



Making the Market: Specialty Coffee, Generational Pitches, and Papua New Guinea

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Abstract: Today the commodity circuit for specialty coffee seems to be made up of socially conscious consumers, well-meaning and politically engaged roasters and small companies, and poor yet ecologically noble producers who want to take part in the flows of global capital, while at the same time living in close harmony with the natural world. This paper examines how these actors are produced by changes in the global economy that are sometimes referred to as neoliberalism. It also shows how images of these actors are produced and what the material effects of those images are. It begins with a description of how generations are understood and made by marketers. Next it shows how coffee production in Papua New Guinea, especially Fair Trade and organic coffee production, is turned into marketing narratives meant to appeal to particular consumers. Finally, it assesses the success of the generational-based marketing of Papua New Guinea-origin, Fair Trade and organic coffees, three specialty coffee types that are marketed heavily to the “Millennial generation”, people born between 1983 and 2000.

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Neoliberal Coffee

In the late 1980s the popular media in the United States began to carry stories about the relationship between coffee production and environmental sustainability, and by the mid 1990s “sustainable” coffee production was being directly linked to “saving” tropical rainforests (Hull 1993; *The Economist* 1993). Throughout the late 1990s and during the early 2000s, this trend continued with an almost exponential growth in the number of stories linking coffee to the environment.¹ Today the coffee-related popular narrative encompasses not only an environmental message but also a message about how growing particular kinds of coffee can help rural peoples around the world pursue small-scale economic development in ways that allow them to access their fair share of the global circulation of cash (Alsever 2006; Pascual 2006). In addition, the purchasing of coffee and other commodities that have been cast as embedding “ecological, social, and/or place-based values” into market

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3 transactions has come to be thought of as a potential “form of resistance
4 to neoliberalization” (Guthman 2007:456). The kinds of coffee that are
5 linked to environmental and social sustainability, economic justice, and
6 resistance to neoliberalization are known as “specialty coffees”. These
7 coffees, which include “single-origin” coffees like Papua New Guinean
8 coffee that are marketed as such, organic coffees, Fair Trade coffees, and
9 the other seemingly socially responsible coffees, are usually brought to
10 market by small coffee companies—roasters, distributors, and coffee
11 shops—that gained entry into the global coffee market when it was
12 deregulated in the 1980s.

13 From the late 1940s to the early 1980s, gigantic corporate roasters
14 like Maxwell House dominated the international market for coffee
15 (Roseberry 1996).² These companies produced what we might think of
16 as “Fordist” coffee: coffee that was standardized and mass-produced
17 through a process that was similar to all other Fordist industrial
18 innovation (Harvey 1989). During this time period the International
19 Coffee Agreement (ICA), a set of international treaties and agreements
20 in place between 1962 and 1989 that set production and consumption
21 quotas, regulated the market and governed coffee industry standards.
22 But the coffee industry, like many other industries, was deregulated in
23 the 1980s during the first global stage of neoliberalization. During this
24 neoliberalization, the ICA was cast as a set of regulations that were
25 unfriendly to business, and as it was phased out the coffee industry
26 was affected by privatization, corporate attempts to minimize labor
27 costs, state attempts to reduce public spending on social welfare, and
28 the receding of the state from the support and regulation of public life
29 in general. The neoliberalization of coffee production and consumption
30 through the retreat of the state in terms of industry regulation also opened
31 spaces for other industry actors in the market and drastic changes in
32 global production (Bacon 2004:499).³ Transnational trade and roasting
33 companies quickly filled these spaces, and countries like Brazil and
34 Vietnam radically increased their production in the wake of this market
35 liberalization.

36 Another aspect of this phase of neoliberalization in general was that
37 governance that had once been the purview of the state became the
38 purview of non-governmental organizations and so called “civil society”
39 groups like churches, development agencies, and other international
40 bodies and organizations. These actors moved into various structural
41 positions concerned with the environment, economic development, and
42 human rights—areas that that we think of today as directly connected
43 to coffee production—that had been previously filled by state agencies.
44 Concurrently, within the coffee industry, the loss of the ICA allowed
45 small companies into the global coffee market. Small-scale coffee
46 roasters, traders, and the sellers of coffee-related objects flourished
47 in this new de-regulated market where they could have direct access to

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3 producers and consumers. But as the structure of the global market for
4 coffee has changed, the price of coffee has fallen drastically and the
5 prices paid to coffee producers has declined rapidly (Bacon 2004; Ponte
6 2002).

7 Some scholars and activists argue that the sharp decline in prices
8 paid to farmers between 1999 and 2004 (with a global 30-year low
9 in 2001) galvanized NGOs, development organizations, well-meaning
10 companies, and well-meaning consumers to expand the market for
11 socially responsible coffees that bring more money to producers and
12 that contribute to environmental sustainability (Bacon 2004; Bacon
13 et al 2008). They also argue that the trend towards socially responsible
14 coffees is tied to consumer knowledge about the plight of poor farmers
15 and consumer knowledge of “quality, taste, health, and environment”
16 (Bacon 2004:497). According to these scholars, this consumer pressure
17 resulted in the growth of the specialty market and the development of the
18 Specialty Coffee Association of America (SCAA), an industry group—
19 made up of roasters, traders, and sellers—that promotes specialty coffees
20 in North America. Activists and scholars who argue that these coffees
21 can redress inequality do so because they think that production and
22 distribution monitoring through certification processes and labeling can
23 work to protect conditions of production, land–labor relations, and the
24 environment and thus they argue that these coffees counter some of the
25 ravages of neoliberalization (Guthman 2007). But certification practices
26 and labeling have been debated and critiqued in the literature (Guthman
27 2007; Mutersbaugh 2005), and some scholars have shown them to be
28 typical forms of neoliberal regulation (Guthman 2007).

29 In contrast to those who see specialty coffee as a corrective to
30 neoliberal changes, others see these coffees, the conditions of their
31 production, and their market as brought about by neoliberalization
32 above and beyond critiques of certification. Roseberry argues that as the
33 market structure changed with the demise of the ICO, small-scale coffee-
34 producing companies, distributors, and roasters began to “envision a
35 segmented market rather than a mass market”, and that as they imagined
36 this market, the public relations companies working for them began
37 to attempt to create new consumers through advertising (Roseberry
38 1996:765). People who had not been coffee drinkers in the past were
39 targeted through the creation of particular stories and images that were
40 designed to appeal to them along generational, political and class lines
41 (Roseberry 1996:765). Certain types of specialty coffee were marketed
42 to appeal to people’s ideas about the refined nature of their own tastes
43 and the uniqueness of their position as a certain type of consumer in
44 the marketplace, while others were marketed to appeal to people with
45 particular political beliefs. Marketers wanted coffee consumption to be
46 seen as a way to distinguish oneself in terms of class and to express
47 one’s political ideas and they worked to create the consumer desire right

along with the growth of the new specialty industry (Roseberry 1996). As with other commodities, marketers worked to produce desire first and then present products that would fill people's sense of need like a "key in a lock" (Haug 1987:93). As these specialty markets developed they came to resemble what has been called a "Post-Fordist" regime (Harvey 1989); they were flexible and supposedly consumer oriented and consumer driven, two of the hallmarks of the neoliberalization of markets.

Whether one thinks that the market for specialty coffees emerged because of consumers' desires to redress global inequities generated by neoliberalization through consumption choices or because of the desires of businesses to find new consumers for their products, we can see that the market for specialty coffee attempts to merge seemingly disparate strands of consumer life: economic choice, political action, and identity production. Economic choice (what people buy, when they buy it, where they buy it, and why they buy it) is wedded to political action (both the ideas and practices people associate with their politics and the sense of communities-of-sentiment that goes along with politics and political affinity) and they then contribute to identity production (how people come to be in the world and see themselves in the world and in relation to others especially in terms of social and environmental equity based identities). At first glance then the contemporary specialty coffee market seems to be countering the process that Karl Polanyi called "disembedding" (Guthman 2007).

In writing about the economy as a "process" in general and the emergence of the modern market as a system of organization specifically, Polanyi argues that the economy:

is embedded and enmeshed in institutions, economic and noneconomic. The inclusion of the noneconomic is vital. For religion or government may be as important for the structure and functioning of the economy as monetary institutions or the availability of tools and machines themselves that lighten the toil of labour (Polanyi 1968 [1958]:127).

