and the Falmouth Market

The Falmouth market dates back to the 18th century. It became a wholesale market in 1986 to accommodate the extensive internal distribution of imported dry goods by ICIs. Rural wholesalers and retailers from throughout the island attend this weekly market. Many of them, wholesale ICIs like Miss Tiny, travel the 91 mountainous miles to the northeast section of the island every Tuesday afternoon, spend the night outdoors, set up their display at dawn, and wait for the arrival of customers. Most of the ICIs I interviewed described Falmouth as “rough.” The trip entails the packing, unpacking, and setup of goods, followed by more than eight hours sitting in the sun and the repacking of goods, all within 24 hours. It is a physically exhausting trip across the island that requires sleeping in the open air or in a vehicle and having no access to restrooms, among other discomforts.

I went to Falmouth on my own and with friends several times between the years of 1993 and 1997. From the outset, however, I wanted to do this trip with an ICI. Miss Tiny always was quite evasive about taking me. When I returned in 1995, I was determined to experience this trip with her. I continued to press Miss Tiny despite her negative responses. I asked two other ICIs and their response was similar. They emphasized the issue of safety: “When I go to Falmouth, I have to make sure that I keep my things safe because people will-tie you,” one said. Miss J. said, “We don’t want to take you because we can’t keep watching out for you at the same time. It’s best not to take you.” When I tried to explain that I could handle it, that I come from a family of strong Haitian women, and that I have had to negotiate raced power structures in the United States, the responses remained: “You are not tough enough.” One day, Miss Tiny surprised me and told me she would take me to Miami instead. I did not believe her. We went to Miami. I returned, still longing for Falmouth.

I persisted because I wanted to have the experience of going there with ICIs. I wanted to be on the truck or the van as a bona fide participant-observer. I wanted to sleep outside among the plastic-covered goods and get up at 3:00 a.m. to set up the display. I also wanted to go on this trip with Miss Tiny because, in traditional ethnographic fashion, this trip and all of its roughness would be another feather in my ethnographer’s cap. It would be evidence that I dominated every space like the ultimate tourist-explorer-ethnologist. I remained oblivious to Miss Tiny’s reasons for refusing me Falmouth. At a loss for answers, I went to another ICI who knew her, in search of wisdom. Her questions made me rethink my interest in this weekly market and began to reveal some of the multiple meanings I had ascribed to the trip.

She began by asking me why I really wanted to go to Falmouth. In my responses to her, I stressed that I wanted to experience the trips with ICIs so that I could truly understand their work and write from that point of view. The answer clearly didn’t suffice.

“Didn’t you go there already? Why do you want to go again?” she asked with growing suspicion, and then added, “Gina, it rough! Miss Tiny won’t take you because it’s unnecessary. She doesn’t want you to be uncomfortable. Why you want to go up there, get dirty, and sleep outside and worry? What kind of information are you really after? Didn’t you talk to Miss Tiny and Miss B. about it already? What did they tell you?” I tried to hold my own. She cut me off, clearly getting annoyed: “Look! Miss Tiny doesn’t want to have to worry about you. You’re like her daughter. If she takes you with her, she’ll have to take care of you.”
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But I have roughed it," I said, more to myself than to Miss B. I left downtown
defeated. When I got home that afternoon, I poured out my frustrations in my
journal. The following is a brief synopsis:

Miss Tiny lied to me. Thank God, I went downtown today. I got there just in time to
see her lock up her stall. She told me she wasn't going to Falmouth this week, but all
along she was planning to go. She was surprised to see me. When I asked her where
she was going, she said home. I followed her out of the arcade when she offered to give
me a ride. I saw the gray pickup all packed up and covered with that blue plastic and
held with those ropes. Her son was in the car and so was her goosekiller, a sales agent.
They were going to Falmouth. "Miss Tiny, you're going to Falmouth?" I asked her. "No
man," she said and began to smile. I became angrier as I realized I had been had, and
confronted her. She ignored me. I got in the car right next to her. "Mi don't want to take
you to Falmouth. It rough. You don't need to go there," she said. I asked her why does
she think I cannot handle this trip. I reminded her that I went to Miami with her and
weren't any trouble. I wonder why she did not trust me? "Falmouth is not Miami." She
began enunciating every syllable of every word. Over the five years since I have known
Miss Tiny, I had learned that whenever she spoke the Queen's English and enunciated
her words, it was an indication that she was getting cross [pissed]. Her final words
were, "I am not taking you to Falmouth because you a young lady and I don't want
nothing to happen to you."

Miss Tiny's Agency and Being Loved and Rescued

I did not hear Miss Tiny. I could not hear her; I was trying to reach the count
of three. Of course, my pursuit of Falmouth also bore the arrogance of the
academic, so focused on fulfilling her research agenda that she disregards
the local knowledge that she purports to be documenting while searching for
deeper meanings, where simpler meanings or perhaps even none exist (Narayan
1995). In that sense, I was denying Miss Tiny her agency. While in Jamaica, I
decided the battle for Falmouth was about trust. After all, it had taken me months
to overcome the CIA rumors and the fear that I would sell traders' secrets to
"Babylon." However, distance from Kingston shed a new perspective on this
problem. As I began to write, I recognized the extent to which Miss Tiny actually
was shaping my vision of her, thus creating her world to me in our interactions.
Clearly, she trusted me. She had opened her house to me and even took me on a
buying trip.

