The phenomenon of globalization and its impact on women has focused on the feminization of the assembly line in outsourced and offshore manufacturing sites (Ong 1987; Afshar & Barrientos 1999; Moghadam 1999; Pearson 2000; Beneria 2003; Salzinger 2003; Kabeer 2004). Studies of professional women in global high tech industries or in pink-collar work (Freeman 2000; Mirchandani 2004; Poster 2005,2007; Basi 2009; Patel 2010) are fewer. Globalization offers opportunities to women—especially in U.S and European offshore enterprises based in low-income countries—to improve their economic status, but the global workplace is also the terrain where identities, meanings and experiences are contested and reshaped. Understanding that globalization is a contested term, viewed as a fragmented “contradictory and puzzling process” (Guillen 2001), this study examines how young women in Pakistan, employed in a global workplace i.e. international call centers, manage the dialectical relationship between the reproduction and reshaping of identities and culture that takes place in conjunction with their local cultural imperatives. This question is of special significance in deeply patriarchal Pakistan, where urban, educated young women working alongside male colleagues, frequently at night, signals a significant shift in terms of gender relations, as women are subject to strict social control with work outside the home stigmatized.

The study situates the research participants at three levels of interaction: intra-organizational, intra-familial, and the interface between family and community. The key questions examined are: 1. How does the interface between the global workplaces' internal culture and the local sociocultural context shape workers’ identities? 2. How are social and familial expectations of women reconciled with their emergence as primary earners? 3. How do women navigate the work-family nexus and negotiate the patriarchal bargain? 4. How do the processes of empowerment and agency take shape for agents embedded in complex familial and community networks of cooperative conflict and possible implications for understanding measures of empowerment?

To address these questions this study draws on review of relevant policy documents, participant observation, and in-depth interviews with a purposive sample of women and men, working in two international call centers in Pakistan (n=64) and members of their families. Guided by principles of grounded theory the analysis draws on an overarching framework of gender theories, sociology of work, and social policy. Using the concepts of "doing gender", gender performances, empowerment and role identity theory, this research finds that women and their families are able to reconfigure notions of respectability and images of a "good Pakistani Muslim woman" to include daughters and wives working outside the home. Women adopt identities and strategies that mark them as virtuous, wannabes, bad or independent. Women's transgression of gender norms is managed by what I call a symbolic purchase of the visible markers of Pakistani-Muslim woman, earning trust and goodwill credits by doing gender in mostly traditional ways. Women's strategies and practices of negotiating a patriarchal bargain indicate a path of empowerment, even if they relinquish, contrary to the literature on the subject, their control of resources.

While declining family income might underlie women's entry into the global labor force, the effects of such employment go beyond the obvious material gains and upward social mobility
of their families. Pink-collar work has the potential to expand the middle class and erode entrenched discriminatory gender attitudes and practices, as even nominal support organizational and policy support can accelerate and facilitate social and economic mobility of women. More in-depth research, that follows women in and out of the workplace, is required to understand the multidimensional, complex dynamics of change at individual, family and organizational level. Finally revisiting measures of women's empowerment as a complex indicator of change for improved development policy is suggested.

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