

tive to context. That the problems persist despite the experiences of recent disasters says something about the fraught network which connects international NGOs, states, and survivors. To restructure the network is beyond the means of the book, but *From the Ground Up* does suggest what scholars and practitioners may accomplish when they base the recovery program on the perspectives and resources of the survivors.

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### ***From Modern Production to Imagined Primitive: The Social World of Coffee from Papua New Guinea***

PAIGE WEST

Durham and London: Duke University Press, 2012, xvii+316p., with illustrations, endnotes, and index.

If you're reading this with a cup of fair-trade, organically grown, single-origin coffee in your hand, feeling virtuous because your ethical purchasing power is helping to create a better world for disadvantaged coffee growers in the global South, consider this. Paige West argues that fair-

trade, organic, and single-origin certification schemes in Papua New Guinea “bring with them fully formed prescriptive regimes of governmentality which were developed elsewhere and based on a value system separate from those of most Melanesians.” Moreover, the images used by marketers to “add value to coffee from Papua New Guinea in the global marketplace” not only fail to “reflect the lived experiences of people in Papua New Guinea”; they also “replicate neoliberal logics in ways that are ultimately detrimental to the social worlds and lives of the people growing coffee” (p. 23).

*From Modern Production to Imagined Primitive* “examines the world of coffee from Papua New Guinea, including its political ecology, social history, and social meaning, in order to contribute to anthropological discussions about circulation and neoliberalization” (p. 2). Chapter 1, “The World of Coffee from Papua New Guinea,” introduces the ways in which coffee production connects Papua New Guineans with the rest of the world and discusses concepts of labor and value, anthropological analyses of commodities and their circulation, and neoliberalization as both a philosophical worldview and a set of policy-related discourses and practices. Chapter 2, “Neoliberal Coffee,” outlines the global political and economic changes responsible for the specialty coffee industry and the marketing, advertising and circulation networks that surround it. With a keen eye for the ridiculous, West introduces the truly awful “Mr. Nebraska” and his aggressively simplistic seminar on marketing coffee to different generations. She then presents the specialty coffee-roasting company Dean’s Beans, which considers itself “an emissary of peace and positive social change” to the downtrodden, exploited coffee growers of Papua New Guinea’s Highlands, all of whom supposedly don paint, tusks and feathers on a daily basis (pp. 39–41). Against this disturbing backdrop, West analyzes the deregulation of the global coffee industry, the rise of specialty coffees, and the ways in which voluntary regulatory systems and certification standards manipulate both producers and consumers. She shows that images and fantasies created and perpetuated by the coffee industry depict coffee growers in Papua New Guinea as isolated primitives who must be helped to progress along a linear scale from indigeneity to modernity, protected from the machinations of scheming “middlemen,” and prevented from jeopardizing “the ecological stability of their pristine forested lands” (p. 65). Real Papua New Guineans who do not fit these stereotypes “are considered not only less authentic but also less deserving of the rights to their traditional lands and livelihood strategies” (p. 59). The same images and fantasies conceal the social relations of coffee’s production while convincing consumers that they can enact their personal politics by paying higher prices for products with ethical labels. The images which market meaningfulness to consumers, West argues, replace history and society with fantasy and “set the stage for dispossession” (p. 66).

Chapters 3 through 7 examine the coffee industry in Papua New Guinea both historically and ethnographically. “Historic Coffee” summarizes the history of the coffee industry in the Highlands of Papua New Guinea and shows the historical development of the physical, social, and ideological

routes by which coffee travels today. “Village Coffee” describes the lives of Papua New Guinean coffee growers and the meaning of coffee within local concepts of place, space, and subjectivity, focusing on the Gimi-speaking inhabitants of Maimafu village in the Eastern Highlands Province. Moving outwards, “Relational Coffee” deals with the routes, machines, and people that connect Maimafu with the rest of the world, together with the social relations they entail. West is concerned to show that “the social and material labor of so-called middlemen,” contrary to the negative claims of contemporary coffee marketing, is in fact “crucial for the movement of coffee” and central to the lives and selves of the individuals in question (p. 132). “National Coffee” describes the lives of people in the processing and exporting center of Goroka and the international port of Lae. Finally, “International Coffee” tracks Maimafu coffee beyond Papua New Guinea to the lives and understandings of coffee importers, coffee shop patrons, and college students in Germany, the UK, Australia, and the United States.

