

Pre-print of Jonathan Morris, ‘Making Italian Espresso, Making Espresso Italian’, *Food and History*, 8, 2 (2010), pp.155-183,

Online publication 18 August 2011 D.O.I 10.1484/J.FOOD.1.102222

MAKING ITALIAN ESPRESSO, MAKING ESPRESSO ITALIAN.

Jonathan Morris, Professor of Modern European History, University of Hertfordshire

School of Humanities, Hatfield, AL10 9AB, GB – j.2.morris@herts.ac.uk

Abstract

Espresso coffee has become synonymous with Italy, as have those beverages which employ this as a base such as cappuccino and caffè latte. This article examines the processes by which espresso became ‘Italian’ over the course of the twentieth century by investigating the way that the taste *of* Italian coffee has evolved, along with the taste *for* coffee amongst the Italians. In addition it discusses the ways in which the serving styles of these beverages have been adjusted to make them more palatable to coffee-drinking cultures outside Italy. By focussing on the sensory qualities of the coffee itself, it aims to produce a material history of espresso that can be read alongside that of the socio-cultural conditions that have occasioned its success.

KEYWORDS Coffee, Coffee bars, Cafés, Coffee houses, Coffee Machines, Italy, Espresso, Cappuccino, Hot Beverages, Taste, National Tastes

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Coffee and Taste

Manufacturing taste in coffee is a complex business, not least due to the sensory complexity of coffee itself. Wine contains some 300 chemical compounds that can affect its taste on the palate; the figure for coffee is well in excess of 1,000. As with wine, the eventual taste of coffee reflects the characteristics of the land on which the crop was cultivated, the climate during the growing season, the care with which it was harvested and the methods used to separate the coffee bean (strictly speaking a drupe) from the surrounding cherry. Roasting then transforms the ‘green’ coffee - which is virtually odourless to the human nose - into a highly aromatic industrial product, increasing the number of ‘volatile molecular species’ from around 250 to over 800.² Blending, grinding, processing and preservation techniques all affect the eventual taste. The final stages of preparation, when the solid product is used to create a liquid beverage, are performed by the end consumer. The coffee drinker thus has a fundamental impact on the flavour of their beverage, in stark contrast to the wine imbibor pouring a glass direct from the bottle.

Coffee passes through so many hands on its journey from bean to cup that it is very difficult for any one element in this chain to exercise close control over the experiential taste of the eventual beverage. The challenge for most coffee roaster-retailers is to achieve a degree of sensory homogeneity within each of their coffee offerings that is sufficient to sustain it as a brand. Since the late nineteenth century this has usually been done by blending a variety of

¹ Much of the research on which this article is based was undertaken as part of the “Cappuccino Conquests” research project funded by a grant from the ESRC/AHRC Cultures of Consumption research programme (RES-154-25-0015). This enabled me to spend much time talking to many members of the international coffee trade who are the sources for the generic information I have used in the article. I am also grateful for the comments I received at the “Colloque : Des goûts et des industries”, Neuchâtel, 13-14 November 2009 and those of the anonymous reviewers for *Food and History*.

² Ernesto ILLY, “The Complexity of Coffee”, *Scientific American*, June 2002, pp. 72-77.

beans from different origins to achieve a consistent overall sensory profile that can be maintained by substituting beans from one source with those from another, thereby smoothing over the vagaries of supply. Consequently the vast majority of the world's coffee is traded as an agrarian commodity whose price is determined by that prevalent on the international exchanges, and it is sold on to the public as an apparently undifferentiated, unchanging product whose 'taste' and 'quality' reflects the brand positioning of the producer, rather than the provenance of the beans. It is only recently that a niche market in 'single-origin' specialty coffees has emerged in some highly developed markets such as the USA.

