

Global Heartland: Displaced Labor Transnational Lives and Local Placemaking

David Wilson, Anne Bonds, Andrew E. G. Jonas, Audrey Kobayashi, Richard Walker & Faranak Miraftab

To cite this article: David Wilson, Anne Bonds, Andrew E. G. Jonas, Audrey Kobayashi, Richard Walker & Faranak Miraftab (2016) Global Heartland: Displaced Labor Transnational Lives and Local Placemaking, *The AAG Review of Books*, 4:4, 244-254, DOI: [10.1080/2325548X.2016.1222844](https://doi.org/10.1080/2325548X.2016.1222844)

To link to this article: <http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/2325548X.2016.1222844>



Published online: 08 Oct 2016.



Submit your article to this journal [↗](#)



Article views: 30



View related articles [↗](#)



View Crossmark data [↗](#)

BOOK REVIEW FORUM

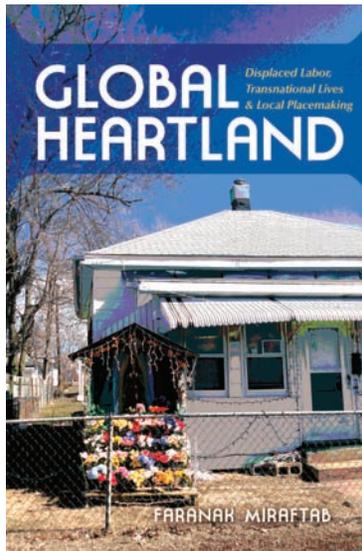
Global Heartland: Displaced Labor Transnational Lives and Local Placemaking

Faranak Miraftab. Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2016. xvi and 310 pp., illustrations, tables. \$30.00 paper (ISBN 978-0-253-01934-9); \$80.00 cloth (ISBN 978-0-253-01927-1).

Introduction by David Wilson, Department of Geography and GIS, University of Illinois at Urbana–Champaign, Champaign, IL.

Faranak Miraftab's *Global Heartland* is an important intervention into our current understanding of a complex world and rural America. A focus on rural Beardstown, Illinois, a small meat-packing town, reveals a town caught in the vice of daunting processes cutting through it: global transnationalism, U.S. neoliberalism, globalization, and uneven development. A recent population decline and economic stagnation are now being tackled by its main employer, a meat processing plant, which struggles to survive. Now it recruits laborers from Mexico, West Africa, and Detroit, who are changing this former "sundown town" into a diverse, global place. Examining the multiscale processes that produce displaced workers and the social forces that lead them to Beardstown, Miraftab offers an eclectic vision on place and place making.

I take from Miraftab's book two core insights that this panel begins to (and others need to) interrogate. First, she uncovers a new, innovative strategy that capital now appears to be using in the most seemingly forgotten and left behind of places to revitalize long stagnant economic



bases. Local-based capital seizes on a new opportunity structure, global instabilities and disruptions from uneven development and neoliberal accumulation by dispossession, to attract new workers from far-flung global locations. The tentacles of labor market replenishment, it follows, reach across the entirety of the globe to pluck, coerce, and remobilize masses of displaced and afflicted people. Ironically, the very forces that have eviscerated Beardstown's economy become openings through which an economic revitalization is pursued. Globalization, transnationalism, and the like, it seems, can be seized and used in a multiplicity of ways.

Second, a new place making follows from this economic project that implants diverse racializations and ethno-making in places to complicate on-the-ground social relations. Places suddenly see new kinds of neighborhoods and social relations, but equally important, the need to practice multicultural-speak and inclusive-speak as an unprecedented demographic diversity ripples through communities as new material and discursive realities. The Beardstown of the old—a flagrantly racist and class hierarchicalized place—assumes a new open and tolerant form. What remains unchanged, though, is the power of economic expediency and capitalist economic imperatives. Such places might now be more porous and open, but a new violence is involved in processes that produce new labor forces.

The essays that follow make it clear that Miraftab's book is a force to be reckoned with. All agree that Miraftab has identified the correct combination of forces—

transnationalism, globalization neoliberalism, uneven development—that now constitute the bedrock for understanding the current place predicament in rural America. Why communities here large and small experience economic paralysis, how they seek to reverse this, and the kinds of places they are becoming are all seemingly tied to this complex convergence of forces. Many questions remain unanswered, though: What is the extent of this new place remaking? How are local and regional institutions being affected? What new social alliances and resistance are emerging in these places to better work realities for the new immigrants? It is the task of us as critical geographers to take Miraftab's lead to push this agenda along. This forum begins to confront these questions, and the search for answers will undoubtedly persist. The discussion on this panel that engaged this text proved provocative and stimulating, and I was glad to be part of it.

Commentary by Anne Bonds, Department of Geography, University of Wisconsin–Milwaukee, Milwaukee, WI.

In early January of this year, a family road trip from Milwaukee to St. Louis brought me through some of the small towns of southern Illinois. We drove through many places that seemed to confirm typical spatial and racial imaginaries of the rural Midwest: as overwhelmingly white and agricultural, as politically and socially conservative (if the roadside billboards and campaign advertisements are any indication), and as apparently abandoned and disconnected from circuits of capital. We stopped for lunch in a town just off of Interstate 55 called Litchfield, selecting our lunch fare based on the limited options offered at the gas stations and trucks stops situated at the intersection of Interstate 55 and the east–west thoroughfare of Highway 16.