As Polanyi traces how and when markets gain radical importance over other aspects of social life he shows how the process of "disembedding" has taken place. Disembedding, as Polanyi saw it, was when economic activities, like buying coffee, became increasingly removed from the social relationships in which they had historically occurred and when the objects circulating in the economy came to be seen as fetishes in that they were seen as emerging in and of themselves and not from labor. In his discussion of disembedding, Polanyi shows how economic transactions increasingly became abstracted from social relations. Disembedding allowed for the disarticulation of economic choice, political action, social relationships, and identity production through abstraction and

with this it made the market less a web of social bonds and relations and more a clean and sharp set of economic transactions.

Specialty coffees, again whether we imagine them as resulting from consumer desire or market manipulation, seem, at first glance to re-embed coffee into a web of social relationships. Well-meaning consumers are connected to well-meaning producers by well-meaning coffee industry businesses. A veritable love fest of learning about each other, supporting each other, and contributing to environmental sustainability while still taking part in the global market seems to have emerged. But these specialty coffees are first and foremost neoliberal coffees; coffees that have a place in the market because of structural changes in the global economy that, in addition to many other things, target individuals as the seat of economic rights and responsibilities. In what follows I show how individual coffee consumers and producers are portrayed and produced through and by people associated with the coffee industry. I then call into question the validity of these portrayals by presenting ethnographic data from the Papua New Guinea, where people grow coffee, and from New York City, where people drink coffee. I conclude by returning to the idea of re-embedding and argue that the seemingly re-embedded coffee market is an eco-neoliberal fiction; a fiction that is meant to divert our attention away from the structural causes of environmental degradation and social injustice.

Consumer Production

The tall blond man from Nebraska wears the clip-on microphone like a professional. He towers above us, the participants in his seminar on marketing at the Specialty Coffee Association of America's Annual Meeting, and smiles a radiant row of perfect white teeth. He breaks the ice by revving up the fairly caffeinated crowd when he says, "Okay. OKAY. We are here to sell coffee! YEAH." People in the audience cheer enthusiastically.

We are all (coffee shop owners and an anthropologist who studies coffee consumption) here in this conference room in our attempt to understand why people buy specialty coffees. Our first task, before we begin any discussion of coffee, consumption, or anything really, is to break into groups and come up with a list of the "essential qualities" (I know, too perfect for an anthropologist, right?) of our own "generation". I am put into the Generation X group. We were all born between 1964 and 1982 and although I momentarily hope that we will bond over our great love for the music of The Replacements, powerful memories of anti-apartheid protests and divestment campaigns, and our ability to quote long bits of the movie *Point Break*, we don't, as a group, seem to have much in common. So we get to our task and try to make a list of

essentialisms. We have trouble because we don't seem to agree on any of them.

After a break, Mr Nebraska smiles us back to our seats and we get started. People yell out the answers to his questions.

Mr Nebraska (MN): "Okay, so you Silent Generation folks [those born between 1927 and 1944], give us your qualities."

"We are loyal and dependable," says one man in the front.

"We built and defended this country," says another who seems to be wearing a hat with a battleship's name on it.

MN: "Okay, now for the Baby Boomers [those born between 1945 and 1963], what do you have to contribute as a generation?"

"We are tenacious and idealistic," says a woman wearing a perky little red suit.

"We are free thinkers!" shout several people at the same time.

MN: "What about the Xers?"

Several people from my seemingly stoic group now perk up and yell, "We are individuals," "We question authority," and "We are fast technology!"

MN: "Now, what about you Millenials? Hello, Millenials? Where are my Millenials?"

Two young guys shyly raise their hands. They appear to be just-out-of-college and sort of out of place in this older business-suited crowd. One of them says, "We are much faster technology."

Everyone laughs. Then Mr Nebraska begins his lecture.

For the next hour he talks about different American generations and how they hold the key to marketing. He begins with his analysis of the essential characteristics of each generation. "The Silent Generation" is "defined by World War II and the Korean War". They are hardworking-loyal-sacrificing-dedicated-conformist-never questioning authority-respectful-patient-delayed gratification-duty before pleasure-kinds of folks. Mr Nebraska smiles broadly when he talks about these people, calling them "folks" at several points and mentioning his grandparents. Then he tells us that we won't talk about them anymore because as a generation they don't have any purchasing power in the retail world so they are a waste of time for the seminar.

He then moves on to the Baby Boomers. They are "All about civil rights, Vietnam, and Woodstock" and they can be summed up as essentially full of "optimism", "team-oriented", dedicated to "personal-growth" and "personal-gratification". They work long hours and have a "hard core" work ethic but a "youthful mindset" which they keep up with "health and fitness".

He says, "GUYS, come ON. There are some values going on here, right? VALUES." He says this meaningfully, pacing the stage and smiling at his own insight.

It turns out that my Generation, Generation X, is defined by “Three-Mile Island”, “the fall of the Berlin wall”, and “Rodney King”, and that we are “liquid”. We have “liquid value” and “a liquid mindset”. We can “adjust to anything” because we are independent-individualist-selfish-latchkey kids who are “all about experience” and who have “no loyalty to anyone or anything”. We are hard to work with because we have a “totally flat view of organization”, which means we have “no respect for authority”.

Finally, he moves on to the Millennials. Premising his discussion of them by saying, with no hint of insight into his role in the creation of this marketing fetish, “Isn’t it just weird? It is just weird that generations are getting shorter. Isn’t it?”

For Mr Nebraska, Millennials are defined by the Oklahoma City bombing, the Clinton–Lewinsky affair, 9/11, and the Columbine shootings. They want “achievement” but are “not driven”. They value “globalism” but are “community focused” and think that by “looking inward” they can “change the world”. They are also apparently “t-totalers” who “don’t want drugs or alcohol”.

When he is finished with his description of the Millennials, he looks at us thoughtfully, pauses, and says meaningfully, “This, THIS, is at the very core of people, it is who they are”.

Next we move onto how to market to the different generations. Mr Nebraska says, “The logo, product, service and atmosphere, or CULTURE of a business”, is “key” to making your “generational pitch”. And he cautions the audience, “You want to listen to this, the cultures I’m talking about, they are in people’s DNA”.

Baby Boomer DNA is apparently encoded with the deep and abiding desire for iconic logos that symbolize gratification, indulgence, and the “unyielding” defiance of age and ageing. Their DNA forces them to desire lots of choices among products, quick and thoughtful professional services, and “up-scale” consumer-comes-first type “retail culture”.

My “Generation X Cultural-DNA” makes me skeptical of logos, desirous of multiple similar products with a unique story behind each of them, wanting service that is “authentic” and during which I can “make a connection” and “share a story”. Culturally, I desire casual, flexible, liquid space where I can read the paper, check my e-mail, and chat with friends. I “can’t abide” images of control.

Millineals are “encoded” with the desire for brands and logos. They “value the symbols of products” more than anything else “about the retail world”. They want “global products” that are “political” and “environmentally friendly”, things that allow them to “express” their “self knowledge” and “politics”. Service-wise they want to “be coddled” and “made to feel important”. They want to “see people who know, really know, how to work the equipment”. And culturally, they desire and can find “a meaning filled experience” during “retail time”.

After the description of the generations, what is in their “DNA”, and the sort of “retail culture” that appeals to them, Mr Nebraska begins to talk about specialty coffee and its emerging market. He focuses in particular on the “stories” behind the coffee and the ways in which they can be made to appeal to the different generations. The stories exist on two scales: the first is that of the coffee shop and the second is that of the coffee producer.

