

ANTHROPOLOGY MATTERS JOURNAL

anthropologymatters.com

Book Review

OLIVIA ANGÉ, *Barter and Social Regeneration in the Argentinean Andes*. New York and Oxford: Berghahn Books. 2018, 236 pp. (pb £99).

Little attention has been paid to barter and Olivia Angé's *Barter and Social Regeneration in the Argentinean Andes* helps breach this gap. Historically, barter has retained an elusive and fetishized space in the economic imagination since Adam Smith first wrote of an imaginary land of barter (Graeber 2011). In *Debt* Graeber convincingly argued that barter exists in many complex ways and should be studied in its own right, beyond the crude stereotypes entertained by traditional economics (2011). In many ways, this monograph builds on Graeber's work and puts forward a competent ethnography of barter in the Argentinian Andes. Moreover, Angé significantly advances the field of barter studies by showing that barter is not merely confined to exchanges between outsiders and a community, as Graeber (2011) claimed, but can be a backbone of internal exchange in its own right.

Angé focuses on barter at religious fairs in the north of Argentina, referred to as *cambio*. These fairs are considered a staple of indigenous life. They have long existed in the margin of legality, but in recent years they have begun attracting outside tourism and even state sponsored iterations. Angé makes deft work of describing the multiple types of exchange that occur at these fairs. Fairs involve not only *cambio* (barter) but also *negocio* (trading for profit), *invitación* (a type of gift giving, usually amongst tight allies or between humans and

other telluric beings), and *yapa* (a gift added to court favour during an exchange, or, as per Lazar (2008), a measure against bias in weighing scales). Angé not only distinguishes between types of exchange but also between types of goods exchanged. Traditional foodstuffs are seen as imbued with life force from Pachamama and their producers are thus often treated ritualistically. Industrial foodstuff however, is not considered to have special properties, and is absent from ritualistic treatment and *cambio*.

One particular point of emphasis is how economic productivity remains a focal point for identity with the main distinction being between highland herders and lowland cultivators. Readers familiar with Andean studies will recognise these distinctions. While these two groups are seen as somewhat antagonistic, they also heavily rely on each other for goods that are not widely available in their ecological niche. Due to the high cost of meat, *cambio* continues to be the main way of exchanging these resources for lowlanders. *Cambio* is seen as the exchange mechanism of the *Abuelos* (ancestors/grandparents) and a method of ensuring a fair society, even amongst the divided highlanders and lowlanders.

Cambio exchanges often feature discussions about the quality and quantity of bartered goods, and raise concerns over cheating. Tensions also emerge when an individual is suspected of acquiring goods via *cambio* that they will later sell for profit (*negotio*). This is seen as a betrayal of trust not only of the living but also of the *Abuelos*. *Cambio* therefore might seem confusing to an outsider; traders seek to trade, but not for profit, while also insisting on fair deals, and they sometimes even covertly seek to profit whilst espousing the values of *cambio*. Angé however, delicately shows how these conundrums play out. This work slots neatly into the large body of existing literature concerned with hostile attitudes to money and different non-capitalist exchange systems. For instance, one may consult the excellent edited volume by Larson, Harris, and Tandeter (1995) or find examples of food as a preferential payment over money in the work of Lund-Skar (1994).

Although *cambio* fairs are a social and economic highlight for many indigenous peoples in the Andean region, the practice was imported by the Spanish who sought to distribute

BOOK REVIEW

resources towards mines and major colonial centres. Part of an indigenous history that is often tinted through a lens of nostalgia, *cambio*'s system of values is understood to be the system of *abuelos*. The embracing of these fairs and of indigeneity ties into an Andean-wide movement of pro-Indigenous nostalgia, as described by Abercrombie (1998) and Burman (2016). This revitalization has also attracted the attention of tourists, NGOs, and the state. The state's involvement is important, given the historical marginalization of both these fairs and Indigenous peoples in the region. Many fairs fail to adhere to bureaucratic standards, particularly regarding the treatment of meat. As a solution to this, the Argentinian state, backed by some NGOs, is pushing 'institutional fairs', which often feature less barter and more standard purchasing. These 'institutional fairs' pose several problems for those engaged in them; do they blur boundaries between *cambio* and *negotio*? Does the exoticising gaze of tourists and the controlling gaze of the state limit the opportunity for *cambio*? Or does this new inclusion offer fertile ground for what is often an illicit activity?

The text itself may tread familiar ground for those familiar with Andean studies. One particular limitation is the significant difference in clarity in definitions of transactions as they appear in the introduction and the conclusion respectively. The conclusion rather clearly lays out definitions but the introduction, whilst certainly attentive to debates around these definitions, tends to not be explicit enough. Angé's final definition 'barter is the direct exchange of use value with no reference to a third object. The importance of use distinguishes it from the gift, while the nonmonetary regime of value distinguishes it from commodity exchange.' (p. 194) does not seem to corroborate with the rest of the text. This definition seems to not take into account the evidence that money is used as a reference for barter values in other sections of the text (especially when concerning meat, given its high value and potential resale opportunities) (p. 102). Whilst the reference to money in barter is considered something to be avoided, Angé evidences it but then does not accommodate for it in this topographical discussion. Nonetheless, Angé evidences the importance of barter, production, and ecological niches for identity in the Andes, and her monograph is an important stepping-stone towards a proper academic investigation into barter.

Angé's insights are important not only for understanding non-monetary economics, but they also provide a valuable prism to understand the complex and changing nature of indigeneity in the modern world. Indeed, this ethnography highlights how the "acceptance" of indigenous peoples by states that formerly sought to destroy their ways of life can come hand-in-hand with fetishisation, touristic exoticisation, and the regulation of traditional activities. Barter in the Andes survived the Spanish conquest, dictatorships and violent repression. Now it shows signs of surviving bureaucracy and regulation.

Hayden Cooper (University of St Andrews)

About the Author

Hayden Cooper is a PhD Candidate at the University of St Andrews. His research is focussed upon the economic and political consequences of the soy boom in Eastern Bolivia. As a result of such his work is a cross section of political, environmental, and historical discourses in both the Andes and the Amazon. hc210@st-andrews.ac.uk

References

Abercrombie, Thomas Alan. 1998. *Pathways of Memory and Power: Ethnography and History Among an Andean People*, The University of Wisconsin Press, Madison, U.S.A.

Burman, Anders. 2016. *Indigeneity and Decolonization in the Bolivian Andes: Ritual Practice and Activism*, Lexington Books, Lanham, U.S.A.

Graeber, David. 2014 [2011]. *Debt: The First 5,000 Years*, Melville House, Brooklyn, U.S.A.

Hayden Cooper
BOOK REVIEW

Lazar, Sian. 2008. *El Alto, Rebel City: Self and Citizenship in Andean Bolivia*, Duke University Press, Durham, U.K.

Larson, Brooke, Harris, Olivia, Tandeter, Enrique. 1995. *Ethnicity, Markets, and Migration in the Andes: At the Crossroads of History and Anthropology*, Duke University Press, Durham, U.S.A.

Skar, Sarah Lund. 1994. *Lives Together Worlds Apart: Qechua Colonisation in Jungle and in City*, Scandinavian University Press, Oslo, Norway.