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## Coffee: An Indian Ocean Perspective

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**Abstract:** Studies of coffee production and consumption are dominated by emphases on Latin American production and American consumption. This paper challenges the Atlantic perspective, demanding an equal emphasis on the Indian Ocean world of Eastern Africa, the Middle East, South Asia, and Southeast Asia. A geographical approach to historical as well as contemporary patterns of coffee production and consumption provides an opportunity to rethink the nature of coffee as a global commodity. The Indian Ocean world has a much deeper history of coffee, and in recent decades, has witnessed a resurgence in production. The nature of this production is distinct, providing an opportunity to rethink dependency theories. Coffee in the Indian Ocean world is more likely to be produced by smallholders, countries are less likely to be economically dependent on coffee, farmers are more likely to harvest polycultures, and countries represent both consumers and producers. A balanced emphasis of Atlantic and Indian Ocean worlds allows us to better understand coffee production and consumption, together telling a more balanced, global story of this important commodity.

**Keywords:** Coffee, commodity, Indian Ocean, Indonesia

### Introduction

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Coffee is a part of daily life for millions of people around the world, fueling their mornings, providing a respite from work, and energizing their nights. It is served ‘instant’ in gas stations, frothed with milk, and in the clevers and clovers of hip cafes. In recent decades, coffee has become the focus of sustained scholarly attention. Coffee is a major commodity, the world’s most valuable traded foodstuff. Researchers of commodity chains, fair trade, sustainability, gentrification, and Western culture have found coffee to be especially stimulating. For some, coffee exemplifies southern production and western consumption. However, this scholarship displays a marked focus on Latin American production and Euro-American consumption. The Atlantic world dominates studies in ways that are not reflected in the historical or contemporary worlds of coffee. The emphasis on the Atlantic world should be balanced by an appreciation of Africa, the Middle East, and Asia—what may be framed as the Indian Ocean world.

What does a deeper appreciation of the Indian Ocean world do to our understanding of coffee as a global commodity? This paper suggests that such a shift allows us to better understand several core issues in the production and consumption of coffee, moving away from dependency theories towards more nuanced, optimistic views. It also helps make sense of ongoing trends in coffee exports; instead of a decline in Latin American production relative to 'new' Asian producers, we are seeing a return to much older and more balanced patterns.

The geographical focus of this paper allows for an assessment of historical and contemporary phenomena across ocean regions. The first section discusses the importance of seeing historical interactions and international trade in terms of ocean regions. The second section demonstrates that the growing academic literature is anchored firmly in the Atlantic world. The third section emphasizes the historical roots of coffee around the Indian Ocean. Part four unpacks what an Indian Ocean view does for our understanding of core themes related to coffee, including the demise of the International Coffee Agreement (ICA), pricing, farming, dependency, and consumption. All told, this paper does not suggest that the Atlantic world is unimportant or that the Indian Ocean world is poised to overtake it, but instead calls for greater balance in the study of coffee production and consumption.

### **Oceans connect**

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While area experts tend to divide the world into continents and regions, such as Latin America, Europe, Africa, the Middle East, and Southeast Asia, such categories tend to overlook dynamics operating across areas. At worst, these regions are the products of colonialism and Eurocentric borders, and at best they fail to capture many important dynamics. This has led scholars to rethink area studies, drawing new lines around ecological zones. Fernand Braudel's pioneering work on the Mediterranean world rejects seeing Europe, the Middle East, and Africa as distinct areas, instead telling history through the sea that connects them. For Braudel (1995, 14), the cultures dotting the Mediterranean 'lived and breathed with the same rhythms...with identical problems and general trends if not identical consequences.' Seeing history through the Mediterranean deconstructs Europe as a natural unit, separate from Africa and the Middle East, helping to better understand historical encounters as well as recent interactions.

This Braudelian impulse has led scholars to rethink how we view geo-cultural areas. Nowhere is this change more evident than in studies of the Atlantic. Seeing the Atlantic world as a region was first promoted by Duke University's 'Oceans Connect' Project and gained further impetus with the publication of the journal *Atlantic Studies*. Viewing the Atlantic

as a region helps to make sense of various events and themes, such as European colonialism and migration, the slave trade, security organizations, and commodity chains. Less attention, however, has been paid to other ocean regions. This is beginning to change, as research on trade and migration across the Pacific Basin testifies (Barter 2015).

The Indian Ocean is also increasingly seen as a world region (Alpers 2014). Anthony Reid (1988) situates Southeast Asia in terms of trade networks, connecting it with Arabia, India, and Europe. The Maritime Silk Road brought spices, silks, and other goods across the Indian Ocean for centuries, before and during the colonial era. The idea of the Indian Ocean as a region deepened with the devastating 2004 Tsunami and growing security concerns in the area. The Indian Ocean world includes all countries whose coastline touches the Indian Ocean proper, namely the countries of eastern Africa, Yemen, Saudi Arabia, India, Thailand, Sri Lanka, and Indonesia, also subsuming maritime trade from nearby areas. Just as the Atlantic world connects the Americas to Europe and Africa, the Indian Ocean world connects Africa, the Middle East, South Asia, and Southeast Asia.

