



Book Review

Global Displacements: The Making of Uneven Development in the Caribbean.
Marion Werner. 2015. Malden, MA: Wiley-Blackwell. 232 pages, ISBN 978-1-1189-4199-7 Paper (\$34.95)

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How does global capitalism play out in particular and uneven ways? Rather than a faceless stable order, it is one fraught with contention. Marion Werner's book *Global Displacements* is vital in its granular observations, examining the complex understandings and lived experiences of the marginalized and exploited, and providing a critical analysis of dominant narratives of 'development.'

Through the contemporary context of Hispaniola in the Caribbean, she examines "stories of worker livelihood strategies, union struggles, labor process restructuring, and development planning" (185), elaborated upon through secondary sources and extensive fieldwork, including interviews with workers, managers, and businesspeople. She casts a wide net, considering themes of worker disposability; the experiences of women and racialized communities; productive networks and uneven rents; the policies of government and international financial institutions; complex social struggles as they relate to export processing; and the role of entrepreneurialism and how it connects with global supply chains. Readers interested in the Caribbean, and particularly Haiti and the Dominican Republic, will gain greatly from reading over the detailed historical chronology, the author's observations, and the firsthand accounts that help humanize what are often presented as faceless political and economic processes.



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In chapter two, the author attacks the “sequentialist narrative on development,” in which countries are said to move from one level of development to the next, from, for example, an industrial start-up stage (in which Export Processing Zones are seen as a necessity) to a more advanced industrialized stage, and so on. She argues that this approach is essentially a continuation of the colonial project, in which the developed countries of Europe and the U.S serve as the “self-actualizing center” while “the other” (the Third World) is defined in relation to this “self” (5). This very narrative then becomes inseparable, the author argues, from the production of uneven racialized and gendered geographies.

In chapter three, the author examines how local gendered “structures of meaning” have evolved through planning carried out by export-oriented capitalists and government policymakers, helping to reproduce the conditions that benefit accumulation (55). The author makes a very important argument, from a feminist perspective, that we need to understand “whose labor is constructed as valuable and how this construction” is achieved, underscoring the process through which gendered class exploitation occurs. She goes on to consider the spatial reorganization of garment manufacturing, the increasing role of men in “value-added” processes, and the “feminization” and recent “defeminization” of maquiladora production marked by a growing “exclusion of female sewers from the upper rungs of a new sewing skill hierarchy” (57).

The author’s approach is widened in chapter four, where she looks at how waged and unwaged exploitation plays out in different parts of the Dominican Republic and intersects with the global division of labor, as differing forms of entrepreneurialism have a significant role in impacting labor and local communities. Cognizant of how patriarchy is at the core of this process, she writes that this occurs through “gender categories ... that construct certain kinds of work as valuable or valueless, on the one hand, and associate certain jobs with certain kinds of bodies, on the other hand” (56).

Next, the author turns to Haiti. The fifth chapter offers a detailed look at the contemporary history of the country’s northern border region, focusing on the dusty trading towns of Ouanaminthe, on the Haitian side, and Dajabón, on the Dominican side. Werner elaborates on the tumultuous events that played out in the north alongside the emergence of the country’s first export processing zone—a process that she describes as “inseparable from the *longue durée* of colonialism” (134). Recognizing the different actors, contradictory alliances, and labor struggles that evolved, she also examines how transnational corporations have played an active role in facilitating the sub-region’s interconnection with global supply chains. She describes how supranational institutions fostered new formative processes, such as World Bank financing packages that facilitated the CODEVI export-processing zone, including a \$20 million low-interest loan that projected the creation of 1,500 jobs in the initial phase of the trade zone (127).

Chapter six looks at the years of United Nations occupation following the 2004 coup in Haiti. This chapter considers a variety of policies, such as the HOPE II Act, to further facilitate Haiti’s incorporation into the ‘global factory.’ Here Werner considers the different sectors backing or opposing these policy initiatives under the second administration of Haitian President René Préval. She makes some prescient observations as to how the discourse on development was ‘reset’ after

a number of crises affected the country, permitting development priorities to be brought better “in line with those of transnational capital and the U.S. government” (153). Earlier modest proposals of poverty-reduction frameworks and social investment projects were sidelined for the sake of new emergency priorities, which focused on deepening the country’s integration with global capital.

While I do not have the space here to go into detail, I do take issue with aspects of Werner’s account of developments on the ground in Haiti with regard to the political and labor struggle leading up to the 2004 coup (Sprague 2008). It is important to point out that Werner never discusses how mass layoffs and violence against grassroots activists, Lavalas communities, and organized labor in the country was a central feature of the political economic restructuring from above that took place in the wake of the 2004 coup d’état (Chery 2006; Griffin 2005; Hallward 2008; Kolbe and Hutson 2006; Podur 2012; Schuller 2007; Sprague 2012, 2018). This is surprising, as the book looks at Haiti in such detail.