West balances vivid description with thoughtful analysis throughout, avoiding the temptation to oversimplify the complex and often contradictory ways in which coffee helps shape people’s lives. She depicts multidimensional characters with ambiguous experiences: Seventh-Day Adventist mission pilots who fly rural coffee to the market despite the critical reactions of their home congregations, seeing their transport of a stimulant prohibited by their religion as a way of linking rural people to cash and development and subsidizing free flights to emergency medical care; Sara and Ellen from Maimafu, who are concerned by the effects of rising labor burdens on women’s health and socially reproductive practices, but also value the time they spend harvesting coffee as a rare opportunity to socialize with relatives living at a distance; Brisbane-based coffee importer Trevor Bruce, who deploys primitive images to compete in the marketplace but is nevertheless uneasy about using coffee to “paint a picture of Papua New Guinea that is not true” (p. 211); and undergraduate students who contradict Mr. Nebraska’s glowing depiction of politically active “millennials” by knowing “almost nothing about specialty coffee” or the adverse effects of neo-liberalization and caring less (pp. 38, 233).

I was disturbed by West’s apparently unproblematic acceptance of the real existence of race. Her understanding of this concept, though not precisely defined, appears to float somewhere between national origin and descent: she explains that the world of Papua New Guinea coffee is “multicultural and multiracial in that its participants are from Papua New Guinea, Australia, the United Kingdom, India, the Philippines, South Korea, and the United States,” but also refers to a factory owner in the Eastern Highlands Province, the son of an Irish Australian and a woman from Hagen, as being of “mixed race” (pp. 10, 166, 175). I do not doubt that ideas of racial identity combine with understandings of cultural difference and markers of social and economic privilege to shape “how power and privilege are understood and how people react to them” in Papua New Guinea and beyond (p. 177). However, West’s implicit assumption that the world’s inhabitants can be meaningfully classified according to genetically determined somatic characteristics has been

profoundly and repeatedly challenged by both historians and scientists. Importantly, concepts of biological inferiority and the racial hierarchies they produced are also closely implicated in the “troubling set of fantasy images of Papua New Guinea” that West rightly deplores (p.29). The book would have benefited from a clear explanation of the problematic nature of the concept of race and the complex and contradictory ways in which it has been and continues to be used.

This caveat aside, I found *From Modern Production to Imagined Primitive* both engaging and thought-provoking. It will interest students of Papua New Guinea’s history, economy and culture, scholars of development, globalization and commodification, and all those who, like myself, had hoped that the extra dollars they spent on certified coffee might somehow trickle down to help its less privileged producers. Idealists: you have been warned.

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### ***Southeast Asian Independent Cinema***

TILMAN BAUMGÄRTEL, ed.

Hong Kong: Hong Kong University Press, 2012, 304p.

The prolific production of independent films in one of the fastest growing economic regions of the world impels filmmakers, critics, and scholars to seriously study Southeast Asian (hereon referred as “SEA”) cinema as a distinct area of filmmaking within global cinema. *Southeast Asian Independent Cinema*, edited by the German scholar of Southeast Asian cinemas Tilman Baumgärtel, is a contribution to the growing discussion of SEA cinematic developments.

Essays that constitute the book’s first part identify the conceptual framework and themes in recent Southeast Asian indie films. John Lent’s definitions of “independence” in terms of governmental regulation, financing, and fresh styles and methods of filmmaking may serve as an index through which cinemas in the region are to be examined. The editor’s own essay extends Benedict Anderson’s “imagined communities” to film and television in the region but hesitates to argue that indie movies are not as popular as other media (such as television melodramas and mainstream films), thereby making contentious the idea that through independent cinema, the peoples of Southeast Asia imagine and construct their communal identities. If so, this is only at a very limited level. Indeed, there may be a “strategic essentialism” here in the sense that the national or cultural essences posited by non-Southeast Asians in the region’s indie productions are largely ignored by Southeast Asians themselves. What are the objectives of SEA filmmakers in portraying different realities—poverty, local traditions, etc.—in different lights, when these themes are largely not patronized by their fellow citizens presumably hooked on technologically superior Hollywood and