

Reviews

Life on the Other Border: Farmworkers and Food Justice in Vermont

Teresa M. Mares

Oakland: University of California Press, 2019

240 pp. Photographs. \$85.00 (hardcover); \$29.95 (paper); \$29.95 (eBook)

Our contemporary discourse around borders and migrants has, by way of toxic politics and scattershot media coverage, centered mostly on the spaces and places of entry, particularly that of the U.S.-Mexico borderland. But what are the experiences of migrant farm laborers significantly north of the Southern border—what of those in insular rural landscapes, defined more by red-sided barns than wire fences and detention camps? This is the focus of Teresa M. Mares’s insightful work in *Life on the Other Border*. In this meticulously researched ethnography, Mares demands that we look deeper into the conditions facing Latinx farmworkers in the spaces between and beyond the borderland, conditions of extreme interdependency that not only mirror the globalized industrial food system, but are built upon the intersecting issues of structural vulnerability, food security, and the politics of visibility. This provocative work on food systems, food justice, and labor rights pushes us to jettison our notion of Vermont as a model food economy and see within it a shadow economy “that subjects laborers to everyday discrimination and exploitation,” reproducing a systemic inequality through the “contradictions of racialized and misaligned agricultural and immigration policies” (p.3).

Working in the tradition of such scholars as Meredith E. Abarca, Margaret Gray, and Julie Guthman, Mares draws on six years of fieldwork to think critically about the politics of food sovereignty and food insecurity in this idealized food landscape, and gives particular attention to how such landscapes act to border, obscure, and erase its most essential and vulnerable community members. As she notes, “there is one term farmworkers use more than any other to characterize their experience in Vermont: *encerrado* ... confined ...

trapped ... bounded ... enclosed. In all cases, this term is laden with sadness, frustration and pain” (p.44). Each chapter works to define the reality of that enclosedness, as Mares moves through Vermont’s agricultural history to the present-day household food practices of migrant farmworkers, with close attention to the experiences of female migrants who lead efforts toward community food sovereignty. She looks at the institutional frameworks of those agency actors who provide food and services to the migrant community, reminding us that voluntary organizations are often required to “negotiate a contradictory politics of visibility” (p.120), documenting their efforts to funders and agencies while also minimizing the presence of the undocumented beneficiaries of their efforts. These agencies, of course, work alongside the massive organizing efforts by farmworkers themselves, and Mares dedicates much of the chapter on political resistance to campaigns led by the organization Migrant Justice.

At the heart of each chapter are the voices and experiences of the farmworkers, as gathered through Mares’s diligent ethnographic work. Her field sites throughout rural Vermont are detailed in rich prose, capturing the kitchens that offer brief respite from the threat of Border Patrol and the gardens thriving in marginal plots of soil and sunlight. Mares’s emphasis on farm territoriality allows her to productively engage with borderland theory, especially as she reminds us that, paradoxically, the promotional portrait of rural Vermont depends on the erasure of its Latinx community. The conflation of American rurality (and American agriculture) with hegemonic whiteness, Mares argues, heightens the precarity of the migrants’ lives, especially as they grapple with the requirements of finding transportation, housing, and methods of provisioning for themselves. Even as many of the migrants interviewed by Mares and her research assistants note that they find the state “beautiful” and “tranquil,” the material conditions of rural Vermont often put fresh produce and protein out of easy reach, especially as procuring such foods means venturing out into grocery stores while

being undocumented or onto highways without a driver's license. Such challenges require strategies that stitch together many forms of sustenance—from kitchen gardens to WIC benefits to off-the-books produce deliveries—that rely on the efforts of migrant women. Yet even such efforts are not liberatory: as one interview subject, Alma, notes, “Here we can buy the food that we want. The problem is that we cannot leave” (p.73). Even as one farmworker exclaims, “*Si, comemos bien!*” (Yes, we eat well!),” the conditions of such consumption have to be read as a form of resistance to cultural and political oppression in the region (p.86) and an improvisation required by the landscape itself.

