duda, habrá que confrontar estas ideas con las de la ciudadanía agraria que Helga Baitenmann y Emilia Velázquez ya han explorado.

El capítulo quinto, escrito por Carlos Conrreras Servín, nos muestra cómo la escasez de agua altera la cotidianidad de los habitantes de la “región centro-norte” de México en la segunda mitad del siglo xix y la primera del siglo xx. Su análisis sobre los fenómenos de El Niño y La Niña nos muestra los acontecimientos de alteración climática que sufrimos actualmente. Sorprende que no haya utilizado los catálogos sobre Desastres agrícolas en el México del siglo xix, publicados por el Fondo de Cultura Económica y el ciesas, los cuáles hubieran aportado más datos a su análisis sobre las sequías.

El séptimo capítulo nos muestra la falacia en que se han convertido las Áreas Naturales Protegidas en México. El trabajo de Mauricio Genet Guzmán nos permite comprender las implicaciones tras la idea de “áreas naturales”, considerada por el autor como un elemento que ha agudizado la erosión de los recursos en las zonas semiáridas y áridas del norte mexicano. Aquí habría que considerar si la idea de los Parques Nacionales que imperó en Estados Unidos de América y en Europa puede analizarse con la misma óptica.

Los textos reunidos por Cañedo y Radding abren nuevas vetas de análisis, pero sobre todo permiten confrontar ideas desde diferentes visiones y metodologías. Mi esperanza es que mucho de lo que se dice en esta publicación pueda dar pie a un diálogo con nuevas aportaciones y llevarnos a considerar qué elementos de la historiografía mexicana pueden enriquecerse con un enfoque ambientalista.

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Corruption in the Iberian Empires: Greed, Custom, and Colonial Networks.


The past decade has witnessed a renewed interest in empires, in the mechanisms, structures, and personnel of government, and in what was permitted, restricted, suffered, or castigated in the governing of early modern Iberia and its overseas dominions. This volume, which presents relatively short essays by nine authors, is devoted to the concept of corruption, a term originally limited to the subversion of justice—one of the principal attributes and justifications of a monarch’s authority—but whose valence and meaning in the early modern era expanded to include any abuse or violation of laws, practices, or customs of governmental institutions. It is useful to remember that the Iberian kingdoms were precocious in fusing medieval patrimonial practices of government to a new Weberian administrative rationalism, thus creating a mixed system of governing, and as a number of the authors of this volume remind us, what was considered corruption was quite different in early modern times than today. In fact, these essays are essentially nine case studies that reveal the complexity of the term and its multiple dimensions, dealing with forgery in Peru (Jeremy Mumford), fraud and debasement of coinage at Potosí (Kris
Lane), patron-client abuses of authority in Mexico Tenochtitlan (William Connell), malfeasance by oidores in Santo Domingo (Marc Eagle), bribery and judicial abuses in New Spain (Christoph Rosenmüller), viceregal self-aggrandizement in Lima (Francisco Eissa-Barroso), commercial fraud in the Philippines (Catherine Tracy Goode), mercantile activity by the clergy in Puebla (Frances L. Ramos), and contraband at Colonia do Sacramento (Fabricio Prado).

There is good writing here, and each of these studies has been quarried from archival bedrock; as a group, the authors reveal a control of extensive imperial, regional, and local historiographies. The studies provide close-up, detailed examinations of abuses of government and the evasion or violation of laws or regulations. To a greater or lesser extent, each author tries to go beyond his or her case study to address broader theoretical issues about what constituted corruption in early modern societies and what was considered legal or at least acceptable behavior. The most successful in this regard are Lane—who applies Claudio Lomnitz’s concepts of the intersection of ambiguities and contradictions in normative behaviors to a bankrupt system of statecraft in Philip IV’s Spain that made venality the way of life or a necessity for many families, individuals, and administrators—and Goode—whose clear exposition of the Manila galleon system shows the mutual benefits of unwritten contracts between merchants and bureaucrats that allowed them both to profit personally while maintaining the stability of the colonial system.

