

Jonathan Morris

La globalizzazione dell'espresso italiano.

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The Globalisation of Italian Espresso

1992. I'd finished teaching the last class in my first course on Italian history at University College London and told the students I'd take them out for a taste of something Italian. We headed up to Euston station where I bought them all a cappuccino at the newly opened Costa Coffee outlet, an offshoot of the coffee roasting company established by two brothers from Piacenza. A few weeks later I ran into one of the class who told me how much he'd liked it. "Do you know I'd never had a cappuccino before and I've gone back to get quite a few since".

Fifteen years on that memory seems to date from another era. It's impossible now to imagine any incoming student not being familiar with the entire range of 'Italian coffees', while cappuccino can be bought at any college catering facility. Espresso-based coffee beverages have conquered not just the Northern European, American and Australasian markets, but are also spreading rapidly in the emerging Asian economies, notably India and China. Costa Coffee was acquired by the UK catering giant Whitbread in 1995 and has expanded from around 40 to 400 UK outlets, while also becoming a major player in the new coffee shop markets of the Middle East. In a trajectory not dissimilar to that of pizza, Italian style coffee has been transported overseas, packaged into new formats (notably in the US) and re-exported to the rest of world¹. Cappuccino has become so commonplace that arguably it has lost any nationality – Italian or American.

Espresso is one of the more surprising elements of the Italian lifestyle to have spread out across the globe. What distinguished coffee's diffusion across the markets of the developed world was the development of a wide range of styles of preparation and socio-cultural usages that created quite distinctive modes of consumption. Different forms of apparatus and methods for coffee preparation include the *ibrik* employed in the preparation of Turkish and Greek coffee, the *moka*, *napoletana* and espresso machines deployed extensively throughout Southern Europe, and the filters, presses and *caffetieres* utilised in Northern Europe and America². Even the same equipment will often be used to brew coffee beverages of very different length and composition – the Portuguese *bica* is about twice the volume of an Italian espresso, but half that of the Spanish *café*; a Scandinavian filter coffee is much shorter and stronger than one prepared in Germany, yet German tourists in America dismiss the coffee offered to them there as 'brown water', as in Percy Adlon's 1988 film *Baghdad Café*³.

Beverage styles are shaped by a combination of historically determined factors. Taste preferences, for example, such as the length and strength, serving temperature, frequency of consumption, and the use of additives such as milk and sugar, usually reflect a combination of availability and role in the diet – is the drink used to raise core body temperature, to accompany or to replace meals (as Mintz argued of the tea with milk and sugar consumed by the British workforce during the industrial revolution)⁴? Socio-cultural functions and contexts must also be considered: if a social encounter is constructed around consumption, how long is this (and therefore the drinks) intended to last, and what should the beverage style chosen communicate about its maker and/or consumer?

To understand the transfer of Italian style coffee beverages from one group of consumers to another, therefore, we need to consider the nature and adaptability of the beverages themselves, the creation of new retail formats in which these can be served, and

¹ On pizza see F. La Cecla, *La pasta e la pizza*, Bologna, Il Mulino, 1998.

² Of the many books on coffee machines etc, the most comprehensive is I. Bersten, *Coffee Floats, Tea Sinks*, Roseville (Australia), Helian, 1993.

³ T. Leeb, I. Rogalla, *Kaffee, Espresso, Barista*, Munich, TomTom, 2003, pp.75-9. contains some notes on national variations of espresso-based beverages.

⁴ S. Mintz, *Sweetness and Power: the place of sugar in modern history*, New York, Viking, 1985

why these met consumer needs that were not satisfied by existing cultures of consumption. Furthermore we need to place these in the context of other beverage choices: not just hot beverages such as tea, but also alternatives such as cola and alcohol. Such choices are often shaped by social distinctions as those of age, class, race and gender, as well as regulatory structures - such as those relating to licensing and pricing - that can determine the character of beverage consumption within a market, while reflecting social and political mores. Hence the simple investigation of a shift in coffee style preference can become a window into understanding much broader, complex changes in the characteristics of a society.

Within the context of what might be termed 'the cappuccino conquests' of the global coffee market, we specifically need to consider how the Italianness of the beverages has contributed to their socio-cultural value and the ways that consumers have deployed this: as well as what an apparent convergence of coffee-drinking styles tells us about the nature of a globalising consumer economy at the start of the second millennium. In this article, I outline five phases in the history of espresso outside Italy – elite, exotic, ethnic, speciality and branded – and demonstrate not just the diversity of meanings manufactured around Italian coffee changed during each of these, but also the material shifts in the nature of the beverages themselves.

Elite Espresso

The pre-Second World War market for espresso coffee was constrained by custom and income. The 'drinking-out' market for coffee was a limited to an urban bourgeois elite, one sufficiently concentrated and time pressed to make it worth caterers investing in the equipment necessary to serve them. Although this clientele clearly expanded over the first half of the century, it remained a restricted one, and for these reasons alone, espresso coffee machine makers, notably the leading manufacturers Pavoni of Milan and Victoria Arduino of Torino, were reliant on the export market as much as the domestic one.

In 1923 the relazione allegata al bilancio di Victoria Arduino reported that:

è verso estero che noi abbiamo rivolto da tempo le nostre maggiori cure per il collocamento dei nostri apparecchi; al riguardo siamo lieto di affermarvi che I nostri sforzi hanno conseguito dei successi confortanti sia in Francia come in Inghilterra, in Austria, in Cecoslovacchia e Polonia e nell'America Latina; e che pratiche vantaggiose le quali daranno indubbiamente in breve buoni frutti sono state avviate in Spagna e in Portogallo, nonchè nell'America del Nord e nei paesi Scandinavi⁵.

