

Coffee: An Indian Ocean Perspective

Dr. Shane Joshua Barter

sbarter@soka.edu

Coffee is a part of daily life for millions of people around the world, fuelling their mornings, providing a respite from work, and energizing their nights. It is served ‘instant’, in diners and gas stations, frothed with sugar and milk, and in the clevers and clovers of third-wave cafes. In recent decades, coffee has become the focus of sustained scholarly attention. Coffee is a major global 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. In this scholarship, there exists a marked focus on Latin American production and Euro-American consumption. The Atlantic World dominates scholarship in ways that are not reflected in the historical or contemporary worlds of coffee.

It is high time that the emphasis on the Atlantic World is complemented by an emphasis on 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 understand better a number of core themes in the production and consumption of coffee. Adding an Indian Ocean perspective helps us to better understand the history, politics, and economics of coffee, moving away from dependency theories and towards a more nuanced, and perhaps optimistic view. It also helps make sense of contemporary trends in coffee exports; instead of a decline in Latin American production relative to ‘new’ Asian producers, are seeing is a return to much older and more balanced production patterns.

This paper begins by discussing the importance of seeing historical interactions and international trade in terms of ocean regions, cutting across traditional ‘area studies’. The second part seeks to demonstrate 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. Given the long history of coffee in the Muslim world, it is all the more confusing that coffee research is so Atlantic-centric. Part four unpacks what an Indian Ocean view does for our understanding of coffee, touching on the demise of the International Coffee Agreement, pricing, farming, dependency, consumption, and culture. All told, this paper suggests not that the Atlantic World is unimportant or that the Indian Ocean World is poised to overtake it, but instead calls for greater balance among experts of coffee production and consumption.

Oceans Connect

While area experts tend to divide the world into continents and regions, such as Latin America, Europe, Africa, the Middle East, Southeast Asia, and more, such categories tend to overlook dynamics operating across such regions. 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. The pioneer here is Fernand Braudel’s work on the Mediterranean World, which rejects seeing Europe, the Middle East, and Africa as distinct areas in favour of telling history through the sea that connects them. For Braudel, the cultures dotting the Mediterranean “lived and breathed with the same rhythms...with identical problems and general trends if not identical consequences.”¹ 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 more recent interactions.

¹ Fernand Braudel, *The Mediterranean and the Mediterranean World in the Age of Philip II: Volume I* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1995), 14.

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, cultural flows, security organizations, and commodity chains. Instead of seeing things in terms of Europe, Africa, and the Americas, focusing on the shores of the Atlantic helps us to understand a great deal of human activity. 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.² The Indian Ocean is also increasingly seen as a world region.³ Anthony Reid's *Southeast Asia in an Age of Commerce* situates Southeast Asia in terms of trade networks, connecting it with the Arab World, India, and Europe.⁴ The Maritime Silk Road brought spices, silks, and other goods such as coffee 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, Indonesia, and Australia, also subsuming trade passing through the Ocean from nearby areas. Just as the Atlantic World connects the Americas with Europe and Africa, the Indian Ocean World connects Africa, the Middle East, South Asia, and Southeast Asia. While studies of coffee have not tended to consciously speak of ocean regions,⁵ the literature prioritizes Latin American production and Anglo-American and European consumption, as well as African labour. Speaking in terms of ocean worlds represents a useful way to characterize coffee research, helping to identify some shortcomings.⁶

Coffee as an Atlantic Commodity

In surveying the vast, impressive literatures related to coffee production and consumption, one is struck by the extent to which authors are attached to the Atlantic World. The picture one gets when reading research on coffee is that it is an Atlantic commodity.⁷ Several major studies of coffee politics, culture, and economics contain similar historical overviews. They begin 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. These sections tend to be brief and lightly referenced, providing perfunctory early histories. Studies go into more detail once coffee arrives in

² Shane Joshua Barter, "Area Studies, Asian Studies, and the Pacific Basin," *Geographical Review* 105:1 (2015); 105-119.

³ See Edward A. Alpers, *The Indian Ocean in World History* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014); K.N. Chaudhuri, *Trade and Civilization in the Indian Ocean: An Economic History from the Rise of Islam to 1570* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1985).

⁴ Anthony Reid, *Southeast Asia in the Age of Commerce 1450-1680* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1988).

⁵ For an exception, see Michel Tuchscherer, "Coffee in the Red Sea Area from the Sixteenth to the Nineteenth Century," in *The Global Coffee Economy in Africa, Asia, and Latin America, 1500-1989*, edited by William Gervase Clarence-Smith and Steven Topik (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003); pp. 50-66.

⁶ In studying coffee trades, writers have approximated the Atlantic and Indian Ocean Worlds. Steven Topik and Allen Wells emphasize how, since the nineteenth century, Latin America has been intimately tied to North American and European markets. Clarence-Smith discusses Latin America in relation to "Old World" producers in Africa, Asia, and the Pacific, overlapping with the idea of the Indian Ocean World. Steven Topik and Allen Wells, *The Second Conquest of Latin America: Coffee, Henequen, and Oil during the Export Boom, 1850-1930* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1998); William Gervase Clarence-Smith, "The Coffee Crisis in Asia, Africa, and the Pacific, 1870-1914," in *The Global Coffee Economy in Africa, Asia, and Latin America*, pp. 100-119.

⁷ Tellingly, the covers of films and books are centered on the Americas and the Atlantic. Irene Angelico, director, *Black Coffee* (2007); Mark Pendergrast, *Uncommon Grounds: The History of Coffee and How it Transformed Our World* (New York: Basic Books, first and second editions); Catherine M. Tucker, *Coffee Culture: Local Experiences, Global Connections* (London: Routledge, 2011).

Haiti, and then far more about Brazil and Colombia. Gavin Fridell’s work is illustrative. After two paragraphs on capital in Europe, Fridell provides one paragraph on Africa and the Middle East, one on Asian production fuelling the rise of European demand for coffee, and then dozens of pages to the Atlantic slave trade, Brazilian production, and Western corporate rule.⁸ This is replicated in a more recent book as well.⁹ Fridell emphasizes the centrality of history in explaining contemporary patterns of exploitation, a history rooted in colonialism and imperialism, but glosses over earlier history and examples from beyond the Atlantic colonial system.¹⁰ John Talbot’s study of the coffee commodity chain displays a similar pattern, where early African, Arab, and Asian coffee is discussed in a single paragraph before providing several chapters emphasizing Brazil Colombia, and the United States. Talbot states that “The legacy of colonialism is clear in this early history” of coffee—“early” meaning nineteenth century.¹¹ Benoit Daviron and Stefano Ponte’s study of global coffee markets begins its history with Brazil,¹² only mentioning the Middle East in reference to the origins of the term ‘Mocha’, although they later provide a discussion of contemporary African production. In a popular volume of the history of coffee, Mark Pendergrast offers several pages of African and Middle Eastern history, although his book is primarily about American coffee companies and Latin American production. Although hardly a perfect measure, 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. The results are provided below in Table 1.

Table 1: Country references in major studies of coffee

	Fridell ¹³	Talbot ¹⁴	Daviron & Ponte ¹⁵	Pendergrast ¹⁶
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

While not perfect measures, the covers, histories, and country references help paint a picture of an Atlantic-centered literature among these popular, heavily cited texts. Of course, there are several studies dedicated to coffee outside of the Atlantic world. Steven Topik and William Gervase Clarence-Smith’s edited volume stands out for its regional balanced, framed as a response to a

⁸ Gavin Fridell, *Fair Trade Coffee: The Prospects and Pitfalls of Market-Driven Social Justice* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2007), 103.