### **Coffee as an Atlantic commodity**

While studies of coffee have not tended to consciously speak of ocean regions, the literature prioritizes Latin American production and Anglo-American and European consumption, as well as African labour. Studies typically begin with perfunctory, lightly-referenced early Muslim histories, with a paragraph or two on coffee originating in Ethiopia, being traded in Yemen, and then being grown by European colonizers in Sri Lanka and Indonesia. They go into more detail once coffee arrives in the Americas. For instance, after two paragraphs on capital in Europe, Gavin Fridell (2007, also 2014) provides one paragraph on Africa and the Middle East, one on Asian production fueling European demand, and then dozens of pages to the Atlantic slave trade, Brazilian production, and Western corporate rule. John Talbot's (2004) work displays a similar pattern, where early African, Arab, and Asian coffee is discussed in a single paragraph before several chapters emphasize Brazil, Colombia, and the United States. Benoit Daviron and Stefano Ponte (2005) begin their history with Brazil, mentioning the Middle East only in reference to the term 'Mocha.' A similar weighting is provided in Mark Pendergrast's (2010) popular global history of coffee. To help demonstrate the Atlantic bias in the literature, I conducted a simple Google Books keyword search for regional place names in these widely-cited texts. Although hardly a perfect measure, the results in Table 1 help to illustrate this bias in historical and contemporary studies.

**Table 1:** Country references in major studies of coffee

	Fridell (2007)	Talbot (2004)	Daviron & Ponte (2005)	Pendergrast (2010)
Indonesia	5	30	14	8
India	8	22	9	13
Vietnam	10	11	20	6
Yemen	0	2	1	11
PNG	1	10	0	5
Brazil	41	84	47	82
Mexico	65	30	18	14
Costa Rica	30	20	17	28
Colombia	36	64	27	30

A handful of studies avoid privileging Latin America. Steven Topik and William Gervase Clarence-Smith's edited volume (2003) stands out for its truly global framework. Acknowledging that the literature has been dominated by Latin America, it includes valuable chapters on the Red Sea, Madagascar, and Indonesia. I should also note several quality studies such as Daniel Jaffee's (2014) work on fair trade coffee in Mexico, where the location is specified and the author does not speak for coffee production as a whole (even if it does seem that studies such as this are disproportionately drawn from Latin America) (see also Lyon 2007, Reichman 2011). Overall though, the literature remains Atlantic-centric. This prioritization of the Atlantic world is at odds with contemporary regional production. In 2014, Latin America accounted for fifty seven percent of all coffee exports, African countries account for about eleven percent, while Asian countries represent thirty one percent (ICO 2015). While the Atlantic world accounts for the majority of coffee, the Indian Ocean world of eastern Africa and Asia is home to considerable production as well, and each year the Atlantic and Indian Ocean worlds creep towards parity.

### **Coffee: an Indian Ocean history**

The Atlantic-centric literature is especially puzzling when we look at the early history of coffee, which was dominated by the Indian Ocean until the nineteenth century. In the above studies, this history is left in the past, assumed to have withered away. This treatment of Africa, the Middle East, and Asia hints at Orientalism, with the distant other being frozen in time and giving way for more modern, Western societies. Of course, many key terms related to coffee have Indian Ocean origins: Mocha (in Yemen), Java (in Indonesia), Arabica beans, and even the word 'coffee'. These terms underlie the Indian Ocean origins of coffee.

In mentioning coffee originating in Ethiopia, authors tend to focus on the apocryphal story of a herder witnessing his energized goats eating coffee (Pendergrast 2010). Others note that coffee was originally eaten in balls of fat to provide energy for highland Oromo warriors (Tucker 2011). Coffee may have entered the Arab world before the tenth century, and was clearly important by the fourteenth. Due in part to a prohibition on alcohol (itself an Arabic term), the Muslim world embraced coffee as ‘the Wine of Islam’. At the beginning of the fifteenth century, coffee spread to Cairo, as Yemeni students brought the drink to al-Azhar (Hattox 1985). Coffeehouses became a regular feature across the Muslim world. Over the next two centuries, coffeehouses moved in and out of favour with rulers, who sometimes framed coffee as a social danger and drug akin to alcohol (Hattox 1985). Coffeehouses were soon perceived as sites of dissidence and perceived ‘immoral behaviour’, so were often closed by insecure rulers. Although coffeehouses were targeted, the beverage itself was not the problem. While alcohol is widely considered forbidden in Islam, and tobacco is debated, Islamic scholarly consensus emerged that coffee is permissible (Sedgwick 2003).

Although the above points may be gleaned from the coffee literature, two largely overlooked areas deserve elaboration. First, coffee is intimately linked to Sufism, through which it spread across the Muslim world. Sufism is not a sect like Sunni or Shia, but instead represents a tendency towards mysticism. Tucker (2011, p. 36) ties the expansion of coffee to Sufism, as coffee ‘helped them stay alert in their nighttime devotions.’ Beyond merely staying awake, coffee was consumed by Sufi orders as part of religious meditation, as various stimulants are sometimes believed to help one approach oneness with God in Sufi devotion. Coffee plays a religious role, blessed before some ceremonies, with a special area and official dedicated to coffee preparation in Sufi lodges (Algar 1992, p. 182). Sufi Brotherhoods sometimes retreated to remote areas where they drank only coffee for weeks of recitation (Watenpaugh 2004, p. 150). When Arab officials sought to ban coffeehouses, this was not just due to a fear of political activism, but also an effort to limit Sufism. In 1665, Ottoman officials banned Sufi orders, an act accompanied by the destruction of prominent coffeehouses (Sedgwick 2003). This demonstrates the close linkages between Sufism and coffee, as Islamic mysticism provided a vehicle for the drink’s early expansion.