Yet, although the composition of blends will inevitably reflect market conditions, notably price, they also have to respect customer tastes. These have developed in dialogue with each other over time, and continue to reflect not just the social and cultural mores of a society, but also its economic and political pasts. In the last three decades of the 19th century, for example, a devastating outbreak of coffee leaf rust destroyed most of the coffee production in Asia and Africa. These were replanted using the hardier robusta coffee plant which, however, has a bitter mouth taste compared to the original arabica coffee plant that remained the dominant species cultivated in Latin America.³ Those European states that sourced a significant share of their coffee supply from their African and Asian colonies became used to blends containing a higher robusta content, and corrected these for taste by utilising longer roasts at higher temperatures (often referred to as 'French').

Such variations in consumer coffee tastes can persist long after geopolitical circumstances have changed. If we construct a 'quality' index by using the standard industry method of calculating the percentage proportion of imported green coffee from each of the four traded classifications – 'Colombian Milds', 'Other Milds', Brazilian Naturals and Robusta -, multiplying these by a weighting indicative of their quality (4, 3, 2, 1 respectively), and adding these up to produce a final index figure, then the resulting average figures among some of the leading European importing countries over the 2006-08 period are: Sweden 262, Germany 217, Netherlands 211, France 185.⁴ France's low score reflects the fact that 46%

³ Stuart McCOOK, "Global rust belt: *Hemileia vastatrix* and the ecological integration of world coffee production since 1850", *Journal of Global History*, 1 (2006), pp. 177-95.

⁴ Method from Francesco and Riccardo ILLY, *From Coffee to Espresso*, (3rd ed., Milan, 2002), p.160. Data from EUROPEAN COFFEE FEDERATION (ECF), *European Coffee*

of its total imports are of robusta or equivalent grades. Ironically, it is no longer France's former West African dependencies that are its principal suppliers of robusta, but Vietnam, a marginal producer when under French rule, but today the second-largest coffee-producing country in the world.⁵

The same blend of coffee beans can taste substantially different, depending on the method of beverage preparation and serving style adopted. One can categorise the multiplicity of preparation methods that have developed around the world into seven basic types: direct boiling with water, cold infusion, hot infusion (caffetiere), filtration (drip), percolation, pressurised extraction (espresso), soluble (instant). Each of these styles has developed its own dedicated brewing equipment: for example, 'Turkish' or 'Greek' coffee is prepared using an *ibrik* or *cezve*: a long-handled narrow necked pot that is used to heat and reheat fine coffee grounds in direct contact with water. The same preparation method may be used to achieve very different tasting results. In Scandinavia drip coffee is prepared, using, on average, twice the quantity of coffee to water than in the United States of America. This partly explains how in 2009 Sweden consumed 7.35 kilos of coffee per capita, whereas in the US the figure was 4.09kg.⁶ As the almost 100% arabica blends found in Sweden contain less caffeine than the arabica/robusta combinations common in the United States, consumers are able to enjoy these stronger brews without adverse consequences. Serving sizes also differ dramatically – whereas in the Nordic countries coffee is usually drunk black and served in relatively small sized cups, in the Anglophone nations volumes are usually larger, not least because of the addition of milk which, of course, dramatically alters the taste of the final beverage itself. The 'supersized' concoctions sold by American coffee shops actually contain

Report, 2008, downloadable at www.ecf-coffee.org. The figure for France assumes that the c.18% of its coffee imports that are described as "unidentified" is of robusta or similar qualities.

⁵ ECF, *European Coffee Report*, 2008, p. 26.

⁶ INTERNATIONAL COFFEE ORGANISATION (ICO), *Country profiles: Sweden, USA*, http://www.ico.org/profiles_e.asp?section=Statistics, accessed 1 February 2011.

very little coffee at their base, again helping to explain the apparent contradiction between beverage sizes and per capita coffee consumption.⁷

Coffee is an acquired taste. It is no accident that Mennell chose to illustrate his fundamental contention in *All Manners of Food*, that ‘in humans most likes and dislikes are learned’ by citing the psychologist Robert C. Bolles’ contention that:

