

revived attention to the debacle of her father's population programme, as discussed by Ewig in chapter 6 of this book. Meanwhile, the ideological and political course of the incoming government is as yet unclear. It is unlikely that the dominant economic 'model' will be abandoned, but the rhetoric used by the newly elected president, Ollanta Humala, in the last few years suggests that there is a chance of more equitable objectives in policy-making. As Ewig shows, however, even equitable objectives may still be constrained by existing inequities; in effect, changing those existing inequities may need a completely different approach. As Ewig argues in her conclusion, a rights-based approach to health care, as opposed to a market-based approach, will not 'automatically resolve all inequities' (p. 212). Rather, inequalities based on gender, race and class need to be understood and put on the political agenda. Ewig's book certainly contributes to that, and hopefully students of policy, health reform and Latin American politics will all see the benefit of this.

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Jacinta Palerm Viqueira and Tomás Martínez Saldaña (eds.), *Aventuras con el agua: la administración del agua de riego, historia y teoría* (Texcoco, Mexico: CONACYT, 2009), pp. xxii + 435, pb.

This book addresses aspects of the institutional history of irrigation in Mexico through the lens of comparative social anthropology. The collection aims to examine in a new light Karl Wittfogel's 'hydraulic hypothesis' about the interrelations between irrigation agriculture and political power, and the links between agricultural intensification and the development of mechanisms of social control, organisation and hierarchy, particularly water bureaucracies and technocracies. It complements the reference to Mexican examples with cases from colonial Spanish America, while some of the chapters also include experiences from Africa, Asia and the Middle East. The book does not present new findings, as it is not the result of new empirical research, but it is structured as an anthology of theoretical debates in social anthropology complemented with a selection of papers previously published in English and Spanish. However, it makes available some new materials resulting from recent research on the rich archival sources of Mexico's irrigation institutions.

The introduction presents a synthetic review of recent theoretical debates about Wittfogel's arguments, mostly by social anthropologists. As a brief note for readers who are not familiar with Wittfogel's work, in the 1950s this author prompted a revival of the classical debate about the relationship between water control and social organisation that can be traced back to Montesquieu, Karl Marx and Max Weber, among others. Although his explorations of this topic changed over time, his name is often associated with environmental determinism. His concept of 'hydraulic despotism', often referred to as the 'hydraulic hypothesis', which refers to the relationship between water control activities and 'total power', is perhaps the most enduring aspect of his legacy. Wittfogel famously argued that 'even in its simplest form, agrohydraulic operations necessitate substantial integrative action... The effective management of these works involves an organizational web which covers either the whole, or at least the dynamic core, of the country's population. In consequence, those who control this network are uniquely prepared to wield supreme political power' (*Oriental Despotism: A Comparative Study of Total Power*, Yale

University Press, 1957, pp. 26–7). As already stated, Wittfogel's 'hydraulic hypothesis' prompted a revival of this age-long debate that is still ongoing, and the collection edited by Palerm Viqueira and Martínez Saldaña aims to make a contribution by casting new light on some of its aspects. One of the main arguments of the book is that the emergence of water bureaucracies and technocracies is not restricted to situations where irrigation systems are centrally administered by the state, as in the typical cases used by Wittfogel to ground his 'hydraulic hypothesis', but can also be found in circumstances where water management is in the hands of local irrigator communities, including small-scale and self-managed irrigation schemes.

