

PEASANTS, POLITICS, AND CHANGE IN RURAL MEXICO

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- RURAL CLASS STRUCTURE IN MEXICO: NEW DEVELOPMENTS, NEW PERSPECTIVES.* By MARIA DE LOS ANGELES CRUMMETT. Kellogg Working Paper number 41 (Notre Dame, Ind.: Helen Kellogg Institute for International Studies, University of Notre Dame, 1985. Pp.49.)
- EL ESTADO Y LOS CAMPESINOS: LA CONFEDERACION NACIONAL CAMPESINA (CNC).* By CLARISA HARDY. (Mexico City: Editorial Nueva Imagen, 1984. Pp. 210.)
- ANTHROPOLOGICAL PERSPECTIVES ON RURAL MEXICO.* By CYNTHIA HEWITT DE ALCANTARA. (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1984. Pp. 224. \$32.05.)
- POLITICAL PARTICIPATION, PUBLIC INVESTMENT, AND SUPPORT FOR THE SYSTEM: A COMPARATIVE STUDY OF RURAL COMMUNITIES IN MEXICO.* By CARLOS SALINAS DE GORTARI. Research Report Series number 35 (Center for U.S.–Mexican Studies, University of California, San Diego, 1982. Pp. 45. \$3.00.)
- THE TRANSFORMATION OF MEXICAN AGRICULTURE: INTERNATIONAL STRUCTURE AND THE POLITICS OF RURAL CHANGE.* By STEVEN E. SANDERSON. (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1986. Pp. 304. \$35.00 cloth, \$9.95 paper.)
- LAND REFORM IN MEXICO: 1910–1980.* By SUSAN R. WALSH SANDERSON. (Orlando, Fla.: Academic Press, 1984. Pp. 186. \$35.00 cloth, \$24.50 paper.)
- THE OIL SYNDROME AND AGRICULTURAL DEVELOPMENT: LESSONS FROM TABASCO, MEXICO.* By SARA JEANNETTE SCHERR. (New York: Praeger, 1985. Pp. 328. \$39.95.)

Rural Mexico has provided scholars with a mother lode for research. For over sixty years, anthropologists and sociologists have crisscrossed the Mexican countryside searching for information about the patterns of cultural variation and social change. By the 1960s, histori-

ans, political scientists, and economists had joined in this research, exploring the structure of power and the distribution of resources. Out of this inquiry has come one of the most fully textured and theoretically sophisticated bodies of literature in the field of Latin American studies.

Ongoing internal debate has enriched this work. From Manuel Gamio's *La población del Valle de Teotihuacán* (1922) through Arturo Warman's *Ensayos sobre el campesinado en México* (1980), contributors to this field have differed sharply in their understandings of the nature of rural Mexico, their definitions of the peasantry and its central problems, and their recommendations for state policy interventions.¹ At the heart of this inquiry lies the debate about the nature of the Mexican peasantry. Traditionally, many scholars argued that the Mexican peasantry was best understood as an isolated social entity, clustered in geographically separated rural communities and preserving cultural traditions and production patterns that were passed down through the generations. In the last twenty years, however, scholars have tended to reject this image of pristine isolation. Instead, they emphasize intense, regular contact between the peasantry and the external society.

The significance of this interaction remains a matter of dispute. Some scholars contend that the peasantry is still a fundamentally distinct and enduring social class, adapting to external penetration in a manner that preserves the integrity of the traditional rural community. Others conclude that the peasantry has been thoroughly penetrated and radically redefined through modern capitalist expansion. Some analysts argue that this capitalist penetration is a constructive force, incorporating the peasantry into the logic of modern historical development. Others interpret it as a destructive force, subjecting the peasantry to sustained marginality and exploitation. The positions taken on these central issues have varied from school to school over the last sixty years, reflecting changing preferences and priorities, data and theories, clients and constituencies.

Research in the 1980s has returned to these classic questions. Drawing on the legacy of prior investigation, however, more recent research is raising its own questions about epistemology, the sociology of knowledge, and appropriate methodologies. The question now is not simply "What do we know?" but also "How do we know?" Proceeding with methodological self-consciousness, recent literature has probed deeper into both the Mexican *campo* and the structure of academic inquiry.

