

balhadores Rurais Sem Terra), which has become the voice of the landless rural workers in 22 states of Brazil, neither of which is fully documented in the Deere and León volume.

Despite these minor shortcomings, this important book should be an essential tool in a variety of social science disciplines. It should also prove quite useful for courses in development, women's studies, and Latin America generally.

Nationalist Mobilization and the Collapse of the Soviet State. By Mark R. Beissinger. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002. Pp. xv+503. \$80.00 (cloth); \$30.00 (paper).

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To those of you who have the impression that the academy is increasingly dominated by fashionable decorative theories, where reputations and marketing ploys leave little space for understanding based on root and branch empirical analysis, I have the absolute pleasure in announcing the arrival of a modern day "classic" that bucks the trend. Mark Beissinger has set himself the task of explaining—no "postmodernist" shirking from causal analysis here—one of the most important and difficult research questions of the last century: How do we explain the collapse of the Soviet Union? Unpredicted and unforeseen by scholars and politicians in the West and East alike, Beissinger takes the truly revolutionary events of glasnost that have shaped our political world, not simply as a topic, but as a research question that challenges the interpretative powers of contemporary sociology.

Although it will not be possible for theorists of nationalism and post-Soviet studies to ignore Beissinger's positions in their respective fields, the real aim and general sociological importance of this work derives from the interpretative and analytic framework that he puts forward for explaining the processes of political change. There is little room here to do anything other than briefly caricature the position advanced in this 500-page magnum opus.

Against what he sees as teleological and "post hoc" interpretations, Beissinger argues that it is necessary to tackle the difficult question of causal interaction between structure and agency to arrive at an explanation for the demise of the Soviet Union. The Beissinger approach puts collective actors and contentious events back at the center of analysis. In essence, he blends the contentious politics approach from social movement research—a close cousin of Sidney Tarrow's "cycles of contention" (*Democracy and Disorder: Protest and Politics in Italy, 1965–1975* [Oxford University Press, 1989])—with a subtle appreciation of how nationalist ideas and beliefs can under specific conditions and opportunities supply

people with the cultural “tool-kits” to try and change their worlds by challenging the status quo. Beissinger’s position emphasizes the dynamic role that ideas, mobilized through collective action and inhering in contentious events, have not only as a challenge to the authority of the state, but also as an important structuring force that shapes future agency and contentious events. Mobilized events introduce contingencies, and thus have the potential to become a causal variable in the chain of subsequent actions: “As the constraints of order weaken, the clustering and linkage of contentious events themselves can provide a structurelike patterning of action that can gain a particular weight and alter expectations about the possibilities for future action, thereby facilitating further agency. In this way, events can come to act as part of their own causal structure” (p. 17).

Taken at face value, this may seem like another linguistic somersault or thinly disguised tautology for conflating structure and agency. However, what is particularly compelling about Beissinger’s approach is that, taking a cue from Margaret Archer rather than Anthony Giddens, the dualism between agency and structure is maintained as an analytic construct. Instead of making actors either the “masters” or alternatively the “puppets” of their destinies, this allows sufficient space for explaining through detailed empirical evidence gathered on specific events, at which times and under which circumstances collective agency shapes institutional and structural change. Thus the possibilities of alternative outcomes are not simply precluded from the outset by a deterministic interpretative framework. Of course, the topic of the study means that for the most part we are dealing with an exceptional historical period of high contention, and a situation whereby people either mobilized challenges, or experienced the challenges of others, through an unfolding series of events that transformed politics, social relationships, and structure of their society. However, when studying this “tide” of nationalism, as he calls it, and giving his own perspective on how ideas can produce change, Beissinger keeps the preexisting structural constraints, institutional constraints, and event-specific influences that shape these framing processes firmly in view, thus he avoids some of the indeterminacy and post hoc narrative “storytelling” that is common to many studies of framing and political change.

Special mention ought to be made of the multiple methods which Beissinger has applied to bring out qualitative and quantitative data that informs us about the unfolding of the process of political change. Protest event analysis is the central plank, but Beissinger shows how this tool can be most fruitfully utilized, and at the same time can link the macro- and microlevels. Again there is too little space here to do justice to the magnificent effort in gathering original and varied data sources. Comfortable, assertive, and stylish in shifting between theoretical inquiry and grounded empirical analysis, the author proves he has sufficient sociological imagination to pull off this staggering feat.