One might anticipate finding similarities between Litchfield and Beardstown, the town that Faranak Miraftab brings us to in her book, *Global Heartland*. After all, the towns are about an hour from one another with settlement histories tied to transportation networks that linked their local agricultural economies to larger markets—Beardstown because of the Illinois River and Litchfield because of the Burlington railroad. Moreover, both communities are similar in size, with populations hovering around the 6,000 mark. In fact, though, the towns are strikingly different, spatially and socially. Where Litchfield is 98 percent white, according to the most recent census, and struggling with depopulation and

a deteriorating infrastructural and economic base, we learn, from *Global Heartland*, that Beardstown has experienced remarkable demographic and social transformation—and even economic revitalization—driven largely in part by the industrial giant Cargill's labor strategies. Miraftab's meticulously illustrated ethnography traces the social and economic remaking of Beardstown through Cargill's recruitment of immigrants and racialized minorities. She illustrates how, within the context of intense global competition, contentious labor politics, and the industrial and geographic reorganization of agribusiness, Cargill resolved crisis by capturing transnational migration streams and recruiting devaluated labor from spatially distant global locations. Illustrating the precarious and shifting geographies of industrial agriculture, this labor strategy has brought workers displaced by neoliberal globalization elsewhere, from Mexico and Latin America, to West Africa, and Detroit—what we might call global others—to the slaughterhouse in Beardstown. Miraftab examines the social reproduction of the town through devalued labor, tracing workplace policies, conditions, and practices and the racialization of desirable labor within the globalized meat-packing sector.

Global Heartland is not just about Beardstown, however. Rather, the book is about the networks and the scaled relations that constitute the “global local.” The book travels from rural Illinois, to Michoacán, Mexico, to Togo to Detroit to unravel how capitalist crisis is resolved through the interconnected processes of labor mobility and displacement. Miraftab's relational focus examines how people and processes within and beyond the local produce space and inform local meanings and politics.

There are so many things that I find exciting about *Global Heartland*, but I want to start by commenting on the beautiful writing and rich detail that is captured on each page: Miraftab's prose invokes all senses—images, sounds, smells—including smells that sometimes we would wish not to imagine, such as those from the slaughterhouse. She takes the reader with her as she journeys to each of her field sites, revealing her deep commitment to the people and communities where she conducted her research. Her feminist approach is attentive to difference and she carefully navigates power differentials to produce an ethnography that not only informs academic debates, but that is also socially and politically accountable to the diverse communities in her study. For those of us who grapple with the methodological imperatives and ethical dilemmas of feminist ethnographic field research, this book stands out as an incredible example of feminist praxis and antiracist scholarship.

One of the most significant contributions of *Global Heartland* is the way in which it uncovers the inseparability of economic practices and processes of racialization to reveal, as Ruthie Gilmore and many others working in the black radical tradition have argued, that all capitalism is racial capitalism. Miraftab's analysis clarifies how capitalism materializes through difference while also materializing those differences. Rather than situating the reworking of race–class hierarchies in Beardstown (and beyond) as an outcome of the logics of accumulation, Miraftab instead demonstrates how social difference is constitutive of economic processes. She draws out the material practices of everyday life to make sense of the dialectic relationships between social reproduction and production. Moreover, her examination highlights the cultural construction of work, untangling how racialized perceptions about employment and jobs queues—which groups are assumed to be best suited for certain types of work—shapes the back-breaking and incredibly dangerous work of meat packing. This focus holds in tension discourses about labor shortages among local whites even as Cargill restructures and displaces undervalued white labor.

Global Heartland challenges us to think differently and expand our contextualizations of the sites and spaces of global change. The author intervenes in normative understandings that locate the “urban” as the site of neoliberal restructuring to demonstrate the significance of rural communities within global economic processes and translocal practices of place making. In *Global Heartland*, the rural is not the antithesis or “the other” to the urban, a distant place “over there” or an “elsewhere,” as Miraftab notes. Instead, she elucidates the sets of relationships that coconstitute Beardstown. Her analysis destabilizes the well-rehearsed “bootstraps” narrative of a rural place that “survived” capital abandonment and disinvestment by revealing how the social reproduction of the community has been made possible through devaluated labor and transnational networks of care.

Global Heartland also demands that we take seriously the social complexity of rural spaces. Dominant geographic imaginaries often construct rural spaces as static and unidimensional: Rural spaces are mistakenly, if inadvertently, represented as stagnating, politically conservative white places. In charting Beardstown's transformation from a “sundown” town that violently excluded and banished people of color to a multiethnic, multiracial community, Miraftab illustrates the dynamism of the town. Rather than painting a congratulatory picture of diversity and multiculturalism—heavy ideas that often instantiate

and reinforce white supremacy—*Global Heartland* instead tells of painful transition, of white working-class residents experiencing their own marginalization and devaluation while encountering labor migrants who have been dispossessed and displaced by similar sorts of processes. Miraftab's nuanced account makes sense of the ways in which white nostalgia for the “good old days” is simultaneously bound up with racial violence and exclusion. One of the things that I found most captivating about the book is the very careful way in which Miraftab narrates these moments of anger, grief, and recollection—of elderly white folks recounting the banality of public lynchings; of formerly middle-class workers making sense of the cheapening and revaluation of their labor; of immigrant workers separated from their families and children. It is important to note, however, that the subjects of *Global Heartland* are not victims; Miraftab's focus on everyday life reveals the relationships and networks of mutual aid through which residents produce space, community, and dignified life.

