

Antipode

A Radical Journal of Geography

Faranak Miraftab, *Global Heartland: Displaced Labor, Transnational Lives, and Local Placemaking*, Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2016. ISBN: 978-0-253-01927-1 (cloth); ISBN: 978-0-253-01934-9 (paper); ISBN: 978-0-253-01942-4 (ebook)

110 years ago, Upton Sinclair's *The Jungle* shocked the US public by exposing the horrors of the meatpacking industry. While Sinclair's book contributed to the passage of food preparation legislation, it did little to change the exploitative working conditions of meatpacking laborers at that time. Starting in the mid-1900s, the wages and conditions of meatpackers improved due to strong union organizing; however, by the 1980s, profit-maximizing policies were reorganizing the meat industry, once again creating oppressive conditions largely ignored by the general public. In Faranak Miraftab's book, *Global Heartland*, the life of the meatpacker is vividly brought to life. Miraftab studies the lived-realities of meatpacking laborers to understand how the industry has influenced the economic revitalization and social transformation of the small, rural community of Beardstown, Illinois, while arguing that the thriving economy and cultural diversity successes of the area obscure larger narratives about the unequal global ties that enabled these changes.

To explain how migrant workers arrived in a historically racist town, Miraftab explores the transnational relationships that shape and are shaped by a place in the rural heartland—a locality often forgotten in the globalization literature. Drawing on the global and relational ethnography of Burawoy (2001), Hart (2006) and Marcus (1995), Miraftab seeks to deepen the “theorization of local-global entanglements” (p.13) by conducting fieldwork in both the “local” place of Beardstown and the “global” sites of the immigrants' communities of origin. By exploring both the materiality of a local space and the permeability of a rural place, she demonstrates how labor migration is critically influenced by global processes. Examining the

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immigrant groups that have migrated to Beardstown, Miraftab focuses on the interracial relations across immigrant groups and their interactions in their new destination. Instead of delving into the role that migrants play in social reproduction in their communities of origin, as most literature on the subject does, *Global Heartland* studies the “invisible resources that communities of origin provide immigrant workers within their places of destination” (p.19).

In 1987, Cargill Inc. bought the meatpacking plant in Beardstown from the Oscar Mayer Company. To maximize its profits, Cargill crushed the union and decreased wages and healthcare benefits, and to fill the low-wage, de-skilled jobs, they recruited both legal and illegal Mexican immigrants. After a raid by Immigration and Customs Enforcement, Cargill instead sought out legal, but disenfranchised populations—West Africans, Cubans, Puerto Ricans and African American’s from Detroit. Miraftab looks beyond the typical justifications centered on remittances or prospects for a better life by exploring systematic processes creating migrant labor to explain why these groups would be willing to accept such low-paying jobs. Her research in Mexico illuminated how the passage of NAFTA and the privatization of social welfare systems decimated small, local farmers and as a result created a larger migrant pool. Similarly, her study in Togo, West Africa, shows how structural adjustment policies along with shifting geopolitical positioning decreased Togo’s GDP and increased unemployment and violence, causing many Togolese to emigrate through the State Department’s lottery visa system. In the case of Detroit, she explains how globalization accelerated deindustrialization through the closing of factories, creating high unemployment amongst African Americans in the urban center. Miraftab highlights how each one of these sites experienced dispossession and displacement with the restructuring of capitalism, arguing that capitalism “produces and relies on uneven developments at multiple scales ... Uneven capitalist developments that produce local, urban, regional and global inequalities also produce conditions for labor migration and displacement” (p.125).

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Drawing on feminist scholarship, Miraftab argues that economic restructuring is also linked to the transfer of social reproduction costs. The performance of care work by family and friends in both the local community and countries of origin makes it possible for immigrant workers to survive on Cargill's low wages. Togolese workers often left children back in Togo to be raised by family members, and Mexican workers often relied on family or friends in Beardstown to care for their children. Just as families subsidized Cargill wages, the health care and social security systems of countries of origin also bear the burden of care when workers become sick and/or elderly. The care work provided by worker's families and institutions in immigrants' home countries during different life stages allows Cargill to cut costs. The company also offshores social reproduction costs to local non-profit groups; when Cargill brought in immigrant populations, it was church and NGO groups that provided support locally and in countries of origin. Miraftab argues that the global restructuring of social reproduction allows corporations to shift their costs and the risks of migrant labor to other locations.

Another central argument of the book concerns the everyday politics of racial segregation in the rural US. While Cargill's public relations campaigns promote a culture of diversity that brings together global citizens, the reality in the plant is anything but unifying. Miraftab illustrates that immigration status, race, and language play roles in controlling the labor force. Cargill is able to abuse the rights of their workers because many migrants at the company either do not know their rights or do not want to speak up against the company for fear of losing their jobs. However, outside of the company, the multicultural experience in public institutions and spaces is far more inclusionary. The interethnic dynamics occurring in the town over the last 20 years illustrate that place matters in the kinds of transnational and social relations taking shape in migrant destination communities. Once considered a "sundown" town, an all-white town that did not allow people of color, increasing numbers of migrants from around the world have brought

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about significant change. While acknowledging that racist attitudes still persist, Miraftab shows how historical racism and the rural environment have contributed to new avenues of social interaction. In Beardstown, different racial groups all live together, in part because there never was a part of town where people of color resided. Racial integration in schools, child care and sporting leagues shows how the small interactions in Beardstown bring about understanding and solidarity, and the reader is able to see how a local context can create constraints but also open up opportunities for building solidarity amongst diverse groups. The author's focus on interethnic connections demonstrates the multiple ways migrant workers invest in the destination community which contribute to the revitalization of a place.

Miraftab's sprawling multi-sited study covers a lot of intellectual and geographical territory. Like many multi-sited ethnographies, the depth of research can be over-shadowed by the breadth, and this is something Miraftab struggles to deal with. Though she is quick to point out that time and resources did not allow her to achieve the depth she wished to reach, her multi-sited ethnography is still able to capture the hidden costs of social reproduction that families and their countries pay. Uncovering the care work that is taken up in immigrant places of destination and origin is an important contribution in understanding the economies of social reproduction. *Global Heartland* contributes to conversations on place-making, reminding audiences that the local and global cannot remain two separate categories.

By looking at globalization in a rural, Midwestern town steeped in a history of racism and the lingering effects of those relations, Miraftab is able to show how a small community is forced to adjust to changes caused by globalizing forces beyond its control. Her explanations for the socio-economic transformations in a rural community stem from the local-global relationships that create the displacement of migrant labor and reorganization of social reproduction costs. It is these insightful examples of the interconnectedness of globalizing labor forces that make the

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book especially appealing to those in migration studies, economic geography, and international studies. The relational analysis of globalizing processes that often go unnoticed would be beneficial to both undergraduate and graduate students studying globalization and urbanization, allowing for a deeper understanding of the process and possibly paving the way for social commentary, allowing the issue to be brought to the public. Miraftab's work shows that globalizing processes appear to prosper and grow outside of urban environments, and while these processes appear different today than in Upton Sinclair's time, sadly globalization creates similar conditions as it did over a century ago; meatpacking is precarious, dangerous and under-paid work that remains invisible to the general public.

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