Arduino and Pavoni vied for the patronage of the most prestigious bars in the world with Pavoni's present in the Parisian Bar des Negociants, the Bar Louis in Algiers and the Bar Buffet Kaertner of Vienna, while Arduino's could be found in the Gran Cafè Colon and Gran Cafè Cosechera of Buenos Aires, as well as the Gran Caffè Kaiser Garten in Vienna. The most important market for Arduino was France where machines were installed in a large number of Parisian hotels and boulevard cafès including the Maison du Cafè in Place de l'Opéra which also operated a 'voiture-bar' serving caffè espresso that was towed around the major French cities⁶.

This elite market was disrupted by the political and economic upheavals of the later 1930s, and a very different international market emerged in the post-war era, in which the old-style machines of Arduino and Pavoni lost out to the macchina a leva developed by Gaggia, in which the use of high pressure facilitated the production of espresso coffee with the distinctive head of crema that defines the drink today.

⁵ Cited in F. Capponi, *La Victoria Arduino. 100 Anni di Caffè Espresso nel mondo*. Belforte del Chiente (MC), Nuova Simonelli, 2005, p.49.

⁶ *La Pavoni, Dal 1905 macchine per caffè*, Milano, Pavoni, 2005.p.42; Capponi, *Victoria Arduino*, pp.74, 85.

Exotic Espresso

The crema caffè revolution began to be exported outside Italy during the post-war economic recovery of the 1950s, once import restrictions were eased. In those markets in which the essential elements of coffee preferences were similar, such as Spain, Portugal and France, the new machines and beverages were relatively easily adapted to tastes – resulting in the evolution of the beverages described above. In Switzerland, émigré roasters took advantage of lower import duties to produce espresso coffee that was exported into Italy itself, while the country became an innovator in the manufacture of automatic espresso machines⁷.

However, during the early 1950s espresso machines also began to achieve prominence in new markets, notably the Anglo-Saxon one. Here they, and the beverages they were produced, were treated as much more exotic commodities – fashionable first amongst a bohemian and cultured elite, and then as part of a youth culture constructed by a new generation of teenage consumers.

In the United Kingdom the first coffee bar to open using a new style Gaggia machine was the Moka Bar in London's Soho district. Both the timing and the location were significant. 1952 was the year that coffee ceased to be rationed in the UK, and it became one of a number of commodities that were (re)discovered by consumers – its exoticness being heightened by the fact that Britain was an overwhelmingly tea drinking country. Soho was part of the bohemian central entertainment district of London, containing a large number of hotels, restaurants, pubs and clubs whose staff were primarily drawn from émigré populations, notably the Anglo-Italian community. Yet while the coffee machine trade, notably the Gaggia franchise, was indeed in the hands of Anglo-Italians, the coffee supply was dominated by the London-based Kenya Coffee Company, while the proprietors of the coffee bars were drawn from a wide variety of backgrounds – the owner of the Moka bar, for example, was a Scotsman, Maurice Ross⁸.

Many of the first venues in which new-style espresso machines were located were effectively night-clubs. The reason for this was that they were able to capitalise on British licensing laws that imposed a closing time of 10:00 on public houses selling alcohol. After hours coffee lounges sprung up, serving beverages late into the night. These lounges often incorporated names and décor that celebrated the distant origins of the coffee bean itself, or simply a general sense of exoticness such as the Moccamba and the El Cubano where a pair of Toucans flew around as part of a jungle theme⁹.

Daytime bars included many presenting themselves as 'continental' – mixing a variety of European styles and cuisines alongside the coffee. A further market was created in the more fashionable department store tearooms and restaurants where women shoppers would meet for coffee – a Gaggia was already at work in Fortnum and Mason's in 1954. At this point Italian coffee was seen as a fashionable beverage – indeed some upmarket outlets took to advertising in "The Times": the first being the Hartman Restaurant which was open 8:00 am to 10:00pm and offered "first class cuisine .. Espresso and genuine American hamburgers"¹⁰

As photo reportages of the time make clear, however, the beverage being drunk in all these premises was not espresso but cappuccino. In part, this can simply be put down to inherited British tastes for a weaker hot beverages combined with milk, in part the greater theatricality of the preparation of the drink using the steam wand, and the exotic nature of its appearance. However we also need to consider the social function of the beverages. Coffee

⁷ M. Segal, 'Fully automatics – Switzerland's high-tec revolution', 'Coffee roasters in Switzerland – catering for every taste', in "Cafè Europa" 25, 2006 pp.12-26.

⁸ On the structures of the 'Italian coffee' trade in Britain see J. Morris, 'Imprenditoria italiana in Gran Bretagna. Il consumo del caffè 'stile italiano', in "Italia Contemporanea", 241, 2005, pp.540-52.