While reading the book, I wondered how the racial complexity of the story of Beardstown might be expanded with more direct engagement with indigenous histories and white settler geographies in the area. How might we better understand the production of white supremacy in Beardstown in its many forms—from spectacular demonstrations, like Ku Klux Klan gatherings and cross burnings, to its everyday, ordinary manifestations—through examination of indigenous removal and displacement? How do the violent settler histories and indigenous dispossession continue to inform local and regional racial formations? The new racial complexity of Beardstown also made me wonder about how groups are racialized in relation to one another. I am thinking here about the idea of relational racialization, as developed by Pulido (2006) and Barraclough (2011), but also of Kim's (1999) notion of “racial triangulation.” How are groups differentially stigmatized and valued in relation to one another and how have racial hierarchies been reworked with the arrival of new immigrant and ethnic groups?

My final thoughts stem from my own experiences with conducting rural research and my deep appreciation of Miraftab's feminist ethnographic approach. I could relate in many ways to Miraftab's story about the challenges of building rapport with community gatekeepers and local “old-timers.” As a white woman who grew up in Wyoming, I have had the benefit of trading on my whiteness and my rural identity to generate connections while conducting rural research. With this in mind, I would have appreciated more discussion of the complexities of conducting this rural ethnography and how these intricate

relationships were unsettled or re-entrenched across each of the field sites.

This is an important book that intervenes in scholarship on global cities and globalization by locating the rural as a key site in global processes of accumulation. *Global Heartland* challenges binary thinking about “the global” and “the local” and reminds urban scholars of the significance of looking beyond the bright lights of the city to understand global change. Miraftab also complicates the increasing “planetary” focus of urban theorizations, however, by illustrating the particular materialities and socialities of place-based politics. In short, *Global Heartland* demands that we take seriously the difference that difference makes. Finally, Miraftab’s relational theorization of social reproduction speaks back to the literature on remittances and typical understandings of transnational flows of labor and capital by demonstrating how the care work of transnational labor subsidizes communities, individuals, and institutions across places. In doing so, the book calls for us to think carefully about how seemingly disconnected workers and communities are relationally constituted.

*Commentary by Andrew E. G. Jonas,
Department of Geography, University of Hull,
Kingston upon Hull, UK.*

In recent times, the concept of mobility has offered a powerful motif for geographical research on the dynamic relationships between capital, labor, and place. For example, research has highlighted how mobility often provides capital with a potent weapon in its arsenal of strategies to extract value from workers, who in turn might have limited options to resist such strategies due to their attachments to place (see contributions in Herod 1998). The threat of disinvestment from a locality enables employers to extract concessions not only from their workers, but also from the local government jurisdictions within which their companies operate. Moreover, with the rise of neoliberal workfare states, capital’s need to nurture productive labor relations around particular places has seemingly diminished in importance, contributing to all sorts of dislocations that further destabilize local social relationships and attachments to place. In this context, the opportunities for workers to find solidarity in their place of work and use it as a basis for resisting the exploitative practices of employers are drastically attenuated.

It is in such a context, moreover, that researchers are beginning to shift their focus toward an investigation into

the transnational networks that workers draw on to reproduce and sustain local livelihoods. A case in point is *Global Heartland*, authored by Faranak Miraftab. At a superficial level, *Global Heartland* recounts a familiar tale of how industrial capital—in this case a company operating in the meat-packing industry—threatened to leave the small community of Beardstown, Illinois, resulting in the displacement of local labor. On closer inspection, however, the book tells a very different story of how, having acquired the Beardstown plant from Oscar Mayer in 1987, the Cargill Corporation subsequently restructured production in ways that eventually reconstituted place-based social relations not just in Beardstown, but crucially also in those distant places from which the company began to recruit its labor force, including Michoacán in Mexico, Togo in Africa, and Detroit, Michigan. Due to a combination of *in situ* spatial restructuring and *ex situ* labor recruitment strategies, Beardstown has been transformed from a sundown locality exhibiting many signs of urban shrinkage into a socially vibrant and ethnically diverse place.

Drawing on detailed ethnographic research, Miraftab carefully documents how the fostering of transnational relations of social reproduction sustains the strategies used by Beardstown meat packers to cope with harsh working conditions and low wages. In this narrative, the agents that are most visibly mobile are not so much capitalist firms as the immigrant workers at the Cargill plant. The author herself participates in this mobility by visiting the localities from which the meat packers came and documents how those places have fared in their absence. In doing so, she tells poignant stories about how migrant workers came to settle in Beardstown, and how they continue to draw on distant social relations and resources to facilitate their integration into the local production system and also the place itself. The displacements referenced in the book’s title are partly about workers who are unable to handle working life in Beardstown and eventually move elsewhere. Crucially, however, they also refer to the disruptions to the immigrants’ families and communities in their places of origin. Here other concepts of mobility become more significant motifs, namely, those relating to flows of knowledge, identity, and caring relations. It is primarily by means of such indirect and extended social relations of reproduction that it has been possible for the meat-packing industry in Beardstown to sustain a profitable yet also harsh local production regime.