Perhaps the best work in this area is Cynthia Hewitt de Alcántara's *Anthropological Perspectives on Rural Mexico*. When she began this book, the author intended to analyze ten communities that had been studied by various anthropologists across time. She planned to chart "changing levels of living and forms of livelihood" in these communi-

ties since the 1920s. She soon realized, however, that two scholars studying the same community might comprehend it in radically different terms. What appears to be a stable, cooperative environment when seen through the lens of a functionalist paradigm, for example, is found to be laden with conflict when seen through the eyes of a cultural ecologist. Hence a review of the findings about specific communities across time revealed more about the implicit assumptions inherent in different methodological frameworks than about "objective" changes in community life. Consequently, Hewitt de Alcántara's study was redefined to focus on the varied theoretical perspectives employed by those researching rural Mexico, the impact of these perspectives on the portraits they painted, and the waxing and waning of paradigmatic preferences across time.

Hewitt de Alcántara organized and classified hundreds of pieces of research in her effort to systematize sixty years of scholarly production. Noting that the categories themselves and the time frame for their ascendancy are often difficult to define precisely, she outlines seven broad paradigms within which most of this work can be situated. Her analysis of dominant trends from the 1920s through the 1950s includes a discussion of anthropology's early cultural relativism and the rise of "particularism," the subsequent debate within the indigenista movement between those who advocated a "pluricultural" environment and the "incorporationists" who pushed the rapid transformation of indigenous communities, and the development of functionalism, a conceptual framework closely associated with the work of Robert Redfield.

In the 1950s, the complacent assumptions of functionalism were challenged by increased attention to issues of domination and conflict, and a series of new perspectives emerged. Within anthropology, one of the more significant developments was the rise of cultural ecology, a perspective that explored the broader structural relations between rural communities and the socioeconomic and political contexts in which they were enmeshed. This stance, exemplified in the work of Eric Wolf, allowed analysts to see more clearly the repressiveness of local *caciques*, the exploitation of the peasantry in regional urban centers, and the manipulations exercised by government bureaucrats. While functionalists saw the social cohesion of Indian communities as a product of an enduring harmony of interests, Wolf perceived it as a desperate bid for survival when faced with the repressive onslaught from the hacienda; while functionalists viewed interactions between villages and regional centers as grounded on exchange and mutual benefit, Wolf found rural production appropriated by outside elites through manipulation and force.

As Hewitt de Alcántara notes, this attentiveness to questions of power and control was reinforced by the evolution of the dependency

paradigm in the 1960s and early 1970s. Inspired by the work of ECLA economists, the *dependentista* framework called attention to the role of the international economic system as the source of “underdevelopment.” Hewitt de Alcántara lumps together most of the best work done in Mexico in the 1960s under the “dependency” rubric, including not only André Gunder Frank’s work but also Pablo González Casanova’s research on “internal colonialism” and “marginality” and the Inter-American Committee for Agricultural Development’s studies of agricultural inequality.

According to Hewitt de Alcántara, the dependency paradigm waned toward the end of the 1970s, to be replaced by a historical structuralism encompassing both orthodox and revisionist Marxist analysis and linked to a renewed cultural ecology literature. Although orthodox Marxists anticipated the demise of the peasantry and its rapid incorporation into the proletariat with the deepening of a capitalist transition, a number of revisionist Marxists acknowledged the continued survival of a broad peasant sector. Roger Bartra and other “circulationist Marxists” concluded that the incomplete capitalist transition in Mexico left residual economic forms like the “simple mercantile economy” of the peasantry, which were characterized by inefficiency and superexploitation. Ultimately, however, these Marxist analysts still expected the dissolution of the peasantry during the eventual transition to socialism. But “campesinistas” like Arturo Warman and Gustavo Esteva challenged this view. They envisioned the indefinite survival of the peasantry, either through a form of cooperativism that (in Esteva’s view) would allow for the coexistence of organized smallholders and agribusiness or (according to Warman) as survivors of the crises and contradictions of capitalism. As Warman noted, “modernity . . . [might have] less probability for survival than peasant antiquarianism.”²

Anthropological Perspectives is an extraordinarily ambitious and skillful undertaking. The work was complicated by its massive scope and by the paucity of signposts needed to define major categories. The dividing lines between paradigms and time periods are often fuzzy, dimmed further by the tendency of some theorists to straddle theoretical frameworks or vacillate on central issues. Heated debates within each school have also threatened to overwhelm any sense of shared premises. The ambiguity inherent in the task makes it virtually inevitable that others in the field will question some of Hewitt de Alcántara’s specific generalizations or classifications.³ Nonetheless, this book is a masterful work, clarifying paradigmatic distinctions and the major lines of discourse.

