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Dannie Kjeldgaard, University of Southern Denmark, Denmark
Andrea Hemetsberg Lisa Pichler, University of Innsbruck
Harri Luomola, University of Vaasa
Dania Mastrangelo, IULM
Jacob Östberg, Stockholm University
Maria Pecoraro, University of Jyväskylä

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Dannie Kjeldgaard, University of Southern Denmark, Denmark
Andrea Hemetsberger, University of Innsbruck, Austria
Harri Luomala, University of Vaasa, Finland
Dania Mastrangelo, IULM University, Italy
Maria Pecoraro, University of Vaasa, Finland
Jacob Östberg, Stockholm University, Sweden
Elisabeth A. Pichler, University of Innsbruck, Austria

ABSTRACT
By way of a transnational history of European coffee consumption culture we explore and revisit the notion of a European consumer market. We developed a cultural history of coffee in Denmark/Sweden, Finland, Austria and Italy covering a geocultural variety of coffee consumption cultures. From these localized histories we identified a set of common themes defining the socio-cultural trajectory of the commodity’s biography. The common structures of the cultural history of coffee consumption culture facilitate the articulation of contemporary competition in European and national myth markets. The paper contributes to the cultural branding paradigm by adding the perspective of transnational history to contextualize national myth markets.

INTRODUCTION
With the globalization of markets and consumer culture, marketing and consumer research has been concerned with the issue of the existence of the global consumer versus marginalization of localized consumption cultures. Research about commonalities and differences among consumers across markets emerged from the prospect of the Single European market (SEM) in 1992—the Euro-consumer (see, e.g., Halliburton and Hüneberg 1993; Schmidt and Pioch 1996).

European researchers started to look for “evidence” of the existence of “this elusive creature—the Euro-consumer” (Schmidt and Pioch 1996, p.15) in an attempt to find common grounds for standardization, and to juxtapose European with North American consumption patterns. More recently, in interpretive consumer research, focus has moved to identifying particularities of marketing contexts, which annuls some of the theoretical insights in the canons of consumer research. The plethora of lived consumer cultures, and a sense of the inadequateness of theoretical conceptualizations generated in Northern American cultural contexts to explain these, provoked calls for marketing and consumer culture theories that are attuned to specific Latin (Cova and Cova 2002), Celtic (Brown 2006) or Nordic (Kjeldgaard and Östberg 2007) contexts.

In this article we attempt to bridge this divide of the particularistic local consumer cultures and the futile attempts to identify homogeneous consumer segments. While not exactly advocating a return to the ideas of the Euro-consumer we do note that across the sites researched in this project, there are certain commonalities that will lead us to suggest looking at European structures of common difference (cf., Wilk 1996). We argue that a transnational history approach to consumer culture may reveal structural commonalities of cultural meaning in market places otherwise hidden by an epistemology of contemporality and “methodological nationalism” (Wimmer and Glick-Schiller 2002).

Coffee consumption represents an interesting context to explore consumer cultural and market place glocalization from a historical perspective. Coffee history spans from the myth of the origin of European coffee culture in 17th century Venice, Oxford, and Vienna from which it spread across Europe in multiple local manifestations, to its contemporary cultural artefacts, ranging from the Espresso tradition of Italy to the practice of bulk drip coffee drinking in Nordic contexts. These early outcomes of glocalization have been shaped by a multiplicity of modernity projects and consequently varied consumer cultures inscribed in local/national/regional mythologies of cultural identity. With the contemporary globalization of coffee consumption epitomized by Starbucks, historically glocalized European coffee consumption cultures are undergoing transformation. In this paper we trace the cultural biography (Kopytoff 1986) of the commodity of coffee to elucidate the historical trajectory of the commodity. Establishing this trajectory is necessary to understand the structures of marketplace meaning systems in the product category of coffee in the contemporary market place: “[…] it is the social history of things, over large periods of time and at large social levels, that constrains the form, meaning, and structure of more short-term, specific and intimate trajectories” (Appadurai 1986, p.36).