⁹ Gavin Fridell, *Coffee* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2014); pp. 23-60.

¹⁰ Fridell, *Coffee*, 23.

¹¹ John M. Talbot, *Grounds for Agreement: The Political Economy of the Coffee Commodity Chain* (Lanham, MD: Rowman and Littlefield, 2004), 45.

¹² Benoit Daviron and Stefano Ponte, *The Coffee Paradox: Global Markets, Commodity Trade, and the Elusive Promise of Development* (London: Zed Books, 2005), 83.

¹³ Fridell, *Fair Trade Coffee*.

¹⁴ Talbot, *Grounds for Agreement*.

¹⁵ Daviron and Ponte, *The Coffee Paradox*.

¹⁶ Pendergrast, *Uncommon Grounds*.

literature dominated by Latin America.¹⁷ Overall though, the prioritization of the Atlantic World is at odds with contemporary production patterns. In 2014, Latin America accounted for fifty seven percent of all coffee exports (Brazil alone accounts for thirty two percent), African countries account for about eleven percent, while Asian countries represent thirty one percent.¹⁸ While the Atlantic World accounts for the majority of coffee production, the Indian Ocean World of eastern Africa and Asia account for over forty percent, and each year the Atlantic and Indian Oceans Worlds creep towards parity. The Atlantic-centric literature is even more puzzling when we look at the early history of coffee, which was dominated by the Indian Ocean until the nineteenth century.

Coffee: An Indian Ocean History

If coffee began in Africa and the Middle East, and then spread to South and Southeast Asia, what happened to coffee in these areas? 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 (the principle coffee port in Yemen), Java (the island in Indonesia), Arabica beans, and even the word coffee, which originated in Arabic (*kahwa*) and arrived in Europe by way of Turkey (*kahve*). 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 newly energetic goats eating coffee.¹⁹ Others note that coffee was originally eaten in balls of fat to provide energy for highland Oromo warriors.²⁰ Coffee may have entered the Arab world as early as the sixth century, or perhaps the eighth, but more clearly was present in the fourteenth.²¹ Due in part to a prohibition on alcohol (itself an Arabic term), the Muslim world embraced coffee as a social beverage, becoming ‘the Wine of Islam’. At the beginning of the fifteenth century, coffee spread to Cairo, as Yemeni Sufis studying at al-Azhar brought the drink to campus.²² Soon, coffeehouses became a regular feature across the Muslim world, providing fertile soil for dissidence and perceived ‘immoral behaviour’. In 1511, a Meccan official outlawed coffee, although this decree was not enforced beyond the Arab Peninsula, with coffee culture continuing to grow in Turkey and Egypt, especially after the Ottomans conquered Yemen in the 1530s.²³ Over the next two centuries, coffeehouses moved in and out of favour with Muslim rulers, who framed coffee as a social danger and drug akin to alcohol.²⁴ While alcohol is widely considered forbidden in Islam, and tobacco is debated, scholarly consensus emerged that coffee is permissible.²⁵

While 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 long before European colonialism. Sufism is not a sect like Sunni or Shia, but

¹⁷ Steve Topik and William Gervase Clarence-Smith, “Introduction: Coffee and Global Development,” in *The Global Coffee Economy in Africa, Asia, and Latin America*, 12.

¹⁸ *International Coffee Organization*, “Total Production of all Exporting Countries,” www.ico.org/prices/po-production.pdf.

¹⁹ Pendergrast, *Uncommon Grounds*, 3.

²⁰ Tucker, *Coffee Culture*, 36.

²¹ Islamic scholars Rhazes (850-922 CE) and Avicenna (980-1037 CE) refer to a drink called ‘bunchum’ in terms of its stimulating properties. The link between ‘bunchum’ and coffee remains debated. William Ukers notes that regardless of whether *bunchum* was made from a root or from coffee, “the Arabs knew coffee as far back as the year 800.” Benjamin Moseley, *A treatise Concerning the Properties and Effects of Coffee* (1792), 7-9; William Harrison Ukers, *All About Coffee* (1935).

²² Ralph S. Hattox, *Coffee and Coffeehouses: The Origins of a Social Beverage in the Medieval Near East* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1985), 27.

²³ Tucker, *Coffee Culture*, 51-52.

²⁴ Hattox, *Coffee and Coffeehouses*.

²⁵ Mark J. Sedgwick, *Sufism: The Essentials* (Cairo: University of Cairo Press, 2003).

instead represents a tendency towards mysticism.²⁶ Tuchscherer suggests that the Sufi Shâdhiliyya Brotherhood may have been the first to grind coffee beans and distil the drink, part of their spiritual exercises.²⁷ Tucker ties the expansion of coffee to Sufism, as coffee “helped them stay alert in their nighttime devotions.”²⁸ 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, a core theme in Sufi devotion.²⁹ Coffee plays an important religious role, blessed before some ceremonies, with a special area for coffee preparation in Sufi lodges and an official, known in Turkish as the *iceri medyancisi*, tasked with preparing and serving the drink.³⁰ One Sufi Brotherhood retreated each winter to a remote area where they drank only coffee, no water, for weeks of oral prayers and chanting (*dhikr*).³¹ Coffeeshouses were historically part of religious property endowments (*waqf*), providing meeting houses for Sufi devotionals. When Arab officials sought to ban coffeeshouses, this was not just due to a fear of political activism, but also an effort to limit Sufism. During a period of instability in the Ottoman Empire in 1665, officials banned Sufi orders, an act that came with the destruction of prominent coffeeshouses.³²

It was through Sufi mystics that coffee spread throughout the Indian Ocean. While Talbot suggests that the spread of coffee beyond eastern Africa “was a project of European colonizers,”³³ the arrival of coffee across the Indian Ocean had nothing to do with Europeans. Sufism provided a sort of gateway Islam, as its emphasis on the oneness of God and tolerance of acculturation made Sufism the perfect 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. Known as Southeast Asia’s Verandah to Mecca, Aceh boasted the region’s first Islamic community, Sultanate, and Islamic schools. The most powerful of Aceh’s rulers was Iskandar Muda (Young Alexander, r. 1607-1636 CE), a Sufi Monist who was known for his centralizing tendencies, state support for Islam, and constant wars. Under Muda, some of Aceh’s great Islamic scholars, Hamzah Fansuri and Shams al-Din al Sumatrani, achieved considerable power. As the Sufi state supported mosque construction and Islamic education, coffee was an essential part of Islamic practice. Coffee became part of martial arts (*silat*) training regimens within Sufi orders and was found in most traditional Islamic boarding schools (*dayah*). In the seventeenth century, Europeans in southern Thailand, another Sufi scholarly center, observed Muslims drinking coffee.³⁴ In Western Aceh, local entrepreneurs began growing coffee in the eighteenth century, refusing to pay taxes to the Sultan, and became involved in the global coffee trade selling directly to American pepper merchants.³⁵ Sufi influence spread southward to West Sumatra, whose early Islamic groups were known coffee drinkers as well as cultivators.³⁶ Again, the arrival of Sufism and coffee went hand in hand, in this case following

²⁶ While the West tends to focus on Sufi dancers, such as Turkey’s ‘Whirling Dervishes’, and scholars prioritize Sufi scholars such as al-Ghazali, it is important not to overlook puritanical elements in Sufism, such as Sudan’s Mahdiyah in the late nineteenth century.

²⁷ Tuchscherer, “Coffee in the Red Sea Area from the Sixteenth to the Nineteenth Century,” 51.

