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Article

2020

Accepted version

Public access

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How to cite

NAEF, Patrick James. Coca yes, cocaine no: how bolivia's coca growers reshaped democracy. In: Journal of Anthropological Research, 2020, vol. 76, n° 2.

This publication URL: <https://archive-ouverte.unige.ch/unige:139716>

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Book Reviews

Coca Yes, Cocaine No: How Bolivia's Coca Growers Reshaped Democracy.

Thomas Grisaffi. Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2019, 272 pp.

\$25.95, paper. ISBN 978-1-4780-0297-0.

Thomas Grisaffi's objective, in his fascinating recent work, *Coca Yes, Cocaine No*, is twofold. He first aims to describe the shift of an agricultural and criminalized union of *cocaleros* (coca growers) into the ruling party responsible for governing Bolivia, the Movement Toward Socialism (Movimiento al Socialismo or MAS in Spanish); he then offers some key elements to understanding President Evo Morales's inability to adequately represent his base, which is composed of *cocaleros* union members and leaders. Indeed, due to his international obligations (mainly toward the US) to stem coca cultivations and cocaine trafficking, Morales fell short of fulfilling *cocaleros*' expectations and hopes. As the author states, "by sidestepping the issues of cocaine, Morales generated unrealistic expectations among rank and file of union members, and so it was inevitable that, once in office, he would disappoint" (p. 21). Grisaffi reveals what he defines as an "uncomfortable truth"—the fact that coca growers regularly use the traditional status of the coca leaf to advocate for their rights as indigenous peoples, while knowing that most of the harvest is redirected toward cocaine production. The paradox that *cocaleros* face in Bolivia is embodied by the fact that they risk criminalization for pursuing their livelihood (p. 200).

This monograph is the result of a decade of research (2005–2015) composed of 30 months' fieldwork in the Chapare coca-growing region, the case study for this work. The first part of the book is contextual, with chapters looking at the political history of Bolivia and Chapare; uses of coca leaf, ranging from rituals and healing to the illicit narcotics industry; and finally, aspects of local governance, focusing on how unions exert a form of social control, sometimes in tense contradiction to state law. The second part of Grisaffi's work examines how life in Chapare has been altered by the MAS assumption of office. He analyzes the discourse of indigeneity produced by *cocaleros* in order to legitimize their practice, the coca control of policies and the numerous failures of the war on drugs, the nature of the "Andean self-governing principles," and the way coca growers managed their regional presence in the national and local media. Finally, through an analysis of coca grower's hopes and disillusionments related to the MAS governance, Grisaffi accurately demonstrates the limits that local and vernacular democratic mechanisms face in the global political context.

In addition to the quality of his writing and clarity of his argument, the judicious and continuous integration of primary data makes this book captivating and vivid. Through ethnographic vignettes and detailed descriptions of the relationships between the author and the actors of his research, Grisaffi manages to bring the atmosphere of the Chapare region to life for the reader. The thorough description of social control exercised by the MAS—through various mechanisms, such as punishment, shaming, and fines—is certainly one of the most powerful and original insights of this book.

The author also demonstrates a welcome reflexivity when he considers his fieldwork and the evolution of his mindset throughout his study, pointing out, for instance, his naivety and idealism when he first rejected considerations of the corruption, coercion, and authoritarianism attributed to the unions (p. 107). This reflexive stance allows Grisaffi to understand the cultural specificity of democratic practices in the Chapare region, thereby avoiding the trap of an ethnocentric and westernized conception of democracy, which could only result in labeling the unions despotic and corrupt. As he notes: “While liberal theorists might consider these practices to be the antithesis of democracy, for the *cocaleros* they represent the very highest form of political engagement they aspire to” (p. 194).

The author’s focus is largely centered on the *cocaleros*, who are the main subjects of this study. However, it would have been interesting had the voices of other actors involved in these issues been louder contributors, such as members of the local police forces, political representatives other than those of the MAS, or even international actors, such as the United States Agency for International Development (USAID) or the Drug Enforcement Administration (DEA). Nevertheless, this study remains a significant contribution to the fields of Latin American Studies and drug politics—a topic of keen importance, which can shed light on other relevant issues, such as the depenalization and legalization of cannabis use in countries such as Uruguay and the USA.

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