⁹ See Matthew Partington, *Oral testimony and the interpretation of the crafts*, www.brighton.ac.uk/designingbritain

¹⁰ *The Times*, 30 October 1954, p.2.

bars and lounges were destination venues where one would meet with others to socialise, rather than simply quaff a quick cup of coffee during a pause in the working day as in Italy - hence the beverages needed to be larger to take longer to consume. It was also preferable that they should be hot, and therefore need time to cool down to drinking temperature. One of the most famous photos of the Moka Bar in 1954 features a client using an electric razor at the bar: according to “La Voce degli Italiani”, a journal for Anglo-Italians:

Tutto cominciò con una osservazione di un cameriere italiano: ‘Questo cappuccino è così caldo che mentre aspetto che si raffreddi avrei tempo di farmi la barba’. Il proprietario del Moka Bar non ci pensò due volte. Dopo mezz’ora sulla vetrina del bar era esposto un cartello che diceva: ‘Have a shave while you drink our coffee’.¹¹

This early fad for Italian coffee subsequently spread elsewhere in the English-speaking world, though with some subtle variations. In Australia many members of the middle class were attracted to the new beverages because they had seemingly been endorsed by British fashionable society, rather than as a consequence of the arrival of Italian emigrants¹². In Sydney espresso coffee was first served at the department store, David Jones, in 1955 where “coffee drinkers have the opportunity of tasting delicious Espresso coffee as served on the continent and London”¹³. Again developments in alcohol licensing may also have hastened the adoption of espresso: until 1955 Sydney’s pubs were required to close at 6:00 pm, a restriction that persisted in Melbourne until 1966. Not surprisingly espresso bars played a central role in the nightlife of the later city, helping it to become the country’s coffee capital, while in Sydney the installation of espresso machines in coffee shops and milk bars helped maintain customer interest in what might otherwise have become outmoded institutions¹⁴.

“The New York Times” reported in 1956 that the big apple had also developed its own espresso scene within a similarly eclectic set of locales. These included a replica of the Caffè Greco as well as:

a Japanese-Italian place decorated with Kabuki prints; .. a partnership of two former analysts whose strong suit is detecting schizophrenia; a place featuring Gallic (Paris, France) pizza; an allied Yankee ice-cream parlour; and an English pub with newspapers provided on reading sticks

Meanwhile in Tokyo:

.. the ultimate in internationalism goes on in one parlor – waitresses do the mambo while carrying cups of Italian espresso to tables set against a Viennese décor¹⁵.

In the US the differing licensing structure meant that bars not only served both espresso and alcohol, they frequently combined the two so that “on the West Coast the rage is Poncino, a little espresso and a lot of rum; on the East Coast (around Radio City’s bars), its Irish espresso, a little espresso and a lot of Irish whisky”¹⁶. According to one observer, in many coffee houses, while an espresso machine might be visible on the counter, many of the drinks were prepared with ordinary coffee at the back of the premises, its taste masked by the additional alcohol¹⁷. Even the basic coffee beverages were significantly altered or augmented – espresso often arrived as ‘Roman espresso’ with the addition of a twist of lemon peel while cappuccino was served with cinnamon or nutmeg topping as standard and frequently included whipped cream (making it closer to the Viennese *kapuziner*)¹⁸.

The New York Times separated the ‘caffeine retreats’ in Manhattan into two forms.

¹¹ *Guerra e pace a Soho attorno al Caffè Espresso* in “La Voce degli Italiani”, Londra, Dic 1954, p.5

¹² See T. Cammarano, *Espresso in 1950s Sydney: One drink, two scenes*, Unpublished MA dissertation in Gastronomy, University of Adelaide, Feb 2006.

¹³ ‘*Espresso coffee for Sydney*, in “Hotel and Cafè News”, Sydney, 27,4, (April 1955) p.17

¹⁴ On Melbourne see A. May Brown, *Espresso. Melbourne Coffee Stories*, Melbourne, Arcadia, 2001.

¹⁵ H. Mitgang, *New York’s Caffè (Espresso) Society*, New York Times, 14 October 1956, p.14

¹⁶ *Ibid.*

¹⁷ Telephone Interview Ted Lingle, Executive Director of the Speciality Coffee Association of America, 20 December 2004.

¹⁸ See *Fun with Coffee*, Pan American Coffee Bureau, 1956, p.7; *Today’s Coffeehouse (A Handbook)*, Coffee Brewing Institute Inc, New York, 1964, pp10-11.

Those in Greenwich village .. are intimate places whose youthful customers have no qualms about imbibing espresso while dressed in their evening, or turtleneck sweater, clothes. Those uptown only hint at earthiness, but they are really rather sleek – patronized at night by dreamy after-theatre goers and at lunch hour by American expatriates and telecommunicators from near-by radio centrals who look as if they could elbow their way into a Madison Avenue existentialist novel¹⁹

This division was even starker in the UK where the spread of coffee bars and lounges into the provinces was fuelled not just by a desire to imitate the capital, but a very real need for places of sociability dedicated to youth, separate from the traditional British pub. Effectively the market was segmented into more upmarket daytime premises which were particularly appealing to middle class women who were unlikely to frequent pubs, and those which provided social centres for the newly emergent teenage consumers who were excluded from premises serving alcohol. Many of these served as venues for dancing and music – for example, the Casbah club in Liverpool which hosted the first concerts of the Quarrymen, later the Beatles, was set up by the family of the original drummer Pete Best in the basement of their house serving “no booze, just coffee and Coke, and fantastic live music” – the coffee being served by an ersatz espresso machine attached to a wall.²⁰

The quality of the coffee served in these establishments was of less importance than the novelty of their appearance and preparation. In fact, by the early 1960s, new simpler methods of coffee preparation that retained an eye-catching element were taking over in the catering market such as the use of pour and serve filter coffee, kept warm on an electric plate, and the Cona coffee system in which the coffee was brewed in a glass container and kept warm over a naked flame²¹. These methods required less training and maintenance, and facilitated quicker service than was possible with an espresso machine. Many of the continental coffee bars turned into quick service cafés that placed more emphasis on eating as a way of increasing income given rising property rents, while the social functions of the coffee lounge were undermined by changes in the British licensing legislation in 1961 and 1964 that extended opening hours until 11:00pm. At this point, too, pub managers began to actively target the youth market²². A further contributing factor to the decline of the coffee house in both the US and the UK was the spread of television reducing the market for out-of-house entertainment²³. As a result, Italian coffee became increasingly confined to those ethnic catering outlets established by the emigrant community.