Mr Nebraska’s Baby Boomers, constructed against a social mirror of 1960s activism (the civil rights movement and protests against the war in Vietnam) and the constrained/restrained rebellion of going to a musical show (the concert in Bethel, NY on 15–17 August 1969 which became known as Woodstock), and who are produced as deeply desirous of validation of their continued youth even in the face of their 60th birthdays and deeply connected to the idea that they have spent their working lives working harder than others, can easily be sold specialty coffees and specialty coffee venues that appeal to their ideas of work and activism. He discusses their work ethic, how they “worked long hours themselves” when they were young and how they “understand” labor. Because of this, stories about coffee shops will appeal to the Boomers. He says that they “love Starbucks” because it started out as one shop and is now, “the biggest and the best”. They like a story of success that somewhere along the way meanders through a 1960s sense of helping “the down trodden”. If small coffee shops and roasters can tell a story that shows now they have “fought hard” for their market share and that they have “made hard choices” along the way, the Boomers will flock to their shops. If people selling coffee can write stories about producers that appeal to that 1960s sense of rights and war protests, they can win consumers. He suggests that Boomers are more likely to buy coffee that is grown by people who live in a war torn country (“Guatemala really appeals to their sense of post war hardships”). Since they are health conscious and since they “really wrote the first book on organics” they are particularly interested in organic certified coffee in that its story is one of a “more healthy” drink than regular coffee. He also argues that Boomers want the standardization of a chain retail outlet but the “feel” of an “up-scale” personalized experience. This is why chains that are meant to feel like local coffee shops appeal especially to them (eg Peets, Caribou, and Starbucks).

Since Generation X is defined against depressing Regan-era events, and since we are “liquid”, we are hard to sell to. We are “cynical” when it comes to retail and we are the reason for “diverse venues” for standard consumer products. We don’t want the same experience over and over again (the aforementioned chain coffee shops). We want a coffee shop that has an authentic story that we can connect with. We like alternative venues that might have been begun as anti-establishment shops. We like the “Seattle connection” to be articulated in the shop stories. We

want to know the story of the shop and the stories of the people who work there. We also want stories behind each of the products that are all similar but that are marketed to us as “unique”. We like the idea of authenticity when it comes to the people who grow the coffee. And we like the idea of experiencing some aspect of their lives through drinking the coffee. We want to connect to the authenticity of others in some way, and that way can easily be through buying product. We also like the idea of supporting people whose story shows that they are “bucking” the establishment in some way.

The people that Mr Nebraska called Millenials are, for him, the “driving force” behind the “globalism” that is emerging in the specialty coffee market. While Boomers and Xers appreciate certain aspects of the stories behind origin-marketed coffees and Fair Trade and organics, it is the Millenials who “thrive” on these stories. “They want to change the world and they know that they can do it through coffee.” They also, “know that the politics of their parents are not their politics” and that their politics “can change the world one village at a time”. They are much less concerned with the shop and its story and much more concerned with the ways in which coffee can connect them with “people all over the world” and the ways that it can allow them to “participate in (the grower’s) struggles”. They define self through their consumption in that they see themselves as politically active through their connection with “these stories about growers and the environment”.

The marketing seminar is wrapped up by Mr Nebraska with a long discussion about how each of the generations wants a particular story about the products that they buy. He talks about the process of creating a story for a business and the ways in which coffee works to “sell itself in today’s market universe” because of the stories of growers that can be associated with it. He is passionate about the reality that he has just laid out for us—he repeatedly talks about how the “DNA” of the consumer is set along generational lines and how these generations want to “know and experience” stories about their coffee.

Mr Nebraska works to both create “virtual consumers” for his audience and to imbue them with particular sets of values. James Carrier and Daniel Miller have built on Polyani’s previously discussed notion of abstraction in order to propose a new set of theories about how we might think about contemporary social relationships in general and people’s roles as consumers more specifically (Carrier and Miller 1998). They call this set of theories “virtualism”. Carrier defines virtualism as the attempt to make the world around us look like and conform to an abstract model of it (Carrier 1998:2). He uses the concept to criticize thinking and policies in economics where there is a common tendency to abstract human decision making from its complex social context, and build models of the world and its workings that cannot take the full range or complexity of people’s daily social activities, practices, and lives

into account. This much is normal for modelers. But these abstractions become virtualism when the real world is expected to transform itself in accordance with the models:

Perceiving a virtual reality becomes virtualism when people take this virtual reality to be not just a parsimonious description of what is really happening, but prescriptive of what the world ought to be; when, that is, they seek to make the world conform to their virtual vision. Virtualism, thus, operates at both the conceptual and practical levels, for it is a practical effort to make the world conform to the structures of the conceptual. (Carrier 1998: 2)

Miller argues that we can see this virtualism at work in the production of the contemporary consumer in economic discourses (Miller 1998:200). He sees the creation of a “virtual consumer” or the image of a person who wants and desires and buys certain things according to models of consumer behavior based on aggregate figures used in economic modeling. The world of retail then comes to resemble the world in this economic modeled world—storeowners and shopkeepers alter the physical space of their businesses and the social actions of their business in attempts to catch part of the market of this virtual consumer. Eventually, if we follow Miller’s argument, because the physical world has come to look like the virtual world, the consumer’s actual behavior comes to mirror the virtual behavior and the virtual consumers become real (Miller 1998).

Mr Nebraska creates virtual consumers and then lays out the process by which the physical world should and will come to reflect the wants, desires, and values of this consumer. He takes generational stereotypes and casts them as immutable biophysical characteristics that work to guide tastes, desires, politics and economic choices. He also argues that the evaluative processes that people make with regard to consumer choice have to do with these immutable generational characteristics. But “Generations” as objects and entities are a production of contemporary public culture; they are social artifacts. As artifacts they give demographers, journalists, and marketers a way of describing social and economic trends by age group without attending to race or class (Ortner 1998). In her analysis of the social creation of “Generation X”, Sherry B. Ortner shows that the idea of “generations” began as a way of describing people in terms of economic living standards like buying homes, competing for jobs and promotions, and competing for places in universities and colleges (Ortner 1998). In the past, generations were used to predict and talk about “identity through work: jobs, money, and careers” (Ortner 1998:421). Today Mr Nebraska relies on “generational marketing” to construct his virtual consumers and to set the stage for story telling about producers and production that draw on the assumed values of these virtual consumers. It is

therefore a fictional, virtual consumer and her values that guide how coffee production is to be told as a marketing narrative.

How is coffee production in Papua New Guinea, for example, where I have conducted anthropological research for the last 12 years, turned into a story that consumers can “thrive” on? How does it become a story that makes people “want to change the world” or feel like they learn something special about the world and themselves through its consumption? And how are stories told that will work to re-connect economic choice, about what coffee one buys, to politics in a way fosters both social relationships between producers and consumers and allows consumers to feel good about themselves?

Producer Production

The following Blog entry, entitled “Papua New Guinea—Back to the Future”, is one example of how coffees from Papua New Guinea are given a story by marketers and roasters and how that story is conveyed to consumers. It was written by an employee of Dean’s Beans and placed on the company’s website. The company is a small, extremely successful specialty coffee roasting company in Massachusetts that specializes in organic and Fair Trade certified coffee. They sell only certified specialty organic and Fair Trade coffees and they associate each of their coffees with certain origins. They focus not only on commerce but also on “people-centered development”, which they define as, “An approach to international development that focuses on the real needs of local communities for the necessities of life (clean water, health care, income generation) that are often disrupted by conventional development assistance”.⁴ The website juxtaposes this form of development with “conventional development”, which includes “military aid, large dams, free trade zones and export economies that bring lots of money to the contractors and aid organizations, but often result in massive deforestation, resettlement of communities, introduction of pollutants and diseases”. And the website states that the company is “committed to small, meaningful projects that the community actually wants, and that are sustainable over time without our continued involvement”. They specifically link organic and Fair Trade certified coffee with their critique of “conventional development” and state repeatedly that these specialty coffees help growers get their fair share of profit and that they contribute to the ecological health of the planet. Dean’s Beans is therefore specifically positioning itself as a company that attempts to redress the social and environmental inequity generated by neoliberalization.

This commitment to countering the evils of neoliberalization is noble but the way that the company presents images of and ideas about Papua New Guinea reveal a global vision that has been produced by an

antiquated sense of unilinear evolution and people without history and that feeds directly into eco-neoliberalism. The Dean's Beans employee who visited the Eastern and Western Highlands of Papua New Guinea in 2005 writes:

Chiseled warriors in Bird of Paradise headdresses and spears, impassable mountain roads, stunning vistas, abundant gardens of coffee and vegetables. Papua-New Guinea is the final frontier of dreams, of images from the pre-colonial past. Yet here I am, the first American anyone can remember coming into these Highlands, many say the first white guy. I have dreamed of this land since I was a child, looking at National Geographic (yeah, those photos!), reading about its wildness in my Goldenbook Encyclopedia.

