Marion Werner

Global Displacements: The Making of Uneven Development in the Caribbean.

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Hispaniola, divided into two countries by competing European colonial powers during the “age of enlightenment,” is characterized as a contentious, shifting site of labor migration and capitalist exploitation in Marion Werner’s rigorous study of contemporary fissures within a growing global apparel industry. Her Marxist-feminist examination of production restructuring in Caribbean industrial trade zones contributes not only to contemporary studies of global supply chains but also, and more importantly, to a rich understanding of the debilitating effects of adapting hegemonic neoliberal economic export policies in “developing nations.” Werner, a geographer, goes so far as to criticize those who view development as a progression of stages of global capitalist industrialization as misguided emissaries of Eurocentricity. Through meticulous research including ethnographic fieldwork in trade zones, *el campo*, and urban communities in Haiti and the Dominican Republic, she shows that “places do not ‘enter into’ global supply chains; rather, places and global arrangements of production dynamically reproduce one another” (p. 185). Forged by an endemic alignment of race, class, and gender hierarchies, the global factory perpetuates uneven development on which transnational production restructuring depends.

Three chapters focus on workers in the Dominican Republic where thousands toil in places far removed from the swank beach hotels and tobacco boutiques that tempt Northern tourists. Fieldworkers, mostly of Haitian descent, labor from sunup to sundown on sugar plantations. Dominicans leave rural life for urban factories offering entry into modernity on the sewing and cutting floors of industrial parks. All strategize to gain social merit in complex trajectories that involve informal networks and an unregulated informal economy, migration, unionization, and the development of technical skills.

Two chapters take us from idling factories in Santiago—the Dominican Republic’s second largest city—to Haiti’s northwestern border trade zone. Werner explains how natural disasters, international relief efforts, political upheaval, elite economic rivalries, the U.S. government, and international banking institutions helped to stifle wages, progressive land reform, and a viable infrastructure that could have strengthened local economies. Vividly, she describes how women face greater obstacles to advancement than men as the gendered division of labor is ingrained in patriarchal social mores pervading the factory floor. Data analysis on gender ratios shows how men’s participation and wage earnings in the garment sector have increased while women’s

wages have remained largely stagnant. Most low-paid Haitian t-shirt operators are women, for example, while men work with higher quality material and are paid more. This is but one glaring example of how gendered conceptions of work affect workplace mobility and status.

Werner takes readers into areas ignored by most researchers such as the way dependence on severance pay fosters corporate loyalty and wage suppression. Once a laborer is dismissed, severance pay is often withheld, fostering new creative strategies for daily subsistence. To explain the lack of contemporary research incorporating factory closures on workers' lives, Werner points out that factories are often shut down by the time research is published, ending attempts to revisit ethnographies. Changes to government policies and trade agreements affect the landscape of international capital investment, accessibility to land, equipment, fabrics, and labor contracting. Pernicious racial animosity perpetuates exploitation while obscuring solutions. It is still to be seen how two Caribbean nations sharing a permeable border fare as the Dominican Republic expels thousands of undocumented Haitians. Agricultural export production in the Dominican Republic, controlled by multinational corporations, depends on Haitian plantation labor. Conversely, Haiti relies on food imports and goods from the Dominican Republic, its main trading partner. Redressing the injustices of uneven development is both an ethical and economic imperative. A fundamentally different notion of development drawn from postcolonial and feminist politics might help stave off future crises.

In the penultimate chapter Werner posits the creation of competing narratives to the dominant ideological discourse that denies the limitations of capitalist production, and she demands that they be rooted in social relations, national and regional histories, and racial and gender differences. Like Puerto Rican literary scholar Lisa Paravisini-Gebert, who called for "scholarship ... rooted in true knowledge of the historical and material conditions responsible for women's choices and strategies in the region" (see her essay in *Daughters of Caliban*, a book I edited in 1997), Werner eschews essentialist theorizing. Regretfully, while demonstrating the power of foreign capitalist investment to reproduce geographies of unequal development, she overlooks the intricate role of women labor activists as agents of social change within Caribbean transnational garment zones. The creation and dissolution of factories affords a rich landscape for radical critiques of neoliberal economics. *Global Displacements* offers vital insight into the importance of the particularities of place in a rapidly changing global economy. Caribbean scholars can learn much from its comprehensive historical, social, and economic analysis.

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