Ethnic Espresso

It is usually assumed that the spread of espresso was fuelled by Italian emigrants introducing the machines to new markets. Of course, there is considerable truth to this. In the 1950s, for example, Germany experienced a boom in the number of Italian gelaterie as these turned themselves into *Eiscafé* providing themselves with an alternative source of income during the winter by serving espresso from the new style machines. Again their primary custom came from a younger generation which used them in a manner similar to that of their Anglo-Saxon peers elsewhere²⁴.

However, many of the entrepreneurs involved in promoting the first wave of Anglophone espresso came from outside the Italian community. A major explanation of this phenomena lies in the question of class – both of the émigrés themselves, and of the

¹⁹ Mitgang, *op. cit*

²⁰ www.casbahcoffeeclub.com Accessed 23 August 2006.

²¹ Analysis of the advertising in the trade journal *Coffee Bar and Coffee Lounge*, 1959-63 makes this clear.

²² J. Burnett, *Liquid Pleasures. A Social History of Drinks in Modern Britain*, London, Routledge, 1999, pp.137-8.

²³ L. Klinger-Vartabedian and R.Vartabedian, *Media and Discourse in the 20th Century Coffeehouse movement* in “Journal of Popular Culture” 26, 3, 1999, pp.211-8.

²⁴ See P. Bernhard, ‘*La pizza sul reno*’ in questo volume.

customers they preferred to serve. The great majority of Italian emigrants were lower class and consequently so were the bars that they established to cater both to themselves, and to their host populations. These were not at the forefront of fashion, and often had to adapt their offerings to those of the host population.

We can see this in the British case. The overwhelming drink of choice in the Anglo-Italian working man's café was hot tea served to along with such English staples as the bacon sandwich. Coffee machines were something of a luxury unless they could also be used for tea preparation: instead many proprietors preferred to use the machines made by Still and Son of London which combined a boiler for tea with a coffee brewing system and a steamer. This enabled them to produce a so-called 'frothy coffee' with hot milk – in effect, a cappuccino using brewed coffee rather than espresso.

One such proprietor was Stefano Sidoli, who took over the Bar Centrale in central London in 1975 from another Anglo-Italian. Sidoli continued to use a Stills machine and serve English-type breakfasts until 1987 when he purchased a Gaggia machine outright from a dealer within the community and taught himself how to make espresso and cappuccino. At the same time as he updated his menu, replacing the bread rolls containing tinned Salmon, corned beef and liver pate with Italian-style panini filled with roast peppers, grilled aubergines and a variety of cheeses. What Sidoli did was to make 'the bar more Italian' through the changes in its coffee and related offerings, while retaining what he described as the "the London Italian feel of the 1970s"²⁵.

The increased 'Italianness' of the Bar Centrale reflected a change in the nature of its customers, both in class and experience, and equally a change in the perceptions of Italy itself. Office workers had come to dominate the central London workforce, while the image of Italy had been transformed from that of a 'cheap and cheerful' country to a refined and sophisticated one, epitomised by success of its fashion industry. At the culinary level, this was seen with the appearance of up-market Italian restaurants in the boom years of the latter 1980s, demonstrating the diversity of Italian cuisine in contrast to the early trattorie and downmarket chains that had primarily traded in pasta and pizza. Significantly many of these new restaurants chose to place a coffee machine on prominent display in the dining room in order to demonstrate their authenticity²⁶.

Similar trajectories can be observed elsewhere in the Anglophone market. In Australia, once the upmarket fad faded, espresso was left to the Italian bars popular with the immigrant working-classes. In Melbourne by the end of the 1950s these had a reputation as 'hotbeds of vice' and were the focus of a 'moral panic' directed against Italian-Australians²⁷. However the transformation in the country's population in the 1990s caused by renewed immigration from both Eastern Europe and Asia saw the creation of new Australian espresso culture, embodied in the 'flat white' – essentially a cappuccino with 'poco schiuma' – which was "created right here in Australia because many of us want the full rich flavour of the coffee without all the foam contained in a cappuccino"²⁸.

In the USA too, espresso coffee retreated into the Little Italies within the major industrial cities. One such area was the North Beach district of San Francisco, home to many Italian-American dockers. This contained places such as Caffè Tosca and Caffè Trieste: the latter established in 1956 by Giovanni Giotta, a trained opera singer who still regularly gives concerts for the customers. Caffè Trieste became famous as the haunt of the literary beatnik movement, attracted to the 'earthiness' and Italian feel of the coffeeshop – even today, it refers to its 'non "cookie cutter" style'²⁹. However, this created its own form of exclusivity -

²⁵ Interview with Stefano Sidoli, London, 23 August 2005.

²⁶ Interview with Jim Harding, Managing Director La Cimbali UK, Elstree (UK), 8 September 2005.

²⁷ See Brown-May, *Espresso*. p.32.

²⁸ http://www.dairyfarmers.com.au/internet/s14_crema/recipes/flat_white.jsp accessed 3 September 2006.

²⁹ <http://www.caffetrieste.com/index.html> accessed 7 September 2006.

according to Ward Barbee, the editor of “Fresh Cup Magazine”, these coffeehouses were for customers who “either were or wanted to be Italian-American”³⁰. Indeed, he believes in many of these coffeehouses (though not, of course, Trieste), the coffee itself was of poor quality, past its sell-by date and had been dumped by Italian exporters. This critique, in itself indicative of the next phase in espresso’s overseas evolution – its emergence at the centre of the Speciality Coffee revolution that centred on standards and quality.