While Talbot (2004, p. 1) suggests that the spread of coffee beyond eastern Africa ‘was a project of European colonizers’, the arrival of coffee across the Indian Ocean was through Sufi networks. Sufism provided a sort of gateway Islam, as its tolerance of acculturation made Sufism a vessel to spread Islam beyond the Arab world. With Sufism came coffee, which first arrived in Southeast Asia via Aceh, Sumatra, in the sixteenth century. Aceh’s most powerful ruler was Iskandar Muda (r. 1607-1636 CE), a Sufi Monist who was known for his centralizing tendencies. As the Sufi state supported mosque

construction and Islamic education, coffee was an essential component of Islamic practice. It became part of martial arts (*silat*) training within Sufi orders and was a staple of traditional boarding schools (*dayah*). In the seventeenth century, coffee was also being consumed in southern Thailand, another Sufi scholarly center (Reid 1988, p. 38). Entrepreneurs began growing coffee along Aceh's west coast in the eighteenth century, selling directly to American pepper merchants (Gould 1956; Wild 2005, p. 99). Sufi influence spread southward to West Sumatra, whose early Islamic groups were known coffee drinkers as well as cultivators (Laffan 2011, p. 253). The link between Sufism and the spread of coffee is an important, often neglected point which highlights the pre-colonial roots of coffee across the Indian Ocean.

Coffee was thus part of a complex international system long before the arrival of Europeans. Authors tend to assume that global trade is a Western invention, downplaying centuries of commerce across the Muslim world and China. Fridell (2007, p. 104) appears dismissive of coffee as a pre-colonial commodity; 'Prior to the emergence of a world system, coffee was generally a minor crop traded by Arab merchants for use as medicine or for ceremonies for the wealthy.' He suggests that 'Coffee emerged as a significant world trade commodity alongside the development of the world system that first took root...on the heels of European colonial expansion' (2007, p. 103). Ralph Hattox (1985, p. 72), however, explains that coffee was a sophisticated industry long before European colonialism, with Yemenis working to monopolize planting and Cairo becoming the hub of investment in the early 1500s. It is not simply that coffee happened to be traded by Muslims. It was a cash crop in Yemen under Ottoman rule and was soon planted by Arabs in India and Ceylon (Sri Lanka) for sale to consumers around the world (Duncan 2002, p. 319). As Topik and Clarence-Smith (2003, p. 5) observe, 'beans were planted in India by Muslim pilgrims in the seventeenth century, long before the British took any interest in the crop.' Europeans hardly invented multinational trade and were not the first to view coffee as a commodity.

European colonialism and demand for commodities expanded the precolonial coffee trade. Anthony Reid (1988) describes a pre-colonial 'Age of Commerce' in the Indian Ocean, a period of market expansion and growing wealth fueled by stability in Ming China and the Ottoman Empire, Japanese silver, and later enriched by early European traders. This era ended in the 1680s, when Japanese markets closed, China faced internal turmoil, and wars in Europe limited the demand for exports. Europe managed to rebound, but Asian powers did not, and with the advent of modern corporations raising new levels of capital, as well as new means of war, Europeans were powerful actors in the Indian Ocean by the eighteenth century. Coffee production mirrors this change. Europeans secured coffee trees and planted them in new regions, generating new profits and siphoning wealth from the Muslim world.

By 1699, coffee plants were brought by the Dutch East India Company to Java, and within twenty years, the Dutch East Indies was the world's leading producer. While this marked a shift from Arab control towards European dominance, coffee remained an Indian Ocean phenomenon. The primary exporters during this era were the tiny, isolated French Island of Réunion, Dutch and then British Sri Lanka, and Dutch Java and Sumatra. Réunion became a major producer for a short period in the 1710s, its brief ascent ending due to British pressure, plant fungus, and the collapse of the French East India Company. In Sri Lanka, the Dutch had long traded coffee with native cultivators, and in 1820 British officials established new plantations (Duncan 2002, p. 320).

From the early days of Dutch colonialism in Java, the Dutch began collecting coffee as a form of taxation. The result was over 1000 tons arriving in Amsterdam annually in the 1720s. Dutch expansion changed radically in the early nineteenth century, as the Dutch East India Company was bankrupt and the government assumed control. After the Napoleonic Wars and a brief British occupation of Java, a new era of direct colonialism began in the early nineteenth century. A system of forced cultivation was created in order not to just make the colony self-sufficient, but also to rebuild the Netherlands. Natives were forced to devote twenty percent of their land or labour to cultivating export crops, including coffee. The Cultivation System soon expanded from Java to West Sumatra and some Dutch-controlled areas in the eastern islands. By 1850, 75,000 tons of coffee were exported annually from the Indies (McStocker 1987, p. 42). In the 1870s, coffee production expanded to Bali and Timor, and then to North Sumatra and Central Aceh. By this time, coffee production had transformed, in part due to E.D. Dekker's influential novel *Max Havelaar: Or the Coffee Auctions of the Dutch Trading Company*, which emphasized the cruel nature of the Cultivation System. With the end of forced cultivation, exports diminished and the means of production transformed. By the 1890s, coffee was produced on large, privately-held estates for the first time.

