

CARMEN KORDICK, *The Saints of Progress: A History of Coffee, Migration, and Costa Rican National Identity*. Tuscaloosa: University of Alabama Press, 2019.

Carmen Kordick's superb book is a thoughtful and nuanced depiction of regional, national, and transnational individual and collective identity-making in Costa Rica from the late nineteenth century up to the early twenty-first century. Focusing on rural communities in the Tarrazu Valley, the book examines the evolution of a distinct economy, namely the coffee trade, as well as the formation of communal and national identities, and the impact of immigration both on those who left—the Tarrazúceño/as who migrated to Paterson, New Jersey—and those who remained behind. Based on municipal and state archives, as well as personal archives and extensive oral histories, Kordick creates an intimate history of a place, while demonstrating the importance of local histories in undermining national ones.

Kordick begins by tracing the establishment of the communities of the Tarrazu Valley in the late nineteenth century, in the context of the settlement of the Costa Rican frontier that took place during this period. She then goes on to depict the emergence of the coffee industry as the prime export economy of Costa Rica (along with bananas from the Atlantic coast) as well as a marker of Costa Rican national core identity as a nation of white yeomen smallholders. Kordick articulates the ways in which the coffee economy functioned as a double-edged sword. On the one hand, it indeed contributed to the progress and prosperity of the region and was a means by which provincial agriculturists engaged themselves with the national ethos. On the other hand, as a result of the considerable expenses that the manufacturing of coffee entails, this economy deepened already existing asymmetrical economic hierarchies in Costa Rica, resulting in social stresses and discontent that are in marked contrast to the national myth of an egalitarian, peaceful society.

Costa Rican and non-Costa Rican scholars (Lowell Gudmundson, 1986; Giovanna Giglioli, 1996; Lara Putnam, 2002; Carlos Sandoval-García, ed., 2008) have been challenging that myth for some decades now, and Kordick's work is a substantial addition to this narrative. In the third and fourth chapters Kordick focuses on what she calls a tradition of violence (57), including both state violence against men and domestic violence perpetrated by men on women and children. Chapter Five considers the short-lived 1948 civil war in which the communities of the Tarrazu Valley played an important role. Here too Kordick shows how an event portrayed in retrospect as an exception to the national character was in fact the result of national social and economic processes. She also demonstrates that the war, while relatively tame in comparison to the

bloody conflicts that raged in neighboring states, still left the region severely traumatized.

In respect to the post-civil war era, Kordick argues (in the book's conclusions) that during the Cold War period the United States amplified the myth of Costa Rica as democratic and peaceful as a means of distinguishing it from the other states in Central America, thus placing the blame for the turmoil in the region on imagined national heritages rather than ongoing and constant U.S. interference. However, as Kordick herself points out, the Costa Rican myth of exceptionalism is grounded in the nineteenth-century post-independence period and has been repeatedly reinvented to accommodate changing needs, so in this respect at least, the linkage of the myth's periodization to the Cold War is not fully convincing.

In her last two chapters, Kordick discusses the migration of Tarrazúceño/as, mostly landless male peasants, to the town of Paterson, New Jersey, in the 1960s. In this context, in what is yet another manifestation of the deconstruction of the myth of exceptionalism, Kordick depicts the astonishment of these immigrants at being classified as Latinos rather than as Whites (155) upon their arrival in the United States and also shows how the Costa Rican embassy ignored the existence of this group of undocumented, lower-class Costa Rican immigrants and refused to extend them help (179). The depiction of the strong familial and economic ties between the two communities brings to mind similar stories, such as those described by Peggie Levitt in her seminal work *The Transnational Villagers* (2001). Kordick compellingly examines immigration as a move back and forth between different national, gendered, class, and ethnicity regimes, stressing that the migration from the valley did not constitute a break from rural traditions and national ethos, noting: "Ironically, however, migration has strengthened Tarrazúceños' connection to the nation-state by altering local socioeconomic realities in such a way that it has increased the number of families who can identify with the nation's archetype: the yeoman coffee farmer" (136). Employing a transnational perspective, Kordick analyzes not only those who left, but also those who stayed behind as well as those who came to take their place, in this case indigenous Panamanian seasonal workers, and examines their influence on the construction of ethnic identity in the valley. She further demonstrates the extent to which the dream of migration as a springboard to becoming a land owner and coffee planter was a gendered one—it was mostly the men who returned to Costa Rica with enough funds to purchase their own land, while the women opted to remain in the United States.

In summary, Kordick's work highlights the important contribution of local histories to the understanding of the larger national and transnational picture and demonstrates the critical role of locality in a transnational world. As such,

*The Saints of Progress* is relevant for scholars of Costa Rica, as well as anyone interested in inter-American relations, immigration studies, and identity-formation in the transnational context.

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JOHN R. GUST & JENNIFER P. MATHEWS, *Sugarcane and Rum: The Bittersweet History of Labor and Life on the Yucatán Peninsula*. Tucson: University of Arizona Press, 2020.

When scholars think about agricultural production in Yucatán, it is generally henequen—not sugarcane—that comes to mind. This fibrous material helped build the fortunes in the region from the end of the nineteenth to the beginning of the twentieth centuries; but sugarcane and rum helped to ensure henequen’s success. In their fascinating study of the region, Gust and Mathews demonstrate that henequen, sugarcane, and rum went hand in hand; workers in Yucatán that labored on henequen haciendas often soothed their tired bodies and minds with the rum produced in the area. Over-consumption of alcohol could also lead to acts of violence in homes and communities, and it sometimes created conditions by which individuals found themselves hopelessly tied to an hacienda. As poor workers found themselves with unpayable bar tabs, Gust and Mathews illustrate that rich hacienda owners offered to pay the bills in exchange for workers. The consumption of locally produced rum, the authors argue, assured a plentiful and compliant workforce on sugar or henequen plantations. By default, then, sugarcane and rum exacerbated the divisions between elites and workers in the unfree labor system that dominated the Yucatecan economy. Thus, Gust and Mathews use sugarcane and rum as an avenue to explore the economic and social realities of Yucatán. As the authors point out in their Introduction, “to understand the henequen hacienda, we must understand rum, and to understand rum, we must understand the henequen hacienda” (6).

The first two chapters of this book are comparative in nature. Sugar production was not a major part of the economic output of New Spain during the Spanish colonial era. While it thrived in the Caribbean, sugar production took some time to be established in Mexico. The authors situate Yucatán within the larger sugar-producing world, which is an excellent way of introducing the material to readers. These chapters in particular are accessible to specialists and non-experts alike, regardless of academic discipline. Chapter One explores the history of sugar cultivation worldwide and briefly examines the importance of the crop to European imperial powers. In Chapter Two, the authors turn to the