METHODOLOGY
Methodologically we draw on two approaches that are particularly suited to grasp the complexity outlined above. For the historical aspect we are inspired from the approach labelled “transnational history” (Iriye 2004). Basically this approach springs out of a dissatisfaction in historical circles with one-sided focus on historical research within particular nation-state context. A transnational historical approach involves looking at how phenomena in a particular setting emerge in relation to developments in other settings. By identifying these relations and historical trajectories researchers are able to identify and understand socio-cultural historical phenomena beyond nation-state contexts (Ibid) avoiding a solipsistic or myopic perspective. Transnational history is part of an overall research strategy of this project to “follow the thing”–one of the tenets of multi-sited research (see Kjeldgaard, Csaba, and Ger 2006). Through this combination of approaches the paper seeks to uncover variations of outcomes and consequences of glocalization as well as exploring consumer cultural differences and similarities in Nordic (Denmark, Sweden, and Finland), Mediterranean (Italy) and central European (Austria) glocal consumer culture. For each site a cultural history of coffee consumption has been detailed. None of the researchers are trained historians so we have relied on a variety of academic and popular cultural histories in each locality as well as literature dealing with global and pan-European cultural histories of coffee. For each site we collected accounts of the cultural history of coffee, identifying main themes until there was a thematic saturation. While this does not cover an all-encompassing history it does represent the predominant representation of coffee history. As such we argue that this constitutes the contemporary representation of the collective memory (Zerubavel 2004) of the commodity. After reading and comparing the individual cultural histories we identified a number of common themes across sites. In fact, the similarity of the cultural histories of coffee across sites belies the often popularized claim of the differences of contemporary coffee consumption cultures (which might be the case in terms of the variety of practices).
HISTORICAL CONTEXTUALIZATION OF A EUROPEAN CONSUMPTION CULTURE

In this section we aim at giving a coherent description of the diffusion of coffee consumption practices throughout Europe. We discuss Nordic, Central, and South European contexts that are particularly rich in historical and contemporary coffee consumption practices and meanings, and provide insights into both, cultures of dominant as well as derivative coffee cultures.

Coffee and the variation in consumption styles of coffee over time has always been part of a negotiation of the local and the global. From an early exoticism over insertion into projects of nation-hood and politics, a symbol of local scarcity and global abundance in the mid-20th century to contemporary processes of Starbucksification. The history is presented under six sections: The Myth of the Origin of Coffee Consumption; The Function of Coffee-Medicalization and the mobilization of Labour; Coffee and Social Class; A Common History of Shortage: Bans and Embargos; Coffee and the Continuity of the Modern; and Coffee as Part of National Identity Projects.

Myth of the Origin of Coffee Consumption

Coffee as a consumption commodity entered the European context as the result of the increased trade that followed 15th and 16th century explorations of the world, colonial settlements and an increasing number of trade routes. The emergence of coffee culture in Europe coincided with the Enlightenment period and the emerging Western modernity (Ellis 2004; Taylor 2004). The importance of coffee consumption is evidenced by the plethora of myths surrounding the first place where coffee was served. While many like to place the origins of European coffee culture in Vienna, after the Turkish siege, it appears that the Italian coffee history dates back already to the 16th century when the explorers brought coffee, along with other exotic goods new to this part of the world, into the major Italian harbours. In 1570 coffee was introduced in Venice along with tobacco. The Paduan Prospero Alpino, a famous botanist and physician, enabled Venetians to learn and appreciate coffee because he described its characteristics in a book—De Planctis Aegyptii et de Medicina Aegyptiorum—printed between 1591 and 1592. Also for this reason, Venice was the city where coffee could rapidly be found in abundance even if, at the beginning, it was sold only at chemist’s shop and the price of the beverage was very high. Coffee became the object of trade and commerce also in consequence of travelers’ reports. In fact, for example Francesco Morosini, high judge of the doges’ city and ambassador of the Venetian Republic to the Sultan, in 1582, through his report from Constantinople (what we today refer to as Istanbul), let people know that in the East there were a lot of public places where people used to meet each other and drink coffee. Still, it was not until December 29th 1720 that Café Florian opened in Venice to be the first Italian coffee shop followed by a rapid expansion of this type of public consumption institution—by 1763 only Venice numbered no less than 218 coffee shop.

