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The Politics of Food in Mexico: State Power and Social Mobilization by Jonathan Fox

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Bulletin of Latin American Research, Vol. 13, No. 3 (Sep., 1994), pp. 337-338

Published by: [Blackwell Publishing](#) on behalf of [Society for Latin American Studies](#)

Stable URL: <http://www.jstor.org/stable/3338517>

Accessed: 26/11/2011 21:46

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Pergamon

Bull. Latin Am. Res., Vol. 13, No. 3, pp. 337–361, 1994
Elsevier Science Ltd
Society for Latin American Studies
Printed in Great Britain
0261-3050/94\$7.00 + .00

Book Reviews

Fox, Jonathan (1993), **The Politics of Food in Mexico: State Power and Social Mobilization**, Cornell University Press (Ithaca and London). x + 280 pp. \$43.95.

This book is a rare analysis of reform dynamics which gives due attention to struggles occurring both within society and the state. Such a task requires appreciation of the interactive nature of policy-making and Fox does just this in his account of the Mexican Food System (SAM) of 1980–1982. The author offers an innovative theoretical approach for understanding state–society relations and illustrates the relational character of state power through a detailed and nuanced analysis of the various parts of the SAM reform package.

The author takes issue with both state and society-centred theories and proposes an interactive method which helps understand such unexpected outcomes as the successful democratisation of access to food in poor rural areas. Alliances between reformist functionaries and representative social movements overcame the opposition of traditional elites within certain regions and within the state apparatus. Furthermore, Fox shows how these reforms, although small scale at first, facilitated the consolidation (for the first time) of region-wide grassroots organisations in several states of rural Mexico, particularly in the impoverished south.

The fact that these organisations were able to retain political autonomy reveals an important although vulnerable change within the system of interest representation. The weakening of corporatist controls and the emergence of new interlocutors has changed the ways in which poor rural people achieve representation. Fox suggests that a small but significant degree of pluralism and tolerance for autonomous rural organisations has been achieved and may be extended in the future. The roots of this change, he argues, are to be found in the strategic alliances formed during the SAM period.

Fox distinguishes between the achievements of SAM in the area of basic food production and its broader political impact for small farmers. Most of the apparatus responsible for implementing SAM continued to be controlled by entrenched interests which prioritised industrial and agribusiness development over the peasantry. The goal of boosting productivity and achieving the SAM goal of national self-sufficiency in grains was thus interpreted in traditional fashion as subsidies, chemical fertilisers and technology were invested in greater quantities. The results were predictable. National output jumped, but the benefits remained skewed in favour of the larger, capitalised farmers. What was lacking was an attack on the traditional structures of domination. The relative success of one of the SAM programmes was precisely due to the displacement of regional intermediaries and the support given by state reformists to new Community Food Councils.

Although the book deals with a period and policies which were buried under the weight of the debt crisis and neoliberal restructuring, the lessons of SAM for today are highly relevant. The Mexican state no longer possesses control over the same financial resources nor the international autonomy of its oil-boom years, but it still intervenes in the channelling of resources to the rural poor. The National Solidarity Programme (PRONASOL) has incorporated many of the ideas, and personnel, of the reformist current which was involved in implementing SAM. However, PRONASOL reformers

face similar obstacles from regional elites and state actors and the greater presence of opposition parties complicates the picture as moves towards pluralism are resisted by important sectors within the PRI.

The book is well researched and well written and should find a wide readership beyond students of Mexican politics and a more affordable paperback edition would be welcomed. However, the book's tight focus on the interaction of state and social actors may be criticised for its overly institutionalist bias. For example, discussions within peasant communities and organisations receive less treatment than the relationship established with the state. Internal class-based stratification within and between peasant communities is well acknowledged. More recent research has highlighted the specific injustices suffered by women and Indians. The emergence of autonomous producer organisations or the Community Food Councils described by Fox may provide an opportunity to overcome internal inequalities, but they may equally reproduce them. Attention to matters of internal organisation should accompany the concern with external relations, both in research and in rural development practice. These are issues which Fox has addressed more fully in other works on leadership accountability within grassroots organisations and deserve full attention in the future. They are also important if we wish to see movements that break with the pattern of community factionalism which the post-revolutionary state has so carefully fomented through its clientelistic channels of brokerage.

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Arreola, Daniel D. and Curtis, James R. (1993), **The Mexican Border Cities: Landscape Anatomy and Place Personality**, University of Arizona Press (Tucson and London). xix + 258 pp. \$35.00.

The Mexican–United States border cities have undergone rapid and profound change since the 1950s. Current forces for change include the prospects of a North American Free Trade Agreement and the strength of the main Mexican opposition party in the border states. Yet many people in the United States persist in viewing the Mexican border cities simply as reminders of 'Old Mexico', 'tawdry yet convenient and accommodating tourist outlets . . . for short-term visits' (p. 3).

Daniel Arreola and James Curtis seek to challenge this one-dimensional image of the Mexican border cities by exploring the heterogeneity of the landscape in 18 border cities from Tijuana to Matamoros. They seek to demonstrate the differences as well as the similarities between these settlements, four of which recorded populations of less than 20,000 in the 1990 Census, whilst Ciudad Juárez, Tijuana and Mexicali had over 600,000 people (and other estimates place their populations over the one million mark). The authors focus on particular cities as case studies. Ciudad Juárez, the oldest of the 18 cities, provides an example for Chapter Two's discussion of the cities' historical development. Urban structure is examined in Chapter Three, with case studies of Camargo and Matamoros. Tijuana is chosen as an example of tourist landscapes, and Nuevo Laredo's 'Boys' Town' as an example of 'parish landscapes' (prostitution zones) in Chapter Four. Other aspects of Nuevo Laredo surface in Chapter Five (on commercial landscapes, where Reynosa is the main focus of attention) and Chapter Six on residential townscapes. Finally, Nogales is taken as a case study for Chapter Seven's discussion of industrial and 'transit' landscapes.

The task of studying 18 different cities is an ambitious undertaking, particularly