



The Politics of Food in Mexico: State Power and Social Mobilization. by Jonathan Fox
Review by: Peter S. Cleaves
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able. For anthropologists and social scientists interested in socioeconomic and institutional change in the developing world, these two assumptions are important because they highlight the fact that in the short and medium term, economic change might generate more costs than benefits.

In her book, Ensminger sets out to explain how the spread of market forces transformed labor, social, economic, and property relations among the Galole Orma. She relies on historical and longitudinal data of a group of households to show the asymmetric effects that the penetration of market forces have had on the Galole Orma. By employing both the new institutional economic perspective and the ethnographic approach of anthropology, she is able to analyze the process of institutional and ideological change within the Galole Orma community. In particular, she shows how these changes gradually led to a shift within the Galole Orma community away from pastoralism toward a more sedentary community of cattle herders.

Her application of the new institutional economic perspective to the study of the process of change among the Galole Orma is generally convincing. For political scientists, the most striking claim made by the author is the one made in chapter 6. There she argues that "in the aftermath of increasing economic growth and resultant economic diversification among the Orma, there was a breakdown in community and a failure of collective action" (p. 143). While she is quite persuasive in her argument as to why there was a breakdown (particularly because of the increasing inability of elders to enforce property rights), she overdoes her case when she claims that the failure of collective action at the community level was effectively supplanted by the state in Kenya. Her attempt to explain state formation within the context of new institutional economic theory becomes dangerously mechanistic at times. Her argument that the benefits offered by the state through its increased institutional penetration of peripheral communities such as the Orma have led to growing acceptance of the state assumes a rational outcome that is difficult to sustain in Africa today.

The fact that the penetration of market forces and state institutions have had a significant impact on pastoralists like the Galole Orma is undeniable. To make the claim, however, that "the lessons from this case study of state incorporation speak also to the issue of state formation, and more generally to the relationship between economic growth and the breakdown of communities, and the institutions that support communities, in this case marriage, lineage, clan, gerontocracy, patriarchy, and patron-client relations" (p. 143) suggests that the author does assume that change always moves in the direction of increasing efficiency or economic growth. Although she recognizes that there have been losers, particularly the nomads, she implies that there has been a convergence of interests between the state elite and Orma elite and nonelite alike.

The main point is not that the penetration of market forces and state institutions has not reshaped the Orma community and led to a breakdown of traditional patterns of collective action. What is at issue here is that this process of change in Africa rarely, if ever, involves the complete breakdown of "lineage, clan, gerontocracy, and patron-client relations." In most instances, these elements continue to influence institutional change and have an impact on economic development. Whether

elites use these quasi-traditional elements to enhance their own political and economic positions, or the elements persist because institutional and economic change is "lumpy" and reflects multiple asymmetries, the outcome in Africa, at least in terms of institutional and economic development, has generally been a suboptimal one.

Purdue University

DWAYNE WOODS

The Politics of Food in Mexico: State Power and Social Mobilization. By Jonathan Fox. Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1993. 280p. \$39.95.

The sun has not set on hopes that state bureaucracies in developing countries can implement reforms biased in favor of the poor. This hope persists despite the relatively sad record to date. The literature is replete with examples of reforms that have been stillborn or sabotaged or have produced unintended and even damaging consequences. Constraints on reformers with grand objectives are considerable. They must convince political leadership to back their change strategy. They must devise the policy with little information on how it will fare in practice and show quick results to maintain momentum. They must be highly skilled in managing the administrative, political, economic, and ideological dimensions of the new policies until they are self-sustaining. Reform policies, however, raise a red flag to supporters of the status quo. The policies divert resources from existing programs, whose committed supporters in the bureaucracy and civil society oppose and undermine the changes. The poor are typically unorganized and offer few resources to support the reformers other than a promise to accord legitimacy to the regime if the reforms work. Economic cycles inevitably squeeze the government treasury, and political leadership changes—resulting in a review, and sometimes abandonment, of policy just when the new program might be showing accomplishments.

Jonathan Fox confronts each of these issues head-on in a theoretically relevant, well-documented, and sensitive analysis of food policy in Mexico. His case study is the Sistema Alimentario Mexicano (SAM), a rural-development-cum-food-distribution policy instituted under Mexico's Lopez Portillo presidency (1976–82). In 1980, the Mexican government was alarmed by rapidly rising food imports but was not about to scrap the 1917 peasant landholding legislation, which, through the sacrosanct collective farm unit (the *ejido*) suboptimized domestic food production. José Lopez Portillo gave status and backing to a young team of agrarian reformers who had new ideas: make peasant producers the prime beneficiaries of state subsidies in seeds, fertilizers, credit, technical assistance, grain purchase, and water, while extending the state food distribution network to remote rural areas. The goals were to increase production, save foreign currency, reaffirm the viability of the peasant farmer, raise nutritional levels, and enhance political legitimacy for the regime from groups who, seven decades before, had been the footsoldiers for the Mexican Revolution.