When conceptualizing the relationship between capital, labor, and place, Miraftab prefers to use the term *relational* rather than *mobility*. From a relational perspective,

place is stretched out or, using terminology from Giddens (1984), becomes distantiated as its constituent systems of social interaction extend outward beyond the territorial boundaries of the locality. Accordingly, the book shows how social relations of production, labor control, and social reproduction once assumed to be place-specific in fact stretch from one place to another, connecting Beardstown to communities in other parts of the U.S. Midwest, Mexico, and Togo. Although Miraftab is keen to trace transnational networks of social reproduction, such as family, care, and identity, the social efficacy of such relations only becomes apparent in the light of her careful examination of contemporary production and labor processes in Beardstown. Furthermore, the reader is offered tantalizing glimpses of very different translocal relations that governed the recruitment and integration of labor in Beardstown in the 1850s, the 1900s, and the 1950s. No doubt other stories could be told that might help to pinpoint more precisely the respective roles of local and transnational social networks in shaping the relations between capital, labor, and place at various time-space conjunctures.

If the book's main focus is on social relations of labor reproduction, *Global Heartland* nonetheless also speaks to our understanding of production and the changing character of the local labor control regime. The local labor control regime refers to the mutual dependencies and reciprocities that develop over time between capital, labor, and place (Jonas 1996). This is an uneven power relationship, however, within which capital still holds the trump card. Although the concept is not referenced in *Global Heartland*, the book provides us with several insights into how the labor control regime in Beardstown has evolved from a corporate welfarist model in the early twentieth century into the harsher neoliberal regime of the early twenty-first century, one characterized by state withdrawal from areas of social expenditure formerly relied on by the local workforce.

In the vacuum created by state withdrawal, one might have expected capital to step in and develop strategies to compensate, at least in part, for the decline in social conditions faced by meat-packing workers. Far from it, for *Global Heartland* shows that it is workers and their transnational relations that help to sustain not only local labor but also the accumulation strategies of local capital. In the light of such evidence, the concept of the local labor control regime could be modified to take more fully into account the transnational conditions of labor's social reproduction. Nevertheless, the specific reciprocities that provide succor to the local labor control regime

in Beardstown continue to depend on *in situ* social relations. In other words, there always is something essentially local about the local labor control regime insofar as relations between capital and labor are socially constructed and contested simultaneously within and between place(s).

To conclude, Faranak Miraftab's powerful and, at times, very personal study of the meat-packing industry in Beardstown, Illinois, offers an exemplary analysis of the relational character of place. The book challenges us to think seriously about places that are all too often located at the periphery of mainstream urban theory. Instead, places like Beardstown can become central nodes in the extended lives and livelihoods of workers and their families. Moreover, the book highlights how far—metaphorically and materially—production in the Global North depends on social reproduction in the Global South and, accordingly, the extent to which flows of people, resources, and identities operate in both directions. It further reveals that relational thinking is not just about tracing flows from one place to another; it also involves revealing how spatially extended social relations come to ground in specific places and, in doing so, they change the very characteristics of those places, not least localities in the Global North still dominated by a single industry. Finally, *Global Heartland* reminds us that knowledge of the relations between capital, labor, and place must continue to be about how social relations of fixity and mobility work together in complicated and often unexpected ways, which are often in tension.

Commentary by Audrey Kobayashi, Department of Geography, Queen's University, Kingston, ON, Canada.

This is a remarkable book in many ways. Miraftab has created a compassionate and compelling account of people about whose lives we seldom hear very much. This is a dedicated ethnography, carefully conducted in depth and over a considerable period of time, beautifully and compassionately written. She not only learned a great deal about the lives of new workers in Beardstown, Illinois, but gained from the trust that would allow her to give her readers some deep insight into their varied experiences, backgrounds, and relationships with other residents of Beardstown. She provides rich details of individual lives while maintaining a sense of the bigger picture, emphasizing that the experiences of individuals always occur in context and in complex relations with others that include

family members, communities, corporate entities, and a transnational field. Few studies have achieved such a rich personalization of transnationalism and its role in both international and local development.

The treatment of race is especially rich. Beardstown has grown from a dichotomized population of white and black in a typical U.S. industrial town to a multicultural population that includes newcomers from many parts of the world. The racialized landscape that results is textured and nuanced, both because of the diverse backgrounds of the newcomers, and because each community is regarded differently by the long-settled population. Deeply held views of African Americans on the part of established white residents have been challenged and have shifted with the arrival of Africans who have significantly different backgrounds and goals. As the various groups, recent and long-standing, mingle with one another on playing fields, in schools and day care centers, and in the workplace, everyone has been affected and changed by the interactions. Race is thus both enduring and very malleable, as “different groups are ethnicized, racialized, and classed by dominant white locals, by each other and by themselves” (p. 75).

Another important aspect of racialization in Beardstown is the way in which Cargill, the meat-packing plant, has racialized its new employees. There is a limited corporate multiculturalism, she claims, more concerned with celebrating diversity than with either recognizing the actual needs of employees or addressing the treatment of employees by a white management group. She sets up a dynamic tension between the processes of finding place in a new community landscape and of feeling out of place in an industrial setting where the trappings of multicultural tolerance do little to mask the oppressive labor tactics that have always been the modus operandi of corporate actors. Moreover, she relates in detail how the Cargill plant is linked to global economic processes of dislocation and displacement, representing a twenty-first-century chapter of a long historical process in which transnational capital and transnational lives both sustain and contradict one another. She constantly draws the everyday experiences of workers at the local level into a large and complex web in which their cheap labor provides food and profit for others, even as the material conditions of their lives are fragmented, dangerous, and exploitative.