Hewitt de Alcántara adopts a muted editorial voice throughout the book. She locates her own research in the dependency section and includes a sprinkling of favorable commentary about a new alternative

development model that emphasizes decentralization and local empowerment. But the book is a largely taxonomic work that avoids self-serving polemics. The author's decision about rhetorical style seems motivated by her philosophy of social scientific inquiry. Drawing on Thomas Kuhn's *The Structure of Scientific Revolutions*, she rejects inter-paradigmatic comparisons about the validity of research findings. Consequently, the field's drift away from one paradigm is not taken as a reflection of that perspective's inadequacies, nor is the shift toward another seen as evidence of its superiority.

Hewitt de Alcántara's sustained detachment and diplomacy are cardinal virtues frequently underrepresented in the academic world. Her acute paradigmatic relativism, however, reduces her ability to defend her own intellectual stance or to argue forcefully for her own ethical choices. Ultimately, the absence of such a defense weakens this impressive work. A heartier argument on behalf of her own intellectual decisions could have outlined more clearly the relative merits of competing paradigms, helping others in the field to weigh epistemological options. Further, it could have allowed the reader to explore more fully the perplexing internal logic of paradigmatic shifts.

The central themes outlined by Hewitt de Alcántara continue to shape the research debates of the 1980s. Two recent studies, Steven Sanderson's *The Transformation of Mexican Agriculture* and Sara Jeannette Scherr's *The Oil Syndrome and Agricultural Development: Lessons from Tabasco, Mexico*, explore the impact of international economic forces and capitalist penetration on rural Mexico. The two books tend toward different conclusions.

Sanderson argues that "the transformation of Mexican agriculture is a product of a systematic internationalization of capital in agriculture and the long-term creation of a new global division of labor" (p. 6). In analyzing this process, he moves beyond the standard discussion of direct foreign investment to explore a range of mechanisms through which internationalization occurs. Data from three key agricultural sectors—fresh fruit and vegetables, livestock (particularly cattle), and basic grains—provide the raw material for his analysis.

In *The Transformation of Mexican Agriculture*, trade is identified as an important conduit for the internationalization process. Sanderson outlines the changes that were required for Mexican exporters to secure the approval of the USDA and U.S. consumers, including purchasing imported stock and seeds, changing pesticide and packing processes, and integrating into U.S. distribution networks. But the internationalization process proceeds not simply in production for export. Sanderson argues that it increasingly occurs within locally owned firms, including businesses that produce largely for the Mexican domestic market. Even with livestock destined for the local market, confinement

feeding is replacing range and *traspatio* (backyard) feeding; fruits and vegetables for the domestic market increasingly undergo industrial processing, packing, and canning.

The effects of this process extend all the way to the peasant economy as peasants are expelled from valuable land and resources shift toward the “productive” agribusiness sector. Even programs run by the Mexican government follow this trend, heavily subsidizing agribusiness in the irrigation districts while depressing the prices of staples largely produced by the peasant sector. Declining domestic food production in turn has triggered further internationalization through large-scale grain imports from the United States.

To address these problems, Sanderson recommends that the Mexican state “reapprehend national control” over its agricultural economy (p. 118) and terminate its “prostration before the logic of the market” (p. 236). Specifically, he argues for a sustained counterflow of state resources away from the urban-industrial sector toward small-scale rural production, the effective targeting of state production subsidies to the poor (instead of allowing universal subsidies that are regularly appropriated by the wealthy), and increased state planning of Mexico’s heavily internationalized irrigation districts.