Beyond the Dutch East Indies, coffee spread to other Southeast Asian colonies. Despite the frequent claim that Vietnam is a 'newcomer' into the coffee market (Fridell 2007, p. 145; Petchers and Harris 2008, pp. 44-46), the country has a long history of coffee cultivation and consumption. Coffee plants were brought by French missionaries in the early nineteenth century to encourage hill communities to settle. French colonizers established coffee plantations in highland regions by the 1890s (Doutriaux, Geisler, and Shively 2008), expanding production in Dak Lak Province by the 1920s. Among the two thousand tons grown annually, little was exported to France, as Asian demand was considerable and France already enjoyed a steady supply. In the 1940s, Vietnamese coffee collapsed as a consequence of leaf diseases and political instability. Further east, production in Papua New Guinea began

in the 1880s, when German colonizers created early plantations, followed by Australian planters further south (West 2012, p. 73). In the 1920s, a gold rush led to new European settlement and new coffee farms exporting to Australia. Similarly, coffee was introduced to East Timor in 1815, soon accounting for eighty percent of East Timor's exports, just as the Philippines also enjoyed a coffee boom.

The above history demonstrates the centrality of the Indian Ocean in the early spread of coffee, as well as its importance in the late colonial era. However just as coffee expanded to new parts of Asia in the 19<sup>th</sup> century, it had also travelled across the Atlantic. Coffee arrived to Dutch Guiana (Suriname) and Saint Domingue (Haiti) in the late eighteenth century. Fueled by slave labour, French Saint Domingue became the world leader in coffee exports by 1788, ending a decade later with a Haitian Revolution that began in the coffee-growing highlands. The short-lived Haitian ascendancy, shipping to consumers in the United States, demonstrated the potential for an intra-American coffee trade. Brazil began to cultivate and export coffee on a large-scale in the 1820s. Benefitting from slave labour and extensive territory, Brazilian production soared. Despite the formal end to slavery in 1888, expansion continued with the development of railways into the interior. Colombia and other Latin American producers followed suit. It is crucial to note that Latin American production was a post-colonial affair, expanding well after independence. By the 1850s, world coffee production was fairly balanced between Latin America and Asia, with Brazil accounting for half of world production and Asia accounting for almost forty percent (Daviron and Ponte 2005, p. 58).

Given coffee's deep roots in the Indian Ocean world, and its more recent arrival to the Atlantic, the dismissive scholarly views towards coffee beyond the Atlantic are all the more confusing. Ponte and Daviron (2005, p. 57) suggest that 'Eventually, during the 1980s and 1990s, coffee cultivation also spread to Asia.' Talbot (2004, p. 121) frames Asian countries as 'non-traditional' exporters—'they had only begun to extensively plant coffee in the 1980s.' Vietnam in particular has been viewed as a 'new' producer (Wild 2005, p. 6).

In some way, the tendency to view Asian producers as 'non-traditional' or 'new' must be attributed to the bias of researchers. Home to European languages and connected to American history, Latin America is far more legible to scholars and readers. The difficulty of learning the spoken and written languages of Africa, the Middle East, South, and Southeast Asia presents a barrier to understanding regional history. It is also that most coffee produced in Latin America was sent to Euro-American consumers, providing records as well as interest. Another reason for the emphasis on coffee exchanges in the Atlantic at the expense of the Indian Ocean is that scholars are more concerned with recent history. By the early twentieth century, Latin American producers were clearly dominant, as growing American consumption was

based on Brazilian beans. By 1910, Brazil produced over eighty percent of world coffee exports, rising to ninety percent by the 1930s. Given this domination, it is perhaps understandable that authors focus on Latin America, even if they do so at the expense of the previous five centuries. While this still cannot explain why writers afford greater attention to producers such as Costa Rica and Mexico at the expense of Indonesia and Vietnam, the domination of Brazil and to some extent Colombia helps to explain this bias.

### **Atlantic and Indian Ocean coffee: contemporary implications**

The previous section suggested that writers have downplayed the longer history of coffee in the Indian Ocean. This geographic bias is not limited to history, as it also characterizes discussions of contemporary coffee politics and economics. The following section suggests that various aspects of the moral economy of coffee, all connected in spirit to dependency theory, look very different if we look beyond the Atlantic to the Indian Ocean world.

Approaching the coffee literature for the first time, one is struck by the extent to which the literature is influenced by dependency theories. Here, free markets consist of developing countries not simply producing goods for trade with the developed world in an effort to gain access to foreign exchange, but more that they are exploited through this trade, forced to provide primary goods in exchange for meager profits with value-added stages of production captured by the developed world. Topik and Wells (1998, p. 44) note that Marxist scholars have gone further, arguing that commodity markets make producers less developed. Dependency theories generally focus on the Atlantic world, with Latin America producing for the United States and Europe. Asia and the Middle East have never fit comfortably into dependency theories, especially as Asian growth has undermined the core / periphery dichotomy. Here, writers may speak of the Developmental State, with sometimes corrupt states leading capitalist growth.

Experts on coffee appear firmly rooted in dependency theories. Bates (1997, p. 11) criticizes the coffee literature on precisely these grounds, noting that the dependency school ‘treats Brazil as a critical case’, where coffee barons have worked with Western companies and kept their country poor. While Bates agrees with many insights offered by dependency accounts, he argues that such approaches cannot alone explain political development in Brazil. Steve Topik and Mario Samper (2006, p. 124) also note the dominance of dependency theories in the coffee literature, adding that dependency ‘failed to predict the malleable nature of coffee cultivation’, especially in other parts of the world. Topik and Clarence-Smith (2003, pp. 12-14) suggest that the literature’s bias towards Latin America has led authors to emphasize inequalities and large estates, a perspective more in keeping with crops such as bananas and sugar than coffee.

