

Review: Coffee Culture: Local Experiences, Global Connections, 2nd Ed.

By Catherine M. Tucker

Reviewed by Yves Laberge

Ottawa, Québec, Canada

Tucker, Catherine M. *Coffee Culture: Local Experiences, Global Connections*, 2nd ed. New York: Routledge, 2017, xvii+169 p. ISBN: 9781138933033, paperback. US\$29.95; also available in hardcover and Kindle. Note: Part of the *Routledge Series for Creative Teaching and Learning*.

The first edition (2011) of this incomparable book by anthropologist Catherine Tucker was reviewed in *Electronic Green Journal* (Volume 1, Issue 36, 2013); according to our computerized statistics, it remains the most accessed contribution of this reviewer (Y. L.) with hundreds of downloads. This new edition of *Coffee Culture* truly deserves to be reviewed. Of course, this scholarly book is not about coffee fields or coffee growth; rather, it discusses the uses, perceptions, lifestyles, fashions, and social habits related to coffee consumption. It is addictive, but nevertheless praised and socially valorized as a distinctive sign of refinement in our modern societies. Even at the entrance to the University of Ottawa's library, the first thing you see when you enter through the turnstiles is not books or a counter to borrow books. Instead, you will notice a famously branded coffee shop, busily selling king size cups to newly initiated students who are discovering and getting used to the caffeine experience.

Coffee Culture comprises 19 short chapters. The first pages provide some historical and theoretical background (Lévi-Strauss; Bourdieu). Chapter 5 describes coffee as a part of a world system that was globalized long before this term would be coined. The sad episodes related to slavery, colonialism, and forced labor since 17th century are retold without insistence (p. 40). Chapter 8 links coffee consumption with national identity, comparing four countries and their general relationship with coffee. Brazil, for example, one of the most important producers of coffee by all standards, does not seem to take any prestige in being a world-class exporter of coffee; Catherine Tucker even refers to "Brazil's nonidentification with coffee." In contrast to this, Columbia has an opposite attitude of "national pride" (p. 61). Inevitably, environmental issues are discussed, for example waste of used cups and the introduction of coffee capsules ("pods"); billions are produced annually and have become an unforeseen problem because they are difficult to recycle (p. 68).

Catherine Tucker should be congratulated for her excellent and vivid book on coffee consumption. It was carefully written after field research on various farms, notably in Honduras (p. 139). Each chapter concludes with some highlights and summary questions. We understand that coffee is socially constructed, just like any kind of food, and perhaps

more than any other commodity (p. 31). Thus, five years after its first edition, Catherine Tucker's *Coffee Culture*, 2nd ed. is more relevant than ever. Of course, it is not the definitive book on this wide subject, as there remain many coffee-related topics that could have been discussed in more detail. Clearly, the author succeeds in conceptualizing the world of coffee into a solid theoretical framework, for instance when reaffirming (relying on Michel Foucault's notion of "body discipline") how workers at the advent of industrial revolution needed their daily dose of caffeine (with sugar) to prepare themselves for everyday hard work: "coffee became increasingly part of people's lives, and many people use coffee (or tea) as a way to deal with lifestyles that require long hours of concentrated mental efforts" (p. 49). Tucker does not try to venture into domains such as chemistry, medicine, or morals; she does not insist on the addictive and the unwelcome side effects of coffee (like insomnia). No where in this book will we find messages about coffee being bad for your health, especially for teenagers and elders. She nevertheless reminds us about the capitalist structure that lies within and behind the industry of coffee, causing poverty and exploitation in the poorest regions. In contrast, I might add that we often hear tourists comment on some charming street in a beautiful city that was "filled with little coffee shops" conceived as what could be coined as good-time zones. This book is recommended for academic libraries.

Yves Laberge, Ph.D. <ylaberge@uottawa.ca>, Department of Visual Arts, University of Ottawa, Ottawa, Canada

Electronic Green Journal, Issue 41, Spring 2018, ISSN: 1076-7975