

in 1972. This final chapter is succinct, gets to the point, offers new knowledge well-documented and in the eyes of this reviewer it is in fact the best contribution in the book.

In general it is interesting to note that a good many of the articles make a reference to the Battle of Okinawa, which without doubt has ongoing traumatic significance in the history of the island(s), given that it led to the death of a third of the civilian population and physically wiped out the island culture. However, none of the authors seems to have really dealt with the historical circumstances of the battle. It is not enough simply to cursorily quote the former governor Masahide Ota, who at the time was a youthful member of an elite, behind-the-lines unit, and later, disillusioned, became a pacifist. Bochorodyz writes, for example (p. 72) that the Japanese authorities made no effort to evacuate civilians. But that is not true: The evacuation, which was probably started too late, was halted in August 1944 when the US navy's submarine *Bowfin* sank the refugee ship *Tsushima Maru* with 1,500 women and children on board (clearly a war crime). Furthermore, many other articles insinuate that the 100,000 civilian deaths were a war crime carried out by the Japanese military in the form of forced suicides or executions of alleged spies. This was certainly the case for a few hundred people. But in fact most of the deaths were brought about by the US military's ceaseless bombing, the artillery fire over months, the death zone along the front, the flame-throwing, explosives and hand grenade attacks on caves and shelters, and the systematic burning of all thatched peasants' dwellings. So, a statement like the following comes across as cynical: "American soldiers seemed surprisingly friendly at first" (p. 74). When US war propaganda creeps into the contributions unchallenged, then all the scholarly efforts for exactness are threatened.

As to be expected in publications of this genre, this collection of articles provides a good many highlights in the contributions on the history, the language and the culture of Okinawa, but the biased political comments unfortunately tarnish some of these achievements.

*Albrecht Rothacher*

JAN BREMAN, *Mobilizing Labour for the Global Coffee Market. Profits from an Unfree Work Regime in Colonial Java*. Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, 2015. 412 pages, €99.00. ISBN 978-90-8964-859-4 (hb)

This recently released book examines colonialism and its impact on the social structure of the Priangan Highlands in Java, the main coffee-producing region of South-East Asia. During the eighteenth century, the Dutch East India Company (Vereenigde Oost-Indische Compagnie, VOC) evolved a system of compulsory cultivation of coffee by local peasants and its delivery at a price far below the real value. The success of the beverage on the world market produced rising

demand and increasing pressure on growers. Whereas the VOC had originally been interested only in trade, it found itself having to extend its political control into the hinterland of Batavia, which it achieved through a system of indirect rule imposed on Sundanese regents. The same mode of cheap exploitation continued after the fall of the VOC (1799–1800) and the subsequent emergence of the early-colonial state. During the heyday of the Cultivation System (1831–66), millions of guilders were remitted annually to the Netherlands by the government of the East Indies. The money was used to redeem the national debt and to finance metropolitan infrastructural projects. Reform of the Cultivation System with the Ethical Policy came about, not because of sympathy for the plight of Javanese peasants, but because of a desire to create greater scope for private enterprise. All along the way the colonial regime constructed a series of spurious justifications for its proceedings.

Produced by Jan Breman, Emeritus Professor of Comparative Sociology at the University of Amsterdam and something of a latter-day Multatuli (E.D. Dekker, 1820–87), the monograph is based largely on primary materials found in the archives at The Hague, Leyden, and Jakarta. He writes with what seems to be a tightly-controlled fury lightened only by caustic irony; the volcanic rumblings of indignation under the authorial surface are contained by academic rigour so that the threatened full-scale eruption never actually materialises. “Not in my name” might well be the underlying motto, but he is always fair and nuanced. And at times he is able to let people condemn themselves with words out of their own mouths, Jean Chrétien Baud being a conspicuous example (pp. 208–9). Dissent was stifled by a *de facto* code of silence within the colonial bureaucracy – the fact that nevertheless there *were* dissenters does the Dutch nation proud.

The author traces the various twists and turns of policy particularly during the period 1720–1870, first under the VOC, followed by the early colonial era and the Raffles-Fendall interlude (1811–16), the restoration of Dutch control after the Napoleonic Wars, the *Cultuurstelsel* (Cultivation System), and finally the Priangan regulation of 1871, which was part of a wider package of reforms that marked the transition to a system of exploitation based on free market.

Among the many themes threading through the book here are a number which may be highlighted: the lack of accurate information available both to the colonial regime and to the historian; the under-utilisation of indigenous sources in the colonial historiography of Java (p. 273); the uncaring attitudes and wilful ignorance even of the highest Dutch officials; the exceptional status of the Priangan Regencies, sealed off from the rest of Java and with an economic system *sui generis*; the principle of cheap governance; the expectation of “as much coffee as possible for as little money as possible”; the colonial ideology of limited needs (which rendered it “acceptable” for peasants to be paid a pittance); the disappearance of Javanese cottage industries, meaning that people had to resort to expensive imports; and the near-impossibility of upward social mo-

bility. The powers-that-be, subscribing to the “lazy native” thesis, pursued a “cruel to be kind” philosophy: the Javanese had to be taught where their real interests lay (“servitude as the road to progress”) and economic discipline had to be instilled for their own benefit. The burden upon the peasantry became almost insupportable. The compulsory cultivation of coffee was difficult enough, because it included the picking of the berries, which then had to be dried and the beans shelled; the travelling time required to reach coffee gardens far distant from their homes (hilly terrain took twice as long to cover than flat ground); and then the delivery of the finished product to the appointed warehouses. Added to that was the necessity for the peasants to grow their own rice. The upshot was recurrent famine. Then they faced the demand for *corvée* services, as well as heavy taxation; the unconscionable tampering with weights and measures; the coercion, the draconian punishments, and the other ill-treatments meted out to them (pp. 247-8). Peasant resistance was passive (and sometimes not-so-passive), indicated for example by land flight, smuggling, theft, and other illicit practices, leading on occasion to outright rebellion (such as the Java War of 1825-30). Furthermore, the indigenous population had the temerity to start drinking coffee themselves, although forbidden to do so (p. 309). Breman does not have much time even for Raffles (pp. 134, 138, 362), and he is scathing about Willem I (p. 168 especially). The epilogue comprises an exhilarating critique of alternative points of view.

The precariousness of the Netherlands itself should not be overlooked. The country suffered from severe poverty (p. 165) and its own national existence was far from guaranteed: after all, its territory was under foreign occupation during the French Revolutionary and Napoleonic Wars (and yet again during the Second World War); Belgium was lost in 1830; the personal monarchical link with Luxembourg terminated in 1890; and much of the Dutch empire had to be surrendered to the British.

The book’s weakness is the indexing (or lack of it). A *two-page* name index is utterly inadequate, and the absence of an accompanying subject index, even though several pages have been left blank for just such an eventuality, is most inconvenient for any reader who might wish quickly to check a half-recollected piece of information.

Nevertheless, writing in December 2015, I have little hesitation in placing Professor Breman’s monograph at the top of my personal books of the year list. A careful, detailed, authoritative, and scholarly reconstruction of the forced cultivation of coffee in West Java, *Mobilizing Labour for the Global Coffee Market* is quite simply a masterpiece.

*AVM Horton*