Using an innovative “two-track” approach, Sanderson skillfully links national-level analysis of local production and marketing processes with a global or “world systems” analysis, tracing patterns of penetration and uncovering their local consequences. His long experience with agribusiness in Northwestern Mexico provides a rich background for his analysis of the transformation of the irrigation districts. His treatment of the peasant economy is more abbreviated and may overemphasize the erosion of this sector, but it captures important elements of peasant decline.

One problematic aspect of the work is found in the tension between Sanderson’s explanation of the cause of the problem and his approach to its solution. Throughout *The Transformation of Mexican Agriculture*, the Mexican state is presented as a second-level coconspirator in the internationalization process. Sanderson argues that during the period following World War II, the state habitually acceded to the mandate of technical modernization, the cross-national integration of production, the power of agribusiness, and the pull of urban markets. Given this collapsed image of the state, how can it then be presented as the agent for agricultural reorientation and nationalist delinking? Because the global forces for internationalization are painted so forcefully and Mexico’s populist legacy is so weakly conveyed in this work,⁴ Sanderson’s “parsimonious suggestions” will have a hard time persuading his readers. Still, this work makes a major contribution to our understanding of the broader forces shaping rural poverty and agricultural change.

While Sanderson links global economic penetration and peasant decline, Scherr's *The Oil Syndrome and Agricultural Development: Lessons from Tabasco, Mexico* attempts to separate the two. Scherr argues that the peasant economy can survive and prosper despite the dislocations of international economic penetration and rapid capitalist development. Looking at the impact of the oil boom on four types of agricultural producers in the area surrounding the new oil fields of Tabasco, she argues that smallholders drawing heavily on family labor are particularly resilient and capable of prospering, even in the face of regional economic transformation.

Scherr notes that both neoclassical literature on the "Dutch disease" and "neo-Marxist" analyses link oil boom expansion to declining peasant production. Empirical observation of agricultural contraction in oil boom countries further supports this view. When Scherr began her research, she expected the agricultural economy of Tabasco to be suffering a marked erosion.

Contrary to expectation, she found an "agricultural boom" concomitant with the oil boom in this region. This expansion was particularly pronounced in the production of cacao, an important regional commodity. Scherr then proceeded to do a careful, in-depth study of the patterns of cacao production, looking at cultivation practices, labor use, marketing, and technological improvement. The data base for this study consisted of a census of cacao producers conducted by the Secretaría de Agricultura y Recursos Hidráulicos (SARH) of Tabasco in 1978, a 1979 sociodemographic survey of the state of Tabasco, a nonrandom survey of forty-eight cacao producers, and a four-part questionnaire administered to eight case-study households.

Scherr concluded that four factors contributed to the successful performance of the cacao sector: rising prices, new investments in processing, state agricultural development planning, and the flexibility of the "smallholder" or peasant producer. This final point is given special attention. Scherr finds that, on one hand, larger producers tended to shift away from agricultural production during the oil boom, preferring to invest in more lucrative urban activities and having difficulty in locating an adequate labor supply as rural labor migrated into construction work. On the other hand, smallholders used a flexible supply of family labor that adapted quickly to changes in input costs, prices, and the seasonal demands of the crop and thus were able to sustain production, allowing the agricultural economy to grow.

In conclusion, Scherr throws her lot in with the campesinista argument emphasizing the unique durability and adaptiveness of the peasant economy. She recommends that agricultural policy be directed toward supporting smallholder producers through "institution building" for cooperative buying and marketing, carefully selected input subsidies, and agronomic and farm management research designed for

small producers. The example of Indonesia, an oil boom country that avoided sharp agricultural decline through the emphasis on small-holder production, is suggested as a possible model for Mexican policy development.