Coffee is one of the great, marvellous flavours. Who could deny that? Well, actually anyone drinking coffee for the first time would deny it. Coffee is one of those things that [have been] called innately aversive. It is bitter and characterless; it simply tastes bad the first time you encounter it. By the time you have drunk a few thousand cups of it, you cannot live without it. Children do not like it, uninitiated adults do not like it, rats do not like it; nobody likes coffee except those who have drunk a fair amount of it, and they all love it.⁸

That initiation into coffee inevitably takes place within the context of the dominant culture in which an individual is raised, so that their taste for coffee is, in reality, a taste for coffee as it is blended, roasted, prepared and served within that community. Travel narratives frequently employ the trope of coffee as ‘Other’ as a vehicle for exploring cultural difference, while travel guides often concentrate on how to obtain a beverage that tastes as close as possible to that enjoyed at home.⁹ Consequently coffee can become a sensory evocation of one’s membership of a social grouping, serving not so much as a chauvinistic symbol than simply a

⁷ To take an extreme example, of the 710ml Starbucks “Venti” Iced Latte, only 89ml consists of coffee (a “triple” espresso). See the nutritional data available on the Starbucks website: http://www.starbucks.com/menu/catalog/product?drink=espresso#view_control=product, accessed 25 February 2011.

⁸ Stephen MENNELL, *All Manners of Food. Eating and Taste in England and France* (2nd ed., Urbana, 1996), p. 17.

⁹ See, for example, Umberto ECO, “La Cuccuma maledetta” in Agostino NARIZZANO, *Caffè: Altre cose semplici*, (Verona, 1989), pp. 113-15 on the differences between Italian and American coffee.

shared taste. It is in many ways an excellent exemplar of the type of ‘banal nationalism’ identified by Billig as essential for the reproduction of ‘established nations’.¹⁰

Nowhere has coffee become a more iconic symbol of the nation than in Italy. The ‘Italian espresso’ has become closely identified with the country by both Italians and foreigners alike as have those beverages which employ this as a base such as cappuccino and caffè latte. This article examines the processes by which espresso became ‘Italian’ over the course of the twentieth century by investigating the way that the taste *of* Italian coffee has evolved, along with the taste *for* coffee amongst the Italians. In addition it discusses the ways in which the serving styles of these beverages have been adjusted to make them more palatable to coffee-drinking cultures outside Italy. By focussing on the sensory qualities of the coffee itself, it aims to produce a material history of espresso that can be read alongside that of the socio-cultural conditions that have occasioned its success.

Making Italian Espresso

In 1998 an Italian National Espresso Institute (INEI) was established to evaluate the sensory profile of an ‘Italian espresso’ (*espresso italiano*), and define the parameters under which this could be produced. According to INEI:

On sight, *Espresso Italiano* has a hazel-brown to dark-brown foam – characterised by tawny reflexes – with a very fine texture (absence of large mesh and larger or smaller bubbles). The nose reveals an intense scent with notes of flowers, fruits, toasted bread and chocolate. All of these sensations are felt also after swallowing the coffee in the long lasting aroma that remains for several seconds, sometimes even for minutes. Its taste is round, substantial and velvet-like. Sour and bitter tastes are well balanced and neither one prevails over the other. There is no, or a barely perceptible, astringent taste.¹¹

¹⁰ Michael BILLIG, *Banal Nationalism*, (London, 1995).

¹¹ CENTRO STUDI E FORMAZIONE ASSAGGIATORI, *L’Espresso Italiano Certificato*, supplement to *L’Assaggio* n.6, Sept 1999, p. 7. I have kept the translation offered by INEI although a better rendition might refer to a long-lasting aftertaste (as opposed to aroma), and a rounded body.

