

Book Review

– *Making It at Any Cost: Aspirations and Politics in a Counterfeit Clothing Marketplace*, by Matías Dewey. University of Texas Press, 2020

La Salada in Buenos Aires, also known as the great black market of Latin America, accumulates in its almost 20 hectares the production, purchase and sales of different products, among which the counterfeit brand clothing stands out. Founded by Bolivian migrants in the early 1990s, a decade of great political and economic structural changes in the region, this market has become a transnational commercial pole from where distribution and commercialization routes are opened for buyers and sellers from neighbouring countries. Thus, despite the marginal character granted by local and national authorities, La Salada is a gold mine for all those entrepreneurs in the capital city of Argentina who seek to forge their own future in the garment industry. It is in this scenario where illegality and informality coincide, shaping a complex governance structure that succumbs to the invisible hand of the market.

Matías Dewey's book manages to unveil the dynamics of social, political and economic coexistence within La Salada, through a painstaking ethnographic work. The author seeks to contribute both to research on economic sociology, with regard to the social order in the shadows of the legal architecture of the state, as well as to research in the garment industry, especially in relation to literature on entrepreneurship, sweatshops, and global value chains. As a prelude to the three parts that compose the book, the author introduces La Salada acknowledging its marginal character, framing it as a stigmatized urban area that arises from the process of deindustrialization in the capital city of Argentina. An informal and illegal post-Fordist market of migrant origins, where self-employment fulfils a structural gap in the garment industry, by satisfying the demand for low-cost clothing from a sector of the population that has been left abandoned by formal firms. In the first part of the book, subdivided in three chapters, the trading dynamics within the marketplace are unveiled, demonstrating that these are unlike the ones identified in the literature about legal markets. In the sense that contrary to the valuable role that plays confidence in legal economic transactions, ambiguity, fear and mistrust are deeply-rooted features of the day-to-day social interactions of La Salada's entrepreneurs.

In the three chapters that make up the second part of the book, Dewey makes a critical contribution to theoretical debates about ethnic entrepreneurship referring to literature on ethnic economies and economic enclaves. In his analysis he addresses the motivations to become an entrepreneur in the garment sector in La Salada, as part of a learning process tied to the future trajectories that envision business owners in the marketplace. Particularly, in this section the author provides valuable inputs regarding value chains and business upgrades of entrepreneurs, which challenges the increasing body of anthropological research on the garment industry that centres its attention in the copy/original dichotomy. Namely, the manner in which counterfeit garment producers capitalize the needs from buyers, without necessarily following the fashion and design standards of official brands. On the whole, the production of counterfeit clothing in La Salada is not aimed at emulating the original brand designs, on the contrary, garments are produced according to the clients' tastes. From this, it is noticed that entrepreneurs in the informal garment industry tend to follow the same productive patterns and aspirations as formal companies but at a local scale.

Finally, in the third part of the book, Dewey addresses the economic uncertainties and personal insecurities of entrepreneurs of La Salada. This, in a scenario where governance structures are detached from the rule of law, a fact widely discussed in academic research on informal economies in large Latin American metropolises. The author exhibits the extra-legal practices to which entrepreneurs are subject in the marketplace most of which are oriented both to ensure social balance with their counterparts, as well as to access financing to invest in their businesses. For instance, it is found that microfinance in La Salada is characterized by the use of cash in commercial transactions, which violates any possibility of fiscal control through bank records. This situation goes hand in hand with a productive development scheme linked to informal loans, where getting and preserving creditworthiness becomes part of the aspirations of entrepreneurs especially in social settings where commercial credibility is constantly at risk. Such well-functioning of the garment industry within La Salada, makes it an economic enclave, hence the possibilities of approaching economic formality are not a priority for this type of marketplaces.

Making it at any cost: aspirations and politics in a counterfeit clothing marketplace is a sophisticated piece of ethnographic work, especially relevant for academic research focused on the study of urban economic structures in Latin American cities. Throughout the book, the well-structured analytical sequence and narrative followed by the author is captivating and manages to engage the reader in the everyday living of the inhabitants of La Salada. However, on a theoretical level, despite the fact that from the onset Dewey states the theoretical contribution that he seeks to make there is a sense that the book engages in too many fields of study, losing consistency in the construction of the core arguments of the research. For instance, this occurs with the use of the concepts of informality and illegality, which define the type of social and economic relationships that emerge in urban spaces characterized by job insecurity and social

stigmatization. Overall, the book encourages the reader to discover the different analytical nuances that a recurring phenomenon studied in the Latin American region might take, leaving the path open for further research to be done.

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