The reformers ran into typical problems: opposition from agricultural bureaucrats who wanted all subsidies to go to large farms in irrigated areas; decline in high-level backing as Lopez Portillo became a lame-duck

president; a state-centered political system in which peasant organization was inherently weak; and sharply reduced state finance after the 1982 debt crisis. Fox traces the orientations and capabilities of all the major actors in this drama (e.g., DICONSA, a food distribution agency) and concludes that the policy was most effective where reformers succeeded in organizing the peasant beneficiaries in the context of the reform itself. For example, newly created community food councils used official regulations, shrewdly drafted by the reformers, to hold DICONSA agents accountable for delivering food to rural stores where peasants could buy at subsidized prices.

This research forms part of the literature vaguely called the "new institutionalism." Fox eschews the label and deals industriously with the timeless concerns of organizational effectiveness and responsiveness. The book quite adequately explains the position of the major players in the complex Mexican political system, which helps show why the reform took the course it did. Fox dismisses what he sees as a dichotomy between state-centered and society-centered analyses of bureaucratic behavior and posits the *interactive* alternative, which combines the two. An example of an interactive finding would be change instituted by elites which impinges on beneficiaries, who constitute themselves into groups, which ally with the elites to create a reform coalition.

This analytical concept is linked to a suggestive strategy for reform mongering. The "sandwich strategy" is not a food handout but, rather, an objective alliance between entrepreneurial reformists and autonomous social movements to offset the power of entrenched authoritarian elites. The "sandwich strategy" is the SAM reformers' contribution to praxis, skillfully articulated by Fox, who quite rightly claims that the strategy has cross-national implications. Scholars and practitioners alike are well advised to study Fox's findings in this realm for theoretical and practical guidance, and chapter 7 (which studies the technique) would fit well into any course on policy formulation and implementation.

One criticism is that Fox neglects to discuss how food policy and peasant agriculture were affected by subsequent events. After the Lopez Portillo government, agrarian reformers vainly waited for a "Son of SAM" to rescue the collective-landholding ideals of the Mexican Revolution while allowing Mexico to feed itself. Under Miguel de la Madrid (1982–88), the Mexican state was penniless and ignored the peasant farmer. Carlos Salinas de Gortari (1988–94) then amended the 1917 Constitution in a way that many analysts believe will end the *ejido* and permanently change the context for official policies toward the rural poor. The value of Fox's contribution is thus not his description of the SAM but the expertness with which he uses Mexican food policy to draw important theoretical and practical lessons for state-induced change. The findings, which emphasize targeted organization of the poor more than class mobilization, are salient in one degree or another for Asian, African, and other Latin American cases, as well as for traditionally neglected groups in the United States and other richer countries. *The Politics of Food in Mexico* is a fine example of a case study grounded in exhaustive field research. It addresses real world problems in a theoretically innovative way.

University of Texas, Austin

PETER S. CLEAVES

Nations of Immigrants: Australia, the United States, and International Migration. Edited by Gary P. Freeman and James Jupp. New York: Oxford University Press, 1993, 250p. \$18.95 paper.

Is the process of state-formation among "nations of immigrants" distinctive in some important ways? Strange as it seems, despite the considerable weight attributed to immigration in explaining the political, economic, and social development of the United States and the small number of other countries that fall within this category, little attention has been devoted to the more general question. And perhaps even more surprisingly, historians and social scientists concerned with particular countries within the category have seldom availed themselves of the possibility of comparison to test their observations, or at least enrich them by engaging in the sort of counterfactualism that is rendered possible by relatively similar experiences elsewhere. As the editors of the present work remark in their introductory essay, "One of the very few serious attempts to understand settler societies in a comparative framework is Louis Hartz's *The Founding of New Societies*," an edited volume published thirty years ago, when "political culture" reigned unchallenged (p. 9). But although the Hartz collection contains some stimulating essays, surely even the most conservation-minded among us would agree the field has remained fallow long enough to stand vigorous cultivation.

Although less ambitious, the present volume is a well-executed collaborative examination of the sources and consequences of recent developments in immigration policy in the United States and Australia by scholars from both countries. It is a stimulating beginning in a promising area of research, and contains valuable suggestions for more comprehensive projects along the lines noted.

Comparison, here, serves not so much to achieve broad generalizations as to provide a better understanding of each case by highlighting its specificity. The introductory chapter by the editors sketches the distinctive historical configurations of the two countries, highlighting differences as well as similarities. The juxtaposition of the two cases brings to mind that the notion of "nation of immigrants" should be made time-specific, reflecting a combination of objective criteria (e.g., the rate of immigration in relation to population) and subjective perceptions. In this perspective, the United States was *not* a "nation of immigrants" at the time of the Founding, but became one from about 1830 until it acted very effectively to change its character in the 1920s; Australia in effect *foreclosed* its transformation into a "nation of immigrants" by closing its borders in the 1890s, before the arrival of a significant flow of continental Europeans and Asians. Both countries reopened in the late 1960s; but although Australia is today much more a "nation of immigrants" than the United States (about one out of five Australians was born abroad, as against only one out of twenty Americans), immigration into the United States has been and remains a source of much greater ethnic diversity. Despite the broadening of sources of immigration in the post-war period—first to encompass southern and eastern Europeans, and later Asians—as of 1986, 75% of the Australian population was of British or Irish descent; and immigrants of "English-speaking background" still account for nearly half of the annual intake today.