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**Review of *Troubled Fields: Men, Emotions, and the Crisis in
American Farming* By Eric Ramirez-Ferrero**

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modes of agriculture? This question achieved special prominence during the “farm crisis” in the 1980s, when thousands of farmers lost their land to foreclosure. Since then the issue has largely been forgotten, except in northwestern Oklahoma, the site of *Troubled Fields*, where the decline of family farming can be measured in continuing population loss, the breakdown of families, and increased risk of suicide.

Troubled Fields is actually two books in one, the first a finely textured study of northwestern Oklahoma farmers and their life histories, the second a political tract permeated by the author’s admonitions and warnings about the threat of globalization to American family farming. The first part is based on twenty-six life stories, with an equal number of interviews conducted with men and women. This is the best part of the book, a worthwhile (and much needed) contribution to the field of Oklahoma studies. The second part focuses on the American Agriculture Movement and its call to redefine land as a social trust and not as an industrial resource.

In chapter one, “The Invitation to Die,” the author describes himself and his fieldwork experience. Such “positionings” of the authorial self are de rigueur in anthropology nowadays, and useful—to a point, that is: autobiographical accounts usually conceal as much as they reveal, and we do not learn until the second half of the book that Ramírez-Ferrero has a political agenda.

This agenda is called “social justice and parity,” terms with roots deep in the history of American socialism and the Progressive movement of the early 20th century. There is nothing wrong with having an agenda, but it would have been better had the author told us up-front, instead of assuming his readers would understand (and agree with) his political philosophy.

Chapter two, “The Nelsons,” focuses on one farm family, describing its members’ story of coming to terms with severe financial debt and the changes this process has created for them. The analysis of men’s emotional values and the premium placed on the denial of suffering is particularly telling. In chapter three, “Creating Oklahoma,” Ramírez-Ferrero turns to the historical processes that have shaped Oklahoman identity, especially the identity of farming men. The next chapter, “The American Agricultural Movement,” is the book’s longest, a surprising fact since it is based on the minority of interviewed families who are AAM members. In the last chapter, “Modernity, Emotions, and Social Change,” Ramírez-Ferrero calls attention to the consequences of the growing dominance of industrial agriculture in northwestern Oklahoma and offers his opinions about what constitutes a “just” society.

Troubled Fields: Men, Emotions, and the Crisis in American Farming. By Eric Ramírez-Ferrero. New York: Columbia University Press, 2005. xii + 221 pp. Appendix, notes, bibliography, index. \$64.50 cloth, \$24.50 paper.

Is the family farm an anachronism, to be replaced, sooner or later, by larger and more efficient industrial

Troubled Fields would have been a very different book if the author had premised his argument on the view of the majority of farmers that individualism is good instead of on a form of capitalist mystification. Given the decidedly left-leaning political orientation of most anthropologists, it is not surprising that this view receives little scrutiny, whereas the opposite, if the book had been written from that perspective, would be seen as deeply biased and reactionary. Nevertheless, Ramírez-Ferrero provides a window into the world of Oklahoma farmers and the emotional values that shape and constrain their reactions to economic transformation. His book is an invaluable contribution to the ethnography of agriculture in the United States. **Charles W. Nuckolls**, *Department of Anthropology, University of Alabama*.