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**Myths of Ethnicity and Nation: Immigration, Work and Identity in the Belize Banana Industry, by Mark Moberg, Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 1997.**

**Reviewed by Anne Sutherland, Professor of Anthropology, Macalester College, St. Paul, MN**

Anthropology, along with many of the social sciences, has been through a revolution recently, one that has blurred disciplinary boundaries and changed the nature of the questions anthropologists are asking today. As with many revolutions throughout history, in one sense, everything has changed and, in another sense, nothing is new. What has changed is nothing less

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than the discipline itself, but what remains the same is that, wisely, anthropology has not abandoned its traditional strength-- fieldwork.

One of the "schools" to emerge from this revolution is an approach coming from the University of Chicago and other places, loosely referred to as Historical Ethnography. Of course, there is nothing new about history or ethnography, but what scholars such as John and Jean Comaroff and Marshall Sahlins have advocated is a genuine marriage of the two that goes beyond Evans-Pritchard's famous speech in the 1950's exhorting structural-functional anthropologists to share a bed with history. Historical Ethnography still takes seriously the traditional anthropological method of intensive, personal fieldwork to find out how people think, what they do and what it means to them. But traditional ethnography has not usually asked the question: So how did this culture come to be this way? Today, ethnographers no longer take for granted that culture (or identity) is a given. Instead it is problematized, something that has to be explained. If culture persists, or identities of ethnicity and nation are key features of culture, then we must try to understand how they are constructed and reconstructed over time.

Mark Moberg's *Myths of Ethnicity and Nation* starts with a traditional ethnographic question - what are the ethnic and identity issues in Belize's banana export industry? In short, the construction of ethnicity in the banana industry in Belize consists of dividing the largely immigrant work force into competitive teams by nationality (Salvador, Guatemala and Honduras) and the Belizean work force into Afro-American (Creole and Garifuna) and Maya (Ketchi, Mopan, and Maya). The competitive team approach had to be modified when the rivalry ended in a murder. Ethnic categories are also part of a wage/class hierarchy, with Afro-Americans at the top (foremen and field supervisors), Salvadorans, Hondurans, and Guatemalans (mostly illegal immigrants who can be threatened with deportation) with wages in descending order and the Belizean Maya at the bottom. Gender is a further complicating factor as one-half to 90 per cent of the work force at any time is composed of women. Moberg has a fascinating case study with which to muse on ethnicity, nation, class, immigration, the state, and an export agricultural industry. His account is nicely written and includes compelling stories, such as those on worker's resistances, theft, foot-dragging and sabotage.

For his analysis, Moberg turns to classical Marx with some help from the geographer David Harvey's critique of postmodernism. Moberg argues that identity and ethnicity, while being ways to mark off different groups working in the banana industry, are mere ideologies masking the true underlying issues, which are political economy and class. The real segmentation is class and the real issue behind ethnic discrimination is simply discrimination in the work force. While I would never argue for downplaying economic issues and class, an enormous body of literature demonstrates that primordial identity issues such as ethnicity cannot be reduced to economics, since doing so would fail to explain why these identity issues are so persistent and why they, and not other ways of marking people, are the ones used to represent class.

Moberg's theoretical approach does not make room for asking those questions except in the most simplistic way (e.g., those are the groups that are there empirically and historically). As Comaroff and Comaroff have shown, history is not the answer, it only raises another question, namely how and why did people develop the forms, functions and meanings they now have. To find the answers one needs to factor in the last 200 years of globalization processes and the influences from outside the object of study that have led to the present situation. Weaving history with structure and function, and all of that with wider processes of globalization, is a daunting task, but I believe it must be tackled.

The question of how and why identities keep being reconstructed is a very pertinent question in the Belize context. As Moberg points out, immigrants from El Salvador, Guatemala and Honduras - when they come to Belize - are immediately reclassified as "aliens" and grouped together in an unmarked way as "Spanish" (with language use being the primary marker). Moberg's important contribution is to document how the differences between them are reemphasized and reinforced by their employers through devices such as differing wages for each group. But we have to ask, who, if anyone, benefits from ethnic divisions? Moberg's case argues

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for the ruling elites, the banana growers, who promote the ethnic divisions, but it is not clear that they benefit. The resulting labor shortages, political instability, and sabotage in an industry that is already surviving only with protected prices from the European Union, leads me to doubt that ethnic divisiveness is to their benefit.

In addition, although ruling elites, be they capitalists, colonialists, or an indigenous ruling class, will use what divisive means are at their disposal to weaken the bargaining power of their employees, they would not be able to use these devices if the ethnic or racial division was not already there and was not already of some importance to those who belong to the ethnic groups. It would be interesting to know some of the benefits of ethnic division to the members of the group. Furthermore, comparative information on non-banana work areas could indicate if these differences persist and why even in industries that do not promote them.

A strength of Moberg's analysis is the effect of immigration on Belizean national culture. Recent changes in demographics due to immigration have shifted the balance between Afro-American groups (Creole and Garifuna) and Spanish-speaking Belizeans so that currently, the latter outnumber the former. This perceived threat to the hegemony of the Afro-Americans who have dominated the national discourse on identity, is clearly part of the identity politics of the banana belt. The supervisory role of the Afro-American Belizeans is another source of repression for the immigrant workers, while at the same time displacing Afro-American Belizeans as ordinary workers in favor of the more poorly paid immigrants.

Overall, this book is well documented, cogently written and highly informative. It is the most thorough study of the banana belt in Belize to date and makes a valuable contribution to the literature on Belize and on the banana industry in general. There is a dearth of solid information on Belize, and an even more acute shortage of ethnographic work. This lack of accumulated scholarship hampers scholars in that they have to deal with the most basic information gathering as their first task. *Myths of Ethnicity and Nation* is an important contribution to scholarship on Belize. More ethnography like it will enhance the ability of scholars of Belize to make comparative analyzes and comprehend the complex world of this very small country.

**Growth Management for a Sustainable Future: Ecological Sustainability as the New Growth Management Focus for the 21st Century, by Gabor Zovanyi, Westport, CT: Praeger Publishers, 1998. xv, 221 pp.**

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The opinions represented here are strictly those of the author and do not in any way reflect official opinion or policy of the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency.

As a follower of the "limits to growth" debate, a believer in the laws of thermodynamics, and reader of Herman Daly and other critics of the growth paradigm, over the past few years I have silently shaken my head at the dissolution of the growth/no-growth debate in the 70s in favor of