Espresso is best thought of as neither a type of coffee, nor a form of beverage, but as the outcome of a particular preparation process; one in which what are known as the four Ms in Italian (*macchina, macinazione, miscela* and *mano* – machine, grind, blend and barista) act in combination to produce the desired outcome. To create this elixir, according to the INEI, water under 9 bars of pressure should be blasted through a portion of 7 grams of coffee ground to a fineness to ensure that it takes 25 seconds to deliver 25 millilitres of liquid (including the foam or ‘crema’) into a thick white porcelain cup of 50ml capacity that is elliptical in shape with a slightly raised bubble at the centre that swirls around the liquid as it enters. The water temperature at the group head (the chamber where it encounters the coffee) should be at 88C, while the temperature in the cup should be 67C. To achieve the sensory effects described above (and which the INEI has mapped in much greater detail), the final beverage should have a viscosity of less than 1.5 mPa at 45C, contain more than 2 mg/ml of fat, and less than 100 mg of caffeine.¹²

These parameters have been incorporated into an Italian government Certificate of Product Conformity (Csqa n. 214 - 24 September 1999, DTP 008 Ed.1) for ‘*espresso italiano*’. INEI, a private institution, operates on the basis that its members (mostly Italian companies active within the coffee industry) may submit their various models of grinding and brewing machinery, along with their branded coffee blends to the Institute, which will then ascertain if these are capable of producing an espresso to the required sensory standard. If so, they are entitled to display the ‘Certified Italian Espresso’ trademark on their product. INEI also trains and certifies baristas as being capable of preparing an ‘*espresso italiano*’ and maintains a register of bars entitled to display the trademark in their windows.

Of particular importance, according to INEI is that:

Espresso Italiano is obtained, by definition and by tradition, through an expert blend of coffees of different origin. This is the only way to obtain the pleasant and rich aroma and the important and velvet body. The difference between an *Espresso Italiano* and a preparation obtained with the same methods but from one single coffee

¹² A pdf summarising these parameters can be downloaded from the Institute website http://espressoitaliano.org/doc/istituzionale_inei_lq_ita.pdf. Accessed 25 February 2011.

is similar to the difference to be found, in music, between a symphony and a solo performance ...¹³

It is, then, the *miscela*, not the coffee's origin, that delivers quality in the cup. By insisting on blending as a pre-requisite, INEI has codified the technical skills of the roasters into its definition of espresso, thus shifting the locus of quality creation from the producer country to the country of processing and preparation – that is Italy itself.

What is striking about these statements is that Italian espresso is presented as an unchanging, static beverage, whose 'original' features have been established by 'tradition'. Given that espresso is a process not a product, in which none of the '4 Ms' deployed need to have originated in Italy, the importance of this claim for the Institute and its members is that it constitutes the basis of a national claim for cultural ownership of espresso that can, in turn, be used to leverage up the economic value of the member's products. By formulating the parameters for making Italian espresso they are equally concerned, so to speak, with making espresso Italian.

This claim does not stand up in historical terms, however, particularly when examined from a sensory perspective. It is indeed true that the espresso process largely evolved in Italy, but this is a relatively modern piece of technological history, while the widespread adoption of espresso drinking by the Italian public is a very recent phenomenon. Each step in this evolution has seen substantial shifts in the sensory profile of what has been served as 'espresso' and the styles in which it has been consumed.

The Evolution of Espresso

The history of coffee in Italy long predates that of espresso. Venice was one of the first ports to begin importing coffee into Europe from the 1570s, with shops selling the beans present by the 1640s, although the first recorded coffee house did not open until 1683.¹⁴ During the following century, as grand cafes appeared in city centres such as Florian's in Venice and the

¹³ CENTRO STUDI E FORMAZIONE ASSAGIATORI, *L'Espresso Italiano Certificato*, p. 8.

¹⁴ Markman ELLIS, *The Coffee House. A Cultural History* (London, 2004), p. 82.