Notwithstanding the richness with which she describes the process of racialization, I found myself often wishing as I read that the effects of racialization would be made less implicit. I would have liked to have seen a stronger,

explicit sense of how this study contributes to and even challenges prevailing theories of the racialization process; of how the specific conditions in Beardstown differ from those in other places—such as Hazelton, Pennsylvania, for example—where racism is angry and overt, and where corporate attitudes toward labor are based on exclusion rather than incorporation; or of how emerging processes of capitalism and neoliberalism are different than those of the past. These are the types of questions that flow from reading *Global Heartland*. The reason I yearn for such explicit discussion is that the issue of racism is always present, lingering in every sentence, preceding and resulting from every lucid observation of life in Beardstown, every description of the complexity of people's lives and relationships. The finesse with which this study of racialization is conducted, therefore, is what makes this such a remarkable book.

Commentary by Richard Walker, Department of Geography, University of California, Berkeley, CA.

Faranak Miraftab offers us a well-written and accessible account of a case study of one Midwestern industrial town and its labor force, done in a personal and sympathetic tone that will appeal to a wide audience. Stylistically, it is informal, which I do not always like; we are academics, after all, and have good reason at times to adopt the distant voice of the dispassionate observer and analyst. Yet the writing is done with grace and the style is appropriate to the subject, which delves into the personal lives of an immigrant workforce in a revealing way. In short, in terms of presentation, Miraftab hits the mark.

Global Heartland is based on solid research and sound theory. Empirically, it is an ethnography, which is not my favorite research method, but is much admired in geography these days. Miraftab has done her research well, and she was able to move in close to her subjects and seamlessly pull back. Moreover, she does not just catch her subjects in one place and time, but follows them back to their origins abroad. This adds a geographic dimension to the study that one rarely sees.

Theoretically, Miraftab does not overreach like so many of her colleagues on the left. There's no opening flight into the stratosphere of high theory, but an admirable effort to hone in on a target with concepts appropriate to the subject matter at hand. This is clear from the outset when the reader realizes that the seemingly overambitious title, *Global Heartland*, is, in fact, a very telling

juxtaposition of the old notion of the Midwest as the nation's "heartland" and the modern reality of a globalized economy reaching deep into the United States, where it might be least expected. The contradiction catches us off-balance, at first, and then reveals itself to be a brilliant ploy to allow Miraftab to move deftly between the local and global, concrete and abstract.

Choosing to deploy theories as tools to solve the empirical problems at hand does not, however, mean that she is dealing with low-level ideas. Quite the contrary, she takes on some of the biggest ideas in contemporary geography. Miraftab outlines five key themes in her introduction and revisits the same five in the conclusion (she is extremely well organized). Her themes fall into two groups:

1. Spatial theory, including the local and global, materiality of place, and metrocentricism, or the obsession with big cities.
2. Economic geography, including industry restructuring, labor migration, and what she calls "the crisis of social reproduction."

Spatial Themes

There are three big spatial concepts applied to the Beardstown case in *Global Heartland*, all of which are theoretically profound and germane to the subject. "Space matters," as Massey and Allen (1984) put it, and this book makes that clear.

The Interweaving of the Local and the Global

Miraftab gets this right in three respects. First, she opposes the false dichotomy of local and global; second, she realizes that local-global does not correspond to concrete-abstract; and, third, she understands that every locale is, in part, globally constituted and that globalized processes are based in (and emerge from) things happening in particular localities. Nevertheless, I must insert a disciplinary caveat. As a scholar trained in the field of planning, Miraftab is a bit short on actual geographers as inspiration. In talking about the global and local on page 12, she cites two sociologists, an anthropologist, and only one geographer. She later cites Massey (1994), but never such essential works on the local and global as Cox (1997) or later works on spatial theory such as Herod (2010).

The Materiality of the Local

Localism is rooted in what Harvey (2001) and other geographers call "absolute space," which brings with it the

specific histories, social orders, and built environments that are the basis of geographic difference. Miraftab understands that the specificity of the local matters to her case of a classic industrial town that has been turned upside down while staying the same. There is, however, a lack of theoretical undergirding on the necessity and constraints of built environments, and the need to reconstruct local geographies as the face of capitalism changes (Harvey 2001).

The Perils of Metrocentricism

Here Miraftab is taking on contemporary scholars for paying too much attention to the largest "global cities" and ignoring the importance of smaller places (cf. Robinson 2006). Moreover, she comes back at the end of the book to criticize the idea of "planetary urbanism" (p. 218) for erasing places like Beardstown in the great "slurb" of global urbanization. I certainly agree (Walker 2015b), but would qualify what Miraftab says in three ways:

1. There were lots of geographers and urbanists talking about smaller cities in the first world before Robinson; it is part of a much older tradition of "city systems" by people like Pred (see Pred 1977; Walker 2015a). The essential thing is not that smaller cities matter, but that big and small are indelibly linked through flows of goods, ideas, capital, and labor. They are, in short, dialectically related and not things apart.
2. Big cities do matter disproportionately in the world economy (Scott 1998; Storper 2013), and have become relatively more important in recent years, whereas the system of smaller cities in places like the Midwest has shrunk. Conversely, although many of the latter cities were historically embedded in agricultural systems, they were never simply rural, either (Page and Walker 1991).
3. The global expansion of urbanization is real and it involves smaller cities as well as megaurban regions. The long historic process of the overwriting of agrarian societies by an urban world is plowing ahead, driven by capital accumulation on a global scale.

