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## Review of *Unmaking the Global Sweatshop*. Rebecca Prentice and Geert De Neve (Eds.)

Jacob Van Pelt  
*Illinois State University*

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## Book Reviews

Rebecca Prentice and Geert De Neve (Eds.), *Unmaking the Global Sweatshop*. University of Pennsylvania Press (2017), 304 pages, \$79.95 (hardcover).

This ethnography takes on the herculean task of documenting, diagnosing, and prescribing a solution to the current state of sweatshops, as well as other concerns in the world of garment workers. In three parts and nine chapters, the editors combine the works of 17 contributors to paint a picture of what is going on today in the factories where our clothes are made. The whole book is focused through the lens of health in this world after the 2013 Rana Plaza building collapse in Bangladesh. The Bangladesh Garment Sector is compared to New York at the turn of the 20th century, and the Rana Plaza building collapse has a historical counterpart in the tragic fire on March 25, 1911 in New York in the Asch Building in Manhattan, in which 146 people perished. One chapter, for example, tells the story of one person's attempt at starting an ethical clothing company, first in Sri Lanka and later in the United States. The authors also look at what forces contribute to poor working conditions and inhibit progress, often referring to New York's Garment sector in the 20th century as an historical guide.

As the authors make note, and has even been made light of by a political comedian like John Oliver, the condition of garment workers is a topic that phases in and out of the public consciousness. It seems no one wants to contribute to what is going on, but any attempt to figure out how to help can be so confusing it dissuades even reasonable people from moving forward. This book provides great insight for both experts and interested lay-people trying to deepen their understanding of the situation. From touching personal testimonies to analyses of policy and macro-level influences, this collection takes a deep dive into what is happening. On the whole, the book is accessible to

educated readers, although parts of it are definitely written in language directed solely at other experts in this field of study.

One of the lessons I took away from the book, which I think would be of the utmost interest to social workers, in particular, is how in all of the efforts to help alleviate the struggles faced by garment workers, these workers themselves are regularly left out of the discussion. As is made clear in the historical sections of this book, the success in New York's garment sector came from unions being strong enough to advocate for themselves. This is in sharp contrast to the situation in the contemporary garment sectors highlighted by the book. The authors instead paint a confusing array of non-governmental agencies (NGOs), activists in the countries purchasing the garments, and the companies employing these workers. Additionally, much of the work being done in the name of garment workers is market-oriented, placing social pressure on customers to support ethical garment makers, no matter how confusing and difficult it can be to discern just which clothing companies are ethically responsible in their manufacturing processes.

Ignoring the input of the workers themselves creates other types of problems, as well. As these authors note, lack of worker input leads to situations in which companies and NGOs offer mainly "quick-fix" technical solutions to the problems at hand. "You can go in a factory and make sure that the fire extinguisher is there and people know how to get out of the factory, these kinds of things are technical, but the fundamental problem is the workers, even if they know their rights, they can't defend them, and that's political and that doesn't change" (p. 67). Without worker input, solutions too often are reactionary and limited at best. They are only capable of fixing problems after the fact—a fire extinguisher is provided *after* a fire. But they are unable to work to *prevent* problems, or to fix the systemic problems that contribute to an event such as the Rana Plaza collapse.

In conclusion, this collection focuses on the importance of unions for any real progress to occur, especially union representation of female workers. The garment industry is overwhelmingly comprised of female workers who are stigmatized. That their voices should be heard is of crucial importance, and these authors underline repeatedly that there is a lack of female representation in the decision making bodies.

This will be a valuable collection for anyone interested in the problems of the global garment industry. Although it does seem to aim for people who are already familiar with the topic, this book would be useful for anyone interested in the current state of this industry. I wanted more quantitative data, such as the percentage of people involved with a union, and the distribution of wealth between the different levels of management and workers in a given factory, but of course such information is incredibly difficult to tease out with accuracy. Yet even without such data, the arguments presented are incredibly convincing.

For a thorough look at the garment industry on a global stage and its impact on the health of workers, *Unmaking the Global Sweatshop* fills a genuine gap. From narrating the rise and fall of a company intending to be as ethical as possible, to seeing how the various agreements made by NGOs, governments, and manufacturers impact the lives of individual workers, *Unmaking the Global Sweatshop* provides a compelling picture of the garment industry today.

Jacob Van Pelt  
Illinois State University

Pat Armstrong and Ruth Lowndes, *Creative Teamwork: Developing Rapid Site-Switching Ethnography*. Oxford University Press (2018), 194 pages, \$55 (hardcover).

Most countries of the world are entering into the experience of an aging society, yet it remains difficult to arouse interest in the study of long-term care facilities. Researcher themselves often experience deep distress in face of constant exposure to elderly residents of long-term care homes, whose lives include the end stages of the aging process, along with loneliness, loss of value, diseases, incapability, dependence on helpers, and various stages of dementia. Most people, it seems, prefer the company of children to that of the oldest among us. Although everyone hopes for health and longevity in life, few people really enjoy constant and up-close exposure to what real longevity looks like.