Speciality Espresso

Between 1960 and 1990 the proportion of US households in which coffee was regularly consumed had fallen from 75% to 50% which many in the coffee world blamed on the major roasters for reducing the quality of their coffee in order to compete on price. In response, some small independents began promoting Speciality Coffees, often drawn from a single producing region, which had a distinctive taste in the cup³¹. Originally these were for sale as roasted beans for home consumption, but during the 1980s some so-called ‘gourmet retailers’ began to promote them by serving coffees in-store. A ‘College Coffeehouse programme’ sought to educate the next generation of consumers, taking advantage of the fact that with most US states prohibiting the consumption of alcohol until age 21, the coffeehouse could easily become the social centre of the campus.

These College coffee houses usually incorporated an espresso machine because, as the 1986 programme manual explained:

Including an espresso/cappuccino machine in your equipment package has several advantages. Espresso drinks, which include espresso, cappuccino, café au lait and café latte, have become more popular. They usually account for a small percentage of total cups sold in a campus operation; however, the mark-up is much higher - - typically two to four times higher than regular brewed coffee on a per-cup basis. Furthermore, the inclusion of espresso drinks and the attractive appearance of an espresso machine gives the operation an ‘upscale’ quality image. This, in turn, can promote sales of other specialty coffees³².

Espresso was not strictly speaking, speciality coffee, given that it is most often prepared from a blend of six or seven coffees from a variety of countries and usually contains both Arabica and Robusta varieties. Nor, in its pure form, was it particularly popular. As one early entrepreneur explained:

You must remember that the general public’s perception of espresso is ‘that short, dark, bitter cup of stuff that I have to put 10 packets of sugar into to be able to drink it’³³.

However, the other milk-based beverages were more readily adopted by the consuming public and were designated as speciality beverages by the new movement. The value of this was confirmed in 1994 when a tipping point was reached with cappuccino for the first time exceeding gourmet brewed coffee as the primary speciality beverage consumed outside the home³⁴.

So who were the consumers of these forms of coffee? The survey showed the most valuable indicators were age, education, income and region. The typical gourmet coffee drinker was a college educated 18-34 year old with a household income of over \$50,000 living in the West or mid-Atlantic states. In short, a member of what David Brooks subsequently identified as a new upper class of Bobo’s – Bourgeois Bohemians – who had created an America where “WASPY upscale suburbs were suddenly dotted with arty

³⁰ Interview with Ward Barbee, Editor, *Fresh Cup Magazine*, London, 24 May 2006.

³¹ On the origins of the Speciality Coffee Movement see Mark Prendergast, *Uncommon Grounds, The history of coffee and how it transformed our world*. Basic Books, New York, 1999, pp.337-67.

³² *Foodservice Director’s College Coffee House Manual*, Coffee Development Group, Washington DC 1986 (Equipment sections).

³³ W. P. Ferguson, *How to open your own Espresso Cart*, Self-published manual, Seattle, 1991, p.5.

³⁴ *The 1994 Gallup Study of Awareness and use of Gourmet and Specialty Coffees Survey*, Princeton, Multi-Sponsor Surveys, Inc., May 1994.

coffeehouses where people drank little European coffees and listened to alternative music” and “it was impossible to tell an espresso-sipping artist from a cappuccino-gulping banker”³⁵. Class then was a crucial determinant of Italian coffee drinking – but class determined as much by the cultural capital obtainable through education and location, than merely income and economic function.

The geography of the speciality coffee movement was significant. Alfred Peet, a Dutch-American coffee roaster whose store in Berkeley served large numbers of ‘hippy’ students in the late 1960s is often referred to as the Moses of the movement, but his disciples migrated to new centres for alternative lifestyles, notably the city of Seattle. As the city was transformed from an old industrial centre based on aircraft manufacturing at Boeing, into the capital of the new economy housing the headquarters of Microsoft, so a new coffee business emerged based around coffee carts that served take-away beverages to commuters at the monorail stops and the ferries across the Puget Sound, as well as the lobbies of their workplaces³⁶. By 1990 there were over 200 such carts serving the city, though their numbers were later eclipsed by the coffee shops that sprang up to provide both takeaway and sitdown service indoors³⁷. Speciality Coffee became a crucial component of the city’s self-image as projected in the television show *Frazier* where much of the action took place at the fictional Caffè Nervosa.

The most famous protagonist in the Seattle coffee revolution was Starbucks, opened by three protégées of Peet as a pure bean retailers in 1971, but taken over by Howard Schultz in 1987, two years after he left the company to set up coffee bars inspired by those he encountered on trips to Milan and Verona. Initially Schultz had tried to recreate what he claimed was the authentic Italian experience featuring bow-tied baristi, opera on the music system and standing only consumption. However he soon began adjusting this format to meet US customer needs, replacing the opera with jazz, introducing paper cups for those who wished to take their coffee away, and providing seats, later sofas, for those who preferred to consume in comfort in-store³⁸.

Schultz was particularly attracted to Italian coffee because the individual preparation of the beverages meant they could be presented as high value, hand-crafted products, and priced accordingly. The coffee styles also had to be redesigned, however, notably by increasing their size: a Starbucks small cappuccino is about twice the size of a standard Italian one, but still only contains a single shot of espresso. Not only did the larger volume appear to give greater value for take-away customers in particular, it also softened the taste by increasing the milk component, thus making it more accessible to the American palate. The addition of syrups which sweetened the taste, or the use of low fat or soy milk that appeared to make them healthier, also met customer demands, while the designation of these with Italianate names, was a further way of incorporating ‘authenticity’ and ‘value’ into the beverage.