Caffè Greco in Rome, the cultural impact of coffee was captured in Carlo Goldoni's comedies, such as *La Bottega del Caffè* (1750). These new public spaces nurtured cultural and political movements such as that around Pietro Verri's Milan-based journal *Il Caffè* (1764-66), which played a leading role in the Italian enlightenment, while the 19th century coffee houses of Turin provided a meeting place for many of the politicians who played prominent roles in the unification of Italy. The socio-political role of coffee houses in Italian history could be said to parallel that experienced in 17th century London, 18th century Paris and 19th century Vienna.¹⁵

Although these cafes form an important part of the history of coffee culture in Italy, they did not contribute to the development of a distinctive style of 'Italian coffee'. The beverages served in the Italian coffee houses were prepared and served in pots using infusion-based methods consistent with the prevailing practices across Europe. During the nineteenth century domestic coffee was usually prepared using the filtration method, increasingly using a brewer consisting of two chambers with a filter holding the coffee between them that became known in Italy as a *napoletana*. Water was boiled in the lower chamber, and the *napoletana* was then turned upside down allowing the water to filter down through the coffee from what was now the upper to the lower chamber.¹⁶

Pellegrino Artusi, the father of Italian domestic cuisine, clearly regarded knowledge of the preparation techniques for coffee as sufficiently diffuse amongst the middle class readers of his 1891 masterpiece, *Scienza nella cucina e l'Arte di Mangiar Bene*, that he refrained from discussing them, instead concentrating on roasting techniques and the best blends. He was particularly enthused about the value of black coffee at breakfast:

Upon awakening in the morning, find out what best agrees with your stomach. If it does not feel entirely empty, limit yourself to a cup of black coffee; and if you

¹⁵ A useful transnational account of the development of the cafe and coffee house as both architectural and social spaces is provided by Cristoph GRAFE, Franziska BOLLERY, eds., *Cafes and Bars. The Architecture of Public Display*, (London, 2007).

¹⁶ See the descriptions of coffee brewing techniques in GIUSEPPE ANTONELLI ED., *Nuovo Dizionario Universale Tecnologico o di Arti e Mestieri*, Tomo III, (Venice, 1833), pp. 196-98. For a history of the evolution of Italian domestic coffee making machines see Ambrogio FUMAGALLI, *Macchine da caffè*, (Milan, 1990).

precede this with half a glass of water mixed with coffee, it will better help to rid you of any residues of an incomplete digestion. If, then, you find yourself in perfect form and (taking care not to be deceived, for there is also such a thing as false hunger) you immediately feel the need for food – a definite sign of good health and presage of a long life – this is a most suitable moment, depending on your taste, to complement your black coffee with a piece of buttered toast, or to take some milk in your coffee, or to have a cup of hot chocolate.¹⁷

During the depression years of the 1890s, coffee imports into Italy remained relatively stable with annual per capita consumption calculated at 0.39k in 1893. Between 1900 and 1913, however, this more than doubled with imports rising from 14,089 tonnes in 1900 to 28,659 in 1913, or 0.82k per capita.¹⁸ By 1912 even the overwhelmingly working class residents of the Roman suburb of Testaccio reported drinking coffee daily, sometimes accompanied by milk and bread for breakfast.¹⁹ Clearly this was a significant increase. However, a rough calculation based on the standard shrinkage allowance for green to roasted coffee of 20%, and using the 10g for brewing indicated by Artusi suggests that whereas the average individual drank around 40 cups of coffee a year in the 1890s, by the 1910s this might have reached 80 – making coffee drinking more of a weekly luxury rather than a daily act for the average consumer. It is likely that much of the self-reported ‘coffee’ consumption in neighbourhoods such as Testaccio was actually of coffee surrogates, chiefly toasted barley (known as *orzò*) and chicory.

It was the First World War that introduced one specific group of Italians – the 1.8 million men enrolled in the armed forces - to the pleasures of daily coffee drinking with a prescribed ration of between 10-15 grams a day. By 1918 annual green coffee imports exceeded 51m tonnes with over 40% of this destined for the military. Units were issued with grinders, although the soldiers deployed in the trenches often resorted to pounding the pre-roasted

¹⁷ Pellegrino ARTUSI, *Science in the Kitchen and the Art of Eating Well*, trans. Murtha BACA and Stephen SARTARELLI, (Toronto, 2003), p. 560.