²⁸ Tucker, *Coffee Culture*, 36.

²⁹ Hattox, *Coffee and Coffeeshouses*, 14.

³⁰ Ayla Esen Algar, *The Dervish Lodge: Architecture, Art, and Sufism in Ottoman Turkey* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1992), 182.

³¹ Heghnar Zeitlien Watenpaugh, *The Image of an Ottoman City: Imperial Architecture and Urban Experience in Aleppo in the 16th and 17th Centuries* (Leiden: Brill, 2004), 150.

³² Sedgwick, *Sufism: The Essentials*.

³³ Talbot, *Grounds for Agreement*, 1.

³⁴ Anthony Reid et al, *Southeast Asian Exports since the 14th Century*, 142. Reid, *Southeast Asia in the Age of Commerce*, 38.

³⁵ James W. Gould, “Sumatra—America’s Pepperpot, 1784-1873, Part One,” *Essex Institute Historical Collections* 92:2 (1956); Topik and Clarence-Smith, “Introduction,” 5; Antony Wild, *Coffee: A Dark History* (New York: W.W. Norton and Company, 2005), 99.

³⁶ H. A. Steijn Parvé (1855), cited in Michael Laffan, *The Makings of Indonesian Islam: Orientalism and the Narration of a Sufi Past* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2011), 253.

centuries-old gold trading routes.³⁷ By nineteenth century, the Minang highlands in West Aceh were producing coffee, prior to Dutch control.³⁸ The link between Sufism and the spread of coffee is an important, often neglected point which highlights the pre-colonial roots of coffee in the Indian Ocean.

It is also important to recognize is that coffee was part of a complex system of international trade long before the arrival of Europeans. While not global, as it did not include the Americas, the Indian Ocean was the heart of a trading system that spanned Europe and Africa to East Asia. Authors tend to assume that global trade is a Western invention, downplaying centuries of commerce across the Muslim world and China. Fridell 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.”³⁹ His historical discussion begins by noting 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.”⁴⁰ It should be recalled that one of the very reasons for colonialism was to become part of a long-standing international trading system, as European demand for spices and other goods was making Europe’s Muslim rivals rich. Ralph Hattox explains that coffee was big business, with Yemenis working to maintain a monopoly over planting and Cairo becoming the hub of a futures market and price speculators in the early 1500s.⁴¹ 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.⁴² As Topik and Clarence-Smith observe, “beans were planted in India by Muslim pilgrims in the seventeenth century, long before the British took any interest in the crop.”⁴³ Europeans hardly invented multinational trade and were not the first to view coffee as a commodity, to seek monopolies on its export, or create plantations.

European colonialism and demand for commodities expanded the precolonial coffee trade. Anthony Reid notes that the ‘Age of Commerce’ in Southeast Asia and the Indian Ocean, a period of market expansion and growing wealth, began before European arrival, benefitting from stability in Ming China and the Ottoman Empire, Japanese silver, as well as enriched by early European colonial traders. He dates the end of this era in the 1680s, when Japanese markets closed, China faced internal turmoil, and wars in Europe limited the demand for exports.⁴⁴ 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 finally able to dominate the Indian Ocean by the eighteenth century. The production of coffee mirrors this change, as Europeans finally managed to secure coffee trees and plant them outside of Ethiopia and Yemen, allowing them to control trade and siphon 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 coffee producer. While this marked a shift from Arab control towards European dominance, coffee remained an Indian Ocean

³⁷ Delmus Puneri Salim, *The Transnational and the Local in the Politics of Islam: The Case of West Sumatra, Indonesia* (London: Springer, 2015), 13.

³⁸ Laffan, *The Makings of Indonesian Islam*, 42.

³⁹ Fridell, *Fair Trade Coffee*, 104.

⁴⁰ Fridell, *Fair Trade Coffee*, 103.

⁴¹ Hattox, *Coffee and Coffeehouses*, 72.

⁴² Gregory Dicum and Nina Luttinger, *The Coffee Book: Anatomy of an Industry from Crop to the Last Drop* (New York: The New Press, 1999), 6. James S. Duncan, “Embodying Colonialism? Domination and Resistance in Nineteenth-Century Ceylonese Coffee Plantations,” *Journal of Geographic History* 28:3 (2002), 319.

⁴³ Topik and Clarence-Smith, “Introduction,” 5.

⁴⁴ Anthony Reid, *Southeast Asia in the Age of Commerce, 1450-1680: Volume 2, Expansion and Crisis* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1995), 285.

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, echoed today in the label of Bourbon coffees. The island's brief ascent ended by the 1750s due to British pressure, plant fungus, and the collapse of the French East India Company, although Réunion creoles soon established new fields in Madagascar.⁴⁵ In Sri Lanka, the Dutch had long traded coffee with native cultivators, but it was in 1820 that British officials first established major plantations.⁴⁶ By 1840, the British seized 'vacant' land for the crown and established large estates to export tea and coffee, with production growing over the next fifty years.

Typical of early colonialism, the Dutch were initially limited to maritime trade, with a light presence on land until the late seventeenth century. The exception was around Batavia (modern Jakarta), near which the Dutch began planting coffee. The Dutch collected coffee from villagers in Priangan, West Java, as a form of tax, and in 1725, 1200 tons a year were exported to Amsterdam. Dutch expansion changed radically in the early nineteenth century, as the Dutch East India Company was bankrupt and the Netherlands government assumed control. Shortly after, the Netherlands fell to France in the Napoleonic Wars, and in 1811 the British occupied the Dutch East Indies. As the Dutch returned, a new era of direct colonialism began. A system of forced cultivation was created by Governor General van den Bosch 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 began in Java and soon expanded to West Sumatra and some Dutch-controlled areas in the eastern islands. By 1850, 75,000 tons of coffee were from the Indies exported annually, obtained almost entirely through forced cultivation.⁴⁷ 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 massively influential *Max Havelaar*, 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. With the exception of a resurgence of exports in the 1920s, coffee production in the East Indies declined relative to new Latin American producers.

The nineteenth century saw coffee expand throughout Southeast Asia. In Vietnam, coffee plants were brought by French missionaries in an effort to encourage hill communities to settle. French colonizers established coffee plantations in highland regions by the 1890s.⁴⁸ It was in the 1920s, in Dak Lak Province, that coffee cultivation really expanded. Among the two thousand tons grown annually, little was exported to France, as domestic demand was considerable and France already enjoyed a steady supply.⁴⁹ Despite the frequent claim that Vietnam is a "newcomer" into the coffee market,⁵⁰ the country has a long history of coffee cultivation and, as will be discussed below, consumption. In the 1940s, Vietnamese coffee collapsed as a consequence of World War II, a wave of leaf diseases, and the long independence struggles against France, the United States, and China. Another colonial producer in the Asia-Pacific is Papua New Guinea. In the 1880s, German

⁴⁵ Gwyn Campbell, "The Origins and Development of Coffee Production in Réunion and Madagascar, 1711-1972," in *The Global Coffee Economy in Africa, Asia, and Latin America*, pp. 67-99.

⁴⁶ Duncan, "Embodying Colonialism?" 320.

⁴⁷ Robert McStocker, "The Indonesian Coffee Industry," *Bulletin of Indonesian Economic Studies* 23:1 (1987), 42.

⁴⁸ Sylvie Doutriaux, Charles Geisler, and Gerald Shively, "Competing for Coffee Space: Development-Induced Displacement in the Central Highlands of Vietnam," *Rural Sociology* 73:4 (2008), 530.