Yet the Speciality movement involved few Italian Americans or firms from Italy itself. In relocating Italian coffee from San Francisco to Seattle, it removed it from an ethnic, essentially lower class setting, to re-position it as a beverage for the mainstream white upper middle class. Famously, Faema refused to back Schultz on the basis that Americans would never learn to drink espresso³⁹. They were right - but as Schultz proved, this didn’t mean wouldn’t drink the milk-based Italian coffee beverages.

One Italian company was a major beneficiary of the Seattle phenomenon, however. La Marzocco, a small family firm from Florence, headed by Piero Bambi, produced machines

³⁵ David Brooks, *Bobos in Paradise. The New Upper Class and How they got there*, New York, Simon and Schuster, 2000, pp.9, 10.

³⁶ On Seattle J. Lyons, *Selling Seattle. Representing Contemporary America*, Wallflower Press, London, 2004.

³⁷ Ferguson, *How to open your own Espresso Cart*, p.v.

³⁸ H. Schultz and D. Jones Yang, *Pour your heart into it. How Starbucks built a Company one cup at a time*, Hyperion, New York, 1997 p.87.

³⁹ Schultz, Yang, *Pour your heart into it*. Pp.67-8;

that uniquely incorporated two boilers, one of which was solely dedicated to providing the steam for milk frothing. Recognising that these would be perfect for the American market, Kent Bakke, the founder of Espresso Specialists Incorporated in Seattle in 1978, began importing them for his clients, including Starbucks. Their success was such that a group of American investors headed by Bakke ended up acquiring the company, opening a new plant in Seattle to meet demand⁴⁰.

The success of Starbucks and the speciality coffee movement was dramatic. There were 585 speciality coffee outlets in the USA in 1989 rising to 3,600 by 1994 of which 425 were owned by Starbucks⁴¹. The Davids of the speciality coffee movement had spawned their own Goliath, while the Italian style coffee beverages that they intended to be a stepping stone to the true speciality experience had instead become the overwhelming beverage of choice.

Branded Espresso

The coffee shop business has developed into a recognisably new retail format that fits into the rhythms of modern working life. In contrast to the coffee bars of the 1950s and 60s, this is very much a daytime venue. Take-away coffees and muffins are provided to commuters and employees who take advantage of the fact that as most work is now carried out on personal computers, refreshment breaks can be taken according to individual preference rather than at convenient moments in the production cycle. For a slightly higher price, customers purchase not just coffee, but the right to sit in the coffee shop and use its facilities, allowing them to relax, read the papers, socialise, use the washrooms, and listen to music. The rise of the laptop and the provision of wireless-free internet has enabled coffee shops to function as alternative work places and meeting venues. Other customers, notably young mothers, prefer to meet friends in the clean and comfortable surroundings of a coffee shop, rather than expend the effort to entertain at home. Thus the coffee-shop is a 'twenty minute' business – selling an experience built around coffee.

Nonetheless the coffee remains central to this experience. One major reason for the success of espresso-based beverages is that because they can't be made as well at home they appear to represent better value, than say, tea. Machines are usually mounted on the back counter so customers can watch their beverages being prepared by hand. The trade is not particularly price sensitive, with customers willing to pay more for a better experience, although they will probably measure this against the price for coffee at Starbucks⁴².

Starbucks did not invent the coffee shop formula, but they were the first to brand it and reproduce it across the country, creating what Thompson and Arsel have described as a 'hegemonic brandscape' in which, which competitor coffeehouses are 'more or less like Starbucks in much the same way that a fast-food restaurant is more or less like McDonalds'⁴³. By the end of 2005 there were roughly 21,600 outlets serving speciality coffee in the USA, of which over 8,000 belonged to Starbucks⁴⁴. Such success did not come without costs as the corporation found itself demonised by anti-globalisation campaigners such as Naomi Klein who attacked its tactics in swamping the market to force local enterprises out of business, while it became a symbolic focus of the anti-capitalist riots in Seattle that coincided with the

⁴⁰ Interviews Kent Bakke, Seattle, 8 Jan 2005; Piero Bambi, Florence, 7 Feb 2006.

⁴¹ Figures from *Specialty Coffee Retail in the USA*, Specialty Coffee Association of America Factsheet, 2004; *Starbucks Company Factsheet*, February 2005.

⁴² Only 26% of US Customers mentioned price as a factor in their choice of coffee shop, compared to 70% citing location and quality. *Specialty Coffee Retail in the USA, 2005*, Specialty Coffee Association of America factsheet downloadable at http://www.scaa.org/press_resources.asp. Barry Kither, Marketing Director, Lavazza UK, suggested Starbucks was the price reference point in an interview at Hatfield, 16 Jan 2006.

⁴³ C. J. Thompson, Z. Arsel, *The Starbucks Brandscape and Consumers (Anticorporate) Experiences of Globalization*, in "Journal of Consumer Research", 31, Dec 2004, p.633.

⁴⁴ *Specialty Coffee in the USA 2005; Starbucks Company Factsheet August 2006* downloadable at <http://www.starbucks.com/aboutus/overview.asp>

World Trade Organisation ministerial meeting of 1999⁴⁵.

