

Jan Breman, *Mobilizing Labour for the Global Coffee Market. Profits From an Unfree Work Regime in Colonial Java* (Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, 2015) 404 p. ISBN 978-9089-648-594.

Jan Breman's book is not only an interesting contribution to the field of studies on the global division of labour, it is also a fascinating analysis of the way both land and labour were mobilized in the coffee sector in colonial Java, covering a time span of 150 years (1720-1870). The major contribution of this study is its broad scope as it does not merely focus on labour but includes land-relations as well. In this very detailed and well-written book, the author stresses the importance and uniqueness of the Priangan region. Breman convincingly examines the impact of colonialism – and more precisely the impact of compulsory coffee cultivation – on the local social structures of this area and how these structures evolved over time (for instance between local lords and peasants).

The main argument of this study is straightforward: 'Mobilizing Labour' aims at refuting or at least nuancing the established revisionist view in the literature. Instead of arguing that the Cultivation System was beneficial for the local peasants, Breman persuasively stresses that the oppressive nature of the system was beneficial for the Colonial State but not for the peasants and, secondly, that the never-ending (mostly latent) resistance of the coffee farmers eventually led to the eclipse of the system.

In order to achieve this goal, 'Mobilizing Labour' chronologically analyses the coffee sector in Priangan from its early start to the abolition of the Cultivation Scheme. In the first chapter, the focus is on the VOC and how this trade company tried to impose political-administrative control over the Priangan region. Moreover, Breman also sketches the societal relations in the early 18th century. The second chapter demonstrates how the VOC succeeded in interfering in the local economy. More importantly in this part is the introduction of forced coffee cultivation and the installation of a monopoly which left coffee peasants with little or no room for negotiating (except land flight). The following chapter focuses on the 'transfer of power'. As a consequence of poor management and bankruptcy the VOC had to transmit the control over the coffee sector to the Colonial State. But, although the VOC quitted the scene, the regime of forced coffee cultivation continued in Priangan (but not in other parts of Java) and became even more harsh (known as the Priangan Ruling). The fourth chapter deals with the British intermezzo in the early 19th century and the reforms the British brought into force in Java (for instance abolition of forced cultivation), but not in Priangan. In the following part of the book Breman scrutinizes the emergence of the so-called 'gardens'. From the end of the 18th century coffee cultivation was relocated from the land around the houses of the planters to further away 'gardens' (i.e. large-

scale plantations) which required far more labour mobilization. Besides the en masse mobilization of labour (including women and children), planters also had to perform other duties (*corvées*). The impact of the Cultivation System is the leitmotiv in the sixth chapter. Compulsory coffee cultivation remained the spearhead of export crops in Priangan, although sugar cane gained influence. Moreover, in the 1840s Priangan had reached a limit. Despite increased land- and labour mobilization, productivity as well as food production decreased. In this chapter Breman also stresses the inequality between labour categories, in spite of the Colonial Administration's wish to distribute the workload evenly. From the middle of the 19th century the oppressive Priangan System got more and more criticism which is the focus of the subsequent chapter. The final part of 'Mobilizing labour' deals with the abolition of the Priangan System, the liberalisation of the coffee sector and its consequences on the coffee producers in this region.

Breman successfully analyses the rise and fall of coerced coffee cultivation in Priangan. He convincingly shows that precolonial inequalities gained strength during the colonial period as a consequence of the oppressive Priangan System. However, the author fails to contextualize his case study. Comparisons with the mobilisation of labour in other coffee producing regions in the world would have added to this work. Comparison with coffee regimes in colonial Africa for instance would have shown remarkable resemblance with the way labour was organized in the Dutch Indies. Moreover, although the 'Global Coffee Market' is included in the title, a global perspective is lacking: how important was Priangan as a coffee producer on a global scale?

Despite these minor remarks, 'Mobilizing Labour' is an excellent study and a must-read for scholars interested in labour history, the history of coffee cultivation and the way Colonial States tried (but sometimes failed) to leave their mark on local societies.

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Wim de Wagt, *Wij Europeanen* (Amsterdam: Uitgeverij Bas Lubberhuizen, 2015) 224 pp.
ISBN 978-9059-374-317.

Geschiedenis laat zich meestal lezen als een rechte lijn. De ene gebeurtenis vloeit voort uit de andere. Achteraf lijkt het ook allemaal heel logisch. Successen hebben hun wortels in het verleden, tegenslagen en ellende kunnen worden verklaard door de evenementen van weleer. Geschiedenis staat vast, en werpt zijn schaduw over het heden. Als we terugkijken op de geschiedenis hebben we misschien wel