There are no roads connecting the capital, Port Moresby, with the rest of this island, which is the size of New England. We have to fly to the interior, and I am glued to the window of the small plane, knowing that below me are anacondas and pythons, tree kangaroos and Birds of Paradise, wild rivers and still uncontacted tribes.

There is also coffee, introduced to the Highlands only in the 1950's from rootstock taken from the famed Jamaican Blue Mountains. Coffee is the only cash crop in the Highlands. The people grow all of their own food, using the coffee money to buy cooking oil, sugar, used clothes and other necessities. They depulp the cherries by hand using round rocks. This is the only place in the world where coffee is depulped this way. It is a family affair, and I visit with several families singing and depulping by the river. After sun drying the beans, the villagers have to carry the sixty pound sacks on their backs for up to twenty miles, over mountains, through rivers via rocky paths.

Historically, they would sell their beans to a number of middlemen who wait by the only road, giving the farmers pennies for their labor. But we are here to change that. We are here to work with several farmer associations to create legally recognized cooperatives, and to create more direct trade relationships that should increase the farmer's income fourfold, as well as increase sales.

As I am the first coffee buyer to come into this area, the farmers organize a Coffee Cultural Show. I thought that meant a few dancing and singing groups, a feast and a gift exchange. Wrong! As we rolled into a distant village after three hours over rivers, boulders, mudpits and bridges that shook beneath the land rover, we were greeted by ten thousand people! It was the largest gathering ever seen in these parts. Traditional warrior societies, women's clans, singing groups, hunters and every possible combination of feathers, noses pierced with tusks, and painted bodies festooned with coffee branches and berries greeted us riotously. I was hoisted into the air and carried almost a mile by joyful men, while the women called a welcoming chant. There were

speeches by every village's elders, by coffee farmers and of course by me.

For two days the festivities roared on, segued together by an all-night discussion around a fire about coffee techniques, trade justice, the role of women and every imaginable subject for people who have never met an American or a Fair Trader. Wild pigs were cooked on hot stones in pits, covered with banana leaves. Huge plates of yams (they laughed when I told them about research which links yam consumption to twin births—and they have a lot of twins there!). Of course, we brewed up lots of Dean's Beans Papuan coffee (Ring of Fire). It was the first time these farmers had ever had their own coffee, and they loved the taste almost as much as they loved seeing their own tribal names on the coffee bags, tee-shirts and hats I had made for the visit. As we passed through the Highlands, we had to stop at each tribal boundary for permission to enter the territory.

Considering that there are over eight hundred tribes in PNG, we were crossing boundaries every ten miles or so. At each boundary we were greeted by warriors in full dress, with welcoming chants and speeches, and invited to feast and speak. Needless to say, it took a long time to get a short distance, but we were well fed and made hundreds of new friends every day.

Back in the capital, we went on the radio (four million listeners nightly, as there is no electricity in the villages, only battery powered radios) and talked about making strong cooperatives and quality coffee to insure vibrant communities. Our meeting with the Prime Minister didn't happen, so we spent a day on an island of fisherman and their families, cooking the bounty of the sea and playing with the kids. My kinda day. Papua-New Guinea. A lifelong dream come true. It was a profound honor to be able to go as an emissary of peace and positive social change. If you ever get to go, DO IT! You can be assured of a warm welcome and a great cup of coffee. Just tell them you're a friend of mine.⁵

This blog entry is a good example of what Mr Nebraska suggested that roasters, importers, and marketers do with regard to creating a story for specialty coffees. This is an unsettling example to be sure, one that locates Papua New Guinea in a morass of primitivist imagery, colonial nostalgia, self aggrandizing travel narrative bravado of white exploration, outright falsehoods (eg anacondas and un-contacted tribes do not exist there and the claim that the writer is the "first coffee buyer" to enter places in the Western and Eastern Highlands is absurd), and inaccurate information (eg the description of middlemen and the claim that cooperatives will "increase the farmer's income fourfold"), but it is representative of many of the narratives one finds in blogs about Papua New Guinea in general and with regard to coffee specifically.

The coffee growers that this narrative constructs seem to have the same values as the virtual consumers for which it was constructed. These growers seem to want to maintain tradition, maintain benign ecological relations, based on market economics, with their forests, they want to see and know and understand modernity but not to lose their souls to it. They are produced as both the ecologically noble savage and the fallen from grace but deeply wanting to maintain ecological stability primitive. These images penetrate deeply into the Euro-American psyche and are a reflection of Euro-American fantasies about indigenous peoples.

When businesses tell stories like this one about virtual producers, they want consumers to see natives who are poor Third World agricultural laborers who value and contribute to the ecological sustainability of the earth, while at the same time make just enough money to maintain their coffee-producing ways of life, without wanting to gain access to all the things that consumers have including the feeling of right to over consume the world's resources. They also want to provide consumers with an aura of social responsibility, political action, exotic locality, environmental sustainability, and social status through a capitalist marketing version of Geertzian "being there" narrative. The idea is to market meaningfulness without actually going all the way down the road of consumer education. Coffee companies like Dean's Beans add value to their products by going half way, by creating virtual producers and hoping that these narratives appeal to the virtual consumers that have been made for them by the likes of Mr Nebraska.

This narrative also attempts to repackage poverty as uniqueness and to make primitivism as a form of scarcity. Scarce things have value and by producing a fantasy of Papua New Guinea's coffee industry as primitive and of primitivism as scarce, this narrative adds value to the coffee at the expense of people from Papua New Guinea by turning them into virtual producers. The virtual producers created by Dean's Beans are poor farmers yearning for a benevolent and right-thinking American businessman to come in and create economic equality through the softer side of capitalism.

But what does coffee production look like on the ground in Papua New Guinea and how do people there think about and understand the industry? How does that story above relate to the lived experiences of people in Papua New Guinea who grow coffee? Does the Dean's Beans story achieve the goal of creating a narrative that people can connect to and thrive on?

Producing Lives

Although coffee had been grown in what is now Papua New Guinea since the late 1800s, the post war period in the 1950s and early 1960s gave

1
2
3 rise to the indigenous coffee production industry that exists today. In the
4 1950s, the Agricultural Experimental Station at Aiyura near Kainantu, in
5 what is now the Eastern Highlands, began to experiment with coffee. In
6 1951 Bimai Noimbano, a Papua New Guinea national from Watabung,
7 began working at the station, and in 1953 he developed the first nursery
8 for coffee seedlings near Goroka—the city that is now the capital of the
9 Eastern Highlands Province (Finney 1987:5). Upon seeing the success
10 at Aiyura George Greathead and Ian Downs, two important colonial
11 officials in the Highlands who lived in Goroka, advocated coffee as a
12 means for encouraging both settler colonialism and the development
13 of a cash-crop industry that Highlands residents could take part in.⁶
14 Greathead was particularly vocal in his insistence that coffee provided a
15 crop that would foster a strong agricultural backbone for the territory's
16 emerging economy. The national workers at Aiyura had social networks
17 across the Highlands and they used these networks and the established
18 relations and routes between colonial patrol officers and local peoples
19 to move seedlings in to remote areas very early on.

20 The industry developed rapidly in the 1960s and 1970s with a series
21 of minor setbacks during the pre and post independence years (roughly
22 1972 to 1977).⁷ This development of the industry brought many of
23 the major infrastructural developments that came about directly prior
24 to independence. Colonial patrol reports from the Lufa District of the
25 Eastern Highlands Province provide census related data about coffee
26 production in the early 1960s and by the late 1960s they provide detailed
27 demographic and production information (who has how many trees and
28 where). By the early 1970s the patrol officers are advocating road and
29 walking track construction projects so that rural growers can get their
30 crops to market. During the 1980s and 1990s the industry became the
31 backbone of the Highlands regional economy.