Despite these critiques, the coffee literature remains focused on North / South dichotomies and trade as exploitation. Fridell (2007, p. 135) begins his study of Fair Trade coffee by emphasizing the 'vast inequalities and social injustices' associated with capitalism, dividing the world into the 'advanced capitalist North and poor worlds and small farmers in the underdeveloped South.' Daviron and Ponte's *Coffee Paradox* (2005) is premised on growing wealth generated by coffee consumption while farmers in the global South become impoverished. Talbot (2004, p.7) begins his study by emphasizing coffee being produced by developing countries for rich Western consumers, referred to in terms of the core and the periphery.

It is not that dependency theories are not useful. Coffee is produced in tropical countries and most of it is consumed in the northern, developed world, which pays little money to producers. It is also true that the free market alone will not fix such fundamental problems. This said, the dependency lens colours the coffee literature to the point of obscuring reality, lumping together all commodities and world regions. Complementing an emphasis on the Atlantic with an Indian Ocean perspective has the potential to help experts rethink dependency, as coffee production is very different outside of Latin America, and even Latin American coffee may not conform to standard accounts. Below, I note a number of areas in which an Indian Ocean perspective helps us to rethink our understanding of coffee: The collapse of the International Coffee Agreement (ICA), domestic dependence, and consumption patterns. All told, balancing Atlantic and Indian Ocean worlds is the key to understanding contemporary and emerging patterns of coffee growth and consumption.

### **The Demise of the ICA**

The 1989 collapse of the ICA has been viewed by many as a victory for neoliberalism against the Global South. After all, the rapid fall of global coffee prices and efforts by international financial institutions to get the state out of the market in the developing world generated a crisis for farmers in the developing world. An improved appreciation of Indian Ocean production provides a different perspective. Here, the ICA was a Latin American cartel, freezing production at 1962 levels to the detriment of Asian producers whose markets were at historical lows. The end of the ICA was a rebellion among Asian producers seeking to return to previous patterns, not just some victory for Western consumers.

The Brazilian state became involved in coffee governance as early as the 1920s, seeking to manage the industry and purchase excess stocks to keep prices up. In the 1950s, Brazil and Colombia came together to raise and stabilize prices by withholding supply. In the late 1950s, African producers signed on as well, or more accurately, French, British, Portuguese, and Belgian rulers joined on behalf of their colonies. The 1950s was a boon to African

coffee, as Asian production was down, European demand rose, and colonial rulers invested in their remaining overseas territories. As a result, European countries supported the Agreement to enrich their colonial enterprises and later as a form of wealth transfer to their colonies. The United States finally agreed to sign on in the 1960s, as this would represent a form of aid to rural Latin American regions threatened by communist influence. The first ICA was signed in 1962, and through various iterations, continued into the 1980s, finally collapsing in 1989, as the end of the Cold War deprived the United States of a reason to keep prices artificially high.

The end of the ICA has been interpreted by scholars as a neoliberal victory at the expense of the developing world. West (2012, p. 97) suggests that the end of the ICA ‘was directly tied to the policy discourses and practices of neoliberalization.’ Antony Wild (2005, pp. 5-6) adds that the ICA ended as ‘the ideologically driven policies of laissez-faire capitalism were given full rein’ in a ‘market free-for-all’ driven by the United States, World Bank, and Asian Development Bank. David Goodman (2008, p. 5) links the challenges faced by poor farmers to the demise of the ICA and ‘the neo-liberal political project epitomized by the Washington consensus.’ Talbot (2004, p. 92) suggests that neoliberalism led the US to abandon the ICA, which in turn fueled structural adjustment policies. Sure enough, as the ICA fell apart, coffee prices plummeted. By 1993, prices had fallen to one third of their 1983 value. Fridell (2014, p. 64) illustrates how this drop devastated coffee-dependent economies, particularly in Africa, where ‘two decades of thorough free trade reforms’ left farmers exposed to the market. It is also important to note that, after this collapse, prices rebounded in 1993, dropped again in 2001, and by 2010 reached record highs (Fridell 2014, p. 2).

Instead of seeing the end of the ICA as a triumph of neoliberalism, it is useful to see it as the end of a Latin American cartel. This is precisely how Bates (1997, p. 120) views the ICA, as a cartel which sought to raise prices to consumers given inelastic demand. This Brazilian-led cartel sought to freeze 1962 levels of production, maintaining high prices for Western consumers, but also restricting rival producers, most located in the Indian Ocean region. Brazil maintained veto power over coffee export quotas, allowing it to maintain its dominance. Freezing 1962 was a good deal for many African producers, since production was uniquely high and with independence struggles in the 1960s and 1970s, production fell, making the quotas for African countries seem generous. As Ethiopia, Uganda, Angola, and some other African producers faced civil war, their ICA-mandated quota remained above production levels (Talbot 2004, p. 68). For Asian countries, 1962 was an extreme low-point, having faced the Japanese invasion, independence struggles, and continued ethnic violence. The ICA thus limited Asian production to its lowest levels. Indonesian production was especially stunted in the 1950s and 1960s due to political turmoil. Under the ICA, Indonesia’s quota did ‘not reflect its production capacity, which in 1985 was double the quota, giving rise to

suggestions by Indonesian exporters of withdrawing' (McStocker 1987, p. 41). Takayama Akiyama (2001, p. 89) emphasizes India's low quota under the ICA, 'allowed to export only around 50 percent of its exportable production', leading Indian producers to trade with non-ICA members in the Communist world. Despite being critical of neoliberalism in ending the ICA, West (2012, p. 92) observes that the ICA limited the development of coffee revenue in Papua New Guinea, as the country was not allowed to increase exports to ICA members. For Asian producers, the ICA represented an Atlantic cartel, not southern solidarity versus the West.

