Lowell Gudmundson, *Costa Rica after Coffee: The Co-Op Era in History and Memory*

Louisiana State University Press, 2021, pp. xxii + 141

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Lowell Gudmundson's *Costa Rica after Coffee* is a most engaging account of the role that coffee has played in transforming Costa Rican society in the last 70 years. It follows, some 35 years later, his pathbreaking *Costa Rica before Coffee* (Louisiana State University Press, 1986), a book that reminded its readers of a time when coffee was not the dominant economic activity in Costa Rica (coffee was first exported in 1832, although it would be several decades before it became the main export).

In addition, Gudmundson uses his long and unbroken association with the Central American republic to reflect on the nature of Costa Rican democracy, the roots of its alleged exceptionalism and the link with the civil war in 1948 – perhaps the defining moment in the country's democratic evolution. These reflections by the author, captured both in Chapter 1 and in a lengthy introduction, are sufficiently profound to suggest that Gudmundson still has much to say about Costa Rican society as a whole.

Gudmunson is not arguing in this book that coffee has literally disappeared, although the industry has been facing a series of crises in recent decades. It is a much more positive and uplifting message, inasmuch as coffee has transformed the nature of society to the point where other higher productivity activities now eclipse coffee in terms of their contribution to employment, output, exports and tax revenue. And yet this transformation, as Gudmundson is all too well aware, has been associated with a sharp rise in income and wealth equality as well as an increase in political corruption and the collapse of the two traditional political parties that emerged from the 1948 civil war.

Most of the focus in the book is on the rise of the cooperative movement in the coffee sector from 1950 onwards. Using interviews with participants and a careful sifting of primary sources, Gudmundson notes the transformational impact that coffee cooperatives in the central valley (the key coffee-growing region of Costa Rica) had on production and the distribution of income. He also documents the struggles that cooperatives have experienced in adapting to the rise of coffee brands in developed markets, especially in the United States and Europe, while analysing the impact of the decline on national finance for coffee after the advent of neoliberalism in the 1980s.

All of this is described within a long-run context in which Gudmundson notes the demographic changes that have occurred in Costa Rica in the last 60 years. From one of the youngest populations in the world, with nearly half under the age of 15 in 1960 and only 4.8 per cent being older than 60, Costa Rica now has one of the oldest populations with a life expectancy of some 80 years (higher for

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women) and nearly 15 per cent of the population above the age of 60. Furthermore, all of this has occurred despite the high levels of young Nicaraguans migrating to Costa Rica from the neighbouring republic in the last 40 years. And since the young do not share their parents' and grandparents' enthusiasm for rural life, coffee growing has begun to look like a very old-fashioned activity.

This is not, of course, how the government would like to see it and when President Xi of China in 2013 asked to visit a 'typical' Costa Rican family, he was taken to a small-scale coffee farm owned by an elderly grower with strong links to a cooperative. Yet today a 'typical' Costa Rican is more likely to be working for a software company in the capital San José or a tourist business on the Pacific coast. Coffee, it would seem, has passed into the mythology of Costa Rican history in the same way as small-scale farming in the United States or sugarcane production in much of the Caribbean.

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Sarah Walsh, *The Religion of Life: Eugenics, Race, and Catholicism in Chile*

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The Religion of Life by Sarah Walsh is part of a broad and rich historiographical field that looks at the development of eugenics beyond the Anglo-Saxon world. The pioneering works of some historians in the 1990s, such as those of Mark Adams, Nancy Stepan, Anne Carol and Raquel Álvarez Peláez, among others, opened the perspective on eugenics to a global dimension outside the classical epicentre of its development, in Germany, the United States, England and some Nordic countries. This comparative stimulus and historical research in diverse national contexts was followed in the 2000s by Latin American authors who began to study eugenics in this region. The works of Marisa Miranda, Gustavo Vallejo, Andrés Reggiani, Héctor Palma, Ricardo Augusto Dos Santos, Luis Ferla, Ana María Talak and Sandra Caponi, among others, followed this path.

In the Chilean case, the decisive impulse for studies on eugenics in the country unfolded in the 2010s, during which a well-nourished field of studies was consolidated by articles, monographs, research projects, university courses and a handful of books on the subject. Here it is fair to mention works such as those of Bernardo Subercaseaux, César Leyton, Cristián Palacios, Javiera Letelier, Gabriel Cid, María Josefina Cabrera and the author of this review, among others.

Walsh knows this field well, and through this book she has managed to solidly inscribe herself in it, delving into a barely outlined topic in the work of local

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