So while coffee might have been first imported to Italy and historians have found out about coffee houses being opened in Venice and Oxford in as early as 1647 and 1650, respectively (Menninger 2004), a more comprehensive coffee culture where public life migrated out to the coffee houses seem to have flourished in Austria before this trend took off in Italy. Austria also nurtures legends about the introduction of coffee to the country. According to a legend, the Turks left some bags full of coffee beans in Vienna at the end of the second Turk siege in 1683, and a well-respected envoy of the Austrian emperor was allowed to keep them and open the first Viennese coffee house by way of thanks for his bravery in the field. However, in the meantime this legend has also been declared untrue (Steinlechner 2008). In fact, coffee was first put on the Austrian map in 1665 when the Emperor Leopold I welcomed ambassadors of Sultan Mehmed IV in Vienna in order to sign a peace treaty. The Turkish delegates brought all kinds of foreign goods with them and gave Austrian citizens the possibility to marvel at them in their luxurious camps. They also served coffee to the locals and can thus be held accountable for the initial spark of interest in this drink in Austria (Heise 1996). Twenty years later, two Armenians founded the first Viennese coffee house in 1685 (Teply 1980). Despite the geographic distance from central Europe to the southernmost Nordic countries Denmark and Sweden, coffee drinking quite quickly made its way there and was introduced in the second half of the 17th century. In Sweden, for example, coffee was first recorded on a customs record in Gothenburg in 1685. The drink migrated north and made its way to Finland where it has its historical roots amongst the gentry of the 1730’s.

Apart from the discontinuities in the historical records of the first coffee houses in Europe, and almost independent of the origins of European coffee drinking and culture, myths of origin serve European attempts of appropriation of coffee as typically European. Despite the fact that its geographical origins are exotic; Eastern; oriental, coffee drinking as a cultural endeavour has been quickly absorbed by European nations, similar to tea, and other colonial products. Globalization, although denoted as a typical modern phenomenon has its roots in colonization of nations, their commodities and produces. Although coffee has been brought to Europe rather than being forcefully acquired, European hegemonic empires have been quick in institutionalizing a cultivated and socially stratifying practice of coffee drinking in Europe. Myths of origin also reveal the power of social institutionalization. Those nations which were first in developing institutionalized and socially stratifying forms of coffee drinking, authentically claim their right on a national coffee culture today. The commodity of coffee and its consumption culture hence rapidly spread across Europe and developed into local contexts to become part of the definition of cultural identity representing an early example of the globalization (Robertson 1992) of consumer culture. While we do see a geographic diffusion from particular cultural centres of Europe to other places, the diffusion have occurred at a remarkable pace given the transportation and communication facilities of the time. This puts us into perspective contemporary hype of the instantaneousity of diffusion of global consumer culture.

Coffee as Function: Medicalization and the Mobilization of Labour

When the new product coffee was brought into the consumer culture at the time, it appears that its role was initially contested and that it took some time for it to find its place in local food cultures. Coffee, and especially large quantities of coffee, quite evidently has certain effects on both body and mind and therefore coffee, to this day, has distinct links to other substances bearing these qualities, namely medicines. In Austria, for example, drinking coffee in social settings was not, as accounted for above, common until after 1665 when the first coffee house opened. Coffee, however, had not been totally unknown to Austrians before. Since the 16th century medical doctors had prescribed their patients coffee as a drug capable of curing gastro-intestinal diseases. The strong effect of coffee led fanatical Christians in Italy to question whether drinking it was in accordance with the Christian faith and whether the drink was only for misbelievers. Under the pontificate of Pope Clemente VII they asked to ban coffee drinking. In order to make up his mind, the Pope asked for a cup of coffee and then said that it would have been a sin to let only misbelievers drink it. Thanks to the Pope’s approval, the success of coffee was assured and after
this episode, coffee was also considered by some physicians as a medicine for its “therapeutic powers.” Also in Sweden coffee started out as more of a medicine than a social drink and it was placed on the pharmacy list of approved drugs in 1687, recommended for overall strengthening of the stamina. Later on as coffee drinking was spread amongst the upper-class in Europe throughout the seventeenth century, the habit trickled down to the lower classes who initially drank coffee mostly for its invigorating qualities, and to cure hangovers and flautulence.

In the Nordic context, the invigorating qualities of coffee aligned itself nicely with the ideology of Protestant work ethics that highlighted the clarity of the mind, sobriety and the virtuousness of working hard (Andersen 2007). We can see that the appropriation of coffee by wider bodies of consumers was closely associated with the onset of industrialism and both the industrial and agrarian working day. Coffee became a consumption alternative as public authorities attempted to increase worker efficiency by discouraging the consumption of beer and stronger spirits. Coffee hence played a part in the mobilization of the industrial work force.