Experts tend to blame neoliberalism for the end of the ICA, but also note the nagging problem of 'tourist coffee', in which producers exported to non-ICA countries to be sold in international markets. This hints that many countries, especially Indonesia and India, were producing beyond their quotas. Even supporters of the ICA admit that its quotas 'served to limit the entry of new [sic] producers to the market' (Talbot 2004, p. 59). Fridell (2014, p. 63) notes that the ICA faced significant internal dissent from small producers hurt by ICA quotas. While referring to the ICA as a 'golden era' for producing countries, Seth Petchers and Shayna Harris (2008, p.44) observe that it worked against countries trying to enter or expand coffee markets. Even though Talbot (2004, p. 77, 67) recognizes that the ICA restricted many countries, as quotas were based on 'historic' production, he still interprets the death of the Agreement as a victory for neoliberalism and the 'defeat of producers' collective action.' At the end of the ICA, there were two camps: Brazil, Colombia, Africa, and Europe, which wanted to maintain the ICA, and small Central American producers, some eastern African countries, Asian countries, and the United States, which wanted it to end. Talbot (2004, p. 85) explains that the dissenting producers were those that were the 'losers' in the ICA. It is unclear, then, how the end of the ICA represents the defeat of producer solidarity. Instead, divisions among producers, namely South American beneficiaries and Asian losers, best explain the end of the Agreement.

For the USA and World Bank, the end of the ICA partially represented a neoliberal victory, but for Asian producers, it represented a challenge to Latin American hegemons. For Asian countries, this represented an effort not to become new producers, but as the above history makes clear, to reclaim their former status. Here, an Indian Ocean perspective helps shed new light on the end of an era of coffee production too often seen from an Atlantic lens.

### **Smallholders versus estates**

One of the perennial criticisms of any tropical agricultural commodity is the issue of monoculture plantations. As developing countries specialize in one crop, the result can be dependency, agricultural crises, and the displacement of peasant smallholders. Large estates typically feature itinerant labourers who

earn low wages and have precious little security compared to smallholders. They are also more likely to plant monocultures as well as use fertilizers and insecticides. Coffee production, however, is typically carried out by smallholders. Even in Latin America, large estates are relatively rare. This said, Latin America is more like to have larger estates than Africa or Asia, allowing writers to mischaracterize coffee production.

The majority of Latin American coffee is grown by small and medium holders, especially in Central America. This said, Latin America also cultivates coffee on a larger scale. Coffee in Haiti and Brazil expanded through large slave-holding estates, and even after slavery was abolished, coffee was grown in the large landholdings created by European colonizers. Brazil's 'giant *fazendas*' produce much of the country's coffee (Pendergrast 2010, 296). Talbot (2004, p. 117) notes that Colombia 'is the best example of a country with state coffee policies controlled by large growers and exporters.' The contributors to Bacon's *Coffee Crisis* (2008) observe that, while the smallholders of Mexico, Nicaragua, and El Salvador are more numerous than the literature allows, exports remain dominated by industrial plantations. While the scale should not be exaggerated, Latin America nonetheless stands out as unique in the coffee world for being home to some large estates, a legacy of colonialism and inequality.

In the Indian Ocean world, coffee is produced almost entirely by smallholders. This distinction has important implications for how we evaluate the commodity. For Kenneth Curtis (2003, p. 313), 'In some regions, such as parts of Latin America, coffee has been produced on large estates... In other areas, and characteristically in Africa, coffee has been produced on a small scale.' He emphasizes the importance of this difference, as estates tend to involve coerced labour while smallholders are voluntary and independent, with greater insurance when prices fall. In Indonesia, coffee is almost entirely grown by smallholders. This was true even under the oppressive Dutch Cultivation System, which was largely comprised of 'coerced smallholders' (Clarence-Smith 2003, p. 110). With ethical reforms, new laws allowed Europeans to own land directly, leading to the creation of estates in Java. These estates, though, contributed to the spread of plant-based diseases, and were broken up at independence. Outside of Java, the rule has always been smallholdings. Since the 1920s, 'the engine of growth of the Indonesian coffee industry was to be the Sumatran smallholder' (McStocker 1987, p. 43). Indonesian state planners neglected coffee production for this reason, commodities such as petroleum, palm oil, and minerals are easier to centralize and tax. The growth of coffee in Indonesia has been bottom-up, with village smallholders producing coffee for export through cooperatives. Similarly, coffee in Papua New Guinea was once produced by colonial estates. At independence, these estates were broken up and new areas of cultivation remained small-scale. Today, nearly ninety percent of Papuan coffee is grown by smallholders (West 2012, p. 7). Coffee represents a surprisingly small portion of Papua New

Guinea's economy, as the state has neglected coffee in favour of centralized, taxable resources such as mining and palm oil. West (2012, p. 10) notes that 'coffee is the only export commodity owned and operated by the local people.' Importantly, Costa Rica, the Latin American country seen as exceptional by critics of global trade, is characterized by smallholders. Instead of seeing Costa Rica as a more ethical outlier, it is actually more consistent with coffee growing around the world.

While Daviron and Ponte (2005, p. 66) suggest that the production and export of coffee is exemplary of global commodities, coffee actually seems unusual. Baffes et al (2005, p. 297) note that, unlike other crops most coffee is produced by smallholders. Latin American countries such as Brazil are unique in the extent to which they have mechanized production, something only possible for low-quality Robusta beans in large-scale operations. Coffee does not benefit from economies of scale, operating best through smallholder production, and provides employment for millions of people. Talbot (2004, p. 41) sees this cup as half empty, since it means that more livelihoods are affected by fluctuating prices. To see the cup as half full, we should appreciate that coffee is owned by smallholders and offers diffuse economic benefits, especially outside of Latin America.