Although the later chapters move away from farmworkers' foodways to focus instead on Vermont-specific agencies and activists, Mares still reminds us that any efforts toward food sovereignty and food justice must have material consequences. It is not enough to get a farmworker to a grocery store; support initiatives must also include bilingual shopping guides, the distribution of goods door-to-door, and the acknowledgment that money is not the only thing forestalling good health and nutrition for migrant farmworkers. The question of where food justice solutions come from dominates Mares's closing chapters, and perhaps my only criticism is that she gives too much credence to specific activism initiatives in the Vermont region in producing meaningful change. (Though, as she acknowledges, much of her faith in these initiatives is due to her own insider knowledge of the Vermont activist community.) Community mobilization, however, is central to the agency documented in Mares's research, and in her concluding remarks on the many policy changes demanded by farmworkers, she reminds us exactly who is at the center of the Vermont agricultural story: those who are most invisible.

Mares's book contributes enormously to the fields of critical ethnography, borderland studies, and immigration studies, and would be an excellent addition to any classroom or public discussion of labor rights and food justice. Her work reveals Vermont as a borderland in every sense of the word, with as much structural violence as that of the Southern border, and forces us to acknowledge the “violent status quo of how food makes it from farm to plate” (p.185).

—Jessica Carbone, *Harvard University*

The Georgian Feast: The Vibrant Culture and Savory Food of the Republic of Georgia (Revised and Expanded, 25th Anniversary Edition)

Darra Goldstein

Oakland: University of California Press, 2018
259 pp. Photographs. \$26.95 (paper)

A quarter of a century ago, Darra Goldstein demystified Georgian cuisine for a new set of audiences. In the updated edition of this foundational book, just as the title foretells, Goldstein once again sets out a *supra*—a table fully laden with a multicourse feast—a shared table being at the heart of the Georgian ethos. Despite the heavyweight nature of Goldstein's contributions, I found this book inviting and easy to read from cover to cover, while dog-eared many of the pages containing exotic, yet simple to make, recipes.

Goldstein's many levels of expertise, as a food scholar and as someone intimately familiar with the language, culture, and history of the region, deliver more than just the average cookbook. The first third of the book is a lengthy narrative section detailing the history of Georgian cuisine and explaining how its culinary culture remains inextricably embedded in place. Nestled between Europe and Asia, Georgian culture has a strong passion for food that is place-based and “tied to their land” (p.47) —foraged, grown in the countryside, or traditionally cooked and fermented in red clay pots. This connection and its iterations come to life through Goldstein's rich descriptions of Georgian foodways and cooking practices.

Both the narrative and recipe sections of the book are peppered with photos of Georgian life, from the mundane—outdoor lunches on *tabla* in the village and roadside vendors—to the festive occasions such as a rooftop wedding in Tbilisi. Goldstein's choice to include black and white photos rather than color serves to emphasize the strong persistence of Georgian classic rural life into the twenty-first century. She further enlivens this world by including personal anecdotes, stories, and recipes from the many different Georgians she has developed relationships with—a Tbilisi physician, the mother of a Georgian filmmaker, Georgian expats, one of her diasporic Georgian students. Thus, she makes one feel at home, if only figuratively, in the small, yet richly diverse and mighty (after all, Stalin was a Georgian) country.

Goldstein makes the recipes accessible, recommending that readers not worry about pronouncing the names of the various foods, often referencing her “American adaptations,” and giving the sense that she is so excited about sharing this cuisine that she truly cares if the cook succeeds. She even provides the Western cook with addresses for mail ordering harder-to-find, special ingredients (such as nigella seed and *churchkhela*, a homemade candy made from the autumn harvest of nuts and grapes). At the back of the book are suggested menus, so that you, too, can put on a complete Georgian-style *supra*—a feast for New Year's, a casual supper, or a rustic picnic.

With vivid gustatory imageries, readers can nearly taste the grilled meats and cheeses, skewered eggs and *khachapuri*, cheese-and-herb-filled bread, of an impromptu lunch in the