Werner does usefully survey the different action plans that international financial institutions and the government of Haiti used to ramp up decentralization in order to spread economic activities to a larger geographic area and variety of sectors. A spatially decentralized form of the prevailing model of low-wage labor exploitation makes supply chains less susceptible to crises and protests in the country’s capital city, she argues.

In thinking about the problems of developing agriculture through such initiatives, the author points out that much of the financing provided by the Inter-American Development Bank (IDB) has been “dedicated toward so-called private sector development projects aimed at integrating Haitian farmers into global export markets – in mango and coffee, for example – and into input markets controlled by large multinationals like Monsanto” (162). Here we see the shifting orientation, eased along by supranational organizations, toward global competitiveness and transnational capitalism. In chapter seven on “crisis claims,” the author (citing Roitman 2014) explains how dominant narratives “render impossible a range of questions – and thus, answers and actions – that defy the structure of thought instantiated by this dominant framing” (164).

Werner’s approach, at times, does follow a more general turn among many critical scholars of development towards a post-structuralist perspective, which seeks to deconstruct assumptions and knowledge systems, and rejects notions of precise interpretation and singular meanings. Her approach centers on the “assumptions, discourses, and spatial imaginaries” of narratives on development in the region (5), while looking at “embodied negotiations” in thinking about “where places and global arrangements of production dynamically reproduce one another” (185) leading to geographies that become racialized and gendered (18) (rather than racialized and gendered social and class relations).

An initial problem, in my view, with the post-structuralist approach is a lack of sufficient clarity on matters of substance; important issues are raised but then become confused through rhetoric. Bits and pieces take precedence over social reality, and the focus becomes centered on questions such as how discourse constructs reality. This can detract from the reader’s understanding of the overall picture. Development is feudal, or capitalist, or socialist, i.e., for some purpose or end, but this end is never as clearly articulated as it might be here. An idealist

understanding of development is just short of saying in traditional Cartesian terms that thinking it makes it so. Where are the social relations of production? Where are the factors and forces that propel the postwar deepening of the internationalization of capital that shape the dialectic of globalization?

Werner describes “value hierarchies of labor” articulating with “coloniality” and combining “into concrete determinations of place production” (40). However, value is determined by production for the ends of private accumulation via concrete social relations mediated by power interactions between unequal class forces at the point of production. By looking at concrete conditions in the Caribbean, we can identify how state and transnational capitalist forces are recalibrating and facilitating new accumulation networks. New subcontractor networks are drawing in local contingents in diverse ways, and as many lower income people are compelled to participate in new transnational value chains, with others marginalized, or seeking to export their labor abroad. Different forms of coercion and hegemonic construction are bound up with this process.

Uneven and combined development has been inherent in the fundamental capitalist process, stemming from the law of value/production for private capitalist accumulation. Yet, combined and uneven development does not mean that capitalism is inherently organized to produce *national* economic development. Rather, capitalism is organized to produce private capital accumulation as an end in itself, a fact made all the more clear through the rise of transnational forms of accumulation.

We can see local, national, and regional particularities, I argue, in the context of the moment, a moment marked by the profound rise of transnational/global capitalism. When engaging with theory, however, Werner, in my view, often remains trapped in the development (West) versus underdevelopment (Third World) discourse that can (in her analysis) be discerned in place-bound terms and place-bound notions of geography. I contend that we need to avoid the false inside-outside dichotomies, such as a state-centric logic that takes as a priority a dichotomy of place (each country) versus spatial analysis (the dialectic of an interconnected world). For transnational capitalists, the real economy is not a mass of independent national economies but an interconnected (global) space in which place and space form a heterogeneous unity that never reaches a simple whole: an open-ended, heterogeneous, ‘nontotalizable’ totality. Put in more simple terms, capital accumulation is a worldwide process.

I would suggest we start with the role of social formation, production, and reproduction, and consider the manner in which these are being reworked and struggled over under a heterogeneous system of global/transnational capitalism (Sprague 2019; Watson 2015). Forming through this process, different narratives come about, seeking to legitimize, plan, alter, and/or challenge capitalist development.

Ultimately, capitalist development is geared to capital accumulation as an end in itself rather than toward social transformation according to socially determined goals. While many factors exist, the main variable determining developmental options is the organization of production towards private capital accumulation. It is class power (with its racialized, gendered, and other

dynamics) that masks what transpires in the global division of labor, around which the right to exploit and accumulate capital are organized. We need then to understand the many particularities through which political economic restructuring is occurring in the globalization era, and it is here where the author's detailed ethnographic research and historical overview is immensely helpful.

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