### **Dependence: domestic & farm levels**

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If coffee provides wide employment and allows small farmers to participate in world markets, price volatility can have especially large impacts in the developing world. This leads some experts to demand a new agreement to stabilize prices. Talbot (2004, p. 216) suggests precisely this, adding that while the ICA froze out 'new' producers, he assures us that a 'prolonged period of an unregulated market has erased that history.' While a cartel that can limit production and purchase reserves when prices decline may help stabilize prices, another way to manage volatility is through diversification. And again, while Latin American producers have been more or less dependent on coffee revenues, Asian producers feature more diverse economies at the national and farm levels.

Coffee producers vary tremendously in terms of their economic diversification. Latin America and many African states tend to feature export economies dominated by coffee. In a sense, this is a product of being flagship members of the ICA, which raised the price of coffee and provided few incentives to produce other crops. Talbot (2004, p. 40) shows that, in the 1960s and 1970s, major producers under the ICA were largely dependent on coffee at rates far above comparable export crops. In recent decades, only Brazil has managed to diversify its economy, in part aided by coffee revenue (Topik and Samper 2006, p. 124). As of 2012, soybeans, sugar, and meat exports produced more revenue than coffee. Other ICA beneficiaries have failed to

follow this example. Coffee is second to gold among legal non-petroleum exports in Colombia, second to textiles in El Salvador, and is the top export from Guatemala. In Asia, national economies look very different. Coffee does not even rank among Indonesia's top twenty exports, which are spread across numerous sectors. In Vietnam, communications technology, footwear, and computers are the major exports, with coffee representing about 3% of the export economy (OEC 2015). Asian economies are more diverse than Latin American or African economies, so are less dependent on coffee and are thus shielded from market volatility.

While national-level indicators are important, it is also useful to look at the village level, especially if our bottom line is the livelihoods of farmers. After all, a national economy may not depend on coffee, but specific regions and farms might, increasing economic as well as ecological risk. Alternatively, and this is what we find in Africa, farmers may produce a variety of crops, but national exports may be dependent on coffee. If coffee prices drop, these farmers will be in a better position than those who plant only coffee. Farm diversity is linked to scale, as large estates are more likely to feature monocultures, while smallholders usually prefer polyculture.

Talbot (2004, p. 36) suggests that 'In coffee growing regions, the local economy depends on coffee income.' This represents an apt characterization of many Latin American producers. Authors have lamented that, after the ICA and with the decline of coffee prices, farmers have had no choice but to diversify their crops. This is another problem of the ICA raising coffee prices while other crops remain less lucrative, as farmers took the risk and focused on one cash crop, sometimes at the expense of subsistence crops. V. Ernesto Méndez (2008, p. 217) has found that, along with tapping into Fair Trade networks, 'diversifying the coffee plantation with marketable crop or tree species' has been a dominant response to the decline in coffee prices. Unpredictable prices in the 1990s led farmers to plant fruit and other trees, as farmers increasingly prioritize 'crop diversification over the maximization of one specific crop' as insurance against price fluctuations.

Crop diversification represents a long-standing norm in the 'Old World' Indian Ocean producers, who have long histories of market risk and smallholders who are unwilling to gamble on coffee. Historically, Yemeni production consisted of smallholders planting multiple crops (Topik 2003, p.26). Similarly, in Réunion, coffee fields were typically polycultures, providing essential foods to ships in port and spreading risk against the effects of tropical storms (Campbell 2003, p. 69). Coffee in Madagascar is typically grown in small farms, where unlike most Europeans, natives 'intercropped subsistence crops...which helped them to survive periods of vicissitude' (Campbell 2003, p. 82). In Tanzania, villagers liked planting coffee more than other cash crops because it was less onerous and could be included in local fields (Curtis 2003, p. 320).

Shifting to Southeast Asia, a core argument in James Scott's *The Moral Economy of the Peasant* (1976) is that Southeast Asian peasants are risk averse, foregoing profit to avoid disaster. Farmers limit risk by planting multiple seed varieties and crops. Farmers may still plant cash crops, but these are secondary to the subsistence crops. Consistent with this, most Southeast Asian smallholders do not depend on coffee. Clarence-Smith (2003, p. 107) emphasizes the norm of mixed crops in Asia, specifically Central Java's 'elaborate crop mixes.' Jeff Neilson and Felicity Shonk (2014) describe smallholder production in Sulawesi, where Toraja Highlanders gain significant returns on coffee crops, but for some reason this does not lead villagers to expand production. The authors explain this seemingly irrational economic behaviour in terms of local economic diversification as well as a cultural preference for crops with symbolic value. They found that 'coffee is a single component within complex livelihood strategies... Coffee was not, on average, the most important income source for respondent households.' In my fieldwork in Central Aceh, many self-proclaimed coffee cooperatives list coffee as one of nearly a dozen commodities, and few households consider coffee to be their primary income generator. Like national economic diversity, farm-level diversity in the form of polycultures and intercropping are important forms of insurance against price fluctuations, as well as poor weather or infestations. Crucially, while they seek the same ends of protecting against market instability, polycultures and the ICA work against one another, as raising coffee prices pushes farmers to specialize in coffee at the expense of other crops, with economic as well as ecological risks.