⁴⁹ Charles Robequain, *L'évolution économique de l'Indochine française* (Paris: Hartman, 1939), 80.

⁵⁰ Fridell, *Fair Trade Coffee*, 145. Seth Petchers and Shayna Harris, "The Roots of the Coffee Crisis," in *Confronting the Coffee Crisis: Fair Trade, Sustainable Livelihoods, and Ecosystems in Mexico and Central America*, edited by Christopher M. Bacon et al (Cambridge: the MIT Press, 2008), 44-46.

colonizers created early plantations, followed closely by Australian planters further south.⁵¹ 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, with Europeans establishing estates, and by the nineteenth century, coffee represented eighty percent of East Timor's exports.⁵²

In the Atlantic World, coffee had become a major industry by this time. Coffee was being grown by colonizers throughout Africa for European consumption. In the Western Hemisphere, coffee had arrived to Dutch Guiana (Suriname) and Saint Domingue (Haiti) in the late 1700s. French rulers in Saint Domingue utilized slave labour to become the world leader in coffee exports by 1788. This early peak was interrupted by the Haitian Revolution, sparked in the coffee growing highlands in the 1790s. The short-lived Haitian ascendancy, shipped largely to consumers in the United States, demonstrated the potential for an intra-American coffee trade. Coffee arrived to Brazil in the 1770s, becoming a major export in the 1820s. Fuelled by slave labour and extensive territory, Brazil produced half of the world's coffee exports by the 1850s. Despite the formal end to slavery in 1888, a second coffee boom occurred in the 1890s, assisted by the expansion of railways into the interior. During this time Colombia also became a major producer. It is crucial to note that Latin American production was a post-colonial affair, expanding after the independence struggles of the 1810s and 1820s. 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.⁵³

The above historical survey demonstrated the deep roots of coffee in the Indian Ocean World, and its more recent arrival to the Atlantic. Given this, the dismissive views of leading scholars towards coffee beyond the Atlantic World are all the more confusing. Ponte and Daviron suggested that “Eventually, during the 1980s and 1990s, coffee cultivation also spread to Asia.”⁵⁴ Talbot frames Asian countries as “non-traditional” exporters—“they had only begun to extensively plant coffee in the 1980s.”⁵⁵ Vietnamese in particular has been viewed as a “new” producer, with some authors attributing its rise to World Bank machinations⁵⁶ (despite being Communist and the industry beginning with Soviet aid). What explains this tendency to view Asian producers as “new” or “non-traditional”? In some way, this 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 as well as readers. The difficulty of learning the different spoken and written languages of Africa, the Middle East, South, and Southeast Asia presents a barrier to understanding regional history. It is also that, as will be discussed below, most coffee produced in Latin America was sent to Euro-American consumers, providing records as well as an interest. It may also be due to a perception of Asia and the Middle East as tea drinkers, overshadowing coffee in the Western imagination. The primary 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. It is beyond doubt that, by the early twentieth century, Latin American producers were dominant, as growing American consumption was based on Brazilian and Colombian 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.

⁵¹ Paige West, *From Modern Production to Imagined Primitive: The Social World of Coffee from Papua New Guinea* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2012), 73.

⁵² José Ramos Horta, *Funu: The Unfinished Saga of East Timor* (Asmara: Red Sea Press, 1996), 20.

⁵³ Daviron and Ponte, *The Coffee Paradox*, 58.

⁵⁴ Daviron and Ponte, *The Coffee Paradox*, 57.

⁵⁵ Talbot, *Grounds for Agreement*, 121.

⁵⁶ Wild, *Coffee*, 6.

It is important to discuss some of the reasons for Latin American domination in the early twentieth century. Independent of colonial rule and proximate to North American markets, Latin American governments focused on agricultural production. Despite a series of wars in the 1860s, Brazil benefitted from a period of stability, using the opportunity to expand.⁵⁷ The shift towards Latin American hegemony was not just due to its growth, but also to a series of crises in the Indian Ocean World. The crumbling Ottoman Empire and expanding European control limited the demand for coffee and dislocated trade routes, leading to a decline in Yemeni production.⁵⁸ In the late nineteenth century, leaf rust hit coffee crops in Java, followed by Sri Lanka and Vietnam, devastating local production, driving up prices, and thus encouraging Latin American production. Java's decline as a major producer was due to a combination of the end of forced cultivation in the 1880s and leaf rust—indeed the two were related, as the shift to estates meant a shift to monocultures, enabling the spread of diseases. From here, Asian countries had few opportunities to rebound, as colonizers preferred large-scale, top-down crops such as rubber. By the late 1930s, Asia witnessed increasing instability. Anti-colonial rebellions, the Japanese invasion, independence wars, and post-colonial ethnic conflicts brought decades of turmoil. This period of exceptional instability led to a decline in Asian coffee production, dwindling to about four percent of world exports. As a result, Brazil and to some extent Colombia came to dominate world production in the mid-twentieth century.

The Indian Ocean World represents the origins of coffee, not just as a drink, but also as a commodity and cultural feature. Key terms come from this region, which dominated the coffee world before colonialism, in the early colonial age, and helped usher in an age of high colonialism. By the late nineteenth century, however, it was eclipsed by producers in Latin America and consumers in the United States. Unfortunately, this is where many discussions begin. Studies refer to the nineteenth century as coffee's "early history,"⁵⁹ begin historical discussions with Europe⁶⁰ and Brazil,⁶¹ and even refer to coffee as "the American Drink."⁶² Eurocentrism is not necessarily about criticizing European power instead of praising it, but is instead about maintaining that Europeans sit at the center of world events. A better appreciation of wider dynamics is necessary to overcome Eurocentric, Atlantic-centric stories.

Atlantic and Indian Ocean Worlds: Some Implications

The above discussion suggested that writers have downplayed the longer history of coffee and the Indian Ocean World. It is not just that the telling of history demands adjustment, but also that an Atlantic-centric literature leads to several mischaracterizations of contemporary coffee politics and economics. Observing coffee only in Latin America encourages a particularly critical appraisal of coffee compared to what we see elsewhere. What does an Indian Ocean perspective do to our understanding of coffee as a global commodity? How does balancing the dominant emphasis on the Atlantic with an equal weighting of east Africa, the Middle East, and Asia help us to better understand the history, politics, and economics of coffee?

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

⁵⁷ Steven Topik, "The Integration of the World Coffee Market," in *The Global Coffee Economy in Africa, Asia, and Latin America*, 32.

⁵⁸ Tuchscherer, "Coffee in the Red Sea Area from the Sixteenth to the Nineteenth Century," 58.

⁵⁹ Talbot, *Grounds for Agreement*, 45.

⁶⁰ Fridell, *Coffee*, 25.

⁶¹ Robert H. Bates, *Open-Economy Politics: The Political Economy of the World Coffee Trade* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1997), 28; Daviron and Ponte, *The Coffee Paradox*, 58.

⁶² Pendergrast, *Uncommon Grounds*, 22, 45.

