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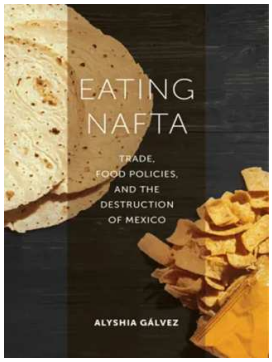

Alyshia Gálvez (2018). ***Eating NAFTA: Trade, Food Policies, and the Destruction of Mexico.*** University of California Press, 288 pp.

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Since its inception in 1994, the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA) has been a touchpoint for scholars critical of neoliberal policy reform in the Americas. Today, political uncertainty swirls around the treaty and the future of binational trade, at least between the U.S. and Mexico, where the Trump administration threatens to tamp down on the flow of people and goods at its southern border. Whatever the outcome of this political theater, the most deleterious effects of NAFTA as felt in Mexico are unlikely to be reversed any time soon and, in fact, may only continue to worsen: the sharp decline in traditional agriculture and the rise of diet-based, chronic disease associated with industrial food production and consumption. Eating NAFTA: Trade, Food Policies, and the Destruction of Mexico, by medical anthropologist Alyshia Gálvez, is a good primer for understanding the unintended consequences of NAFTA on the health of Mexican peoples during these last twenty-five years of wide-ranging economic and political transformation.

Based on the title, I was not sure what to expect from the book, apart from a scathing critique of NAFTA. Even after reading it in its entirety it is difficult to easily characterize the book's wide-ranging contents. The author skillfully weaves together a macro- and micro-analysis of the global food system, evoking a range of both traditional and agro-industrial comestibles along the way. Ethnographic vignettes help ground key arguments in the lived experiences of rural and small-town Mexico, focusing on the state of Puebla where the author conducted extensive field work. Readers unfamiliar with Mexico may be surprised to learn that *tlacoyos* (stuffed corn masa patties), *berros* (watercress), and heirloom corn are being displaced by ultra-processed corn masa, Doritos, and sugar-laden soda in much of the country. Directing blame toward iconic U.S. corporations such as McDonald's and Coca-Cola has become de rigueur in globalization studies—and rightfully so. As the author illustrates, one need look no further than the small, family-run stores that today dot most rural Mexican communities; there one finds a small business model predicated on brisk sales of sugary and salty packaged snacks rather than on the whole foods that historically formed the foundation of community diets.

After laying out her primary arguments and a brief methodological overview in the Introduction, Gálvez turns the reader's attention to the "People of the Corn," the title of Chapter 2. But rather than launching into the standard discussion of how Mexicans are the bearers of a millinery, corn-based diet, she describes a contemporary movement in which elite national and international chefs are engaging in a "bro-fest of discovery" (p. 29) of Mexican cuisine. While her phrase prompted me to laugh out loud as I was reading, it succinctly summed up the gender and class privilege that allows certain individuals to consume, exalt, and, in many instances, financially profit from foods that were once considered humble staples available to all. The "people of corn," it turns out, are increasingly those who have the time, taste, and economic means to seek out tortillas made from stone ground, criollo corn (local, non-hybrid varieties), hand-shaped and cooked on a ceramic griddle over an open flame. The author illustrates the inversion of the food hierarchy by recounting a New York Times video featuring Danish chef René Redzepi, owner of the world renown restaurant Noma. Redzepi made international headlines in 2017 when he staged a pop-up restaurant, "Noma Mexico," in the coastal town of Tulum. The bitter irony of watching the chef wax poetic about a single corn tortilla (being turned out by his female assistant no less) while charging $750 US dollars for a 15-course tasting menu is not lost on the reader. The author sums up, "Mexican food may in part

be so popular at this moment precisely because it is falling out of reach for so many Mexican people" (p. 22).

Meanwhile, Mexican small-scale farmers face drought, declining yields, and stagnant prices for their corn crops—that is, if they continue to farm at all. In Chapter 3 Gálvez lays out a useful framework for understanding the political and economic backdrop against which NAFTA was developed and implemented. She does a fine job of condensing over a century of agrarian history in a way that even newcomers to the subject may grasp the magnitude of the changes to Mexico's agrarian sector. Since the dictatorial regime of President Porfirio Díaz in the late nineteenth century, the modernizing Mexican state has viewed peasant agriculture as a problem to be solved rather than an integral part of the country's total system of food production. The author traces how this ideology has led to the point in which "a shocking 42 percent of Mexico's food supply is now imported from the United States" (p. 86).

The subsequent three chapters move the discussion to NAFTA's relationship to the body, health, and illness in Mexico. The author maintains that Mexico is now in the unenviable position among world nations in demonstrating both malnutrition and chronic disease arising from excess caloric intake. Chapter 4 focuses on the processes by which consumption practices have favored the industrial, global food supply enabled by trade agreements like NAFTA. Processed foods with preservatives are now cheap and easily procured, judging by the popularity of OXXO, the Mexican chain convenience stores that can be found just about anywhere in the republic; the fact that OXXO is oriented toward automobile drivers rather than pedestrian traffic makes it even less conducive to overall physical health.

In Chapter 5 "Deflecting the Blame," Gálvez tackles the issue of how the most economically vulnerable members of Mexican society are often blamed for their own declining health. Rather than addressing underlying structural conditions, the author argues that government agencies and initiatives targeting diet-based illness rely on neoliberal discourses of individual responsibility and education. The "popular" Mexican diet—characterized as unhealthy, fried and sugary food—is the target of frequent attacks at the same time programs meant to alleviate hunger offer rural and poor Mexicans processed commodities such as soy protein and powdered eggs.

Chapter 6 homes in on diabetes as one of the primary diet-related ailments afflicting the Mexican population. Here the author makes a convincing case for the "syndemic connections between stress and the body's ability to metabolize

and regulate sugar" (p. 171). Drawing on trauma-informed research, she argues that the chronic stresses of poverty, migration, and gender disparities are factors contributing to the unequal distribution of the disease across populations.

Before concluding, the book's offers a short chapter that returns to the theme of nostalgia and the commodification of "authentic" Mexican food introduced earlier. Here Gálvez dissects specific food products, showing us just have far they have been removed from their origin context of production; for example, the upscale US kitchenware chain Williams-Sonoma recently tried to sell retail shoppers 18 ounces of "Tex-Mex" pork tamales for just $54.95. Meanwhile, McDonald's launched its "McBurrito" to the Mexican public with an ad campaign declaring that, "Los tamales son del pasado," or "Tamales are a thing of the past" (p. 181).

While the book paints NAFTA in such broad strokes that policy minutiae go overlooked, Gálvez ultimately achieves what so many academics are unable to deliver; she has written a highly accessible book that will have appeal both in and out of the classroom. Her writing is clear and strikes an admirable balance between ethnographic context, theory, and analysis for the average reader. I can easily envision assigning this text in an undergraduate course in food studies, Latin American studies, and medical sociology or anthropology. At the same, this is a book I would heartily recommend to friends and colleagues looking to be better informed about how the effects of NAFTA and trade policies more generally are to be found in fields, stores, kitchens, and bodies across borders.