32 Today in Papua New Guinea one out of every three people in the
33 country is connected to the coffee industry. Either as a coffee grower, a
34 worker in the processing and transporting industries, a businessperson
35 in the processing, transporting and distributing industries, or as one of
36 the thousands of people who support the industry as security guards,
37 cleaning women, clerical and accounting staff, and truck drivers. In the
38 Highlands region most other regional industry depends on coffee to keep
39 the cash flowing: the second-hand clothing industry sees an increase in
40 their business during coffee season, the craft and fresh vegetable markets
41 attract more sellers and buyers when people are flush with coffee cash,
42 the trade stores see their profits increase during the season, and the
43 restaurants, shops, car dealerships and other small businesses depend
44 upon the coffee season to make their yearly profit margins. Many people
45 call it “the people’s industry” because it directly links people throughout
46 the country with each other socially and economically, and it links Papua
47 New Guineans with other people across the world.

2
3 Between 86% and 89% of the coffee grown in Papua New Guinea is
4 “smallholder” coffee. This means that it is grown by landowners who
5 live in relatively rural settings with small family owned and operated
6 coffee gardens with little to no support from private or government
7 agricultural extension. Among most of these smallholders, families run
8 these small coffee businesses and they produce the only cash income
9 that people have. People may own as many as 2000 trees or as few as
10 200. During the coffee season, men, women and children work on the
11 coffee plots and other social life (weddings, compensation cases, school
12 fees, head payments) revolves around the coffee season.

13 We can take the history of coffee production by Gimi speakers in the
14 Lufa district as an example of how coffee spread across the Highlands.⁸
15 By the mid 1960s coffee has been introduced as a cash crop to people in
16 all of the Lufa district Gimi-speaking villages, and by the mid 1970s it
17 has taken off as a system of production. Gimi men had taken part in the
18 Highlands Labor Scheme and left their villages during the late 1960s
19 and early 1970s to work on coffee plantations around the Highlands as
20 well as plantations in coastal areas (Lindenbaum 2002:67, fn 5). They
21 came home from their travels with agricultural knowledge about coffee
22 production and the social knowledge of what cash income from coffee
23 could provide. Coffee itself had come to Gimi through rural agricultural
24 extension and through traditional networks of exchange.

25 In Gimi territory the coffee cherry begins to ripen around the
26 beginning of June and men begin to take interest in their coffee groves
27 again after leaving the work associated with clearing brush and weeding
28 up to their wives throughout the rest of the year. When a man thinks
29 that he has enough cherry on the branch to begin the harvest he and his
30 entire family go to the lowest altitude grove of trees that he possesses
31 and begin to harvest the coffee. People hand-harvest the coffee and then
32 process it using the wet method of coffee preparation. Once the coffee
33 has been harvested, the cherries are washed and pulped. Most people
34 gain access to one of the coffee-pulping machines in the village so that
35 they do not have to undertake this hand pulping, and indeed hand pulping
36 is extremely rare. With a machine, the woman pours cherries into the
37 top of the machine and then as the man turns the crank she pours water
38 in with the cherries. This turning forces the cherry off the beans and the
39 slimy beans drop out of the machine. Once the pulp has been removed,
40 the berries are placed into clean bags and allowed to ferment. They must
41 be fermented so that the sticky enzyme-rich substance on the beans can
42 be washed off. The fermentation process should take between 12 and
43 24 hours. Once fermented, the coffee is washed over and over again
44 until the water runs perfectly clear. It is then placed in the sun to dry and
45 when this is complete people are left with dry silver-skin covered beans
46 called “parchment”. This parchment is then placed in bags and left to
47 wait until a coffee buyer comes to the village.

Gimi sell their coffee to intermediary buyers who visit their villages and then take the coffee to the capital of the Eastern Highlands Province. These buyers are often the only link that rural people have to the national coffee market and in rural villages these buyers are seen as providing a necessary service. The network of rural coffee buyers in the Eastern Highlands alone employs over 700 people. Buyers take the coffee and sell it to factories where the coffee is processed and packaged for export. The factories employ thousands of people; there are factory machinists, accountants, drivers, secretaries, coffee sorters, executives, drivers and security guards, among many other professional types of labor. Across Papua New Guinea, coffee production has helped to create a middle class with these industry jobs.

From these factories, the coffee goes to the international port where it is then shipped all over the world to major ports in Australia, Germany, the UK, and the USA. For the past 20 years the total production of bags in Papua New Guinea has hovered around 1 million bags per year. In terms of the world market, Papua New Guinea produces only about 1% of the total amount of coffee worldwide. But the industry brings about US\$1.9 billion into the Papua New Guinea economy each year, making it about 4% of the total export revenue for the country. Given that the three main export commodities for Papua New Guinea are gold, crude oil and copper and that the other main agricultural commodities are timber and palm oil (which have slightly higher revenues than coffee), and that these aforementioned commodities are owned and operated by the state and joint ventures between large multinational companies and the state (with the minor revenue streams flowing down to landowners not being widely distributed), coffee is the only export commodity that is owned and operated by the people for the people. In addition, across the entire Highlands region of the country coffee is the only product that people produce for the global market and that they gain income from. In many places it is the only economic development that people have and people see it as just that, as economic development and as a marker of their place in the modern global economy.

In Papua New Guinea the remoteness of many of the smallholder growers today is a consequence of rollback neoliberalization. From the 1950s to the 1980s colonial officials and then post independence government officials worked to build roads and walking tracks and maintain them so that coffee growers could get their coffee to market. Since structural adjustments in the 1980s these networks for movement have declined as have most other services provided by the government. Across the Highlands people have decreasing access to schools, health care, agricultural extension, and other services that foster a healthy population in general and a healthy coffee industry in particular. Remoteness and inaccessibility, two of the themes of Dean's Beans blog

entry, are actually the affects of neoliberalization not some condition that can be corrected by it.

How do consumers hear the stories about people who grow coffee; what do they take away from them? How do they understand places in the world like Papua New Guinea as they are related to coffee? And how do they define themselves through consumption? If specialty coffee is indeed re-embedding political action and social relationships into economic choice, what does this re embedding look like in terms of consumers?

Consuming Lives

The marketing of specialty coffee has taken place in numerous ways. One of the most powerful market forces today, according to the marketing seminar discussed above, is the Internet. Mr Nebraska told us that people “research products on the Internet” and that this is the perfect place to “tell your story”. Dean’s Beans took that advice and used the form of a blog to craft a particular fantasy of Papua New Guinea through story telling. This story, if we take seriously what Mr Nebraska told us, should appeal to and work to craft the consumer consciousness of people born 1983 and 2000, the “Millenials”.⁹ Over the course of one semester my student research assistants and I conducted 100 interviews with people born between 1983 and 1989.¹⁰ All of the people interviewed were undergraduate students attending one of the colleges associated with a large private university in New York City. The interviews were concerned with people’s knowledge about coffee production, distribution, and consumption and in particular with their ideas about the stories associated with certain kinds of specialty coffees.¹¹ Below I summarize the data collected and show, quite clearly, that the students we interviewed do not fit the consumer image produced by Mr Nebraska.

First, what did these Millenials know about Papua New Guinea? Ten people knew exactly where it is and gave us specifics like, “sixty kilometers north of Australia” and “the eastern half of the island of New Guinea”. Thirty-five interviewees knew that it is in the southern Pacific. They gave us answers like, “near Australia in the Pacific ocean”, “sort of near the Philippines and Indonesia but closest to Oceania” and “near Malaysia and Indonesia”. Ten people told us that Papua New Guinea is in Africa. Eleven people told us that it is somewhere else incorrect like “South America”, “near Brazil”, “close to India but not near China” and “in the Middle East but not near Iraq”. Six interviewees freely admitted that they had no idea where it is while six refused to answer the question instead saying things like “the fuck I know”, “fuck off” and “I refuse to answer that on the grounds that I incriminate my shitty knowledge of geography”. So about 45% of our interviewees had an idea of where

the country is but only about 10% had a good grasp on the geography of the region.

Next, what did Millennials know about Papua New Guinea coffees? Forty-eight people interviewed had no idea that Papua New Guinea produces coffee. Thirty people knew that Papua New Guinea produces coffee and out of those 30, 18 could tell us something about what they think coffee production is like there. They said things like “people live in villages and grow coffee”, “I think indigenous people grow it there” and “yeah, its huge there, small farms all over the country”. The remaining 22 people had a vague idea about Papua New Guinea producing coffee saying things like “yeah, I kind of know it does” and “I’ve seen it in Starbucks”. Of these 22, nine people mentioned Indonesian coffee saying things like “well, I know it is near Indonesia and they grow coffee so I assume they grow it there also”. So 48% of the people interviewed had no idea that Papua New Guineans produce coffee at all.