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 saved for the developed world.⁶³ *Dependencia* schools originated in Latin America, with key scholars and concepts from the south forcing Western scholars to rethink their views of development. The more Marxian dependency theories have even blamed coffee for Latin American underdevelopment, suggesting that trade makes producers less developed.⁶⁴ Dependency theories are very much based on the Atlantic World, focusing on Latin America producing for the United States and perhaps 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 or new forms of corporatism, with sometimes corrupt states leading capitalist growth.⁶⁵

Experts on coffee appear firmly rooted in the dependency school. Bates 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.⁶⁶ While Bates agrees with many insights offered by dependency accounts, he shows how such approaches cannot alone explain political development in Brazil. Steve Topik and Mario Samper also note the dominance of dependency theories in the coffee literature, noting that this approach “failed to predict the malleable nature of coffee cultivation”, especially in other parts of the world.⁶⁷ Topik and Clarence-Smith 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.⁶⁸ Despite these critiques, the coffee literature remains focused on North / South dichotomies and trade as exploitation. Fridell begins his study of Fair Trade 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.”⁶⁹ Daviron and Ponte’s *Coffee Paradox* is premised on growing wealth generated by coffee consumption while farmers in the global South become impoverished.⁷⁰ Talbot begins his study by emphasizing coffee being produced by developing countries for rich Western consumers, the core and the periphery.⁷¹ Similarly, Pendergrast explains coffee as “inextricably bound up” in the haves taking from the have-nots.⁷² It is not that dependency theories are not useful. There is no doubt that coffee is produced in tropical countries and a great deal of it is consumed in the northern, developed world, and that commodity producers all tend to be underpaid. 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 as well as variation by crop and region. Complementing an emphasis on the Atlantic with an Indian Ocean perspective has the potential to help experts rethink dependency, as things look very different outside of Latin America, and even Latin

⁶³ See Immanuel Wallerstein, *The Modern World System vol. 1: Capitalist Agriculture and the Origins of the European World-Economy in the Sixteenth Century* (New York: Academic Press, 1974).

⁶⁴ Topik and Wells, *The Second Conquest of Latin America*, 44.

⁶⁵ Chalmers Johnson, *MITI and the Japanese Miracle* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1982); Ziya Onis, “The Logic of the Developmental State,” *Comparative Politics* 24:1 (1991); pp. 109-126.

⁶⁶ Bates, *Open-Economy Politics*, 11.

⁶⁷ Steven Topik and Mario Samper, “The Latin American Coffee Commodity Chain: Brazil and Costa Rica,” in *From Silver to Cocaine: Latin American Commodity Chains and the Building of the World Economy, 1500-2000*, edited by Carlos Marichal and Zephyr Frank (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2006), 124.

⁶⁸ Topik and Clarence-Smith, “Introduction,” 12-14.

⁶⁹ Fridell, *Fair Trade Coffee*, 4-5. Later, Fridell speaks of the “exploitation pervasive in the coffee industry.” Fridell, *Fair Trade Coffee*, 135.

⁷⁰ Daviron and Ponte, *The Coffee Paradox*.

⁷¹ Talbot, *Grounds for Agreement*, 7.

⁷² Pendergrast, *Uncommon Grounds*, 409.

American coffee may not conform to standard accounts. Below, I note a number of specific areas in which an Indian Ocean perspective helps us to rethink our understanding of coffee: The collapse of the International Coffee Agreement (ICA), coffee prices, domestic dependence, consumption patterns, and coffee culture. In the end, I note that balancing Atlantic and Indian Ocean Worlds is the key to help understand contemporary and future patterns of coffee growth and consumption.

The Demise of the ICA

The demise of the International Coffee Agreement in 1989 has been viewed by many as a victory for neoliberalism against the Global South. After all, the collapse of global coffee prices and broader efforts by international financial institutions to get the state out of the market in the developing world led to drastic changes for coffee growers around the world and cheaper coffee prices for consumers. An improved appreciation of Indian Ocean producers 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 historical producers seeking to rebound after independence struggles, not just a victory for neoliberalism.

As early as the 1920s, the Brazilian state became involved in coffee governance, seeking to manage the industry and purchase excess stocks to keep prices up. In the 1950s, Brazil and Colombia came together to manage world coffee prices and avoid the market turbulence that coffee is prone to. In the late 1950s, African producers signed on as well, or more accurately, French, British, Portuguese, and Belgian rulers joined for their colonies. The 1950s was a boon to African coffee, as Asian production was down due to wars, 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, largely due to the threat of communism in Latin America and the importance of providing better returns on capitalist trade. 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 suggests that the end of the ICA “was directly tied to the policy discourses and practices of neoliberalization.”⁷³ Antony Wild suggests 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.⁷⁴ David Goodman suggests that the challenges faced by farmers in the global south are linked to the demise of the ICA and “the neo-liberal political project epitomized by the Washington consensus.”⁷⁵ Talbot suggests that neoliberalism led the US to abandon the ICA, which in turn fuelled structural adjustment policies.⁷⁶ Sure enough, as the ICA fell apart, coffee prices plummeted. By 1993, prices had fallen to one third their value one decade prior.⁷⁷ Fridell 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.⁷⁸ It is also important to note that, after this collapse, prices rebounded in 1993, dropped again in 2001, and by 2010 reached record highs.⁷⁹

⁷³ West, *From Modern Production to Imagined Primitive*, 97.

⁷⁴ Wild, *Coffee*, 5-6.

⁷⁵ David Goodman, “The International Coffee Crisis: A Review of the Issues,” in *Confronting the Coffee Crisis*, 5.

⁷⁶ Talbot, *Grounds for Agreement*, 92.

⁷⁷ Fridell, *Coffee*, 2.

⁷⁸ Fridell, *Coffee*, 64. Fridell illustrates this with Côte D’Ivoire, which saw a 69 percent drop in coffee prices, but neglects to mention, though, that the country was in the midst of a horrible civil war.

⁷⁹ Fridell, *Coffee*, 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 views the ICA, as a cartel which sought to raise prices to consumers given inelastic demand.⁸⁰ This Brazilian-led cartel sought to freeze 1962 levels of production, maintaining high prices for Western consumers, but also restricting rival producers. Brazil maintained veto power over ICA decisions and changes in export quotas, allowing it to maintain its dominance. Freezing 1962 was a good deal for many African producers, since production in the 1950s 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 other African producers faced civil war, their ICA-mandated quota remained above production levels.⁸¹ For Asian countries, 1962 was an extreme low-point, having faced the Japanese invasion, independence struggles, and continued ethnic violence. The ICA, then, had the effect of limiting Asian production to its lowest levels. In Indonesia, Robert McStocker notes that production was at its lowest point in the 1950s and 1960s due to violence and 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."⁸² Takayama Akiyama 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.⁸³ Despite being critical of neoliberalism in ending the ICA, West 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.⁸⁴ For Asia, the ICA was Atlantic collusion to keep them out, 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, which then sold it in international markets. The presence of this market hints that many countries, especially Indonesia and India, were producing beyond their low quotas. Even supporters of the ICA admit that its quotas "served to limit the entry of new [sic] producers to the market."⁸⁵ Fridell notes that the ICA faced significant internal dissent from small producers hurt by ICA quotas.⁸⁶ While referring to the ICA as a "golden era" for producing countries, Seth Petchers and Shayna Harris observe that it worked against smaller producers trying to enter or expand their markets.⁸⁷ Even though Talbot recognizes that the ICA served to restrict development for many countries, as quotas were based on "historic" production (meaning 1962),⁸⁸ he still interprets the death of the Agreement as a victory for neoliberalism and the "defeat of producers' collective action."⁸⁹ 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, Asian countries, and the United States, which wanted it to end. Talbot notes that the dissenting producers were those that were the "losers" in the ICA.⁹⁰ It is unclear, then, how the end of the ICA represents the defeat of producer solidarity, and not of Brazilian and

⁸⁰ Bates, *Open-Economy Politics*, 120. See also Topik and Clarence-Smith, "Introduction," 3.