Drugs and stimulants, such as coffee, regularly made their way in the Leisure class first (Veblen 1994), where they are conspicuously consumed, requiring a certain connoisseurship and exclusivity. In order to preserve exclusivity, its consumption is contested and ceremonial, and restricted to specific forms of use. The functional qualities of coffee thus seem to have been emphasized both when coffee made its way into new territories and when coffee spread to new classes. Across sites, coffee has hence been interpreted in predominant cultural currents of the emerging European modernity—the medico-scientific discourse and the discourse of industrialization.

Coffee Consumption and Social Class

Throughout all the empirical contexts we can see how coffee trickled down through the social classes. It started out as an exotic drink for the royalty or the aristocracy, to be consumed in ritualistic settings on special occasions, and then spread to eventually become a drink for the working class where much of the more elaborate protocol surrounding coffee consumption vanished or was re-interpreted. In Austria for example, when coffee stopped being considered a drug it morphed into a semi-luxury food instead, and consequently became a drink that people liked to have on various occasions. The considerable increase in coffee houses and other places serving coffee contributed substantially to the diffusion of coffee to the bourgeoisie and the middle class (Menninger 2004). Similarly in Italy, by the late 18th century, elegant coffee shop like Café Florian in Venice became fashionable places to meet each other and talk about every kind of stuff. This aspect was very important for coffee success and men of culture were so fond of the drink that it was called an “intellectual beverage.” Simultaneously, a distinct Austrian coffee house culture emerged. In 1819, Vienna counted 150 coffee houses; around 1900 they summed up to 600. Viennese coffee house culture became internationally known through the presentation of typical Austrian coffee houses at the world exhibitions in 1873 and 1878. The major characteristics are the abundance of different coffee drinks and the wide array of newspapers available there (in some cafés this amounted to as many as 300 different newspapers), as well as gambling, music and dance. In the 19th century even a special kind of music called “Wiener Kaffeehausmusik” had developed and become especially popular in Vienna (Heise 1996). From 1700 on, a special law regularized the dissemination of coffee houses. Only those who possessed an official permit—called “Kaffeesiedemeister”—by the Emperor were allowed to roast and brew coffee for sale (Ferré 1991). In the beginning coffee houses likened clubs and were exclusively visited by men who enjoyed gambling and smoking. Only in the 1840s women started to go to coffee houses. They were seen as predominantly bourgeois locales where all kinds of court officials liked to spend their spare time. For the lower class it was much too expensive to indulge in coffee consumption in these locales (Steinlechner 2008). Viennese coffee houses reached their zenith during the fin de siècle period. During this time, politicians of all parties but also famous artists, thinkers and writers (e.g., Adolf Loos, Franz Werfel, Franz Kafka, and Arthur Schnitzler) frequented Austrian coffee houses and contributed to the café’s fame (Ferré 1991; Heise 1996; Wiesmüller and Maurer 2003). The most famous and traditional coffee houses still today enjoy the flair of the old Austrian monarchy and the famous literate scene.