The theoretical discussion started in the introduction is followed by a long section composed of five chapters, which takes about half of the book's length. The first chapter is an essay by René Millon, originally published in 1962, entitled 'Variations in Social Responses to the Practice of Irrigation Agriculture', which covers experiences from Tanganyika, Ceylon, Japan, Bali, Iraq, and the former British protectorate of Aden, currently the Republic of Yemen. The second chapter is Robert C. Hunt's 1988 article, 'Size and Structure of Authority in Canal Irrigation Systems'. This chapter deserves additional attention here given that it provided the editors with key methodological instruments. In order to capture the highly diverse relationships between irrigation systems and forms of social organisation, the editors adapted the methodology proposed by Hunt in his comparative studies of social dynamics in relation to irrigation agriculture and exchange systems. In this chapter Hunt presented the results of a systematic comparison of canal irrigation systems in Iraq, Japan, Mexico, the Philippines, Spain, Sudan, Taiwan and the United States, where he applied a theoretical framework grounded on three main concept-variables: the 'irrigation system', the 'size of the irrigation system', and the 'structure of authority of the irrigation system'. Hunt's chapter offers a critique of earlier work by Millon and others, and challenges long-standing, often linear, assumptions about the intertwining between water control and political power, such as in the more simplistic applications of Wittfogel's hypothesis to the relation between water control and despotic power. His study concluded that small irrigation systems can operate without a formal authority, that large-scale irrigation schemes (for example, one of 459,000 hectares) can be operated by local irrigation communities, and that often small irrigation systems are administered by national governments. Therefore, Hunt's study added substantial evidence in support of arguments already made by different authors such as Geertz (1959), Leach (1961) or Glick (1970), among many others, that there is no linear relationship between water control activities and structure or type of authority, which can actually adopt a wide-ranging diversity of forms. The third chapter, by A. Vaidyanathan (1985), is 'Water Control Institutions and Agriculture', which presents a comparative analysis of cases from Asia, mainly from China, India and Japan. This chapter adds a different dimension to the discussion, reinforcing the arguments about the high diversity of forms adopted by irrigation water institutions, but emphasising the importance of focusing on the interweaving between institutional forms and the relevant agro-climatic, technological and socio-economic conditions in comparative studies of the evolution of the institutional forms and effectiveness of irrigation systems.

The other two chapters in the theoretical section were written by one of the editors, Jacinta Palerm (1998, 1997), and deal with the transitions 'from the individual to the family and from private property to common goods and uses', and with the interlinkages between 'irrigation, origin of the state and administration of hydraulic

systems', drawing from Mexican examples. The rest of the book is divided into two sections, which include respectively six chapters on a 'history of water administration', examining examples from colonial Spanish America, mainly Mexico, and four final chapters on 'self management [of water systems] in the early twentieth century' written by Mexican irrigation officers between 1930 and 1942.

The book is a useful addition to the literature on the links between irrigation agriculture and social organisation in Mexico, which places the Mexican experience in the wider international context. Unfortunately the book lacks a conclusion, which would have been very useful to bring together the widely different experiences and lessons introduced in the chapters and, more importantly, to elaborate in greater depth the connections between the theoretical frameworks addressed in the first part of the book and the more historical and empirical materials presented in the two final sections. Also, the collection would have benefited from a more interdisciplinary discussion, as it revolves mainly around relatively well-known debates in social anthropology and misses the opportunity to establish a dialogue with the wealth of academic literature on Wittfogel's 'hydraulic hypothesis' that has been produced since the 1970s in disciplines such as geography and in the field of political ecology more broadly.

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Aaron W. Navarro, *Political Intelligence and the Creation of Modern Mexico, 1938–1954* (University Park, PA: Penn State University Press, 2010), pp. xiv + 301, \$64.95, hb.

The 1940s undoubtedly represent some sort of watershed in Mexican political history. It has become a commonplace that *civilismo* was instituted during this period; that the ruling PRI developed a sophisticated and institutionalised mode of rule; that presidential transitions were made in an increasingly smooth and orderly fashion; and that a development model was forged which could avoid the brutal violence of other republics further south. And, as with so many received truths, these claims do not fully withstand scrutiny.

Aaron Navarro's volume adds considerable detail to these contested narratives. He states that the book is 'an analysis of opposition politics in Mexico', yet this is not quite right. Navarro actually provides both a history of the establishment and regularisation of the Mexican intelligence services and an account of changes in the ways government intelligence officers viewed the political opposition. While there is a good deal on the major non-PRI presidential candidates, at heart the book is an almanac of intelligence reports, expertly linked and analysed, which allow the reader insights into both specific events (the 1940, 1946 and 1952 elections) and broader themes. What emerges with particular clarity is the triangular relationship between the military, the ruling party and the intelligence services; over time, the shifting balance of power (and personnel) within this tripolar structure has been a major determinant of Mexican political development.

Navarro offers welcome evidence for a revisionist view of the PRI's early years. The collated sources show that the military did not simply vanish from the political scene in 1946; that there were competing factions within the post-revolutionary elite; that such factions could exit and re-enter the dominant group at various points; and that