

Goldstein, Daniel M. *Owners of the Sidewalk: Security and Survival in the Informal City*. xiv, 334 pages. Durham, NC.: Duke University Press, 2016. Print.

A book that is simultaneously an insightful ethnography and an outstanding example of anthropological fieldwork and methods, *Owners of the Sidewalk: Security and Survival in an Informal City* takes us deep into the inner workings of Cochabamba's colorful and massive market, the *Cancha*. Because the *Cancha*, in many respects, is the heart of Cochabamba, historically, economically, and socially, Goldstein's newest book contributes greatly to our understanding of the many realities facing the city, Bolivia, and market contexts more broadly. Goldstein had multiple aims in his book: to present a thick description of life in the *Cancha*, to provide insight into the process of fieldwork with an emphasis on collaborative and activist anthropology, and to explore the nuances of informality and insecurity and their implications in a globalized economy. Each of the shorter chapters tells a different story speaking to these themes; the end result is a comprehensive, reflective, and empathetic study of life in one of Latin America's largest markets.

The chapters of *Owners of the Sidewalk* chronicle Goldstein's fieldwork experiences from start to finish, from the initial point of making contacts and building rapport to the final farewells and following through on agreements made throughout his time in Cochabamba. This is done in a reflective, humble, and oftentimes clever manner, making the ethnography an engaging read. It is this stylistic choice that results in both a thorough portrayal of the multiple realities in the *Cancha* as well as a wise commentary on the processes of fieldwork. The scenes are often personal and poignant and he includes anecdotes that are necessarily a

part of fieldwork, but which tend to be left out of most ethnographies. For example, he humorously comments on his own *naïveté*, such as the fact that he had thought that the leaders of two competing groups within the market did not know that he was working with both of them; however, as he finds out at the end of his project, they knew all along. This kind of reflection, attention, and openness is what allows him to learn so much about the various people and groups who are engaged in the *Cancha*.

Speaking to the practice of doing ethnographic fieldwork, Goldstein walks the reader through the methodological decisions that he makes for this specific ethnography, e.g. what he calls “fieldwork in a flash,” having targeted and brief interview questions over a longer period of time to accommodate market vendors’ time constraints. He very clearly demonstrates how anthropological fieldwork allows us to understand the complexities of our world: “Anthropological fieldwork complicates our assumptions about the world, because the more we learn, the more sides to the story we hear, the harder it becomes to live with simple answers. Every situation is more complicated than it initially appears” (230). This was said after talking with the *comisarios*, or those charged by the state with the control of the market. Although their work is often seen as abusive and manipulative, especially toward the *ambulantes* (informal street vendors), Goldstein is able to demonstrate how the *comisarios* are part of a much greater problem, a state system of urban disregulation that attempts to place a particular kind of order onto the market.

It is clear that Goldstein advocates a collaborative and activist anthropology. The research subjects in this ethnography very much drove the goals of the project. Goldstein’s general research interests aligned well with a primary concern of both the *ambulantes* and *comerciantes fijos*, (vendors with fixed stalls): the question and problem of security in the market. This greatly facilitated both groups’ willingness to participate in the project. Goldstein made no intentions to remain a neutral and “objective” researcher nor did he claim to be a hero. All parties involved had self-serving motivations driving their participation. In return for the stories that were offered to Goldstein, he had to give back, engaging in such activities as organizing a seminar on security, writing a book, and helping with a march. In the end, he was disappointed by his inability to help more with the problem of insecurity facing market vendors; however, he recognizes his work as part of an ongoing project to change unjust systems: “...anthropologists will keep writing, critiquing, shining a light on

the darker corners of the world where, all too often, abuses go unwitnessed and ignored. That, it seems to me, is a contribution worth making” (256).

Weaving the background histories and theoretical discussions throughout the more narrative storytelling presentation, results in a thoughtful ethnography that contributes much to the field of anthropology as well as to the body of literature focused on markets in Latin America. Goldstein is interested in the connections among informality, illegality, and insecurity, as well as in how these play out in the marginal spaces of Cochabamba. Bolivia has the largest informal sector of any Latin American country with close to 80% of the population employed within an informal economy; yet, as has been shown in other research, the lines of informality and illegality are blurred. Through meticulous, detailed, and committed fieldwork, with interviews and acceptance of all sides and with remarkable participant observation, Goldstein is able to shed light on some of this blurriness. Both legal, official vendors and state actors operate in and take advantage of activities that are informal (with questions of legality), whether by demanding taxation that benefits the state or local elite, expanding into unofficial market space, reinforcing state ideologies of modernity, or solidifying certain systems of power. The blurriness of informality, additionally, allows both the urban poor and the relatively insecure middle class a certain degree of power and potential for growth in a setting that otherwise is prohibitive of such growth. Through detailed fieldwork, Goldstein is also able to show the heterogeneity of the situation, e.g. the diverse political perspectives and behaviors, and humanity of people who are considered on the margins, those who engage in the informal economy. Finally, most pertinent to all involved parties, the association drawn between informal and illegal leads to a state of continuous insecurity. This is worse, however, for the poorest and most marginalized group, the *ambulantes*: “their very existence [is] unruly, out of place, and threatening to the security of the greater economy and society ... [They] are demonized and persecuted by the state and other local sovereigns, a position that intensifies their daily insecurity” (246).

With nearly 85% of new employment opportunities falling within the informal sector globally, this research has implications well beyond the *Cancha* in Cochabamba. Although this book speaks globally, it is also a true thick description in which the characters come to life and we feel what life is like in the *Cancha*. Although Goldstein professes a bit of disappointment

at not being able to affect greater change, the work is started and this book is certainly “a contribution worth making” (256).

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