⁸¹ Talbot, *Grounds for Agreement*, 68. One exception is in Madagascar, where ICA quotas were below French African production. Campbell, "The Origins and Development of Coffee Production in Réunion and Madagascar, 1711-1972," 97.

⁸² McStocker, "The Indonesian Coffee Industry," 41.

⁸³ Takayama Akiyama, "Coffee Market Liberalization since 1990," in *Commodity Market Reforms: Lessons of Two Decades*, edited by Takayama Akiyama et al (Washington: The World Bank, 2001), 89.

⁸⁴ West, *From Modern Production to Imagined Primitive*, 92.

⁸⁵ Talbot, *Grounds for Agreement*, 59.

⁸⁶ Fridell, *Coffee*, 63.

⁸⁷ Petchers and Harris, "The Roots of the Coffee Crisis," 44.

⁸⁸ Talbot, *Grounds for Agreement*, 77.

⁸⁹ Talbot, *Grounds for Agreement*, 67. See also Fridell, *Coffee*, 19.

⁹⁰ Talbot, *Grounds for Agreement*, 85.

Colombian hegemony. 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 hegemony. This represented an effort not to become new producers, but as the above history makes clear, was an effort to reclaim their former status.

Coffee Prices

One implication of shifting from looking at Latin American, especially Brazilian production, to a wider coffee world is that the prices fetched by coffee farmers appear slightly more equitable, though still insufficient. Authors rightly note that not enough of the money earned in Western coffee sales ends up in the pockets of farmers. This is the heart of Daviron and Ponte's *Coffee Paradox*, in which consumers in the West are paying increasingly high prices for Lattes and other specialty drinks while the income of farmers declines or remains stagnant.⁹¹ Even with Fair Trade coffees, scholars estimate that only fifteen percent of the total price ends up at the farm gate, part of the twenty five percent that returns to the country of origin, while seventy five percent of wealth is captured by exporters, roasters, and service staff.⁹² The Commodity Chain approach is crucial for identifying where wealth actually goes, although it should be noted that under the ICA, state regulatory agencies often extracted significant wealth at the expense of farmers.⁹³ Clearly, much more can be done to ensure that coffee production and export are less exploitative and represent a viable livelihood for producers.

This critique is especially poignant for countries like Brazil, whose economy has grown rapidly over the past decades. It should be noted, though, that most coffee producing countries are far poorer. Central American countries, Kenya, Tanzania, Uganda, India, Indonesia, Papua New Guinea, and Vietnam are at lower stages of development. One outcome is that the jobs generated and the revenue reaching farmers are more integral to local livelihoods. The money which does make its way to the farm gate provides more purchasing power in some countries than in others. While West notes that Papua New Guinea's coffee often fetches a lower price than other beans, due in large part to shipping costs,⁹⁴ she overlooks that the cost of living in Papua is far lower than in Brazil or other producers, meaning that the purchasing power of this revenue is greater. While the profits from coffee should be shared more equitably by importers, roasters, and corporations with producing countries and farmers, an emphasis on the major Latin American producers exaggerates the meager wages offered to farmers, producing a starker picture than if one looked at a wider range of countries.

Smallholders versus Estates

Latin American countries are also distinct in the ways that coffee is grown. While also featuring smallholders, Latin American is home to estates where coffee is cultivated on a large scale. Historically, Topik notes that early production in the Americas was linked to slavery, which was "coffee's handmaiden since its arrival in the Americas."⁹⁵ 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. Pendergrast observes that Brazil is known for

⁹¹ Daviron and Ponte, *The Coffee Paradox*.

⁹² Siljie Johanneseen and Harold White, "Who Really Benefits from Fair Trade? An Analysis of Value Distribution in Fairtrade Coffee," *Globalizations* 7:4 (2010); pp. 525-544.

⁹³ Akiyama suggests that severe corruption among African producers was one of the major reasons that production stagnated and farmers were underpaid. Akiyama, "Coffee Market Liberalization since 1990," 106. See also John Baffes, Bryan Lewin, and Panos Varangis, "Coffee: Market Setting and Policies," in *Global Agricultural Trade and Development*, edited by M. Ataman Aksoy and John C. Beghin (Washington: The World Bank, 2005), 304.

⁹⁴ West, *From Modern Production to Imagined Primitive*, 166.

⁹⁵ Topik and Wells, *The Second Conquest of Latin America*, 42.

its “giant *fazendas*” which produce much of the country’s coffee.⁹⁶ Talbot notes that Colombia “is the best example of a country with state coffee policies controlled by large growers and exporters.”⁹⁷ The contributors to Bacon et al’s *Coffee Crisis* observe that, while the smallholders of Mexico, Nicaragua, and El Salvador are more numerous than the literature allows, exports remain dominated by industrial plantations.⁹⁸ This is particularly bad for the poor because large estates feature itinerant labourers, who earn low wages and have precious little security compared to smallholders. Fridell criticizes the displacement of rural farmers in favour of large landholdings, with landless farmers facing severe exploitation.⁹⁹ Large estates are also more likely to plant monocultures as well as use fertilizers and insecticides.¹⁰⁰ In Latin American coffee production one finds particularly large coffee estates, a legacy of colonialism and inequality. However in the Indian Ocean World, coffee is produced differently, almost entirely by smallholders. This distinction has important implications for how we evaluate the commodity

Several authors note a tendency in Africa and Asia for smallholder coffee production. For Kenneth Curtis, “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.”¹⁰¹ He notes 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.”¹⁰² With ethical reforms, new laws allowed Europeans to own land directly, leading to the creation of estates in Java. These were one factor in 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.”¹⁰³ 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. A similar story is found in Papua New Guinea. While coffee 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 coffee grown by smallholders.¹⁰⁴ 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. Coffee is produced by small farmers and employs a large range of people. West notes that “coffee is the only export commodity owned and operated by the local people.”¹⁰⁵ Importantly, Costa Rica, the Latin American country seen as exceptional by critics of global trade, is characterized by smallholders.¹⁰⁶ Instead of seeing Costa Rica as a more ethical outlier, it is actually more consistent with coffee growing around the world.

⁹⁶ Pendergrast, *Uncommon Grounds*, 296.

⁹⁷ Talbot, *Grounds for Agreement*, 117.

⁹⁸ Bacon et al

⁹⁹ He notes that things are not much better for many smallholders, but nonetheless, owning land provides crucial economic security. Fridell, *Fair Trade Coffee*, 124.

¹⁰⁰ Christopher M. Bacon et al, editors, *Confronting the Coffee Crisis: Fair Trade, Sustainable Livelihoods, and Ecosystems in Mexico and Central America* (Cambridge: the MIT Press, 2008), 139.

¹⁰¹ Kenneth Curtis, “Smaller is Better: A Consensus of Peasants and Bureaucrats in Colonial Tanganyika,” in *The Global Coffee Economy in Africa, Asia, and Latin America*, 313.

¹⁰² Clarence-Smith, “The Coffee Crisis in Asia, Africa, and the Pacific, 1870-1914,” 110.

¹⁰³ McStocker, “The Indonesian Coffee Industry,” 43.

¹⁰⁴ West, *From Modern Production to Imagined Primitive*, 7.

¹⁰⁵ West, *From Modern Production to Imagined Primitive*, 10.

¹⁰⁶ Daviron and Ponte, *The Coffee Paradox*, 66.