In terms of consumption, 19 of the people interviewed always drink Fair Trade coffee, 51 people never drink it, and 30 people said that they drink it sometimes. Eighteen people always drink organic coffee, 52 people never drink it, 20 people sometimes drink it, and 10 people said that they did not know how often they drink it. Of the 20 people who always drink Fair Trade coffee all of them mentioned “producers” and “labor” and about half of them mentioned either “ethical” or “fair” uses of their money as consumers. Of the 18 people who always drink organic coffee not one of them mentioned the health of workers or the earth’s ecosystems but all of them mentioned their own health (but see below, some people do understand that organic is about ecosystem health). All of the people who say that they sometimes drink Fair Trade and organic said that they do not seek them out but if given a choice they prefer to drink them. Of the 50 people who never drink Fair Trade, 20 said it was because they did not know what it is, 18 said it was because it is more “expensive” or “costs more”, eight gave no specific reason, and four gave other responses (“is brewed in self-righteousness”, “reminds me too much of poor people”, “tastes like peasants” and that it is “left wing”). Of the 52 people who never drink organic coffee 35 of them said it is because it is more “expensive” or “costs more”, 15 said that it simply never occurred to them to look for it in stores or shops, and two people said “too fucking hippy” and “too liberal”. So less than 20% of the people interviewed actively seek out and consume Fair Trade or organic coffees and over 50% of the interviewees never drink it. The rest of them drink it if it is convenient.

We also interviewed people about their level of knowledge concerning Fair Trade certified and organic certified coffee and then broke people’s responses into categories of “understands”, “has a good general idea”, “has a vague idea”, “has no idea” and “has the wrong idea”. In order for people to be coded as “understands” they had to mention certification,

but this does not necessarily mean that they understand the process of certification. Out of the 100 people interviewed eight fully understood what “certification” means and entails, eight vaguely understood it, 19 wrongly thought that it was a process of ensuring quality by the FDA and the USDA, and 65 had no idea what it was. Of the 16 people who either understood or vaguely understood the process, not one of them knew that growers must pay to have their coffee certified.

Fourteen people understand what Fair Trade coffee is, 23 have a good general idea about what it is, 25 have a vague idea, 27 have no idea, and 11 have the wrong idea. For Fair Trade we coded their answers as “understanding” if they could convey to us that Fair Trade is a set of relationships through which producers are meant to earn a better wage for their labor and through which labor is regulated by external bodies of some sort.¹²

For answers that we coded as “a good general idea” interviewees had to be able to link the term “Fair Trade” with at least five of the following ideas: living wage, minimum price, long-term relationships, monitoring, certification, small farms, cooperatives, credit to farmers, cutting the middle men, sustainable development, and fair labor practices. They did not have to use the specific terms but they had to allude to the ideas behind them. For “vague idea” they had to mention three of them.

For organic certified coffee we coded the answers as “understanding” if they could convey to us the process by which coffee is grown and that organic coffee uses no pesticides or fertilizers and is connected to the health of the planet, workers and consumers. Only six people fell into this category while 10 fell into it if we take away comments about planet and worker health as criteria. Seventeen people, all of whom mentioned that organic means there are no pesticides or fertilizers used, have a good general understanding of what organic means. Thirty-five people had a vague idea of what organic means, mentioning that it has something to do with how and where it is grown, 23 people had no idea, and nine had the wrong idea.

The first question during our interviews was “what are the different kinds of coffees?” and we were all surprised by the answers we got to it. Overwhelmingly people mixed their kinds of specialty coffees. For example, one 19-year-old man said “dark roast, light roast, Fair Trade, Hazelnut, Decaf, French Vanilla, Mocha, Columbian, and Guatemalan”, a 20-year-old woman said “Origin, I mean the place they were grown, organic, and flavored”. Another 19-year-old woman said “Columbian, chocolate-hazelnut, Ecuadorian, American, Maxwell House”. These answers were typical. Fifty-eight percent of the informants mentioned a type of flavored coffee like “hazelnut” and 45% mentioned a process like “dark roast” or “decaffeinated”. Forty percent mentioned a form of coffee shop production like “espresso”, “latte” or “cappuccino”. The majority of people, 78%, mentioned a Latin American country

when answering this question (Brazil, Columbia and Guatemala were mentioned most often). Fifteen percent mentioned “Africa” and 6% mentioned countries within Africa (Ethiopia, Kenya, Tanzania, Uganda and Rwanda). Four percent mentioned Indonesia.

The one question we asked that had a uniform answer (85% of the interviews) was “who grows coffee?” The answer was: poor farmers. Thirty-five percent of these farmers are “impoverished”. Twenty-two percent of them are “minorities” and 18% of them are laboring under “slave” labor conditions. One respondent says:

The stereotypical image is of a South American working the fields—these aren’t rich people. Depends on what conditions they’re in—some of the farmers are abused, but others have gotten deals with artisan coffee makers who want to show off how much they’ve made from coffee.

Another reports that “people with mustaches” and “people who tried to grow cocaine and got in trouble” grow coffee. While 38% of the answers included both “farmers” and some permutation of “businesses” or “corporations” the answers overwhelming reflected an image of poor people living in the tropics living on the edge of the modern. Other descriptors used when students talked about these farmers were “men”, “brown people”, “poor fuckers”, “downtrodden men and women”, “tropical people”, “people in Africa and places like that” and “donkey riding farmers”.

The deregulated coffee market was supposed to be fairer and more flexible but it has resulted in the lowest coffee prices in the history of the market. Growers in places like Papua New Guinea are cast into fantasy images of ecologically noble savages and pure guileless economic primitives so that people will see their coffee as a scarce resource and thereby pay higher prices for it. Coffee consumers, and potential coffee consumers, born between 1983 and 2000, a market segment with the largest ratio of disposable income relative to their total income, are cast into fantasy images of wide-eyed well-meaning ecologically and socially noble actors who wish to change the world through their consumption practices.

But, the Internet-based marketing of specialty coffees through particular narratives has not created consumers who can recall the stories. Nor has it created consumers, at least the ones we interviewed, who wish to express their politics through consumption. The students we interviewed know almost nothing about specialty coffee, Papua New Guinea, or the ways in which the millions of poor people who grow coffee around the world have been adversely affected by neoliberalization. They most certainly do not seem to view consuming coffee as a political strategy meant to counter the ravages of neoliberal economic change. But they do, overwhelmingly, have the image of a poor

farmer in their heads when they think about coffee. Their fantasy farmers are poor, brown, downtrodden, rural and underdeveloped. These students had absolutely no sense of the sort of multi-classed coffee industry that exists in Papua New Guinea or in any of the other nations where coffee is grown. These people have internalized the virtual producers that they have been given and the structural poverty that many farmers live in becomes something to make a joke about (cf Carrier this issue).

Re-embedding Social Relations and Political Action into Economic Choice?

Neoliberalism fetishizes the market by turning it into something, conceptually, that seems to work on its own apart from human social practices. Since the decline of the ICO the argument, at least with regard to coffee, has been that if left alone and unregulated the market will produce consumer and producer behaviors that bring about environmental stability and social equity. It will do this by re-embedding the economic choice of what coffee one buys into social relations in which consumers and producers understand each other and have a connection across vast physical distances and vast economic disparities. Consumers are meant to come to understand producers in ways that result in the consumers making ecologically and socially progressive political choices about their buying habits. But all of this is built on a set of fictions. The consumers and producers in this story are all made up—they are produced, crafted, and constructed by the likes of Mr Nebraska and Dean's Beans. But these fantasy figures that populate the specialty coffee media and marketing world are not simply benign images used to sell coffee; they are careful productions that have material consequences.