Economic Geography Themes

Miraftab does not overtly claim to be writing about economic geography, but does this as she hits on three key themes worth a closer look. Indeed, the tight link between industrial location and labor migration is far too often misrepresented by economists and economic geographers,

not to mention sociologists and anthropologists, so I can sympathize with what Miraftab might have missed.

Industry Restructuring

The key idea here is that migration is driven by industrial change, which alters the demand for labor: where, when, who, and how much. This is absolutely correct, but Miraftab's theory is a bit thin on this, so I want to expand on it, as I have written quite a bit on it over the last thirty years. Indeed, relying only on sociologists like Massey and Sassen is not sufficient. I would like to have seen more geographers, like Scott (1988, 1998), Storper (2013), and Walker (Storper and Walker 1989). Indeed, the idea of industry restructuring shaping local geography goes back to Massey and Meegan (1982), which launched the "new industrial geography."

What is addressed here is labor demand generated by industry. The term *industry restructuring*, liberally used since the 1980s, is too imprecise. Storper (2013) is the best source on this, and he is still fighting the wrong-headed view among economists like Glaeser (2010) and geographers like Florida (2002) that labor supply leads the way in local development. It is infuriating to see the same mistake made again and again by scholars who should know better, and worse than that, it is a staple of bad local policy and national debates on immigration.

Miraftab is right on the money to say that employers are the key actors in labor demand and recruitment. Beardstown's big meat-packing factory passed from one corporation to another, which then "restructured" labor relations by firing or driving out the former local workforce so they could pay dramatically lower wages and increase the pace of work. Capitalist companies first devalue labor by restructuring jobs and wages, and then they seek workers who will accept lesser work conditions and wages. Not surprisingly, they recruit immigrants from places with a dramatically lower standard of living and plenty of desperate people. This is the point that conservatives always get wrong by putting the blame on the backs of the weakest players, the immigrants themselves.

Migration and Labor Supply

Miraftab follows her immigrant workers back to their places of origin, and the trips she takes to Mexico and Sierra Leone are revealing. She is right to follow Sassen and others in saying that people do not want to emigrate, in the first instance, but do so when their livelihoods and even their lives are in jeopardy. This is a process involving

the collapse of peasant agriculture in the face of national and global competition and overproduction. What this does is "loosen up" labor supply in the places of origin, from which they are subsequently drawn by the lure of jobs or pushed over the edge by war and repression.

What Miraftab does not say, however, is that this has been the repeated story of the transition from agrarian modes of production to commercial agriculture and industry for the last 500 years of capitalist development. Moreover, what this means is that "capital works at both ends" of the migration process—an idea clearly stated in Sassen's (1988) first book, which no one seems to cite any more. I was also surprised that Miraftab did not mention the sociological and anthropological literature on "chains of migration," which her work reinforces (Massey 1999). Such chains are engendered by the actions of migrants themselves, by passing along information on jobs and providing aid to relatives and friends, and they are very precise geographically, from one village in a country like Mexico to one factory in the United States. These are things Miraftab's ethnographies show clearly to be true.

I like to call the whole process "the labor siphon" because it has to be primed on the receiving end of the migration flow, but is fed spontaneously from the supply side on inception. Places with high labor demand, like my home state of California, just dip the siphon into the different places around the world and suck out labor as needed. I must note, however, that Miraftab is misled by Massey when she says that immigrants have been deflected from California by "saturation of the labor market, job displacement and lowering of wages" (p. 16). It was not saturation or lower wages that diverted the flows of migration out of California after thirty years of high demand, but rather that labor demand in California fell in the early 1990s and again in the 2000s, meaning that job growth was flat after 2000 in the Golden State, even as it was growing elsewhere around the country. When I say "growing," I do not necessarily imply net growth, but rather a lot of the kind of thing Miraftab observes in Beardstown: replacement demand for lower cost workers.

A Crisis of Social Reproduction

This is an absolutely pivotal idea of the book and is quite brilliant. Miraftab's argument is that migrant labor is subsidizing capital, Beardstown, and the United States by displacing the costs of reproduction of labor onto the countries of origin. This delivers extra cheap labor power into the hands of the employers. I cannot overemphasize

the importance of this insight, which is essential to both how immigration operates and how capitalism works. As Moore (2015) recently emphasized, capital accumulation has always rested on the extra surplus gained by plundering the earth and its peoples for cheap labor and cheap resources.

The converse is that almost everyone else gets immigration economics wrong, going on about secondary issues like remittances, which conservatives see as subtractions from U.S. national income to subsidize poor countries. Another red herring Miraftab does not mention is the right-wing argument that migrants come to the United States to feed off our welfare system, another subsidy of the poor by the rich. What is amazing is how many academic scholars have veered off into studies of these matters without ever recognizing the greater evil, which is the endless subsidizing of capital, not poor immigrants.

There is a related, but crucial, theoretical contribution embedded in Miraftab's conceptualization of the crisis of social reproduction: that is to gather the spheres of production and reproduction, something the left has always had problems with. As feminists have pointed out for years (e.g., Mies 1986; Fraser 2014), capitalist labor always presupposes the labor of women (and peasants) to raise children, take care of the sick, and tend the aged. I recommend the work of Moore (2015), since I also served on an American Association of Geographers panel commenting on his new book, *Capitalism and the Web of Life*. Moore offers a robust version of a unified theory of production and reproduction, in which capitalism and its labor-value system necessarily feeds off the free work of women, peasants, and nature to generate surplus value and accumulate capital

I must say, however, that I do not like the term *crisis of social reproduction* to deal with what is at stake here. Where is the crisis? Rather, it seems to be a normal process by which capital gains by repetitiously hiring cheap labor. It is, in addition, a geographic matter of the "spatial division of (reproduction) labor" over long distances. Yes, there has been a long devolution of the previous New Deal/Social Democratic labor and political regime in the Global North, otherwise known as the triumph of neoliberalism, but I do not think the term *crisis* quite captures that, either.