### **Exports and consumption**

Fridell (2014, p. 11) rightly notes that the profits available to farmers through coffee are limited by the risks inherent in the commodity's 'intense cycles of boom and bust,' a pattern that is best managed through market intervention. Above, I noted that one alternative is to diversify at the national and farm levels. Another way to protect against market volatility is for coffee producers to cater to regional and domestic markets. This represents another fundamental difference between the Atlantic and Indian Ocean worlds, as coffee in Latin America is largely exported to Euro-American consumers, while in the Indian Ocean, coffee is also exported regionally and is consumed locally. This again provides insurance against market fluctuations, and also has implications for how we view the coffee trade.

Latin American producers tend not to trade coffee regionally, since it is grown by multiple countries and few are consumers, so coffee is almost entirely exported to North America and Europe. Export destinations for Asian producers are far more diverse, marketing coffee to Australia, Japan, the Middle East, and increasingly China, as well as to Western consumers.

About eighty percent of Latin American coffee exports are sent to North America and Europe (Talbot 2004, p. 43). For Asian producers, this number is about sixty percent. The variety of export destinations cushions exogenous economic shocks, spreading risk across markets.

Not only do Latin American producers export mostly to the United States and Europe, there is little domestic consumption, heightening the effects of dependency. With the exception of Brazil, Latin American countries do not see much domestic consumption. El Salvador, Guatemala, Honduras, Nicaragua, and Colombia do not consume much coffee, preferring instead yerba mate, tea, and cocoa. Meanwhile, the Indian Ocean world is characterized by producer-consumers. This is to be expected with the longer history of coffee discussed above, as Ethiopia, Yemen, and Indonesia have developed tastes for coffee over several centuries. Not only does this represent a more sustainable economic system, as the retraction of global demand can be buttressed by local consumption, this challenges a core tenet of dependency theories, which divide the world into producers and consumers. In dependency theories, the destination of a crop is ‘fundamental for understanding its internal consequences’ (Topik and Wells 1998, p. 40). In the studies of coffee discussed above, there is a clear tendency to separate the world into developing and developed, south and north, producer and consumer. Daviron and Ponte (2005, p. XIX, 50) note that coffee is produced by the south for the north. Talbot (2004, p. 7) speaks in terms of core and periphery, with his commodity chain model presupposing this pattern. Commodity chain research typically lacks space for domestic consumption, as commodities move unidirectionally from producers to consumers. A great deal of coffee, however, is consumed where it is produced. Baffes et al (2005) suggest that 20% of coffee is not traded internationally. They estimate that among major producers, Brazil, Ethiopia, and Indonesia all consume over a quarter of their production. In 2012, just over thirty percent of coffee was consumed in production countries, a pattern which is growing annually (ICO 2014). Indonesian consumers increasingly prefer high-quality beans, no longer limited to powdered robusta.

Why do so many authors overlook domestic consumption? For some, it does not tell the dichotomized, simplistic story they want to tell. For others, it is linked to their use of data. Many authors use the terms ‘production’ and ‘export’ interchangeably, as well as ‘consumption’ and ‘import’ (Daviron and Ponte 2005, p. 58). Another factor is that domestic consumption is vastly under-reported in official statistics. African and Asian coffee production involves smallholders in weak states, with governments incapable of collecting taxes or producing reliable data. The very nature of coffee production in the Indian Ocean world makes accurate data problematic. As noted above, such states prefer mining, petroleum, and palm oil because they are easier to regulate and tax. Coffee grown by a farmer who either consumes it or sells it in a village market will not be represented in production data. The only time

coffee in such countries is counted is when it is exported, otherwise farmers have incentives to avoid the state because to be counted is to be taxed. This distorts estimates of global production, allowing us only to speak of global exports. For scholars emphasizing how the north consumes the products of the south, this systematic bias in the data exaggerates the very trade flows they seek to problematize.

### **Conclusions: towards a balanced brew**

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The burgeoning literature on coffee seems anchored in the Atlantic world, featuring Latin American production and Euro-American consumption, along with a sense of dependency and even exploitation. This paper has suggested a need to balance this Atlantic-centric view with an Indian Ocean perspective, as coffee production in eastern Africa, the Middle East, South Asia, and Southeast Asia is less amenable to dependency theories. The Indian Ocean world has a much longer history of coffee consumption and trade. A balanced view provides an opportunity to rethink a range of topics, from the historical origins of coffee, to the failure of international agreements, farming, dependency, and coffee consumption.

The differences between the Atlantic and Indian Ocean worlds are of course not absolute. In terms of national dependency, some African producers resemble Central America more than they do Asia. A global view of coffee allows us to rethink many assumptions in Latin America, as not all Latin American coffee is grown in large estates or as monocultures. Some Central American states are home to smallholders akin to eastern Africa or Southeast Asia. I should also note some important features of coffee that are consistently negative around the world, such as its role as a frontier crop and its value being captured by Western roasters.

A greater appreciation of the Indian Ocean world allows us to better understand where we are going. Asian development has brought about a rebalancing of world power. While many in the West see this as new, and perhaps threatening, many in eastern Africa, the Muslim world, and Asia see this as a return to the past. Coffee production and consumption are growing in Asia. While Brazil alone produced ninety percent of the world's coffee a century ago, today Latin America produces just over half of the world's supply, with Africa over ten percent and Asia above thirty. Too often, the rise of Asian producers tends to be viewed as 'new' to the world of coffee and a threat to Latin American production. As I hope to have shown, they are historic producers, and can only be called new if we begin our story in the mid-twentieth century. The rise of Asian production is nothing novel. Coffee production today looks much like it did in the 1850s, and this greater regional balance demands that we rethink how we view this important commodity.

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