

## Culture



**Harriet ROSENBERG, *A Negotiated World: Three Centuries of Change in a French Alpine Community*, Toronto, University of Toronto Press, 1988. 234 pages, \$30.00**

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emphasize social change that had not been delivered by Liberal reforms. Nowhere in this study is there a discussion of the dissatisfaction that temporarily dethroned the reforming Liberal Party in 1966 and which eventually unseated the P.Q. Though there is a brief consideration of opposing ideologies (Trudeau's Federalism and Multiculturalism), Handler's model does not account for what Rioux identifies as the dialectics of Québec nationalism, and a reader may still be looking for the dynamic of historical change after accepting that a concept of boundedness cross-cuts all Québec nationalism.

The ethnography of Québec bureaucracy follows an argument that Handler introduces in his study of the folk society: that the objectification of "total culture" will invariably fail and lead to further fragmentation. From heritage (*patrimoine*), Handler makes a smooth transition to language legislation and the problem of maintaining linguistic purity in a "normal society". Cultural policy is linked with language policy where minorities are also viewed as collectivities or collections of collective individuals.

Though Handler does comment on the collapse of the Québec Church at the outset of the Quiet Revolution, the ease with which he moves from Groulx's French Canada to Lévesque's Québec is disconcerting. While there are ideological and symbolic continuities which link Groulx with Lévesque, and though the P.Q. did salvage Groulx's statue from the basement of the Assemblée nationale, the differences between the two are as significant as the similarities. Lévesque's Québec would have been an anathema to Groulx and Lévesque's use of television contrasts with the 'appeals' of Groulx to an elite audience. Moreover, as Moreux demonstrates in her ethnographies of St. Hilaire and Louiseville, the consumers of mass media were ideologically divided by the changes that followed the Quiet Revolution.

This book is one of the most stimulating and thought-provoking anthropological studies of Québec in recent years. Though there may be shortcomings in the ethnography and in the ambitious coverage of the volume, it is nonetheless essential reading. Handler's conclusion is thought-provoking when he suggests that cultural objectification characterizes all nationalism and that the bureaucratic "appropriation of culture" will invariably lead to its further fragmentation. These far-reaching conclusions will influence other studies, as the techniques of critical anthropology extend anthropological inquiry from the microcosm of region and community.

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by Irene Silverblatt  
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The "new critical" anthropology, presently berating the discipline for ignoring the past of those under study, should examine its own. It is ironic that many discovering the virtues of historical dimensions and global intersections appear unaware of anthropology's significant, if minority, tradition which conducted research along the lines now receiving praise. Harriet Rosenberg's remarkable study of a French peasantry's situated engagement with national and international forces, *A Negotiated World*, constitutes a timely contribution to this anthropological practice.

Dr. Rosenberg chooses an apt title for her three hundred year panorama of Abries, a village in the French Alps. Contrary to some anthropological expectations, Abriesois did not simply bend to outside forces of state and economy: rather, they actively engaged those institutions dominated by outsiders with varying degrees of success, and actively participated in creating expanded or contracted possibilities of living. By taking the long view, Rosenberg is able to challenge received notions of peasant character that are grounded in contemporary prejudices. As she reminds us in her introductory chapter, "Peasant poverty or wealth, political mobilization or passivity are not givens. Rather they are aspects of peasant society requiring historically contextualized explanations." (p. 3). By foregrounding the precise historical contexts in which Abriesois negotiated their futures, Rosenberg un-masks the presumptions of inevitability underlying both the progressive trajectory of modernization theory and the teleology of dependency theory.