To conclude, I note that Miraftab has made a profoundly political intervention here. False notions of immigrants as the captains of their own fates, people stealing "our" jobs, and parasites on the national economy weigh

heavily on contemporary debates over immigration and race. I have been following the vicious politics of the anti-immigration movement for a long time, going back to the early 1990s when Californians were fighting over the punitive Proposition 187 denying social payments to "illegal aliens." We have a real responsibility as scholars to set matters straight, at the very least within our own domain of research, and to undermine all the false accusations against poor immigrants. This is not just out of some sense of justice, but also to identify truth. I know that is an old-fashioned notion, and I do not think the truth alone will set anyone free, but it can surely be a weapon in the fight against demagogues like Donald Trump and the politics of blame promoted by the avatars of the Republican Party like Ted Cruz.

Response by Faranak Miraftab, Department of Urban and Regional Planning, University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign, Champaign, IL.

The questions that shape *Global Heartland: Displaced Labor, Transnational Lives, and Local Placemaking* are particularly important and timely in this age of global displacements, when millions of people have been forced to leave their homes and move to known and unknown destinations within and across national territories. The number of global displacements caused by economic, social, or political violence had risen to a staggering 59.5 million at the end of 2014—more than at any time since World War II (Clayton 2015). The dominant media and political debates often collapse these movements under the rubric of migration, and by doing so obscure tragedy and ugliness involved in these processes. Far from casual movements by upwardly motivated individuals in search of better opportunities, these are global displacements produced through violent processes caused by devastating economic policies or wars that recipient countries have, at best, not been free of having a hand in. My book seeks to understand, by looking at one destination location (Beardstown, Illinois), the global and the local violence involved in such displacement.

In *Global Heartland* I ask how this population is produced. What processes have led to the point where doctors and engineers from Togo and farmers from Michoacán, Mexico, end up in meat-packing jobs as manual laborers in Illinois? How do the transnational lives of these displaced laborers play a role in their ability to take the back-breaking, low-wage, high-risk jobs that native-born Americans are less willing to take? Finally, I ask what happens to the places these immigrants leave behind and arrive in. What

are the processes of place making and in-placement? How are these sudden and dramatic changes negotiated across racial, ethnic, and linguistic divides, and what difference do the particularities of place, in its materiality and sociality, make in emerging politics of place?

What we see through the stories of Beardstown are not exceptions, and my arguments in this book are not only about a particular place. These stories offer insights that make generalizable, interconnected contributions methodologically, conceptually, and politically—insights that help us theorize place and place making relationally and expose the global cost of migrant labor. The methodology of this project, that of studying its subject from the vantage points of different actors and distinct macro- and microanalytic scales, recovers the interconnected stories and the unequal stakes involved in them. These stories go virtually unacknowledged in contemporary accounts of migration and global labor mobility. In its relational theorization, the book also overcomes analytic closures to (a) see production and social reproduction of migrant labor are interconnected; (b) recognize materiality of place and politics of in-placement; and (c) acknowledge the relational production of difference—namely unsettling categories of belonging often used to discuss dynamics of diverse people, categories such as citizenship and even race.

Beyond its conceptual and theoretical contributions, the questions *Global Heartland* grapples with are deeply political. They feature centrally in electoral politics in Europe and the United States as it is persistently moving to the extreme right of the political spectrum and is also formative to movements on the political left calling for global justice. In the case of the United States, those who cheer Donald Trump's wall-building fantasy see Mexican immigrants as job thieves who suck resources from the United States to enrich relatives back home. The stories of people in *Global Heartland*, however, dispel this key misrepresentation in the right-wing narratives: "They"—the displaced workers—are not a drain on resources of the destination countries. On the contrary, the book shows the multidirectionality of resource flows between immigrants' communities of origin and destination. We in the communities of destination drain immigrants from their resources not only through brain drain (in the case revealed in my book Togolese doctors and engineers working as meat packers) but also by free care work that their families and public institutions in communities of origin invest in displaced workers' lives and social reproduction. To make their wages viable, displaced workers reorganize their families and their lives across their old and new homes, just as companies restructure production

by "offshoring" some phases of it to places where wages are lower. I develop the concept of "global restructuring of social reproduction," to articulate how immigrant workers might fragment their families by leaving their children behind, or they might spatially restructure their life cycle by spending their working age in this country while the care work for the "unproductive" stages of their life (childhood and old age) is outsourced to communities across the border to be performed not only by their families, but also by the public organizations in their countries of origin (e.g., IMSS, Mexican social security). This means that U.S. employers in fact receive a subsidy from the immigrants' countries of origin—not a cash subsidy, but in-kind services, usually care work.