The consumers fashioned by Mr Nebraska's seminar, the producers fashioned by Dean's Beans blog, the Papua New Guineans who make up the vast coffee industry in their country, and the students we interviewed in New York City seem to have little in common. But they are all brought together as individuals by the contemporary neoliberal coffee market. They are targeted as individuals because that is what neoliberalization does; it focuses on individual producers and consumers as the locus and scale of intervention and disallows for regulation and intervention at other scales. All marketed forms of "ethical consumption" make individuals seem and feel responsible for both the conditions of production and the ecological and social justice issues that stem from these conditions of production. Based on this logic governments, regulatory bodies, and the organizations that forced the structural adjustment programs in the 1980s that resulted in drastic economic changes that disadvantaged coffee farmers worldwide are let off the hook for the problems, contradictions, and negative effects

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3 inherent in the global capitalist system and particularly apparent today
4 in the wake of neoliberalization.

5 In an essay that clearly shows the contradictory nature of labels
6 and certifications as both a form of neoliberalization and corrective
7 to neoliberalization, Julie Guthman argues that “neoliberal valuation
8 rests on the presumption that the market will assign high prices to
9 scarce resources” (Guthman 2007:470). Organic, Fair Trade, and origin
10 labeling and certification supposedly add value to coffee because they
11 guarantee that in an unfair world the product in question was produced in
12 socially and ecologically sustainable ways. Value seemingly accrues to
13 the coffee because the monitoring systems in place guarantee sustainable
14 production and sustainable production is scarce. The entire system
15 of labeling is built on the assumption that most coffee production
16 is unethical and unsustainable but that specialty coffees, because of
17 certification and labeling, are sustainably produced. Here sustainable
18 production, and by that I mean socially and environmentally equitable
19 conditions of production, is the scarce resource.

20 The stories told about coffee production by the likes of Dean’s
21 Beans bring that scarce resource to the consumers. They package and
22 market fair labor as something unique and scarce. These stories also
23 do something else, they bundle together a set of images of Papua New
24 Guinea as remote, biodiverse, primitive and impoverished and present
25 and market them as scarce. So in a sense they use the poverty, which
26 was itself in part created by the processes of neoliberalism, to create a
27 scarce resource that is also meant to add value to the coffee. Poverty, as
28 a necessary prerequisite to specialty coffee, itself becomes unique and
29 valued in this skewed system of value creation. Poverty also becomes
30 a condition that is disembedded from its structural causes when it is
31 conflated with and linked to primitivism.

32 Socially and environmentally equitable conditions of production and
33 poverty are then the scarce resources that add value to specialty coffees.
34 Three issues emerge here. First, there is an inherent tension between
35 equitable conditions of production and poverty insofar as if we increase
36 one the other should decrease. With truly equitable production, poverty
37 will be ameliorated and the value that poverty adds to the coffees will
38 cease to exist. It therefore behooves companies like Dean’s Beans to
39 articulate poverty even when that poverty may not be the entire story, as
40 is the case with the coffee industry in Papua New Guinea. Certainly,
41 people who grow coffee in Papua New Guinea are poor by global
42 economic measures but they own their own land and thereby the means
43 of production. Because of this they are in a radically different structural
44 position than people in parts of the world where this is not the case.
45 Although they have been pushed into a kind of new remoteness by
46 neoliberalization they have not suffered the worst of these reforms in
47 terms of alienation from their land. In addition, the narratives that cast

the entire coffee industry in Papua New Guinea in terms of poverty erase the lives of the thousands of people who work in middle class jobs in the industry. By articulating coffee production through a fantasy vision of Papua New Guinea, Dean's Beans adds value to the coffee by misrepresenting those they purport to help. Second, a condition in which fair labor and good environmental conditions have become scarce and thereby valued for their scarcity should be unacceptable to people with truly progressive politics. This state of affairs means that everyone else, people not advantaged by access to sustainable systems of production, is written off in terms of deserving our political attention. This allows us to forget that all production should be made to be equitable, not just that production that can add exchange value when marketed to a particular set of consumers. Third, consumers are asked to address the issue of poverty by "making regulatory decisions about ecological and public health risk, working conditions, and remuneration, and even what sort of producers of what commodities should be favored in the world market", through their economic choices (Guthman 2007:472). They are made to feel like once they have done this they have done their best to redress inequality and they are allowed to forget about all of the people out there who do not have access to certification and labeling. The majority of the impoverished coffee farmers on the planet become someone else's problem and they are disconnected from the lives of consumers. Consumers are meant to feel connected to the poor people who produce coffee sustainably and are allowed to turn their backs on the much larger world of people who don't.

Mass consumer consumption is predicated on the creation of the desire to want and choose and the creation of exchange value is fueled by the creation of unrealistic hope that a given good will fill some need. This perceived value does not stem from anything inherent in the sensual nature of the commodity itself but from projections created by advertising, marketing and consumer culture. Thus, consumers are used to purchasing goods whose qualities, features or usefulness do not meet expectations. What is innovative about Fair Trade marketing is that, by and large, this promised value (ie fair production practices and good environmental standards) is overtly external to the commodity and the consumer truly has no way of knowing whether this value has been received or not—even after the product has been purchased and consumed—other than by reference to the very marketing narratives that promised satisfaction in the first place.

During his presentation Mr Nebraska expressed the belief that a generation's consumer choices are formed by its history and its social and political background. The far more dangerous process, however, is the way that consumer culture shapes political and social choices and actions. In her book, *A Consumer's Republic* (2003), Lizabeth Cohen showed that the atomized nature of consumer culture and the creation

of consumer identities ultimately comes to supplant peoples' identities as political actors. In the case of Fair Trade marketing this is the very point. Thus, the hazard created by Fair Trade marketing is that people's desire for greater social justice is co-opted and satisfied by buying into a narrative such as the one presented by Dean's Beans. Because the professed value of Fair Trade products is by definition outside of the commodity itself, the consumer is in no position to learn to what extent these sorts of narratives depart from the real lives of the coffee producers.

The stories encouraged by Mr Nebraska and told by Dean's Beans are a new form of product endorsement. Poverty adds value to specialty coffee as does sustainable production. Poor primitive people, instead of famous wealthy people, increase this value again with their endorsement. In the past, people bought a box of cereal with Michael Jordan on the front because they wanted to "be like Mike"—talented, successful and rich. The "endorsement" from the primitive is about endorsing a set of relationships as being good, ethical and fair. If the Michael Jordan endorsement sells by creating desire to be better than one is, the endorsement from the primitive sells by telling the consumer that they are a good person just as they are and that through their consumption choices they have an ethical and meaningful relationship with the economic have-nots of the world.

The great trick of the specialty coffee marketing by distributors is that it highlights the global economic inequality created by the capitalist system from which they and their customers benefit while at the same time cabining the extent to which consumers should be concerned about such injustices (eg "bad exploitative capitalism only gave people pennies for their backbreaking labor, now thanks to certification those people get four times as many pennies for their backbreaking labor"). The production of the primitive as so backwards and so impoverished that even a pittance would be a vast improvement allows for the marketers and consumers to let themselves (and capitalism as a whole) off the hook for no significant cost to themselves. If you present narratives about how awful things were before you got there, then even the insignificant bonus of Fair Trade is seen as a good deal.

The fact that the "Millennial" students don't really think about the plight of the have-nots and that they take for granted that coffee is produced by people at the very bottom end of the economic scale shows on the one hand that certification is not having a huge substantive impact on people's consciousness about the exploitative nature of coffee production (in the sense that producers are alienated from almost all of the value they produce). On the other hand, to the extent that people are concerned about this inequality they are told that certification helps to alleviate some of the worst effects of this exploitation even if consumers are not quite sure how. This supposed embedding of the political and social into capitalist consumption may make for a tasty cup of coffee

but it makes lukewarm political action. Ironically, the message of the endorsement of the primitive is not to create desire among the nascent socially conscious consumer to demand greater social justice but to be satisfied in the knowledge that they have done their part to improve the world. This only works because the image of the primitive does what it always does, it tells us that the other is so different from us that it might make sense that receiving a quadrupling of your pennies and a t-shirt is “fair” for hundreds of hours of back-breaking labor. Obviously, consumers wouldn’t do that kind of work for that amount of money but the producers are different and they, according to this logic, should be happy with what they get because the market has done the best that it can.

