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Jonathan Fox, *Accountability Politics: Power and Voice in Rural Mexico* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008), pp. xi + 438, £55.00, £14.99 pb.

This book is an important contribution to the literature on 'new' political and democratic spaces in Latin America. Rich, refreshing and provocative in ideas, Fox presents a case study of Mexican decentralisation, the particularities of rural accountability politics and the re-positioning of democracy, as a series of state-society events during the 1980s and 1990s. He situates these within an overall framework of national changes, electoral competition, human right issues, the independent media's civic resonance and the impact of environmental campaigners.

In Mexico, civic voice (following Hirschman) and power are a social construction, a product of the combination of state-society processes operating at different periods and subsequent to the transition from 'complete authoritarian impunity to an uneven combination of civic responsiveness and accountability'. Fox tries to locate the social foundations of accountability politics in contemporary Mexico. Accountability is conceptualised here as a public 'outcome' that should not be equated with political democracy, but rather as something that is principally determined by people challenging who is accountable to whom. This process takes place 'as clients become citizens and bureaucrats become public servants'. Methodologically, Fox focuses on the ideologies and procedures of reformist anti-poverty programmes and historical regional factors, analysing the ways in which the dynamics between these two elements affect 'autonomous collective action' and produce partial transformations of the state. In this sense, accountability is used as a relational concept linking state policy, civil society actions and individual political experiences.

Many of the chapters provide a critical and fascinating exploration of the social construction and origins of accountability in Mexico. Fox signals the importance and methodological invisibility of intra-municipal power relations. He also points to the importance of other spaces for state-society power sharing, such as regional councils for agricultural investment, food distribution, electoral administration, regional infrastructure investment, watershed management and sustainable use of natural resources. He analyses the political functions of social accountability reforms, and the choices taken by different actors to exercise their political voice.

Fox successfully links exit and voice conceptually to explain that exit (in the form of migration to the USA) can be followed by voice. This allows him to focus on the political significance of the emergent migrant civil society, and consider the migrant political experience in USA as an emergent form of politics. Fox argues that from the 1990s onwards migrant political action unfolded in the USA through home-town associations and voting rights campaigns, making these actors' politically active and engaged in bi-national accountability politics. This autonomous collective action began after migrants left Mexico and experienced different political rights campaign in the host society. Through this process of 'rights enfranchisement', migrants found their political voice and representation.

Fox intends his book to be a contribution to the analysis of how public institutions change and the role of state-society dynamics in this process. He begins the book with a survey of the literature on the role of civil society in vertical and horizontal accountability. He dismisses the widely-held assumption that state and society are bound together in a zero-sum balance of power, pointing instead to the need to explore how pro-accountability actors within both state institutions and civil

society build coalitions and ‘virtuous circles’ to encourage accountability, civil society and state actors effectively empowering one another and then embedding these reforms within the state.

Fox argues that institutions such as ‘transparency and oversight bodies’, acquired in the course of civic society actions and conflicts with both the vertical and horizontal political dimensions of accountability, are a space of accumulation of political interactions that is leading Mexican civil society to democratically ‘thicken’. This phenomenon is propelled by freedom of association and adopts three analytically distinct political pathways: first, the co-production of social capital between state reformists and local societal groups willing and able to take advantage of openings from above, involving limited but substantive participation in the implementation of government development programmes; second, the external nongovernmental actors that provide support to local and regional organisations, such as church, development, and human rights groups, and; third, more overtly oppositional political movements, such as the Zapatistas.

Fox explains the process of accountability politics, seeing this as a series of interactions between individuals and groups participating in defined social, cultural, institutional and policy contexts. However, Fox’s account of social capital’s adaptation to authoritarian environments results in a rather different conceptualisation from Putnam’s. Yet, both authors would probably agree that civic engagement does matter. I suspect there is more to the analysis of accountability politics in Mexico than its degree of institutional reforms and vertical integration, on the one hand, and the horizontal spread of self-organisation, grassroots grounding, national linkages, monitoring capacity and bargaining power, on the other. Fox may be over-optimistic about the ability of reformers within public institutions to enable policy environments that favor collective action. Nonetheless, this book provides an informed and interesting account of institutional changes and regional social organisation in Mexico. It is well written, clearly presented, innovative and empirically strong, going well beyond the study of electoral and elected institutions to focus on new accountability dynamics.

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C. Mathews Samson, *Re-enchanting the World: Maya Protestantism in the Guatemalan Highlands* (Tuscaloosa, AL: The University of Alabama Press, 2007), pp. xvii + 197, \$60.00, \$29.95 pb.

What does it mean to be both Maya and Protestant in Guatemala? C. Mathews Samson sets out to answer this question in this highly readable book, using Presbyterian case studies from two indigenous groups. ‘On the surface, the Mam represent a more traditional evangelical Christian presence as opposed to the activist and politicised practice of the Kakchikel. In neither case, however, do Maya evangelicals reject their cultural identity when participating in an evangelical community’ (pp. 5–6). This assumption is contested by literature suggesting that evangelical religion often tends to turn Indians into ladinos; for example, Sheldon Annis’ book *God and Production in a Guatemalan Town* (Texas, 1987) or James D. Sexton’s article ‘Protestantism and Modernization in Two Guatemalan Towns’, published in *American Ethnologist* in 1978. Samson does not engage this debate, although he quotes