While Daviron and Ponte suggest that the production and export of coffee is exemplary of global commodities,¹⁰⁷ the ownership of production and employment offered by coffee seems unusual. Baffes et al note that, unlike other crops most coffee is produced by smallholders.¹⁰⁸ Latin American countries such as Brazil are unique in the extent to which they have mechanized production, something only possible for low-quality Robustas 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 sees this cup as half empty, since it means that more livelihoods are affected by fluctuating prices.¹⁰⁹ 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

If coffee provides wide employment and allows small farmers to participate in an export economy, it is true that volatility can have especially large impacts in the developing world. This leads some experts to demand a new agreement to stabilize prices. Talbot suggests precisely this, adding that while the ICA froze out “new” producers, he assures that “prolonged period of an unregulated market has erased that history.”¹¹⁰ While a cartel that can limit production and purchase reserves when prices decline may help stabilize prices, another way to manage volatility is diversification. And again, while Latin American producers have been more or less dependent on coffee revenues, Asian producers look very different, featuring more diverse economies at the national and farm levels.

Coffee producers vary tremendously in terms of their economic diversity. 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 shows that, in the 1960s and 1970s, major producers under the ICA were largely dependent on coffee at rates far above comparable export crops.¹¹¹ His discussion of dependency does not include any Asian producers, and later, Talbot notes that Asian coffee producers complement coffee with a variety of commodities.¹¹² In recent decades, only Brazil has really to diversify its economy at the national level, in part aided by coffee revenue which has allowed the country to move up the economic ladder.¹¹³ As of 2012, soybeans, sugar, and meat exports produced more revenue than coffee, which is tied with corn. Other ICA beneficiaries have failed to diversify their economies. Coffee is second to gold among 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, about the same as much wealthier Brazil.¹¹⁴ At the national level, Asian economies are more diverse than Latin American or African economies, so are less dependent on coffee 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

¹⁰⁷ Daviron and Ponte, *The Coffee Paradox*.

¹⁰⁸ Baffes, Lewin, and Varangis, “Coffee,” 297.

¹⁰⁹ Talbot, *Grounds for Agreement*, 41.

¹¹⁰ Talbot, *Grounds for Agreement*, 216.

¹¹¹ Talbot, *Grounds for Agreement*, 40.

¹¹² Talbot, *Grounds for Agreement*, 42.

¹¹³ Topik and Samper, “The Latin American Coffee Commodity Chain,” 124.

¹¹⁴ Data from *Observatory of Economic Complexity* (<https://atlas.media.mit.edu/en/profile/country>).

depend on coffee, but specific regions and farms may be dependent, 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.

Talbot suggests that “In coffee growing regions, the local economy depends on coffee income.”¹¹⁵ This represents an apt characterization of many Latin American producers, which again tend to be large estates and are more likely to feature monocultures, which carry economic and ecological risks. 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 has found that, along with tapping to Fair Trade networks, “diversifying the coffee plantation with marketable crop or tree species” has been a dominant response to the decline in coffee prices.¹¹⁶ In the same volume, Silke Mason Westphal noted that unpredictable prices in the 1990s led producers to plant fruit and other trees, as farmers increasingly prioritize “crop diversification over the maximization of one specific crop” as insurance against price fluctuations.¹¹⁷ The crop diversification which is increasingly found in Latin America has always been the 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.¹¹⁸ Similarly, in Réunion, coffee fields were typically polycultures, both to provide essential foods to ships in port and to spread risk against the effects of tropical storms.¹¹⁹ 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.”¹²⁰ In Tanzania, villagers liked planting coffee more than other cash crops because it was less onerous and could be included in local fields.¹²¹

A core argument in James Scott’s *The Moral Economy of the Peasant* is that Southeast Asian peasants are risk averse, foregoing potential profits to avoid disaster. Farmers here limit risk by planting multiple seed varieties and multiple crops.¹²² Scott notes that farmers may still plant cash crops, but these are secondary to the subsistence crops necessary for survival. As a result, most Southeast Asian smallholders do not depend on coffee. Clarence-Smith notes the tendency towards mixed crops in India and Indonesia, noting Central Java’s “elaborate crop mixes.”¹²³ Even in the colonial era, peasants “preferred growing coffee as a minor crop.”¹²⁴ Jeff Neilson and Felicity Shonk describe smallholder production in Sulawesi, where Torajan 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. Conducting a survey, they found that “coffee is a single component within complex livelihood strategies...Coffee was not, on average, the

¹¹⁵ Talbot, *Grounds for Agreement*, 36.

¹¹⁶ V. Ernesto Méndez, “Farmers’ Livelihoods and Biodiversity Conservation in a Coffee Landscape of El Salvador,” in *Confronting the Coffee Crisis*, 217.

¹¹⁷ Silke Mason Westphal, “Coffee Agroforestry in the Aftermath of Modernization: Diversified Production and Livelihood Strategies in Post-Reform Nicaragua,” in *Confronting the Coffee Crisis*, 194.

¹¹⁸ Topik, “The Integration of the World Coffee Market,” 26.

¹¹⁹ Campbell, “The Origins and Development of Coffee Production in Réunion and Madagascar, 1711-1972,” 69.

¹²⁰ Campbell, “The Origins and Development of Coffee Production in Réunion and Madagascar, 1711-1972,” 82.

Campbell adds that even larger farms plant several subsistence and cash crops.

¹²¹ Curtis, “Smaller is Better,” 320.

¹²² James C. Scott, *The Moral Economy of the Peasant*

¹²³ Clarence-Smith, “The Coffee Crisis in Asia, Africa, and the Pacific, 1870-1914,” 107.

¹²⁴ M. R. Fernando, “Coffee Cultivation in Java, 1830-1917,” in *The Global Coffee Economy in Africa, Asia, and Latin America*, 158.

most important income source for respondent households.”¹²⁵ In my fieldwork in Central Aceh, I was surprised that 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 is an important way to provide insurance against price fluctuations, as well as poor weather or pests. Crucially, while they seek the same ends, 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 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.¹²⁶ Above, I noted that one alternative is to diversify at the national and farm levels, spreading the risk of a market crash or crop failure. Another way to protect against the volatility of international markets 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 produced for Euro-American consumers, while in the Indian Ocean, coffee is also exported regionally and is produced for local consumption. This again provides insurance against market fluctuations, and also has implications for how we view the coffee trade as a whole.

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. Talbot notes that, in 1990, about eighty percent of Latin American exports were destined for North America and Europe. For Asian producers, this number is about sixty percent.¹²⁷ The variety of export destinations provides some cushion against exogenous economic shocks, spreading risk across many markets.

Not only do Latin American producers export mostly to the United States and Europe, there is little domestic consumption, so that coffee production is dependent on Western markets. With the exception of Brazil, which consumes a great deal of its domestic production, Latin American countries do not see much domestic consumption. El Salvador, Guatemala, Honduras, Nicaragua, and Colombia do not consume coffee, perhaps a product of a historical Spanish preference for tea and cocoa. Meanwhile, the Indian Ocean World is characterized by producer consumers.¹²⁸ This is to be expected with the longer history of coffee consumption discussed above, as Ethiopia, Yemen, India, Indonesia, and Vietnam 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 consumers, 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

¹²⁵ Jeff Neilson and Felicity Shonk, “Chained to Development? Livelihoods and Global Value Chains in the Coffee-Producing Toraja Region of Indonesia,” *Australian Geographer* 45:3 (2014), 278-279.

¹²⁶ Fridell, *Coffee*, 11.