The reviewers above capture the multiplicity of processes that embed in my story of Beardstown, places that are overlooked and misunderstood in scholarship of urban globalization. Bonds and Jonas, in their review, capture how *Global Heartland* indeed aims to dispel the myth of "rural" as something distinct and separate from the urban. I share with Kobayashi the urge to examine such processes of intense social and spatial renegotiation in other localities for a comparative understanding of what these processes mean for racialization of subjects in distinct localities. Dick Walker's comments are problematic to me: he raises several critiques that a closer read of the volume would have addressed—some involve smaller errors, for example, that the fieldwork was done in Togo not Sierra Leone; and others involve more misplaced critiques. For example, the crisis of social reproduction, which he takes to task, is not my argument, it is my point of departure in my review of early feminist literature, to build my concept of "global restructuring of social reproduction," which I argue is an integral aspect of global restructuring of production. Similarly, another red herring he takes issue with, that *Global Heartland* does not mention the rightwing discourse of immigrants syphoning public resources, is foundational to the voices of local white folks registered ethnographically; or his critique that the book does not see that "capital works at both ends of the migration process." This is ironically the core message of the book conceptualized in terms of accumulation by dispossession (at place of origin) and displacement to communities of destination—an argument that makes for chapters in part II of the book substantiated not only through political economic but also ethnographic analysis. In the remainder of his critique, Walker seems to be disappointed that I did not either write the book that he wanted, or cite his handpicked colleagues. I surely miss referencing some literature and I apologize to colleagues including Dick Walker whose important writings are not cited. However,

I wanted this book to be analytically sophisticated but delivered in a language that is accessible to a general audience including undergraduate students and Beardstown residents. Heavy citations of scholarship in multiple disciplinary terrains, while impressing colleagues, would have buried the project's reach and message.

I would like to close this response by thanking all five reviewers and stressing the main goal of *Global Heartland*: to see relationships across different, seemingly isolated local communities and help in constructing a world more conscious of the global inequalities and the human costs of our local privileges—including the cheap food served at our table.

References

- Barraclough, L. R. 2011. *Making the San Fernando Valley: Rural landscapes, urban development, and white privilege*. Athens, GA: The University of Georgia Press.
- Clayton, J. 2015. Worldwide displacement hits all-time high as war and persecution increase. <http://www.unhcr.org/news/latest/2015/6/558193896/worldwide-displacement-hits-all-time-high-war-persecution-increase.html> (last accessed 18 June 2015).
- Cox, K., ed. 1997. *Spaces of globalization: Reasserting the power of the local*. New York, NY: Guilford.
- Florida, R. 2002. *The rise of the creative class: And how it's transforming work, leisure, community and everyday life*. New York, NY: Basic Books.
- Fraser, N. 2014. Behind Marx's hidden abode. *New Left Review* 86:55–74.
- Giddens, A. 1984. *The constitution of society: Outline of the theory of structuration*. Berkeley, CA: University of California Press.
- Glaeser, E. 2010. *The triumph of the city*. Harmondsworth, UK: Penguin.
- Harvey, D. 2001. *Spaces of capital: Towards a critical geography*. New York, NY: Routledge.
- Herod, A., ed. 1998. *Organizing the landscape: Geographical perspectives on labor unions*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press.
- . 2010. *Scale*. London, UK: Routledge.
- Jonas, A. E. G. 1996. Local labour control regimes: Uneven development and the social regulation of production. *Regional Studies* 30:323–38.
- Kim, C. J. 1999. The racial triangulation of Asian Americans. *Politics and Society* 27 (1): 105–38.
- Massey, D. 1994. *Space, place and gender*. Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press.
- . 1999. Why does immigration occur? A theoretical synthesis. In *The handbook of international migration: The American experience*, ed. C. Hirschman, P. Kasinitz, and J. DeWind, 34–52. New York, NY: Sage.
- Massey, D., and J. Allen, eds. 1984. *Geography matters!* Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press.
- Massey, D., and R. Meegan. 1982. *The anatomy of job loss*. London, UK: Methuen.
- Mies, M. 1986. *Patriarchy and accumulation on a world scale: Women in the international division of labor*. London, UK: Zed.
- Moore, J. 2015. *Capitalism and the web of life*. London, UK: Verso.
- Page, B., and R. Walker. 1991. From settlement to Fordism: The agro-industrial revolution in the American Midwest. *Economic Geography* 67 (4): 281–315.
- Pred, A. 1977. *City-systems in advanced economies*. London, UK: Hutchinson.
- Pulido, L. 2006. *Black, brown, yellow and left: Radical activism in Los Angeles*. Berkeley: University of California Press.
- Robinson, J. 2006. *Ordinary cities: Between modernity and development*. New York, NY: Routledge.
- Sassen, S. 1988. *The mobility of labor and capital*. New York, NY: Cambridge University Press.
- Scott, A. 1988. *Metropolis: From the division of labor to urban form*. Berkeley, CA: University of California Press.
- . 1998. *Regions and the world economy: The coming shape of global production, competition, and political order*. Oxford, UK: Oxford University Press.
- Storper, M. 2013. *The keys to the city*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press.
- Storper, M., and R. Walker. 1989. *The capitalist imperative: Territory, technology and industrial growth*. Cambridge, MA: Basil Blackwell.
- Walker, R. 2015a. Building a better theory of the urban: A response to “Towards a new epistemology of the urban?” *City* 19 (2–3): 183–91.
- . 2015b. The city and economic geography: Then and now. In *Spaces of danger: Culture and power in the everyday*, ed. H. Merrill and L. Hoffman, 135–51. Athens, GA: University of Georgia Press.