It was through the Miami trip that Miss Tiny exposed me to the most distinctive
and sophisticated aspect of ICI activities: international travel. Miss Tiny thought
that I would not attempt to go to Falmouth with any of the other ICIs, and she
knew that, more than likely, they would not take me along without her sanction.
Hence, she was my only access to this trip. By not taking me along, she deter­
mined my concept of ICIs as individuals who traveled internationally, not
locally, and purchased goods for import. In that sense, through me, she was
constructing a theory of herself and the trade. Having a chapter in a book written
about her already, she was only too aware that whatever information she gave
me would be used to represent her and other ICIs. Hence, her manipulation of
my access to Falmouth served to reinforce her self-concept as an ICI as being
distinct from that of the higgler, or produce market trader. The long uncom­
fortable ride is typical of a rural higgler's experience. Miss Tiny was quick to remind
me that on our buying trip we flew on Air Jamaica to Miami, we stayed in a hotel,
we slept in beds, and we ate in restaurants, whereas in Falmouth she sleeps in
the van or outside with the goods, doesn't sit down to eat, and there are no
restroom facilities. The ICI business is undeniably hard work. But in Falmouth,
this hard work occurs in a rough "local" environment. If I had been paying
attention to what I was being taught by Miss Tiny, I would have realized that black ladies, of course, do not rough it.

Over time, it became clearer to me that issues of gendered identities informed this discourse of roughness within which Falmouth was framed. Though I was conscious of my class position in Jamaica, to begin with I was less cognizant of its gendered dimensions. As a result, during those earlier stages, I rarely acted from that position. Nowhere was this more evident than in my appearance. Although my self-presentation was clearly pricey, my preferred style bordered on and conflated two different classed aesthetics. I rejected certain gendered aspects of the middle-class aesthetic to maintain a sense of awareness or consciousness, especially as I felt that the comfort available to the class to which I was ascribed at times threatened to desensitize me to my environment. Because of the resulting inconsistencies in my presentation and behavior (such as walking on the street or taking the bus), my class position was questionable until the North American accent spilled out. Indeed, I had privileges that I could claim or renounce at will. I was only too aware that the majority of Jamaicans did not have this luxury. As a result, they were usually treated badly and unfairly. When I stripped myself of the class privilege, I became local and experienced the injustice and discrimination reserved for the masses. Nonetheless, I had privileges that I could claim or renounce at will. I was only too aware that the majority of Jamaicans did not have this luxury. As a result, they were usually treated badly and unfairly. When I stripped myself of the class privilege, I became local and experienced the injustice and discrimination reserved for the masses. Nonetheless, I had privileges that I could claim or renounce at will.

Despite my unruliness, Miss Tiny without a doubt placed me in a specific classed and gendered category that differed from her own. Conflict and tensions arose between us in part because, ironically, it was an identity that I consciously rejected. Single and without children (so that I lacked the rites of passage to adulthood), in many ways I remained a youth to her, one who had been entrusted to her care by Dr. Haniff. Because I was in her charge, she believed I should concede to her; that is, allow her to make certain decisions for me. My insistence that she take me to Falmouth was a direct challenge to her assumed position in my life. In my perpetual state of researcher, I was unaware that I also was a surrogate daughter, and as daughter, she wanted to transform me. Hence, her encouragement to adopt the culture of femininity; her continuous advice about finding the right kind of boyfriend with the right kind of car; and her comments about body image and personal style. These all point to how she was bent on remaking me as a particular classed and gendered subject—someone who, within a Jamaican context, could achieve the social mobility that she herself was denied. She was committed to guiding me and ensuring that I observe the local rules of my class and color position in the field. Indeed, given my skin color, by rejecting the nuances of my gendered position, I was committing class suicide. The truth was, without class privilege, the access necessary to circumnavigate the multiple sites of this dissertation project (from the government offices to the university setting to uptown houses of ladies who also are ICIs) would have been severely restricted. From that perspective, I was wandering aimlessly in search of that third matchstick.

In a recent article, Virginia Dominguez (2000) has asked anthropologists to consider another criterion of value as motive for our work. She asks that we reexamine the basis of the relationships we form in the field and allow them to influence our scholarly productions. My interactions with Miss Tiny beg for another perspective on Dominguez’s challenge. Miss Tiny’s own investment in
Tiny, I would have realized that

...
possible. In my longing for Falmouth, though, I lingered on air. Like the duppy, my feet never quite touched the ground. I remained unaware of the impact of my ascribed class and gendered position on my prescribed methodology. Miss Tiny's obstacles successfully dissuaded me. Of course I went to Falmouth on my own, but it was not the same. To date, I have a situated sense of that trip. So, where Falmouth was concerned, Miss Tiny conquered me and I mindfully concede to her. Indeed, she wanted to define herself to me.

