

incentivised to walk and then wait to access services, a routine that reminds recipients of their lowly social status. Women must also invest their time and labour in “managing up.” They attend meetings convened by the local manager and verify their own files, which record the fulfillment of conditions that render them eligible for cash transfers. Juntos may be effective in increasing rates of health clinic visitation and school attendance, but the program appears efficient only by devaluing recipients’ time and labour.

Chapter 5 addresses additional factors that make Juntos appear efficient: the under- and unpaid labour of front-line managers and Mother Leaders. Each manager oversees about a thousand households, each with a mother and an average of three children. Often having advanced from rural backgrounds to Peru’s new middle class through post-secondary education, managers carry out low-paid contract work that takes them away from their families for weeks on end and forces them to navigate limited transportation and communication networks. Local managers visit clinics and schools to verify that mothers have met conditions, gather and enter handwritten records into centralised computer systems, coordinate with social service staff to ensure that babies have health certificates and children are enrolled in school, implement affiliations and suspensions, advise women when payday and other meetings will take place, and distribute cash delivered by armoured trucks every three months.

Mother Leaders are recruited by local managers to help fill gaps between policy expectations and resource allocation. They identify pregnant mothers, promote public health insurance registration and regular health checkups, ensure that children are enrolled in and regularly attend school, and guide women on meeting their co-responsibilities. In effect, Mother Leaders are asked to monitor their neighbours’ behaviour, often just to the benefit of the local manager, who would otherwise find it impossible to implement Juntos.

Shadow conditions – the tasks Juntos recipients are expected to perform above and beyond officially required program conditions – are the topic of Chapter 6. Local managers use their influence and threats of suspension to compel mothers to tidy their houses, grow gardens, attend meetings, cook school lunches, paint Juntos flags, use smokeless stoves, walk in political parades, attend literacy workshops, participate in cooking fairs, attend hygiene training workshops, organise toothbrushes and soap, build latrines, give birth in health clinics, send children as young as six months to the subsidised national day-care program, and do anything else in an ever-expanding range of arbitrary conditions.

Local managers ultimately determine if a mother receives a cash payment. Without clear information of what the state requires, and lacking an accessible way to file a complaint, women are forced to comply with both official and shadow conditions. These shadow conditions illustrate the coercive power of incentives embedded in CCT programs.

While Cookson shows that Juntos policy-makers and front-line staff work hard to improve health and education outcomes, she also offers sharp criticism. The existence of cash transfers reliant on conditions and the concomitant necessity to monitor this compliance are central features of a program created by a state that simultaneously fails to adequately invest in social and health services and does not want to be seen to hand out money to the poor, unless these unfortunate people have shown

themselves to be hardworking, responsible and deserving of that “little bit of help.” Through Juntos, the Peruvian state shifts responsibility for overcoming poverty onto the poor themselves.

In the end, cash transfers alleviate only some costs of caring for family members. More substantive state investment is needed to improve basic living conditions, and attention must be redirected from individual behaviour to “the persistent inequities that shape people’s broader life conditions” (151). An alternative is unconditional cash transfer programs and a meaningful social safety net. This requires a new distributive politics, one not based on an exchange for labour or good conduct, or an unreciprocated gift, but instead “a rightful allocation due to a rightful owner” (Ferguson 2015 in Cookson 2018, p. 157).

*Unjust Conditions* is a must-read for those interested in the political-economic drivers of poverty, as well as researchers, students and practitioners of development, gender and labour, and governance and social policy who wish to understand CCT from a critical perspective.

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**Millar, Kathleen, *Reclaiming the Discarded: Life and Labor on Rio’s Largest Garbage Dump*, Durham and London: Duke University Press, 2018, 248 pages.**

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Kathleen Millar’s *Reclaiming the Discarded* is an eloquent ethnography about the entanglements of work and life on what was Rio’s largest garbage dump, Jardim Gramacho, told through the life trajectories and labour practices of *catadores*, or garbage sorters, as they artfully wade through layers of discard under the hot Brazilian sun.

This book is an excellent example of what anthropologists do best. Methodologically, it is an ethnography that stands on its own. Millar draws on fieldwork completed between 2005 and 2012 – primarily in 2008 and 2009 – when she worked as a *novato catador*, or novice garbage sorter, on the dump and living in a neighbourhood closest to it. Textually, the book is a beautiful read from start to finish: clear, concise and full of colour and life. Beyond the prose, the narrative itself shines, as Millar clearly formed deep and meaningful relationships with *catadores* and the people living around Jardim Gramacho.

Chapter 1 launches the reader into one of the important theoretical contributions of the book. Millar walks the reader through what she refers to as her “first day-as-catador” (which was not her first day sorting garbage). Her battle with emotional and physical exhaustion, and her frustration with the materials, an injury and then a rain shower, provide cause for her fellow *catadores* to laugh and welcome her to the trade. Only when nearing the point of quitting does she begin to see labour as an ontological experience (53) where work, life and death are ever-present in the daily rhythms of labouring bodies. The narrative serves as an excellent hook, capturing the audience with its portrayal of life on the dump. Particularly impressive is the way Millar escapes a victimising narrative so commonly

embedded in the moralising discussions of what is described as “precarious” or “informal” work. Instead, her informants are equals, colleagues and agents – and makers of history in their own right (Thompson 1969).

