

Valdez-Gardea, G. C. 2002. People's responses in a time of crisis: Marginalization in the upper Gulf of California. Ph.D. dissertation. University of Arizona. Tucson, Arizona. 336 pp.

This dissertation explores the creative ways in which particular individuals and the community in general, responds to economic crisis and perceived marginality. It shows how residents of El Golfo de Santa Clara, a small community in the upper Gulf of California, with their meager incomes, fuller utilization of kinship and other social sources, participation in illegal and informal activities, migration, and political participation, are contesting their marginality and resisting the social and economic outcome of state policies in the area.

Residents' feeling of frustration and disempowerment increased during the early 1990s. Because of ecological changes and structural adjustment policies the shrimp industry in the Gulf of California collapsed. Household salaries dropped drastically; fishermen were unemployed and families had to look for different strategies to survive. In the midst of the economic crisis residents of El Golfo were told of the decree of a biosphere reserve, which initially had the objective of restricting fishing activity in the area.

People's responses involved individual and collective performances and discursive critiques of state authority as represented by the management team of the biosphere reserve. Residents pressed their rights to get involved in the management of the area as well as their rights to get infrastructural services for the town.

People's responses show that marginality and poverty had nothing to do with a 'natural' or 'biological' condition, as presented by some earlier anthropological studies of the Mexican countryside, but with a historical economic inequality and the distribution of wealth within the country.

The peoples' responses to their economic and political situation underline a critique to their perceived identity as a "rural community" by the managers of the biosphere reserve and authorities that categorized rural people as backward, isolated, uncivilized, and unimportant in the larger social formation. These local responses to the political and economic context suggest that anthropologists should take a more engaged approach in the study of the Mexican countryside.