Without a doubt in Kingston, time and time again, I was the duppy and Miss Tiny the conqueror. Yet I began the writing process knowing that she and the other ICIs empowered me with knowledge that turns them into duppies and made me their potential conqueror. Seeing that they played pivotal roles in my becoming a scientist who could now see both visible and invisible worlds, would I use the strength and insight they gave me to manage these worlds? Would I remain obsessed with counting in order to write an ordered and coherent ethnography? It could be anthropology from the top down, informed mostly by my analytical tools as opposed to one from below that allowed these tools to be shaped by these textured interactions in the field. Indeed, I could conquer Miss Tiny. I could conquer her if I erased just how I got the four eyes of the obeah scientist; that is, by strategically silencing the extensive role she played in conquering me. Instead, while staring at the screen in the computer center, I tried to be mindful of my feet's relationship to the ground: in order to conquer myself. I used a black feminist approach that prioritized multiple consciousness, to heighten both the scope of vision and analysis, as well as other sensibilities that impact on everyday experience.

When at last I presented this article at an Annual Meeting of the American Anthropological Association, the discussant asked all of us on the panel why we used humor to discuss these moments in the field. I was quick to respond to her. The humor in my piece was far from being intentional. It had simply become a method of distancing to make the processing and writing of the materials possible. I certainly did not set out to write an anthropology that makes one laugh, and found that an anthropology that makes you laugh is a lot more palatable than the one that makes you cry. Indeed the work has brought me to tears. Fieldwork was rather painful. The extreme colorism and classism that pervades this "one love" nation was a persistent reminder that "all of us" are not one and never will be. I was in constant conflict, and often was harshly treated by Miss Tiny, who sought to toughen me up to better prepare me to deal with the realities of being an upwardly mobile female who chose not to pass, by refusing to silence her past. I could have been silent. With her background, Miss Tiny never had the choices I did. She could not choose silence. Strategic silencing is in fact one of the unspoken conditions of mobility to a higher class. The punishment for ignoring this rule is banishment from that class or being shunned, the continuous reminder that you are not one of us. You do not belong. Can I write an anthropology that makes me belong and won't be erased? Can this anthropology serve both Miss Tiny and myself? Can they be one and the same? Most importantly, on which are we more likely to reflect? The anthropology that implicates one or the one that absolves?

Notes

Acknowledgments. I dedicate this article to Miss Tiny. I remain indebted to her for many things, especially her guidance and inspiration. I am grateful to Nesha Haniff for the lead to Miss Tiny and her special feminist guide on how to survive Kingston. I give respect to Althea Gibson and Kirk Meighoo for those long conversations in 1993. I especially thank Ruth Behar, Gracia Clark, Faye Harrison, and Evans Young, who also gave much support.
Antithesis


Chevannes, Barry

Des'ree

Dominguez, Virginia

Douglas, Lisa

Haniff, Nesha Z.

Harrison, Faye V.

Harrison, Faye V., ed.

I'm indebted to Nesha Haniff for the lead itive Kingston. I give respect to itions in 1993. I especially thank her, who also gave much support that helped tremendously in the pursuit of the issues in the dissertation itself. Without Ellinda Stright's dedication, this article would not be. I appreciate her relentless encouragement. Thanks also to Edie Turner and her assistant editors, and to Dr. Ida Tafari, Nadine Pierre, Jennifer Ann Scott, and Mari Jose Niézou Tayo. The various stages of my fieldwork in Jamaica were financed by the Social Science Research Council, the American Council of Learned Societies' International Dissertation Fellowship Program (1983), and the Inter-American Foundation Doctoral Research Fellowship (1995). Subsequent trips were partially funded by the University of Michigan Rackham Graduate School.

1. Indeed, as a number of feminist anthropologists have argued, the historical practice of this discipline is not only to marginalize black women's presence in anthropology, but also to strategically erase them and in the process stifle their creativity (Bolles 1995, Harrison 1991, Harrison and Harrison 1999, Lutz 1990).

2. Many of these arguments have been well developed in essays by other scholars concerned with the same issues (see, e.g., Decolonizing Anthropology, Harrison 1991; Decolonizing Anthropology, Hymes 1977; Page 1987). The use of the preposition and would simply render that relationship additive. Uptown/downtown is a sociographic divide of central Kingston that has definite class and color connotations. The link to color is increasingly fluid, given refractons in the class structure as a result of the recent social mobility of blacks. This spatial divide also demarcates the boundaries of social organization and has its correlations in the concepts of lady and woman respectively. For a more developed explanation, see Ulysse (1999).

3. This issue is explored further in Ulysse (2002).

4. During the first two trips, I encountered difficulties in everyday interactions that I eventually recognized as challenges to my identity based upon contradictions that emerged out my self-presentation. A dark-skinned, middle-class female dresses in accordance with her social position. She does not deviate from the middle-class aesthetic of simplicity and neatness.

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Harrison, Faye V., and Ira E. Harrison

Hymes, Dell, ed.

Lutz, Catherine

Marley, Robert Nasta

Murphy, Joseph

Narayan, Kirin

Page, Helen

Trouillot, Michel-Rolph

Ulysse, Gina