

## Book Review

– *The Popular Economy in Urban Latin America: Informality, Materiality, and Gender in Commerce*, edited by Eveline Dürr and Julianne Müller, Lexington Books, 2019

From its introduction, *The Popular Economy in Urban Latin America* is committed to complicate the dualisms that drag on the debate around informality. It is furthermore keen to avoid the trap of equating the popular economy with one that is exclusively based on principles of solidarity, collaboration, and reciprocity. Drawing largely on ethnographic research, the chapters instead explore the multi-faceted and often ambivalent character of the actors, initiatives, practices, and processes in the popular economy. South-America is overrepresented, but diversity is certainly not an issue. The contributions do a great job in unpacking a plurality of social, political, and spatial entanglements in all cases concerned here. Following the editors' succinct introduction, which nonetheless succeeds in providing a careful overview of the field, the chapters are divided in three main themes: informality, materiality, and gender – the latter extending into the afterword.

Part One focuses on informality. Rudi Colloredo-Mansfeld's opening chapter explores how the penetration of global discourses around competition instigated the cooperation between local family businesses in Atuntaqui, Tulcán, and Otavalo, Ecuador. Whereas at the height of Ecuadorian neoliberalism artisans and small entrepreneurs learned that “competing can also mean cooperating” (p. 29), Rafael Correa's turn to the “popular and solidarity economy” damped the collaborative competitiveness that protected these businesses from the advances of global capitalism. Up next, Peter Mörterböck and Helge Mooshammer guide us through the evolving formal and informal linkages that build the “Hippie Fair,” in Belo Horizonte, from its origins as a small counter-culture artisan fair to the giant popular consumption fair of today. If it “has colluded with the strategies of political power to align the local economy with the rhythms of global markets” (p.58), the fair is also a space for other-than-economic exchanges, where different groups of people get together and reclaim part of this Brazilian city for all. In the only chapter on the Caribbean, Natalie Göltenboth introduces us to Mura-leando, a creative social project space in Havana. That the emergence of a

solidarity-based economy in Cuba hinges on the touristification of its economy is a central paradox for Göltenboth. More interestingly, however, she discusses how exchanges between local artists, residents, and North-American tourists at Muraleando involves more than trading art and souvenirs for hard currency to fund community projects – but the exchange of idealized and ideal representations of Cuba pre- and post-*período especial*.

Part Two centres on materiality. André Vereta-Nahoum analyzes grey literature and mainstream media to retrace the conflicts between traders and city planners, who attempt to materialize their version of a “proper” Night Market, in São Paulo. In exploring the changing physical and political boundaries that shape the market, Vereta-Nahoums show how selective intervention and control by the state create new “agents of popular trade,” fostering the informal practices that also actively produce the market. In the following chapter, Julianne Müller brings a refreshing analysis of East Asian multinational corporations’ strategies to regain control and their share of the market in La Paz, Bolivia. Seen from the perspective of big corporations, the compliance of informal businesses is achieved not through coercion, but through incursions by local corporate employees who build trust relations with vendors in popular commercial centres, in order to effectively implement marketing devices to boost and control the sales of original merchandise.

Part Three introduces gender. In her contribution, Florence Babb advocates for an intersectional approach to the urban popular economies of the Global South. Actually, Babb’s chapter is less of a study of a popular market than an analysis of “braided inequalities” (following Marfil Francke) in Lima, Peru. She does so by contrasting the culturally and economically diverse places, experiences, and identities associated with migrants from the highlands in the capital, where intersecting layers of privilege and exclusion built upon colonial foundations are woven in and reproduced through the fabric of the modern city. The following chapter, by Cristina Vega and Magali Marega, discusses women traders’ individual and collective strategies of public space appropriation in Quito, Ecuador. Foregrounding the multilocality of practices and relations that characterize popular urban street markets, the authors present street vending as a “strategy of care,” which simultaneously allows these women relative autonomy from, and the reproduction of, their households. In the afterword, Carlos Alba Vega “gives voice” to mother and daughter Guillermina Rico and Silvia Sánchez Rico, spinning a narrative of street trade in Mexico City covering short of a century. Almost entirely written from the perspective of Sánchez, with excerpts from a 1994 interview with her mother, the prologue says much about women’s suffering and struggle, at home and on the streets. But it is also an ode to the political prowess and power of two women who forged their leadership against a sexist society galvanizing almost universal support, from the street vendors across the city to the highest echelons of the PRI.

Some of the chapters in the book could have been more ambitious in exploring what is at stake. As in many edited volumes, alternative assemblages could

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have highlighted other interesting themes that run through the chapters, including mobility, both within and to the city; hard and soft infrastructures; competition and solidarity; and appropriations of space, of economic practices, and of political discourses. Informality and materiality are actually – and perhaps unavoidably – transversal to the book which makes it all the more evident that gender does not receive the same attention. In fact, beyond Part Three, most chapters shy away from engaging with gender or with any other of the strands combining in the braided inequalities invoked by Babb in her contribution. Ultimately, however, this is an accessible and insightful publication, that offers both a great overview and relevant new analyses of the field. Bringing together diverse experiences, stories, and approaches, the book is a welcome addition to scholars researching and teaching on the popular economies in urban Latin America.

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