In the Nordic countries the diffusion of coffee consumption followed a similar pattern. In Finland, coffee was initially drunk only on Sundays by the gentry and manor lords, but became more common amongst the bourgeoisie, peasants and workers in the 1870’s. Like the other contexts however, the process was not altogether smooth as drinking coffee was banned in Finland four times on economic, health-related and moral grounds. One particularity of the Nordic contexts is the attribution of coffee consumption to femininity. This stands in contrast to the more masculine attribution of coffee in central and southern Europe. In the Danish context, coffee in the bourgeois classes was appropriated by domestic consumption culture of women as something being served when social visits (Andersen 2007). Danish Enlightenment philosopher and playwright Ludvig Holberg proclaimed that “nowadays our wives and daughters are able to pay several visits in one day and come home quite sober.” Coffee here was given the role of the feminine drink in contrast to beer—the ideal drink for “a Danish man.” Coffee was aligned with the feminine and the (threatening) foreign. There are still a number of terms associated with female consumers of coffee such as jordemoderkaffe (trl. “midwife’s coffee”–very strong coffee) and kaffesøster (“coffee sister”–a woman drinking large quantities of coffee) and barselskaffe (coffee served visitors to a woman who has recently given birth). The Swedish term kaffemoster (“coffee aunt”—someone really fond of coffee) shows that this was not a unique particularity of Denmark. Historically, elaborated social aspects have been intrinsically connected with the Finnish coffee consumption culture, and also in Finland coffee played a particular role for women. For example, it was socially mandatory for well-respected housewives to arrange two grandiose coffee parties and a few smaller ones during a year. So called sewing society meetings (arranged at private homes) for women are a Finnish example of the latter kind of social occasions. Thus, coffee has played a role in facilitating the social interaction between women who were at that time tied up with the home sphere. This helped Finnish women to create a culture of their own and presumably represented first steps of emancipation. Coffee hence was both part of the emerging culture of domesticity as well as a drink item in bourgeois intellec
tual salon culture (Goodman 1989). While coffee has followed a rather traditional trickle-down pattern in most contexts, Finland is somewhat of an exception as coffee was almost instantly consumed in high quantities amongst all social classes. As coffee became part and parcel of everyday life for a broad array of people in the Nordic contexts, it started to profoundly change important cultural categories such as the way the time of the day is divided. In Finland the growing popularity of coffee-drinking changed the daily routines and eating culture of the workers and countryside people. Coffee was prepared, served and consumed only at certain pre-determined times during a day. As a matter of fact, this still shows in the modern Finnish working life: the legislation guarantees two coffee breaks for every Finnish employee. In the 19th century coffee had become
part of agrarian festivities and soon became part of the rhythm of everyday life—evidence of which still lives on through vocabulary such as “morning coffee, pre-moon coffee, afternoon coffee, evening coffee” in the Danish context. While coffee in the Nordic countries thus quite quickly became a rather common domestic activity it was initially seen as something signalling social status. And the domesticity of coffee consumption did not reign alone, as in many other European countries coffee houses were established. The Danish coffee house culture was influenced by Viennese tradition as places of art and poetry (Andersen 2007) rather than being hotbeds of revolution and commerce that were seen in France and the UK (Ellis 2004). Coffee drinking, and the coffee house as an important public institution that reflects the predominant economic-political discourse within national borders seems to unite European coffee tradition. National identities are built and re-built in coffee houses, reflecting the dominant mode of local political discourse. Nordic countries as democratic, pragmatic and open cultures rather define their local identity through peaceful and mind-opening coffee consumptionscapes; France and the UK, likewise fostered their dominant political attitude in discourse.

A Common History of Shortage: Bans and Embargos

Most markets experiences shortages of coffee in connections with major political crises and wars. Particularly the Second World War is highlighted in the history of coffee (e.g. Pendergrast 1999; Ellis 2004) across sites. This collective memory lives on in contemporary popular accounts of the coffee history.

The high prices of coffee made it unaffordable for the biggest part of the Austrian population in the 17th, 18th and also 19th century. Therefore, coffee surrogates and substitutes were developed and consumed which contained just a small amount of real coffee, if any at all. Later on, the first and second world war left an impoverished Austrian population who could not afford coffee anymore. At the time of the reconstruction people turned to substitutes and surrogates made out of acorns, figs, chicory and other fruits and vegetables. Coffee surrogates became very common again and remained dominant in terms of consumption over real coffee until the 1970s (Steinlechner 2008).

The contemporary Finnish coffee culture has been markedly affected by the historical period of rationing (1939-1954) caused by the Second World War. During that time period, real coffee could not be legally sold in Finland. Finns had to settle for substitute and surrogate coffee. The substitute coffee contained a small proportion of real coffee mixed with, for example, chicory whereas the surrogate coffee did not contain coffee at all. All kinds of ingredients were used for the substitute and surrogate coffee: roots of chicory, dandelion and couch grass, wheat, oat, rye and sugar beet. Eventually, common people started to use these terms interchangeably. During this time period people were willing to pay a lot of money for real coffee. Legally, one could get hold of genuine coffee through winning in a coffee lottery.

Coffee, similar to other culture-determining produces and objects, is a commodity that links collective memory to significant economic and political events in that it reflects crisis and times of abundance. Coffee consumption, therefore, becomes symptomatic for the status of European nations, which pride themselves to have (some sort of) coffee culture or coffee drinking history. As national identity is closely linked to coffee drinking as a social institution, consumers turn to awful-tasting substitutes rather than stop drinking coffee. In a similar vein, coffee consumption practices could be interpreted as indicators for the closeness-openness of a nation to global influences. Political threats translate into attempts of re-localization of consumption practices and nationalist tendencies, whereas consumption globalizes in times of political and economic wealth. Radical Italianization of European coffee culture after World War II and European reconstruction bears witness of these processes of modernization.