Starbucks' phenomenal growth has seen it make increasing compromises within its coffee operations, notably the replacement of its Marzocco machines with automatic bean to cup ones that make drinks at the press of a button. These are placed on the front of the counter to disguise the lack of skill in their operation. In a deal that highlighted the gulf in values between the original speciality movement and its corporate successors, the American investors in Marzocco kept the promise they made to Bambi when they acquired the company and closed the US factory to maintain the Florentine one in operation. Today Marzoccos remain probably the highest regarded machines in the Speciality Coffee world with 97% of the output going for export. Conversely Starbucks is portrayed as an enemy of quality, a 'real estate' company whose espresso roast is derogatorily known as 'charbucks' due to its burnt taste (though this is probably necessary to ensure customers can taste any coffee through the large volumes of milk contained in its outsize beverages)⁴⁶.

Thomson and Ariel also argued that the 'hegemonic brandscape' created in the USA was indicative of the lack of 'glocalisation' (local deviation from a global model) in the coffee shop business. As their work only dealt with the USA, this seems an unfounded and inflated claim. In fact, the story of the transfer of the coffee shops format out of the USA is one that reveals a surprising degree of local variation in agency, branding, format, and consumer preferences, including the degree of appreciation for the Italian origins of the beverages.

This is evident even in Britain – the leading market for branded coffee shops in Europe. Undoubtedly the branded coffee shop format was imported from America, with the Seattle Coffee Company – founded by two expatriates from the city – being acknowledged as the first to open in 1994, while the British siblings Bobby and Sahar Hashemi were inspired to set up the Coffee Republic chain in 1995 after Sahar told her brother:

I really miss the skinny cappuccinos and fat-free muffins from those New York espresso bars.. I can't believe there is nothing like them in London⁴⁷

While the Hashemi's were able to draw on Bobby's merchant banking background to finance their operation, the initial growth in coffee shops was largely fuelled by small operators, usually from outside the sector - in 1997 82% of coffee shops were owned by independent operators. It was only in 1998 that Starbucks entered the market, purchasing the Seattle Coffee Company and aggressively expanded its network by buying out existing outlets:

Starbucks said here's twenty grand more than your shop is worth, now get out; and (the proprietors) thought we'd have to sell a lot more coffee to make twenty grand, so they took the money⁴⁸.

Growth of the UK Coffee Shop sector 1997-2005

<i>Year</i>	<i>Total</i>	<i>%Independent</i>	<i>%Branded</i>	<i>% Non-specialist</i>
1997 (dec)	4,756	82.0	7.8	10.2
2005 (jan)	8,338	56.8	29.8	14.1

Source: *Project Café 5*, Allegra Strategies, London, 2005

Not only were most of the agents who imported the coffee shop format into the UK local entrepreneurs, they were also aware of a much greater public respect for the Italian origins of the espresso beverage. As we have seen there had already been a revival of interest in Italian coffee in the early 1990s as the Costa outlet at Euston demonstrated. When the first large players moved into the market they were well aware of this. The two largest chains after Starbucks are Costa Coffee which was purchased by Whitbread in 1995, and Cafè Nero,

⁴⁵ N. Klein, *No Logo*, Flamingo, New York, 2001, pp.135-9

⁴⁶ Ward Barbee interview *op.cit.*

⁴⁷ S. and B. Hashemi *Anyone Can Do It*, Capstone, London, 2003, p.1.

⁴⁸ M. Arrigo, Verbal contribution to roundtable on Café Culture; Caffè Culture Exhibition, London Olympia, 25 May 2006

founded at the same time, and now one of the twenty fastest growing companies in Europe, Both these companies trade heavily on the value implicit in an Italian brand identity. Costa's communications materials all reiterate their claim to be "Italian about Coffee", while it has now begun retailing coffee under the brand name "Costa Italia"⁴⁹. For many years after the Whitbread takeover, the Costa brothers remained a strong presence in the branding, though now the emphasis has been switched to the Anglo-Italian roastery manager, Gino Amasanti. No mention is ever made of Whitbread in these materials.

Caffé Nero meanwhile has traded on an image of authenticity that has been cultivated by creating a more edgy continental feel to its shops through the furnishings and store policies such as allowing smoking in certain sections. An early review of the chain by "Tatler" magazine, proclaiming it served "the best espresso this side of Milan" has become its signature tag line – exploiting the linkage to the fashion capital at the heart of Italy's new upmarket image. Clearly then 'Italianess' is conceived as conferring value on the beverages, whereas, by contrast none of the major US coffee shop chains has cultivated an Italian image.

British consumer habits also differ significantly from those in America. While a large portion of the US trade is takeaway, particularly in the major cities such as New York, the British overwhelmingly prefer to stay and spend time in the store. This may be because the coffee shop is seen as providing a viable formula for the construction of a 'continental café culture' that was long mourned as being absent in the UK. Indeed the early coffee adaptors, who were mostly members of the 18-34 age group, were believed to be identifying themselves with an international European youth culture united by fashion and music (experienced through MTV Europe) and comfortable throughout the continent as a result of cheap holidays and discount airlines. A "Daily Mail" article on 'Cappuccino Society' in 1992 began:

With a confidence far beyond their 19 years, they were easy to spot; rocking back in the designer chairs, they casually chatted over a table littered with bottles of San Pellegrino and espresso coffees. Dressed in the new European 'designer' labels – Cheignon, Chipie, Pepe, Liberto – they looked understated in that typical continental way. If there had been snow outside, we could have been in the Alps; if it were sunny, the location could have been Barcelona, Milan, or possibly Paris. But it was dark, rainy and somewhat foggy and were in Café Qui in the Italian Centre, Glasgow⁵⁰.