¹²⁷ Talbot, *Grounds for Agreement*, 43. In 2012, Brazil exported over eighty percent of their coffee to the United States and Europe, while Vietnam exported under sixty percent, also selling to Japan, South Korea, China, Indonesia, Mexico, and Russia. United States Department of Agriculture, “Global Agricultural Information Network Reports.” <http://gain.fas.usda.gov/RecentGAINPublications>

¹²⁸ An exception is in Papua New Guinea, where locals are not accustomed to the drink, and not coincidentally, a location which was introduced to coffee only recently. West, *From Modern Production to Imagined Primitive*, 111.

“fundamental for understanding its internal consequences.”¹²⁹ In the studies of coffee discussed above, there is a clear tendency to separate the world into developing and developed, colonized and colonizer, south and north, producer and consumer. Daviron and Ponte note that coffee is produced by the south for the north, which consumes 90% of coffee.¹³⁰ Talbot speaks in terms of core and periphery.¹³¹ His commodity chain model presupposes this pattern, moving from coffee growers to exporters, Western corporations, and Western consumers.¹³² Nowhere in this model is there space for domestic consumption, which is outside of the commodity chain.¹³³ A great deal of coffee, however, is consumed where it is produced. Baffes et al suggest that 20% of coffee is not traded internationally.¹³⁴ They estimate that among major producers, Brazil, Ethiopia, and Indonesia all consume over a quarter of their total production. The International Coffee Organization estimates that, in 2012, just over thirty percent of coffee was consumed in production countries, a pattern which is growing annually.¹³⁵

Why do so many authors overlook domestic consumption? For some, it does not tell the dichotomized, simplistic story they want to tell of distinct producers and consumers. 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’.¹³⁶ Several graphs mix terms, with one axis about producers and the other about importers. A third reason for the underrepresentation of domestic consumption is that domestic consumption is vastly under-reported in official statistics. African and Asian coffee production tends to emanate from smallholders in weak states, with governments incapable of collect taxes or producing reliable data.¹³⁷ As noted above, such states prefer mining, petroleum, and palm oil because they are easier to regulate and to extract wealth from. The very nature of coffee production in the Indian Ocean World, in fragmented smallholdings, makes accurate data problematic. Coffee grown by a villager 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. Domestic consumption thus 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.

Coffee Culture

Closely linked to the importance of domestic consumption for market stability and dependency relates to coffee cultures. The socio-anthropological literature on coffee culture tends to focus on Western marketing and consumption. The literature focuses on Western corporations, historical coffee houses, second and third wave coffee shops, and other areas.¹³⁸ It is often noted

¹²⁹ Topik and Wells, *The Second Conquest of Latin America*, 40.

¹³⁰ Daviron and Ponte, *The Coffee Paradox*, XIX, 50.

¹³¹ Talbot, *Grounds for Agreement*, 7.

¹³² Other applications of commodity chains to coffee make similar, unidirectional assumptions. See Mario Samper, “The Historical Construction of Quality and Competitiveness: A Preliminary Discussion of Coffee Commodity Chains,” in *The Global Coffee Economy in Africa, Asia, and Latin America*, pp. 120-153.

¹³³ Talbot, *Grounds for Agreement*, 32.

¹³⁴ Baffes, Lewin, and Varangis, “Coffee.” See also Pendergrast, *Uncommon Grounds*, 411.

¹³⁵ International Coffee Organization, “A Review of the Markets, Challenges, and Opportunities Facing the Sector,” (March 2014). www.ico.org/news/icc-111-5-r1e-world-coffee-outlook.pdf

¹³⁶ Daviron and Ponte, *The Coffee Paradox*, 58.

¹³⁷ Akiyama. For a discussion of weak and strong states, see Migdal

¹³⁸ Pendergrast, *Uncommon Grounds*; Tucker, *Coffee Culture*.

that, with the exception of Brazil, Latin America does not consume much coffee and thus lacks a distinct coffee culture.¹³⁹

We see a very different world in the Indian Ocean, where a longer history of coffee consumption has generated several distinct coffee cultures. Ethiopia, Tanzania,¹⁴⁰ Turkey, Vietnam, and Indonesia stand out as countries with long-standing coffee cultures, as the drink is woven into the local cultural fabric. In the early Arab world, Hattox illustrates the range of coffeehouses serving distinct clientele, adding that the coffeehouse was “a particularly Muslim institution.”¹⁴¹ In Vietnam, *cà phê sữa đá* is a daily staple, as precolonial trade, French production, and perhaps a sense that the rival Chinese drink tea has created a Vietnamese coffee culture with strong roots. In Indonesia, even the most remote villages have coffee shops, where one can chat, read the newspaper, and dunk doughnuts. In the past decade, Indonesia has seen the explosion of local “third wave” coffee shops, with high quality coffee served as espresso or in pour-overs, WIFI, study areas, and even live music. One article in the *Jakarta Post* noted that, “When Starbucks ventured into Jakarta in 2002, it was hardly considered a pioneer in the Indonesian coffee culture”, noting various local traditions by ethnicity and religion as well as Western-style shops that have not really been affected by the arrival of Starbucks.¹⁴² This has a variety of implications, as not only is the Indian Ocean home to distinct coffee cultures, the globalization story of Western corporations transforming world societies may be exaggerated, especially where subcultures are historically rooted.

Conclusions: Towards a Balanced Brew

The burgeoning literature on coffee seems anchored in the Atlantic World, one of Latin American production and Euro-American consumption, providing a pattern of dependency and even exploitation between producers and consumers. 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 distinct, and less amenable to dependency theories. I have shown that the Indian Ocean World has a much longer history of coffee consumption and trade, and that a more balanced view provides an opportunity for us to rethink a range of topics, from the demise of the ICA, to farming, dependency, coffee consumption, and coffee culture.

The differences between the Atlantic and Indian Ocean worlds are of course not absolute. In terms of national economic dependency, African producers resemble Central America more than they do Asia. Some Central American states are home to smallholders akin to eastern Africa or Southeast Asia. Topik and Clarence-Smith suggest that a global view of coffee even allows us to rethink these assumptions in Latin America, as not all Latin America is grown in large estates or as monocultures.¹⁴³ I should also note that some important areas, such as coffee’s role as a frontier crop, some of the ecological problems this brings, and its value being captured by powerful roasters is the same around the world. In general, though, shifting from an Atlantic to an Indian Ocean perspective allows us to rethink coffee production in important ways.

¹³⁹ Jairo Tocancipá-Falla notes that coffee consumption is beginning to rise in Colombia, though it follows the Starbucks pattern among elites. Jairo Tocancipá-Falla, “Cafés in Colombia: Socio-Political and Cultural Forms of Representation at the Turn of the Century,” *International Social Science Journal* 61:202 (2011); pp. 425-436.

¹⁴⁰ Curtis, “Smaller is Better,” 316.

¹⁴¹ Hattox, *Coffee and Coffeehouses*, 96.

¹⁴² Adisti Sukma Sawitri, “Coffee Enlightenment: Fruity, Light, Hand-Made,” *The Jakarta Post* (29 June 2014). See also Andreas D. Arditya and Adisti Sukma Sawitri, “Regarding the Beans: Third-Wave Coffee Hits Home,” *The Jakarta Post* (29 June 2014).

¹⁴³ Steven Topik and William Gervase Clarence-Smith, “Conclusion: New Propositions and a Research Agenda,” in *The Global Coffee Economy in Africa, Asia, and Latin America*, pp. 385-410.

Above all, 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 a new dynamic, and perhaps a threat, many in Muslim world and Asia see this as a return to history. 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. What we see with the rise of Asian production is not something new, but instead a return to historical production. Coffee production today looks much like it did in the 1850s, and this greater balance enables countries and farmers to limit risk and interact with distinct markets.