¹⁸ Riccardo BACCHI, *L'Alimentazione e la politica annonaria in Italia*, (Bari, 1926), pp. 89-90.

¹⁹ As cited in Carol HELSTOSKY, *Garlic and Oil. Food and Politics in Italy*, (New York, 2004), p. 34.

beans using stones gathered from the rocky terrain around them.²⁰ Civil consumption also rose, most notably in the cities where the number of transitory visitors would have increased demand, as well as the preference, not least among the urban lower classes, for socialising outside the home.²¹ The regularity and efficiency of the supply and distribution of coffee, which remained in private hands throughout the war, combined with a relatively low rate of price increase - assisted by many town councils utilising the faculty granted to them to impose a maximum price for a cup of coffee consumed at the bar -, all contributed to the beverage's rising popularity.²² After the war, consumption suffered a sharp reverse between 1919 and 1921 as the state imposed a ham-fisted monopoly over the import trade, but the restoration of the free market saw a revival in coffee's fortunes with consumption peaking in 1929 at 1.2k per capita.²³

The expansion in demand for coffee outside the home from the end of the nineteenth century led caterers to seek more efficient and economical methods to prepare single cups of coffee for the customer. One such was to place a small filter over a cup to produce a *caffè express*, so called because it was prepared expressly for the customer. At the same time, engineers across Europe began developing bulk brewing machines in which the coffee could be stored and then decanted into individual cups when required. Eduard Loysel's enormous percolator-type machines which employed hydrostatic pressure to circulate the water had made a great

²⁰ Gaetano ZINGALI, "Il rifornimento dei viveri dell'esercito italiano durante la guerra" in BACCHI, *L'Alimentazione ...*, pp. 639-40.

²¹ BACCHI, *L'Alimentazione ...*, p. 103 calculates that an annual per capita consumption index for Turin based on the records of the dazio duty charged by the local authority on goods entering the city. Already standing at 2.8kg for 1912-14, this supposedly reached 3.8kg in 1919. These figures lack credibility as the number and variation in visitors to the city (including day visitors) would be such as to render meaningless any per capita estimates based on the number of recorded residents. Nonetheless they are very suggestive both of the much higher consumption levels within cities, and the rise in these during the war years.

²² BACCHI, *L'Alimentazione ...*, pp. 479-85 provides a detailed discussion of the fortunes of the coffee trade under state and private control between 1913 and 1921.

²³ ISTITUTO CENTRALE DI STATISTICA (ISTAT), *Sommario di statistiche storiche dell'Italia*, (Rome, 1976), Tav. 119.

impression at the Paris Exhibition of 1855, but many would argue that the first designer to incorporate a pressurised brewing system into his designs was Angelo Moriondo of Turin who registered a patent for a coffee machine in France in 1885. Moriondo's machine used steam pressure to drive hot water through a compressed cake of ground coffee before storing it in a receptacle from which it could then be served into individual cups.²⁴

It was, however, Luigi Bezzera of Milan who, in 1901, first registered a patent for a machine equipped with multiple group heads onto which portafilters containing compressed coffee could be clamped, allowing the caterer to brew a fresh cup of coffee 'expressly' for a customer by 'expressing' hot water drawn from the brass boiler through the coffee cake using the pressure of the steam. Bezzera's patent was acquired by the manufacturer Desidero Pavoni whose Ideale machine of 1905 is generally recognised as the first espresso machine to enter into commercial production. The following year both Pavoni and Bezzera (who Pavoni allowed to continue making machines under his own name) exhibited their wares at the 1906 World Fair held in Milan.²⁵

The machines were particularly suited to the so-called 'American bars' patronised by the urban bourgeoisie as places to socialise while transacting business, or at the end of the working day. Whereas coffee in the grand cafés was served by waiters to seated guests at a table, in the American bar the clientele stood on one side of the counter and purchased drinks from an attendant who served them from the other. The Caffè Manaresi, opened in Florence in 1898, is reputed to have been the first such bar in Italy, and was nicknamed 'Caffè dei Ritti' by locals because the patrons consumed their beverages standing up.²⁶ The espresso machine stood on the counter facilitating this faster 'express' service.

