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Social Exchange

Barter as Economic and Cultural Activism in Medellín, Colombia

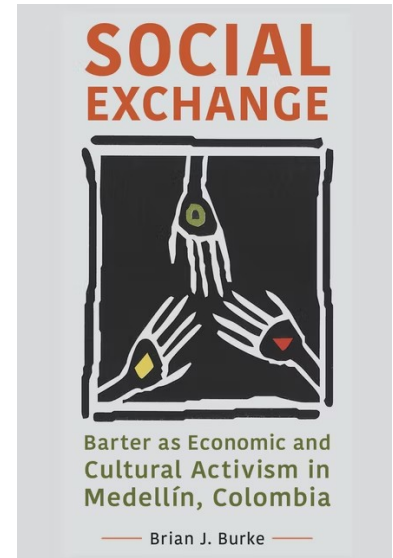
BRIAN J. BURKE

"Brian Burke has produced a rich, wonderfully evocative and thickly described portrayal of the real economy through which millions of us make livelihoods and struggle, imperfectly, for something better. Latin America has often been inspirational to those of us in the neoliberalized North, and here you will find inspiration from a close observation of early experiments in developing economies where what matters is living well rather than endless growth."

— Peter North, author of *Money and Liberation: The Micropolitics of Alternative Currency Movements*

Money occupies a powerful place in our lives – it is a problem, a goal, and motivator, a measure of self-worth and national progress, and even an influence on how we relate to each other and to nature – but what happens when communities start to reinvent money and markets? Over the last twenty-five years, grassroots activists in Medellín, Colombia, have used barter markets and community currencies as one strategy to re-weave a social fabric shredded by violence and to establish an economy founded on respect and reciprocity rather than exploitation. In *Social Exchange*, Brian J. Burke provides a deep ethnographic investigation of this activism and its effects. This story draws us into the cultural and material effects of capitalism and narco-violence, while also helping us understand what new radical imaginations look like and how people bring them to life. The result is an intimate glimpse of urban life in Latin America, as well as a broader analysis of non-capitalist or post-capitalist possibility.

BRIAN J. BURKE is an associate professor at Appalachian State University in Boone, North Carolina. He is the coeditor of *Cooperatives, Grassroots Development, and Social Change*.



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