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in the Humanities & Social Sciences

Steven Topik, Carlos Marichal, Zephyr Frank, eds. *From Silver to Cocaine: Latin American Commodity Chains and the Building of the World Economy, 1500-2000.* American Encounters/Global Interactions Series. Durham: Duke University Press, 2006. 376 pp. $23.95 (paper), ISBN 978-0-8223-3766-9.

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Published on H-LatAm (June, 2010)
Commissioned by Kenneth Kincaid

The Globalization of Latin American Commodities, 1500-2000.

In November 2006, the Danish shipping conglomerate A. P. Møller launched one of the world's largest container vessels, the M/V *Emma Maersk*. At thirteen hundred feet, with an anchor that weighs as much as five African elephants, and able to ply the oceans at thirty-six miles per hour, this leviathan carries containers brimming with cargo that if stacked end to end would stretch forty-four miles. The M/V *Emma Maersk* sails the trans-Pacific trade, carrying shrimp from Thailand eastbound and returning westbound with Guatemalan coffee intended for consumption in Tokyo's coffeehouses. The captain of the M/V *Emma Maersk* underwent intensive training in multimillion dollar ship simulators before commanding his vessel. Meanwhile, the coffee picker from the Guatemalan highlands, if lucky, probably has a few years of primary school education. The Danish captain and the Guatemalan coffee picker are but two people whose labor must be performed before a Tokyo bond trader can consume coffee grown in Huehuetenango. This interconnectedness of all the "jobs" involved in getting the Guatemalan coffee to the Tokyo consumer (along with an understanding of what makes Huehuetenango coffee so desirable–intense body, pleasant wine notes) is known as a commodity chain. Within the commodity chain for the Huehuetenango coffee, the Guatemalan coffee picker faces an economic future very different from the captain of the M/V *Emma Maersk*. In this scenario, the Guatemalan government has not provided its coffee picker with the tools needed to compete in a globalized economy. Hence, the coffee picker limps by on wages that pay at most 1,200 dollars per year while the Danish captain commands a salary in excess of 125,000 dollars per year. Yet not all is doom and gloom on the Guatemalan side of the commodity chain; the Huehuetenango *finquero* (farmer) who grows this premium-grade coffee uses the Internet to sell his product directly to the Tokyo coffeehouse, thereby circumventing numerous links within the supply chain and assuring himself a livable wage.

The interconnectedness of twelve Latin American commodity chains is the focus of the essays that constitute *From Silver to Cocaine*, compiled and edited by Steven Topik, Carlos Marichal, and Zephyr Frank. The analysis starts with the most profitable commodity of the colonial era, silver, and finishes with the most profitable commodity of the twenty-first century, cocaine. In the ensuing chapters, the contributors examine the forward and backward linkages for products that provided nicotine (tobacco), caffeine (coffee), and anandamide (cocoa), a psychoactive ingredient of chocolate that targets the same neurotransmitters as tetrahydrocannabinol (THC), for the consumers in the northern nations. *From Silver to Cocaine* is a revisionist interpretation about the relationship between the wealthier consuming nations of the North and the less-developed producing nations of the South. Providing an alternative interpretation to Immanuel Wallerstein's world-systems analysis of trade, the contributors state that Latin American entrepreneurs were not trade victims but instead were often able to prosper. More important, as in the case of cacao and bananas, Latin American commodity chains often created a demand where previously no supply existed (producer-driven commodity chain).

Intended for an upper-level undergraduate or graduate audience, *From Silver to Cocaine* is both enlightening and entertaining. Slaves in the southern United States spread Peruvian guano (excrement of seafowl) to restore the tobacco soil in the Virginia tidewater region while British farmers used guano because its odor resembled that of traditional farmyard manure. The strength of this collection of essays lies in the fact that the story of guano is not exclusively a Latin American story: the re-

peal of the Corn Laws in Great Britain (1846) and agricultural diversification within continental Europe both occurred because of the Peruvian state's role in controlling the exportation of guano. This interconnectedness lies at the heart of *From Silver to Cocaine,* and its essays allow the reader to see how during the colonial era "silver and sugar bound together Europe, the Americas, Africa, and Asia, thereby fueling early globalization" (p. 3). The chapters are arranged chronologically, thereby allowing for an intriguing analysis of how the Spanish Crown tried to protect Salvadoran laborers from disease while manufacturing the dye indigo whereas land-hungry peasants in the Peruvian region of Huánuco beat the traditional elite to the punch in dominating the cultivation and processing of cocaine in the 1970s.

Finally, the timing of this book is important. According to a June 30, 2008, article from the *New York Times*, "since 1980, even as trade in services and in manufactured goods has tripled, adjusting for inflation, trade in food has barely increased. Instead, for decades, food has been a convoluted tangle of restrictive rules, in the form of tariffs, quotas, and subsidies."[1] Six of the nine agricultural commodities covered in the book (sugar, tobacco, coffee, cacao, bananas, and cocaine) are still an important component of numerous Latin American economies. As the worldwide recession in late 2008 deepens, the northern nations, the richer nations, will be tempted to enact more protection for their domestic agricultural industries. Meanwhile, the southern nations, the less wealthy nations, will face additional obstacles to free trade. If there is a silver lining for the agro-export industries of Latin America, it is that from silver in the early 1500s to cocaine in the 1990s, the region has been able to adapt and at times prosper from the changes within globalized trade.

Note

[1]. Keith Bradsher and Andrew Martin, "Hoarding Nations Drive Food Costs Ever Higher," *New York Times*, June 30, 2008

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Citation: David C. Johnson. Review of Topik, Steven; Marichal, Carlos; Frank, Zephyr, eds., *From Silver to Cocaine: Latin American Commodity Chains and the Building of the World Economy, 1500-2000.* H-LatAm, H-Net Reviews. June, 2010.
URL: http://www.h-net.org/reviews/showrev.php?id=24980

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