The Oil Syndrome and Agricultural Development makes an important contribution to the campesinista literature by adding empirical evidence to this body of theory. Scherr's analysis helps clarify the tenacity of the peasant's commitment to agriculture and the ability of the peasant household to survive major economic transitions. The peculiar circumstances of cacao production in Tabasco, however, may limit the broader theoretical utility of this work. Despite Scherr's contentions, the oil boom period was not an agricultural boom period for most of the country, particularly not for the peasant economy.⁵ Thus Scherr's optimistic findings may be more closely connected with the peculiar characteristics of cacao production than with the nature of smallholder activities. As Scherr reports, cacao producers benefited from several favorable circumstances. In her appreciation of the adaptability of the peasant economy and her eagerness to expand beyond the Tabasco experience, Scherr may underestimate the harsh reality found in peasant staples production in the rest of the country (or, indeed, in cacao production during periods when international prices are falling). Underlying issues of exploitation and political control, Scherr's analysis may be more optimistic than the broader rural realities warrant.

Studies of political power in rural Mexico bring home this point more fully. Both Susan R. Walsh Sanderson's methodical *Land Reform in Mexico, 1910–1980* and Clarisa Hardy's richly textured *El estado y los campesinos: La Confederación Nacional Campesina (CNC)* trace the political decline of the agrarian reform movement and the peasant class that gave it force. Sanderson's work relies heavily on a data tape, coded from the *Diario Oficial*, of 88,500 presidential resolutions concerning land reform between 1916 and 1976. These records include information on the kind of resolution rendered, the amount and quality of land officially redistributed, the circumstances justifying the grant, numbers of land recipients, and associated water rights. Using these data, Sanderson attempts to track the temporal and spatial dimensions of land reform in Mexico.

Her general argument is a well-established one: after the Cárdenas period of political consolidation, the agrarian reform movement in Mexico generally lost momentum. Sanderson adds to existing literature on agrarian reform by tracing these patterns with greater methodological precision. For example, she finds that the pace of land reform declined sharply in some periods (such as the 1940–1947 period) but accelerated in others (such as the 1966–1976 period), although the quality of redistributed land remained "average" to "poor."

Sanderson explains these fluctuations in land reform policy in terms of developments in both Mexico and the United States. She argues that economic decline generates rising pressure for land redistribution; but this pressure may be defused if U.S. border policy is relatively relaxed, thus allowing those negatively affected by the decline to seek work in the United States. When U.S. unemployment rises and immigration policy becomes more restrictive, however, Mexican migration slows and rural pressures build. Under these circumstances, the Mexican government has traditionally responded by increasing the number of formal land grants. Once the pressures are again reduced, the government tends to renew its emphasis on private agribusiness expansion in order to satisfy that powerful constituency and to "increase commercial food production." This tendency is found to produce the pattern of recurring policy change or "countervailing rhythms" that has characterized Mexican land politics.

Sanderson contends, however, that since 1976 this shifting has halted. She accepts the government's recent argument that virtually all the land susceptible to redistribution has now been reallocated and that further applications of the agrarian reform law would undermine needed agricultural production. Unfortunately, this decision has come at a time when unemployment in the United States is high and the U.S. border policy has become restrictive. On the basis of her reading of past trends, Sanderson predicts that the current economic crisis will lead to an escalation of unresolvable rural tensions, provoking a crisis in that sector.

In general, Sanderson's thesis is well argued; in detail, however, it is open to some question. Seeking the precision that comes with quantification, Sanderson relies heavily on data that seem comprehensive but do not fully reflect patterns of land acquisition and control. As Clarisa Hardy found in her careful case studies of peasant mobilization, official land reallocation decisions are frequently not honored; legally "redistributed" land remains indefinitely in the hands of prior owners. Hence heavy dependence on official agrarian reform decrees can produce an unrealistic picture of land tenure patterns. Sanderson's *Land Reform in Mexico* provides a useful analysis of the legal process of land reform and the official version of its results. Hardy's study, however, gets closer to the realities of rural life.

El estado y los campesinos is the result of a project that Hardy coordinated at the end of the 1970s under contract with the Consejo Nacional de Ciencia y Tecnología (CONACYT) and the Centro de Investigaciones del Desarrollo Rural (CIDER), then revised and published with support from the Centro de Estudios Económicos y Sociales del Tercer Mundo (CEESTEM). The work explores the changing role of the Confederación Nacional Campesina (CNC) as the regime reduced and

then terminated its commitment to agrarian reform. This book draws on a series of case studies of peasant mobilization in Sinaloa, Yucatán, and Veracruz.

