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Poor People's Politics: Peronist Survival Networks And The Legacy Of Evita



Synopsis

“Political clientelism” is a term used to characterize the contemporary relationships between political elites and the poor in Latin America in which goods and services are traded for political favors. Javier Auyero critically deploys the notion in *Poor People’s Politics* to analyze the political practices of the Peronist Party among shantytown dwellers in contemporary Argentina. Looking closely at the slum-dwellers’ informal problem-solving networks, which are necessary for material survival, and the different meanings of Peronism within these networks, Auyero presents the first ethnography of urban clientelism ever carried out in Argentina. Revealing a deep familiarity with the lives of the urban poor in Villa Paraíso—so, a stigmatized and destitute shantytown of Buenos Aires, Auyero demonstrates the ways in which local politicians present their vital favors to the poor and how the poor perceive and evaluate these favors. Having penetrated the networks, he describes how they are structured, what is traded, and the particular way in which women facilitate these transactions. Moreover, Auyero proposes that the act of granting favors or giving food in return for votes gives the politicians’ acts a performative and symbolic meaning that flavors the relation between problem-solver and problem-holder, while also creating quite different versions of contemporary Peronism. Along the way, Auyero is careful to situate the emergence and consolidation of clientelism in historic, cultural, and economic contexts. *Poor People’s Politics* reexamines the relationship between politics and the destitute in Latin America, showing how deeply embedded politics are in the lives of those who do not mobilize in the usual sense of the word but who are far from passive. It will appeal to a wide range of students and scholars of Latin American studies, sociology, anthropology, political science, history, and cultural studies.

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Customer Reviews

"At the level of most political science literature on urban poverty and clientelism, this work is genuinely pathbreaking. Combining the best of 'thick description' ethnography with a sense of more global processes at work in a society, Auyero uses the most up-to-date analytical frameworks to interrogate an object of study that has rarely--if ever--been so addressed. This is a book to be reckoned with over the next few years and beyond."--Daniel James, author of *Dona Maria's Story: Life History, Memory, and Political Identity*

Other people write about patronage politics as a form of organization, as a scourge to eradicate, or as a necessary evil on the way to full democracy. Javier Auyero writes about it as a raucous, improvised, crucial way of surviving poverty and inequality. Reporting perceptive first-hand observations in playful, energetic prose, Auyero illuminates poor people's politics in Argentina and elsewhere.

—Charles Tilly, Columbia University

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Where should we shelve this book? Does it matter? Should it be in Latin American Studies? Should it be in sociology? The people that Auyero portrays with the skill of a craftsman could not be Argentinean. They could be in every day New York at the kitchen soups, they could have lived in the old days of Italian immigration. Rather than concentrating in names and places the aim of this book is to find the ways in which every day people make sense of their lives while being in a situation of oppression; to find the ways in which there could be resistance inside acts catalogues as domination and at the same time maintain the idea of domination intact. This book is a must for every person interested in Argentina, for every person interested in Latin America, for every people

interested in the sociological analysis of everyday life and political domination. Integrating theory and empiria, this book is a readable one, even though it doesn't run away from theory. As a grad student and an adjunct teacher myself, I think it could be a great undergrad and grad textbook.

This is a truly outstanding work. Hardly anyone did the kind of fieldwork Auyero did, hardly anyone illuminates the way in which the poor in Argentina manage to solve their everyday survival problems and, in the process, become subordinated in a powerful domination network. I would recommend this book not only to those interested in Latin American politics but also to those who want to know what a theoretically-inspired ethnography looks like.

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