That feel of Europeaness was enhanced in the UK by the deliberate recruitment of large numbers of foreign baristi, tapping into the increased labour mobility amongst young people within the EU. Recently it has been further augmented by the influx of workers from the old Eastern European countries who now form the basis of the labour force within the catering sector.

The success of the importation of the American coffee shop format was to build on this pre-existing desire to build a European culture, by extending its reach to older customers. In Germany the fact that espresso-based beverages have overtaken filter ones in the drink-out market, can be summarised in one word, according to Peter Van Gisbergen of the coffee roasters Probat 'America'⁵¹. In Norway, where there are no US coffee chains, the main supplier of the new-style shops, Trygve Klingenberg of Solberg and Hansen admitted that:

What I didn't predict back in 1995 was the huge number of 30- to 45-year-olds who would get so fed up with going downtown Saturday night to get drunk and get laid, and who would find it far more chic to go for a coffee on a Saturday morning and watch people over the top of their newspapers! Things like this have driven an entirely new generation and a new culture into coffee shops.⁵²

Adoption of this coffee based culture also appears to offer the newly liberated Eastern

⁴⁹ *Costa overhauls its food range*, "Marketing", 16 Aug 2006, p.8

⁵⁰ N. Hands, *Cappuccino Society; Why British teenagers love the Continental café life*, "Daily Mail", 7 Feb 1992, pp.12-13.

⁵¹ Peter van Gisbergen, Interview, Berne, 20 May 2006

⁵² *Brew Coffee, Have Fun* in "Boughton's Coffee House", c.2003 – accessed at <http://www.coffee-house.org.uk/earlyfeatures.html> 7 Sept 2006.

European states a route into the cultural mainstream. Coffeeheaven, a British owned company whose first store opened in Poland in 2000, and which now also operates in the Czech Republic, Slovakia, Latvia and Bulgaria describes its concept as follows:

coffeeheaven is about spending quality time in the dynamic heartland of 'new' Europe. It's about people enjoying life - talking, meeting, eating and drinking in a stylish, contemporary café setting. Choice and quality of coffee and food is outstanding. Our service is swift, friendly and always cheerful. Taking time out at a coffeeheaven in Central Europe will feel as familiar and relaxed as a café in London, Paris or Rome. The coffeeheaven concept combines the best of two converging worlds: Western experience with 'new' Europe's aspirations, talent and youth⁵³.

In some central European states, such as Hungary, however, the fall of the Iron curtain has facilitated the rebirth of the old, almost elitist coffee house culture, alongside the new youth one, as both drive out the dreary old small bars known as espressos which operated under communism⁵⁴.

Equally participation in coffee culture has been seen as a symbol of admission to the American world amongst the developing economies of Asia, where the new middle class have been particularly keen to adopt the coffee house habit. Starbucks first opened on mainland China in 1999 and now has over 400 stores already operating between China, Taiwan and Hong Kong, of which 120 are based in Beijing or Shanghai, despite the fact that the price of a single cup of coffee can exceed that of a worker's daily pay⁵⁵. In these, as in most of the temperate markets, the US chains are assisted by the fact demand is not so much for the standard espresso beverages, as for the blended ice drinks.

However the growth of these markets has also been driven by internal operators. In India, where Starbucks has yet to open, the two major players are the local firms Barista and Café Coffee Day with c500 outlets between them. Having initially been most successful amongst the young, they are now setting up so-called upmarket coffee lounge formats to appeal to businessmen.⁵⁶

The globalisation of Italian coffee drinking should not be seen then, as indicative of the hegemony of a single format or cultural reference, be it Italian or American. There is a great deal of local variation in the agents and agency driving this transformation, as well as in the beverages consumed, the formats adopted and the meanings that have been manufactured around these. Nonetheless it would be a mistake to lament this as a further indicator of Italy losing control of its cuisine while failing to exploit its profitability – Italian roasters such as Lavazza and Illy have been prominent in the international market, developing licensed coffee bar formats with which to challenge the international chains, while professional machine manufacture remains largely concentrated in Italy itself⁵⁷. Although domestic coffee consumption in Italy has stagnated, exports of roasted coffee have soared, allowing producers to subsidise the price of the former via the latter, thus making the ordinary Italian coffee drinker a significant beneficiary of the globalisation of espresso⁵⁸.

Jonathan Morris
University of Hertfordshire.

⁵³ <http://www.coffeeheaven.eu.com>, accessed 16 March 2006

⁵⁴ Interview with Szabados Tamás, Berne, 21 May 2006

⁵⁵ *Shanghai firm appeals verdict in Starbucks case, Starbucks aims at lesser known cities*, in "Comunicaffè International", e-newsletter, Milan, 23 January, 15 February 2006.

⁵⁶ *India – Retail Business is Brewing*; Comunicaffè International, 5 September 2006

⁵⁷ Unfortunately UCIMAC, the machine manufacturers trade association refuses to release figures, but we have been told that of c120,000 machines produced annually, c70-80% originate in Italy.

⁵⁸ In 2005 coffee exports rose by 11.4% *Federalimentare 2005* in Comunicaffè, e-newsletter, Milan, 22 Feb 2006, while domestic consumption fell by c2-3% *Caffe nel HORECA*, Comunicaffè, 22 August 2006.

IMAGES



Figure 1. 'A Coffee and a Shave', Moka Bar, London, 1954, (Getty Images)



Figure 2. Exotic Espresso. Interior of El Cubano, London, 1956 (AHDS Visual Arts Archive)



Figure 3. Ethnic Espresso. Bar Centrale, London (J. Morris)



Figure 4. Branded Espresso. Costa Coffee (J. Morris)