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Endnotes

¹ A LexisNexis search shows that between 1970 and 1979 there are no articles in popular magazines or major newspapers linking coffee and environmental sustainability. Between 1980 and 1989 there are 77 in newspapers and 12 in magazines. Between 1990 and 1999 there are 802 in newspapers and 187 in magazines. Between 2000 and 2001 there are 422 in newspapers and 154 in magazines and the growth continues such that between 2005 and 2006 there are over 1000 in newspapers and 402 in magazines.

² In the USA coffee began as an elite drink but by the first part of the 1900s it was a drink accessible to all, it was consumed in both working-class homes and elite homes (Jimenez 1995). In 1864 Jabez Burns invented an inexpensive roasting machine and small roasting companies began to emerge in the northeastern United States (Pendergrast 1999:55–57). These small companies grew and by the 1890s there was a strong coffee industry in the northeast. During the first three decades of the 1900s a true national market for coffee was created in the United States and the process of standardization in terms of quality, taste, and production began (Jimenez 1995; Roseberry 1996). The Second World War was a “boon for the coffee industry” worldwide (Pendergrast 1999:222). This was in part because the US army began to requisition about 140,000 bags of coffee a month and serve it to the troops, and in part because of changes in the supply chain for coffee (Pendergrast 1999:222). US troops were being supplied with vast quantities of coffee, and Maxwell House and other large factories began to manufacture coffee specifically for the military (Pendergrast 1999:224). In 1942 the War Production Board in the USA took over all control of the coffee entering the US market and began to regulate and ration coffee (Pendergrast 1999:222). This regulation meant that coffee was rationed for civilians and that both civilians and coffee industry people panicked. Although the rationing was ended in July 1943 the idea of coffee being a limited and luxury good had been planted in consumers’ minds (Pendergrast 1999:223). The war created enhanced desire for coffee among civilians and soldiers and it pumped money into the major coffee manufacturers who then, after the war, created expensive and

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expansive advertising campaigns to keep coffee in people's heads as an item that was an important part of their daily life. This influx of cash into the industry, in the pockets of big companies like Maxwell House, allowed for continued standardization and set the sate for a "trend toward coffee of the lowest common denominator" (Roseberry 1996:765). In the late 1940s several international coffee agreements were signed and the International Coffee Organization, a body to oversee global trade in the commodity, was formed (Roseberry 1996).

Through the late 1940s and 1950s coffee consumption in the USA was "flat" with little fluctuation in levels of coffee bought and sold (Roseberry 1996:765). But between 1962 and 1980 coffee consumption declined radically (Roseberry 1996:765; see also Pendergrast 1999:ch 16). Fewer people were becoming coffee drinkers and people who were already coffee drinkers were cutting back. Even more troubling for the coffee marketing industry was the fact that coffee drinking was "skewed toward an older set" (Roseberry 1996:765).

³ Another aspect of this phase of neoliberalization was that governance that had once been the purview of the state became the purview of non-governmental organizations, so-called "civil society" groups like churches, development agencies, and other international bodies and organizations.

⁴ http://www.deansbeans.com/coffee/people_centered.html, accessed for this paper on 13 November 2006.

⁵ http://www.deansbeans.com/coffee/deans_zine.html?blogid=829, accessed for this paper on 13 November 2006.

⁶ Data presented about Mr Greathead are derived from colonial reports, colonial era newspapers, and interviews with one of his surviving sons.

⁷ See Finney (1968, 1973, 1987) and Sinclair (1996) for details on this history.

⁸ I have worked with Gimi speakers since 1997 and have conducted over 40 months of field-based research in Papua New Guinea. All names in what follows are pseudonyms and all interviews were conducted in the Gimi language.

⁹ In terms of how respondents defined themselves generationally, only three people we interviewed defined themselves as "Millenials", but 52% mentioned "Generation X" in that they were either the "tail end" of it or that they were "the generation behind" it, with 40% saying "Generation Y" at some point during the interview. Thirty-four percent of them mentioned that they were the children of "Baby boomers". Ten percent of the interviewees mentioned 9/11 but no one mentioned the Oklahoma City bombing, the Clinton-Lewinsky affair, or the Columbine shootings (the events that Mr Nebraska used to mark the generation) while only 4% mentioned "global", "globalized" or "globalization" (the main focus of the generation according to Mr Nebraska). Only 3% said the word "community" and only 10% talked about social and ecological change or justice. Twenty-seven percent mentioned that they use alcohol, not as Mr Nebraska predicted that they are "teetotalers" and 12% mentioned openness towards sexuality (eg "we are not shocked by homosexuality or not clearly defined sexuality"). Thirty percent of our interviewees mentioned how they feel that the media specially targets their generation and that they are under more pressure to consume than other generations. Fourteen percent mentioned that their generation has a sense of "entitlement" or a "spoiled" nature.

Interestingly, 73% of the interviewees mentioned technology when asked to describe their generation, 66% mentioned the Internet, and 35% mentioned speed of communication (eg "people over the age of twenty-five just don't understand the instantaneous nature of communication"). Twenty percent of the interviewees mentioned Facebook or My Space, 25% mentioned television, and 10% mentioned cell phones. Over half of them mentioned the Internet as a source of information for consumer goods.

¹⁰ The campus interview sample presented here is not characteristic of most of the consumers of Dean's Beans coffees. Dean's Beans is part of a small group within the

specialty coffee industry called “Cooperative Coffees” and their markets are in unusually progressive communities (Madison, Ann Arbor, Berkeley, Amherst) where there is high general awareness of social issues around Fair Trade and Organics. But this is a very small niche market.

¹¹ We limited the age range to people who would be classified by marketers as “Millennials”. We further limited the age range to people between 24 and 18 because we did not want to engage with interviewing a “special class” of people and we would have had to if we interviewed people below 18 years of age. We did not interview a random sample of students rather the student interviewers and I determined interviewees during observation periods at eight coffee-related establishments on or around the Morningside Heights neighborhood. These establishments included a Starbucks, the coffee shop area of a student dining hall, the College café, an old elite coffee house near campus, a new non-chain coffee shop on Broadway, and a new “funky” one near campus. We wanted to include a range of types of shops and price ranges. We only interviewed people who identified themselves as coffee drinkers.

Seventeen people initially interviewed had taken Interpretation of Culture, our version of introduction to cultural anthropology, with me. We threw out those interviews and replaced them with 17 additional interviews because all of these students would have heard “endlessly” (interview, 10 December 2006) about Papua New Guinea during that course.

¹² During analysis we used the following definitions as guides, only counting people as understanding if they gave us these answers in, of course, their own words:

“Fair Trade is a trading partnership, based on dialogue, transparency and respect, that seeks greater equity in international trade. It contributes to sustainable development by offering better trading conditions to, and securing the rights of, marginalized producers and workers—especially in the South. Fair Trade organisations (backed by consumers) are engaged actively in supporting producers, awareness raising and in campaigning for changes in the rules and practice of conventional international trade. Fair Trade’s strategic intent is to deliberately to work with marginalised producers and workers in order to help them move from a position of vulnerability to security and economic self-sufficiency, to empower producers and workers as stakeholders in their own organizations, to actively to play a wider role in the global arena to achieve greater equity in international trade” (http://www.fairtrade.net/faq_links.html?&no_cache=1 accessed on 1 August 2006).

And “Fair trade coffee is coffee that is traded by bypassing the coffee trader and therefore giving the producer (and buyer) higher profits. Fair Trade does not necessarily mean that the extra money trickles down to the people who harvest the coffee. TransFair USA is an independent 3rd party certification that ensures that: Coffee importers agree to purchase from the small farmers included in the International Fair Trade Coffee Register. Farmers are guaranteed a minimum ‘fair trade price’ of \$1.26/pound FOB for their coffee. If world price rises above this floor price, farmers will be paid a small (\$0.05/pound) premium above market price. Coffee importers provide a certain amount of credit to farmers against future sales, helping farmers stay out of debt to local coffee ‘coyotes’ or middlemen. Importers and roasters agree to develop direct, long-term trade relationships with producer groups, thereby cutting out middlemen and bringing greater commercial stability to an extremely unstable market” (<http://www.coffeeresearch.org/politics/fairtrade.htm> accessed on 1 August 2006).

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