

**ANDREA WRIGHT.** *BETWEEN DREAMS AND GHOSTS: INDIAN MIGRATION AND MIDDLE EASTERN OIL.* STANFORD: STANFORD UNIVERSITY PRESS 2021. 288 P. ISBN: 9781503629516

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Andrea Wright's meticulous research explores the intricate dynamics of the Indian immigrant population involved in oil production within the Gulf region. Through extensive multi-sited fieldwork involving Indian bureaucrats, recruiters, oil companies, and Indian communities, Wright compellingly illustrates the intersection of colonial, imperial, national, and neoliberal influences surrounding oil production on the experiences of Indian migrants. Her work illuminates how these structural logics shape migratory experiences and, in turn, how migrants navigate and respond to these structural constraints.

The book is divided into three parts. In Part I, spanning three chapters, Wright discusses how corporate, governmental policies and the international brand image of Indian immigrants configure the experiences of Indian immigrants migrating to the Gulf and examines their response to these configurations. Chapter 1 uncovers the Indian government's dual approach, stemming from the tension between neoliberal and colonial logic; advocating rights of movement while regulating outward mobility by invoking discourses of vulnerability. In addition to these conflicting logics, Chapter 2 demonstrates how the Indian state fosters Indian immigrant entrepreneurship to bolster India's global image within global capitalist markets. Thus, Indian immigrants to the Gulf find themselves situated within colonial, capitalist, and neoliberal structures. However, Chapter 3 showcases that this situation does not necessarily constrain these individuals within these structural factors. Instead, by creating networks with government bureaucrats, recruiting agencies and oil company managers, migrants attempt to navigate and negotiate within these structures.

Part II composed of Chapters 4 and 5, examines the significance that migrants and their families attribute to labour migration to the Gulf. Chapter 4 demonstrates that remitting or accumulating money for their daughters' or sisters' marriages is perceived, by male Indian migrants in the Gulf, as fulfilling familial obligations and showcasing their masculinity. In Chapter 5, migration is also described as a means for Indian migrants to enhance self-esteem by integrating themselves into India's modernity and national development. In one interpretation, it is safe to say that they are performing or internalizing roles imposed by the Indian state to protect India's brand image in the global market, as outlined in Part I. Becoming involved in such a national project also provides them with a sense of escape and a means to overcome the inequalities created by national immigration policies and colonial, neoliberal logic, as delineated in Part I.

Part III illustrates how colonial capitalism and neoliberal corporate practices legitimise and reinforce racialised hierarchies, along with the diffusion of self-responsibility ideology that results in limited workers' rights. Chapter 6 highlights the harsh labour conditions experienced by Indian migrants in the Gulf, characterised by their inability to organize strikes to protest current labour conditions and their isolation at labour camps. These unfair and inhumane treatments stem from conventional practices by oil companies and the British colonial government, still constraining migrant workers through the use of racialised

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hierarchies and associating oil production with national security. Chapter 7 shows how discourse on death and safety in oil production serves to create a disciplined and mobile workforce, placing responsibility for their safety on the individuals themselves. This individualised safety approach facilitates deflecting corporate liability regarding safety concerns.

The first intriguing aspect of this book lies in the metaphor of ‘dreams and ghosts’, through which migrants understand and explain their migratory experiences. They describe the involvement of national brand protection or engagement in capitalist oil projects as a pursuit of dreams. These dreams are built on the stories of ghosts that act as a reminder of past traditions, obligations, and histories. This juxtaposition between dreams and ghosts is indicative of a migrant’s understanding of temporality. Temporality is one of the key logics and scales of both mobility and immobility (McNevin 2020). Temporality is often received as one of the governmentalities regulating human (im)mobility and as a key component shaping migrants’ emotions – such as frustration and fear – during their migratory experiences. For example, being kept waiting for the visa application process discourages people from applying for it, effectively regulating migration while inducing frustration among applicants. Thus, temporality serves as one of the important frameworks for migration analysis. Associating dreams and ghosts with future and ghosts respectively reflects on one of migrants’ temporal understanding of their experiences. Notably, interpreting future temporality (dreams) through the past (ghosts) demonstrates the interconnectedness between past and future within their temporal reasoning. This interconnectedness highlights how migrants construct their temporal logic by bridging past experiences with future aspirations.

Another interesting part of the book is the interplay between structure and agency surrounding Indian migrants. It is widely acknowledged that migrants possess the agency to negotiate with structural constraints, before, during, and after migratory journeys (Castles, De Haas and Miller 2020). This dynamic was explicitly exemplified in the book, where potential Indian migrants form networks with governmental bureaucrats and recruiting agencies to enhance their chances of employment. Similarly, Indian migrants reframe their experience of being commodified in the global capitalist market and the ensuing denial of basic labour rights, by associating it with involvement in national projects and taking pride in representing India as a nation. These case studies provide valuable insights into how transnational migrants manoeuvre within and reshape global capitalism, colonial, and neoliberal logics and hierarchies. While it might seem ambitious, it would have been advantageous if the author had clarified how her work connects to discussions in the field of migration and economics. In particular, the aforementioned insights into migrant agency within structural constraints can be a potential counterpoint against functionalist approaches such as push-pull theory, which often overlooks agency-structural interaction. However, such contributions can be also articulated by potential readers and the book stands as an impressive piece of work.

## Bibliography

Castles Stephen, de Haas, Hein and Mark J. Miller 2020. *The age of migration: international population movements in the modern world*, New York: Bloomsbury.

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