Coffee: The Continuity of the Modern

In the 50es modernity conquered old traditions. With the enormous popularity of Italy as the Austrians’ favourite holiday destination came the increasing preference for Italian style coffee. This was seen in other cultural contexts as well such as the UK (Ellis 2004) and Denmark (Kjersgaard 1992). Especially in the Western and Southern parts of Austria, those sharing a border with Italy, Italian coffee bars added to the local, more traditional coffee places. Nowadays, Italian coffee drinks are served all over Austria and are perceived as equally authentic and high-quality as traditional Austrian coffee specialties. During the 1990s, Starbucks and Starbucksified coffee chains arrived in Austria and opened cafes in the biggest towns. However, Starbucks itself can still only be found in Vienna and has not managed to conquer less touristy places. At the same time, Austrian coffee tradition has enjoyed a nostalgic revival and is still well-liked by Austrian coffee lovers of all generations.

In the latter part of the twentieth century coffee cultures flowed, creolized and materialized in new forms as a global cultural economy emerged. The American diner concept entered Scandinavia in the 1930s to become the working class kaffebar (Biering 2003) serving early morning coffee and lunch and came to epitomize Danish lunch culture (there are only a small number of these left). In the mid 1970s French inspired brasseries emerged in the urban Scandinavian centres and introduced Southern European coffee culture to the market (albeit in the French form—café au lait was all the rage in the late 1980s, early 1990s). In the 1990s Scandinavia saw the emergence of both the Starbucksified coffee cultural style and a connoisseurship style with the emergence of single bars and chains of coffee shops focusing on Italian inspired coffee brewing.

Even during the early history of Finnish coffee consumption, it was not only enjoyed at private homes. There were three cafes in Turku already in 1783. Traditionally Finns have favoured light-roasted coffee. In its simplest form, traditional Finnish coffee consumption moment outside home has been a plain lightly-roasted cup of coffee with sugar and cream (plus a bun) enjoyed in a café locating in the connection of a bus or gas station or a bakery. The globalization trends have diversified the forms of cafes and coffee drinking habits in Finland. Traditional bakery-cafés co-exist with modern coffee shop chains (e.g., Robert’s Coffee and Wayne’s Coffee) and independent coffee houses and the distinction between a shop and a café has blurred. For example, large hyper markets and furniture stores have established inside cafes offering fresh coffee and pastries.

Historically, across the sites investigated here, coffee has been at the core of the articulation—as representation and material manifestation—of the modern. This represents an interesting paradox not only in the continuity of articulating change (McCracken 2006) but the continuity of a particular commodity becoming appropriated for this articulation across time and places.

Coffee as Part of National Identity Projects

As mentioned earlier, coffee came to become symbols of cultural identity and nation-hood. In Italy, coffee history is related to early twentieth century innovation of espresso machines (Pendergrast 1999).

This period coincided with the transformation of Italian society from an agrarian to an industrial one. Drinking culture suited better to the city than the countryside and for this reason the new coffee machines became a symbol of Italian modernization. Espresso could now be
considered one of the symbols of “made in Italy” in the world, and 
one of the most copied products. Good Espresso must be obtained 
by forcing adequately pressurised water through coffee powder 
and should not contain any additive or flavouring and should be free of 
any artificially added water. The Italian Espresso National Institute 
has introduced a certification programme to protect and promote the 
quality of espresso that is the result of a sum of the quality of coffee 
beans, the expertise of the coffee roaster, the technology of the coffee-
machine and grinder-dispenser, and the skill of the barman. Italians 
usually drink only espresso coffee and do not consider “authentic” 
all the other kind of coffee.

Pre-roasted coffee started to gain ground in Finland in the 
beginning of the 20th century when numerous small roasteries were 
founded. In 1930’s, when the political situation in Europe grew 
tense, the feelings of patriotism and belongingness intensified also 
in Finland, and national symbols such as sauna, Suomi-neito (the 
national personification of Finland) and the Finnish flag appeared in 
coffee advertising. On the other hand, coffee was also advertised as 
exotic and exciting because of its origin. The best known character 
in the Finnish coffee advertising was the Paula-maiden. She was a 
dark-haired young lady wearing the Sääksmäki national costume and 
offered coffee from a big copper pot; she never drank coffee herself. 
Another firm introduced a male counterpart for the Paula-maiden: 
the exotic Pedro who resembled a Latin American. After the Second 
World War, coffee advertising prospered using meanings derived 
from the times of material scarcity. The themes of exoticism, festivity 
and luxuriousness were still observable in the Finnish coffee 
advertising of 1980-1990. Another coffee advertising discourse was 
related to creating an exotic and Latin atmosphere and emphasizing the 
strong, exciting and fruity flavour and aroma of coffee. Thus, in 
the Finnish coffee advertising, locality and distant cultural influences 
intertwined. Similar articulations of the national and the exotic was 
seen in the Danish context (Andersen 2007).