The problem for the volume as a whole is that this pointillist approach of case studies is not sufficient to resolve the long-standing interpretative challenges about the nature of government and justice in the early modern Iberian world. The editor’s introduction makes references to the classic studies of colonial government by John Horace Parry, John Phelan, Mark Burkholder, Tamar Herzog, Horst Pietschmann, and others, but this text is too brief to provide much depth, and Rosenmüller’s decision to eschew a synthesis of the studies presented in order to let students “do so themselves” deprives readers of some well-marked guideposts that, as his own fine chapter demonstrates, he could have presented (p. 9). Neither the etymology of corruption, as an organic concept associated with decomposition of the body, nor its relationship to theological ideas about spiritual disorder is unpacked fully; doing so might have opened some discussion of the fusion of morality and government that ultimately expanded the meaning of corruption in these societies. As some of the earlier studies had argued and as a number of the authors of this volume emphasize, private gain and public office were not necessarily at odds in government, and various forms of graft, venality, patron-client exchanges, and corruption facilitated rule when resources of men and money were limited. Surely, early modern expectations and standards were not those of later times, and concessions to such practices may well have facilitated the functioning of “negotiated empires,” which gave local elites a crucial influence on rule. But this rather benign and pragmatic vision of corruption tends to modulate or disregard the considerable contemporaneous critiques of such practices embodied in legislation and continual visitas and residencias or in legal treatises like Jerónimo Castillo de Bobadilla’s Política para corregidores (1597), the tracts of arbitristas or those seeking moral reform like the author of the Arte de furtar (1652), or the scalding poetical condemnations of graft, greed,
nepotism, and malfeasance by Francisco de Quevedo and Gregório de Matos. Finally, whatever the benefit for colonial secular or clerical elites, administrators, or the continuity of rule that various forms of corruption provided, it usually came at the expense of the vast majority of the ruler's subjects. Until their interests and their voices are added to our analyses, the practices of corruption will remain only partially understood and their effects on political stability and change underappreciated.

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The Black Christ of Esquipulas: Religion and Identity in Guatemala.

Douglass Sullivan-González's The Black Christ of Esquipulas: Religion and Identity in Guatemala seeks to demonstrate how the turbulent political history of Guatemala found itself reflected in perceptions of this constantly darkening Catholic shrine. Over time, “devotional faith and candle smoke transformed the figure from a light-toned Jesus to a blackened Christ,” a material metamorphosis that “highlighted how ethnic tensions fueled political conflict and controversy” (pp. 2, 9). However, rather than a study of popular devotion, the book focuses on how political power brokers attempted to formulate popular understandings of the figure throughout Guatemala's history and how they treated its coloration based on the political and ideological concerns of the moment.

The Christ arrived in Esquipulas at the end of the sixteenth century, but Sullivan-González's analysis begins in earnest two centuries later. He briefly discusses the appearance of the shrine's first origin story in the seventeenth century and highlights the fact that devotion to the image crossed ethnic boundaries, including indigenous, Spaniards, and ladinos, by the end of that same century. The appearance of the first devotional material about the figure in the eighteenth century lauded its miraculous healing abilities and considered its darkened color as a reminder to the faithful of their own sinfulness. Moving hastily through the colonial period to Guatemala's first years of independence, Sullivan-González turns his attention to the parish priest of Esquipulas, Miguel Muñoz, who strove to defend the shrine in the face of the Liberal offensive. He courted the devotion of elite whites, among whom the shrine's popularity was waning, by proffering a more rational understanding of the shrine, especially regarding its origins and miracle-working capabilities. This “theological marketing,” argues Sullivan-González, inadvertently expressed concern about the apparent correlation between the darkening color of the image and the darkening color of its devotees (p. 77). Augmenting the anxiety of traditional elites was the ascendancy of Conservative Rafael Carrera, thanks to a coalition of ladinos and Amerindians. The color of the Crucified Christ of Esquipulas, while largely unproblematic in the eighteenth century, had by the nineteenth taken on new meaning as its devotees proved themselves a political force.

By the end of the nineteenth century, with the return of Liberals to power and their encouragement of Protestantism in Guatemala, the Christ of Esquipulas was forced to