When the CNC was created in 1938, the Mexican government and the peasant sector shared a commitment to large-scale land redistribution. The organized peasantry formed an important base of political support for the dominant party and armed support for agrarian reform. But as the regime's support for continued land redistribution waned, the overall objectives of the CNC were obscured. The organization's ability to mobilize the peasantry and mediate with the regime was diminished, and an array of competitors emerged to challenge CNC hegemony.

Hardy notes that the CNC's continuing ties with the peasantry have generally been interpreted as the product of political coercion, corruption, and manipulation. She finds that these bonds are much more complex, however, and presents four factors to explain the continued preeminence of the CNC: first, "institutional legitimacy," derived from the CNC's early role in backing and securing land reform; second, "differentiated action," in which local and regional leaders of the CNC continue to mobilize forces for land redistribution, even as the national leadership distances itself from this campaign; third, "institutional linkages" through which the CNC continues to mediate between land recipients and the state bureaucracies providing credit, supplies and marketing; and fourth, "personalized linkages" through which CNC officials provide a series of paternalistic services for their affiliates, such as intervening in family disputes or securing medical attention. These institutional assets have allowed the CNC to fragment opposition groups and co-opt many schismatic offshoots.

Nonetheless, like Susan Sanderson, Hardy perceives growing tensions emerging as the CNC proves increasingly unable and unwilling to pursue the demand for land redistribution. Hardy finds that over half of Mexico's rural workers are now landless, and access to land remains their primary political objective. Given this situation, the CNC's recent marginal efforts to revamp are unlikely to overcome its current malaise.⁶

Hardy's rich study of the process of rural organizing and the dynamics of negotiation significantly complements Susan Sanderson's more legalistic and quantitative analysis. While Sanderson's work conveys the central dynamic behind rising rural tensions, Hardy's illustrates the intricate process through which these tensions are manifested. Hardy's strengths lie in her impressive interviewing and reportorial skills and in her appreciation of the complexity of the Mexican political system. Her conclusions suggest that the political map of rural Mexico is currently being redrawn and that the outcome is difficult to predict.

One of those most interested in understanding the changing nature of political participation in the countryside is Carlos Salinas de Gortari, author of *Political Participation, Public Investment, and Support for the System: A Comparative Study of Rural Communities in Mexico*.⁷ Salinas's interest in the question is not simply academic. Former Director of the Instituto de Estudios Políticos, Económicos y Sociales (IEPES) of the PRI and head of the powerful Secretaría de Programación y Presupuesto during the de la Madrid sexenio, Salinas was named the PRI's presidential candidate in October 1987 and will almost certainly become Mexico's next president.

In this essay, Salinas explores the levels and forms of political participation in the Mexican countryside. His objective is to determine whether the participatory rural development programs sponsored by the PRI actually bolster support for the regime. He attempts to answer the question by presenting the results of a multifaceted questionnaire answered by 227 inhabitants of three rural communities. The communities were chosen to represent variation in the level of local organization and the circumstances under which government programs were initiated.

On the basis of the survey, Salinas concludes that the Mexican peasant population is more participatory than is generally assumed in both its level of political interest and its active involvement in politics. The level and "mode" of participation varied widely from community to community, however. In some communities, voting (a relatively undemanding form of participation) was most common; in others, many individuals reported also contacting officials or addressing problems directly at community meetings.

Salinas wanted to test Gabriel Almond and Sydney Verba's finding in urban Mexico that high levels of political participation were correlated with high levels of "diffuse" support for the regime but with low levels of specific satisfaction with the actual performance of the government.⁸ Salinas found somewhat different patterns in his rural sample. For those whose participation took the form of voting, high levels of participation tended to correlate with high levels of both specific and diffuse support. For those who tended to employ more mobilizing and time-consuming forms of participation, however, both support levels tended to be lower. Salinas concludes that state spending on development programs that encourage community participation may actually lead to lower levels of regime support, while state neglect may perpetuate the less activist forms of participation that were associated with higher levels of regime support.