Across the sites, historically and contemporarily, coffee consumption 
is used to characterise local culture—what is, coffee serves as a 
food cultural manifestation of what it means to be Danish, Finnish, 
Austrian and Italian (for example, one of the sources for this article is 
titled “Coffee—the national drink of Denmark”). The commodity 
of coffee has hence been a common object onto which the “imagined 
communities” (Anderson 1983) of nations are built and articulated 
through various ways of drinking and practicing national coffee culture. The particular appropriation of the exotic through national 
idiosyncratic coffee consumption rituals and institutionalizations of 
coffee; embracing and appropriating the modern; adding to and influencing global coffee culture; are all ingredients for an imagined 
community of European coffee connoisseurs.

**DISCUSSION**

Coffee unites and differentiates Europe into nations and coffee 
cultures of consumption. Coffee drinking, although exotic in its 
origns, has been mythically established as typically European, 
so-called institutionalized in various forms of consumption rituals 
and coffee houses. Our findings show that coffee consumption—similar 
to other stimulants and luxury goods—originally served as a means 
to social stratification and social interaction, deeply reflecting hierarchical versus emancipated European national cultures and working 
philosophies. While coffee consumption patterns define nations as 
“imagined communities,” coffee also unites through common European 
history. Political upheavals commonly re-localize meanings of 
coffee consumption. Modernization conquers old, local traditions and 
gives way to new, global trends, such as Italianization of European 
coffee consumption habits, while keeping the core local culture of 
coffee drinking.

While, as stated in the introduction, we do not advocate a return 
to the fantasies of the Euro-consumer flourishing in the beginning 
of the 1990s (see e.g., Haliburton and Hünerberg 1993) we do 
want to raise a warning against the recent trends towards solipsistic 
views focusing on only the uniqueness of the particular contexts. 
Our study of coffee cultural history across several European sites 
point to several similarities at the structural level. Therefore, we 
suggest that it might be worthwhile to consider European structures 
of common difference (cf., Wilk 1996) that have been historically 
established. Our analysis of the various cultural histories of the 
coffee commodity reveals that the trajectory of the commodity of 
coffee is quite similar despite contextual specificities. The thematic 
structures discussed above have their root in a common trajectory of 
Western modernity (Taylor 2004) in which commodities and their 
marketing and consumption practices have reflected and followed 
continuities and ruptures from the enlightenment period, early 
industrialization and the late modernization of the late twentieth 
century. The very continuity of the presence of the commodity in 
the market place throughout a socio-cultural development which 
is often said to characterize change is striking. It seems like coffee 

\* is a “sticky object” that historically have become a material manifestation of cultural disruption—from the forming of revolutions in 
17th century coffee houses to the formation of contemporary global consumer culture.

We argue that understanding the historical biography of a commodity—the strong ingrainment and prevalence as symbol of change in socio-cultural histories—aid in understanding the ground on which contemporary glocalization processes occur. The historical 
biography of the commodity prestructures the possible brand-
progression system in which contemporary brand competition 
can occur. Furthermore, since these cultural histories represent a 
cultural memory (Thompson and Tian 2008) they prestructure the possible meaning systems in consumer culture. Consumers, through 
socialization and media representations will draw on the sediments 
of the cultural history to interpret contemporary market offerings. 

Furthermore, our analysis invites to a re-examination of the 
predominant debate on glocalization. One popular notion is that 
local cultures are influenced by external homogenizing forces 
but are re-interpreted to fit local cultural categories. The counter-
argument is that, due to homogenizing forces of globalization, 
local cultures re-invent themselves. The core of both arguments is 
that local cultures are thought to exist prior to globalizing forces 
intruding. The analysis of coffee—and the near instantaneous dif-
susion and materialization in local narratives of identity—suggest that global cultural flows precede and are constitutive for local cultural expressions.

The common structures of the cultural history of coffee consumption culture facilitate the articulation of contemporary 
competition in European and national myth markets. The paper 
contributes to the cultural branding paradigm (Holt 2006) by adding 
the perspective of transnational history to contextualize national 
myth markets.

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