Abries's participation in the momentous proceedings of modernity - statemaking and capitalist expansion - concerns Dr. Rosenberg. To capture their significance she takes us back to Abries under the Old Regime, and tarnishes some cherished peasant stereotypes. The Abriesois exercised considerable control over their economic and political destinies. For example, as part of a coalition of neighboring villages, Abries negotiated a favorable political character vis-à-vis the Crown. During that time their agricultural and pastoral endeavors supported a population over ten times the size of today's, while traditional community mechanisms restricted internal

inequalities of wealth. When the French monarchy was fragile, villagers enjoyed much leeway in directing their future. However, as the monarchy centralized state power in the 17th and 18th centuries, it tightened its reign over border regions like Abries. Nevertheless, the Abriesois were able to take advantage of their customary dealings with centers of power. Politically savvy (to the point of supporting a lobbying staff in Paris), they often succeeded in deflecting growing state demands. So much for the ignorant, conservative, apolitical, impoverished peasant.

The dramatic changes ushered in by 19th century France's industrial and political revolutions gravely affected Abries. *A Negotiated World* proceeds to document how Abries's leverage vis-à-vis centers of power was undermined as mammoth governmental and bureaucratic reforms disassembled the *escarton* system. Newly defined political structures and prerogatives clipped Abries's jurisdiction over significant local affairs, while isolating it from the neighboring communities with which it had shared confederation. Moreover, power was assuming a different shape in the 19th century as links of patronage began to structure Abries political life. Ever sensitive to the interplay of political institution, ideology and culture, Rosenberg notes how this wrenching of decision-making abilities from the hands of villagers succeeded in nourishing images of a politically inert peasantry, enduring the centuries.

These dramatic changes in political structure anticipated and later dovetailed with equally dramatic changes in economic life. During the final years of the 18th century and the first half of the 19th, Abries, like much of the French countryside, was being transformed by the growth of commercial enterprises and rural industry. Internal barriers to wealth differences buckled under the pressures of new forms of finance and capital, thereby setting the stage for the development of full-blown classes. A village that had once mastered its subsistence needs by producing a variety of crops and pastoral products was now torn by economic divisions and materially dependent on a single marketable product. Abries was no longer capable of directing its economic future.

The fundamental transformation in the nineteenth century, as Dr. Rosenberg accurately observes, centered on the inability of villagers to maintain control over key areas of their political and economic livelihoods. Once able to keep state power at arms' length, Abries had been reduced to a cipher in a bureaucratic machine that increasingly absorbed community authority. As capitalist relations pene-

trated village structures and overturned village traditions, Abriesois saw themselves increasingly dependent on the central government for their economic and financial possibilities. The central government underwrote Abries dependency on dairy farms for income: again, control was diverted from Abries's hands as external patrons, able to manipulate national bureaucracies to secure markets and financing, became new loci of power. By the beginning of the next century, the population had dropped by two-thirds. Modernization? Or, as Dr. Rosenberg suggests, underdevelopment.

Anthropologist and historian, Harriet Rosenberg makes her case that the contours of modern Abries were hewn the century before. Then as now, migration was the destiny of many Abriesois confronting seemingly impossible circumstances of living. Most of the descendants of Abries's proud villagers no longer live in Abries; they have either died off or have left. Today's Abries is increasingly made up of immigrants (from other parts of France and the world) intent on converting the town into a tourist resort. Capitalizing on its beauty - its rusticity (underpopulation), sun, fabulous views and slopes, they have little need for the animals and crops that had served the Abriesois for so many centuries. Nor, in one of history's terrible ironies, do they have much need for the original Abriesois.

Abries is split and fragmented. Village houses sport outward signs of modernity, but, as villagers say, "...their new houses are of little value if there are no people living in them" (p. 188). Migrants, living independently of the villagers, not concerned with the productivity of the land, pursue their tourist-related goals. While villagers are not despairing, they harbor an irrevocable sense of loss.

Harriet Rosenberg has given us a distinguished book: outlining the forces of economy and power that contour peoples lives, *A Negotiated World* never loses sight of those same human beings who are constituting them. The beauty of this book lies in its impressive sweep of the human history of Abries, whose comprehension challenges conventional models and stereotypes of peasant society. Without sentimentality but with compassion, Dr. Rosenberg presents us with their negotiated world, and allows us to see with new eyes into our own.

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