This study involves a complex analysis of several interwoven variables. Because no behavioral or attitudinal data are available from the period prior to the establishment of state development programs, it is not possible for Salinas to determine precisely how their creation

affected the respondents' political perspectives. Given the lack of a real control group, several weak correlation coefficients, and the frequent shifting across two levels of analysis (community and individual), it is often difficult to interpret these findings. The strengths of the study may be revealed most clearly in the concluding section of the paper, in which Salinas steps away from the data and reflects on his party's political future in the countryside. Instead of concluding, as many *priistas* might, that encouraging organization in the campo should be avoided because it can mobilize dissatisfaction, Salinas steadfastly advocates continued organization and increased participation. To counter problems of dissatisfaction, he exhorts local party officials to improve their performance and devote themselves more fully to community service.

Given what is known about the Mexican state's long-term shift away from an alliance with the peasantry, such laudable recommendations may be inadequate to resolve brewing problems. The peasant sector has been declining for over twenty years, and deepening rural conflict will be difficult to avoid. María de los Angeles Crummett's *Rural Class Structure in Mexico: New Developments, New Perspectives* attempts to delineate quantitatively the lines of class cleavage in rural Mexico. Crummett questions the significance of the fivefold class typology (infrasubsistence, subfamilial, familial, multifamilial medium, and multifamilial large) developed in the 1960s by the Centro de Investigaciones Agrarias and used widely since. Employing a sample survey of 211 households in three agricultural regions in Aguascalientes, Crummett gathered data on a range of social and economic variables that could be used to differentiate rural households. On the basis of a factor analytic study of these households, she concluded that breaking the rural population down into commercial, subsistence, and landless classes better captured the fundamental patterns of class variation.

Crummett further found that rural classes were differentiated not only by access to the means of production and their level of participation in the labor market but also by domestic characteristics such as the size of the household, the division of labor by sex and age, and generational composition. Her factor analysis lent support to this argument by suggesting that household structure functioned as a separate dimension of the analysis. Crummett's quantitative techniques make her work relatively inaccessible, and campesinistas may question her sharp differentiation between subsistence producers and the rural proletariat. But her efforts to define class differences with greater methodological rigor and to explore the impact of class on individuals within the household make a useful contribution to the field.

In all, these recent additions to the literature on rural Mexico, whether drawn from a dependency perspective, a Marxist or neo-Marxist framework, or a cultural ecology paradigm, share a common com-

mitment to the rural underclass. Like many of their predecessors, these authors continue to search for a model of social transformation that would be consonant with the interests of the rural poor. Much of this recent work, however, is characterized by increased epistemological and methodological sophistication. These careful studies deepen our appreciation of both the historic decline and the amazing adaptability of Mexican peasantry while providing yet another chapter in the ongoing inquiry into rural Mexico.

NOTES

1. Manuel Gamio, *La población del Valle de Teotihuacán* (Mexico City: Talleres Gráficos de la Nación, 1922); and Arturo Warman, *Ensayos sobre el campesinado en México* (Mexico City: Nueva Imagen, 1980).
2. From Warman's *Los campesinos: hijos predilectos del régimen* (Mexico City: Editorial Nuestro Tiempo, 1972), as quoted on p. 165.
3. For example, I would argue that much of the work on inequality, including most of the studies by the Inter-American Committee for Agricultural Development, fits the dependency paradigm only very loosely.
4. In contrast, Steven Sanderson's first book, *Agrarian Populism and the Mexican State* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1981), focused heavily on Mexico's populist political legacy.
5. This outcome is particularly clear in the years preceding the implementation of the Sistema Alimentario Mexicano (SAM). See Sistema Nacional de Evaluación, "Comportamiento de la producción agrícola de 1952 a 1981 (análisis por sexenios)," internal report, 1982.
6. Hardy found that the experimental democratization of the CNC leadership selection process in Sinaloa at the end of the 1970s produced little enthusiasm at the base of the organization. Moreover, the leadership's recent effort to shift attention toward unionization and away from land was also found to be unsuccessful because of the rural workers' continued peasant aspirations and the general preference for the CTM, not the CNC, to serve in labor mediations. See Hardy, 55–70, 138–49.
7. This paper is drawn from his *Producción y participación política en el campo* (Mexico City: UNAM, 1980).
8. See Gabriel Almond and Sidney Verba, *The Civic Culture* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1965).