What is the inescapable pull of *catador* work? Why did *catadores* repeatedly return to the dump, even when many had other (more permanent) opportunities to pursue? Each chapter assembles an open-ended answer to these questions to answer the puzzle of why people return to what is primarily a toxic zone of work. Upon reflecting on the kinds of questions other anthropologists have asked about her research, Millar suggests that this question is never asked because anthropologists have assumed they know the answer – garbage pickers return to the dump out of economic necessity. Millar argues that the *catadores*’ decision to return can be understood as a political act in itself. It is a way “to break with normative forms of capitalist labour” (92). In this sense, Millar’s work resonates with accounts of the flexible labour of mushroom pickers (Tsing 2015).

To support her claims that alternative forms of work are a political practice, Miller introduces the reader to the fascinating work of Edward Palmer (E.P.) Thompson. This move is a refreshing one, as I have always wondered why Thompson hasn’t had more of an influence on anthropologists who study work and labour. Millar suggests that anthropologists have avoided Thompson because, while his work is intriguing, it is also challenging, as it lacks an apparent “thesis” or “theory” that can be applied succinctly to anthropological analysis. Rather than draw on the overly cited work on class consciousness from *The Making of the English Working Class*, Miller channels a Thompsonian essence throughout her ethnography. Her analysis demonstrates a resistance to overly economic understandings of experiences, a rejection of the idea that subsistence drives people to work, and an acute attention to working peoples as the authors of their own political agency and history – regardless of whether or not these contribute to hegemonic understandings of organising – the topic of Chapter 5.

The main strength of *Reclaiming the Discarded* is – without a doubt – what it contributes to contemporary understandings of precarious labour. By troubling the notion that “precarious labour” is necessarily “bad labour,” as contemporary commentators would have us believe, Millar complicates an economic hypothesis that people work because they need to subsist. Anthropologists would head Millar’s call by looking beyond political (and commonplace) forms of political action and consciousness to see the ways everyday forms of work and life can be, in themselves, practices that are indeed political choices with political consequences. The choice of Rose, in Chapter 2, to work as a *catador* as opposed to taking a permanent office position does as much to reflect what precarious employment adds to people’s lives – closeness with co-workers, flexibility to deal with everyday emergencies, a sense of mutual obligation and attachment to friends, and an ability to develop other life goals – as it does to contrast what, according to Rose, is lost with the permanent forms of employment that she has known. This intervention is a welcome one for anthropologists who study non-permanent forms of employment.

What could be conceived of as an additional strength of the book is potentially a weakness. By carefully developing new theoretical concepts from which to understand the realities of *catadores*, such as “relational autonomy” (71), “dump as burial ground” (66), and “plasticity/plastic-economy” (127–150), to

name a few, Millar risks letting her nuanced development of theoretical problems and paradigms overwhelm an otherwise beautiful and accessible ethnography, the strengths of which at least in most cases speaks for themselves. Unfortunately, this makes an otherwise rich and compelling ethnographic account potentially inaccessible to undergraduate and broader audiences.

If a thoughtful and, at times, dismaying portrayal of the sacrifice and hard work that refuse sorters in Jardim Gramacho incur to make a living and produce livelihoods on the periphery of one of the largest cities in the world were not enough, Millar adds a much-needed (and inspiring) account of alternative ways of imagining futures of work and life during times of generalised neoliberal restructuring and an overwhelming global attack on permanent work. *Catadores* teach us that there are other ways of imagining what work life could look like in a future not entirely dominated by capitalist relations. This respectful portrayal of *catadores*’ refusal to succumb to the capitalist steamroller is a refreshing and thought-provoking read for anyone concerned with labour, livelihoods and political change.

## References

- Thompson, E.P. 1969. *The Making of the English Working Class*. New York: Vintage Books.  
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**Guntra A. Aistara**, *Organic Sovereignties: Struggles over Farming in an Age of Free Trade*, Seattle, WA: University of Washington Press, 2018, 272 pages.

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What is organic agriculture? Many of us are familiar with the idea that organic agriculture is a social movement that seeks to transform conventional, chemically dependent farming practices, and society along with them, and have come across debates over certification and labelling, as well as over whether the procurement of organic goods by large corporations like Walmart actually contributes to any positive transformation of farming practices or the food system. But what do these debates and practices look like outside of North America and Europe, and perhaps also Mexico, where most of the research has thus far been focused? Luckily, Guntra Aistara’s comparative ethnography provides us with an insightful addition to existing studies on organic agriculture by delving into the meanings, struggles and practices of organic agriculture for farmers in Latvia and Costa Rica, two countries that are situated in between the east/west and north/south geopolitical axes, respectively. Understanding the practices and struggles of “organics in between” challenges assumptions about organic farming that universalise the North American and European experiences, including the assumption that the transformative potential of organic is always watered down by state regulation and markets.