The number of bars and cafes serving espresso grew gradually in the first three decades of the twentieth century, although the costs of the machines meant they remained largely confined to elite establishments. This circumscribed market meant the main machine manufacturers -

²⁴ On Loysel see Edward and Joan BRAMAH, *Coffee Makers. 300 years of Art and Design*, (London, 1995), pp. 110-13; on Moriandi, consult Franco CAPPONI, *La Victoria Arduino. 100 Anni di Caffè Espresso nel Mondo*, (Macerata, 2005), pp. 3-7.

²⁵ Elena LOCATELLI, *La Pavoni. 1905-2005*, (Milano, 2005), especially pp. 12-19.

²⁶ BANCA NAZIONALE DEL LAVORO *Il Caffè. Produzione e Commercio* (Roma, 1960).

principally Pavoni in Milan, Victoria Arduino of Turin and San Marco in Udine - became heavily reliant on their exports to France, Germany and Central Europe.²⁷ Nonetheless a significant number of artisanal coffee machine manufacturers were established in the inter-war era, particularly in the vicinity of Milan where the 1939 trade directory listed 22 companies including Bezzera, Carimati, Pavoni, Snider and Universal.²⁸ With their theatrical appearance and styling according to the aesthetics of the time, espresso coffee machines were celebrated as symbols of Italian modernity. This was epitomised in Leonetto Cappiello's Futurist influenced publicity poster for Arduino of 1922, in which a man leans out of a passing train to grab a cup of coffee from the machine, making plays on the shared name of the coffee and the locomotive (espresso), the role of steam in driving both of them, and the centrality of speed to their appeal.

Yet, as a closer inspection of Capiello's poster confirms, the coffee produced by these machines was very different from Italian espresso as defined by the INEI today. The beverage was black, rather than brown, and tasted bitter and burnt – a consequence of the steam, as well as the water, being passed through the coffee cake, and the high temperatures in the group head of around 130-140C, compared to INEI's ideal of 88C. The greatest difference of all was that it lacked any of the mousse or *crema* topping that we now associate with espresso, due to the low pressures at which it was produced (around 1.5 bar compared to the 9 bar of today). It was delivered a lot slower – in around 45, as opposed to 25, seconds - and served significantly longer, as the shape and size of the cups in Cappiello's poster makes clear. All in all, the resultant coffee extract was probably a lot closer in taste and appearance to a strong filter coffee than a contemporary espresso.

We can trace something of the spread of espresso through the various editions of the great Italian lexicographer Alfredo Panzini's dictionary of new words entering the Italian language. The use of espresso as a term relating to coffee appears to have first entered the dictionary in the 1920s, and was rendered in 1931 as:

²⁷ On these companies see Franco CAPPONI, *La Victoria Arduino*; Elena LOCATELLI, *La Pavoni*.

²⁸ SAVALLO EDITORE, *Guida di Milano*, (Milan, 1939).

Caffè espresso, made using a pressurised machine, or a filter, now commonplace.²⁹ The coupling together of both the filter and pressure preparation methods suggests that the adoption of the new machines still had some way to go amongst caterers: however, Panzini's lament in the 1935 revision that while the nineteenth century coffee houses were tranquil places furnished with divans, 'these days one has the rapid "bar" and even the workers want coffee', coupled with a reference to a new habit of using the term *caffetteria* (caffetiere) as slang for a slow train as opposed to the fast *espresso* are indicative that emphasis placed on the speed of the espresso process had caught the popular imagination.³⁰

In its earlier editions, prior to the inclusion of the word "espresso", Panzini's dictionary already defined:

Cappuccino. Black coffee mixed with a little milk. Everyday usage, derived probably from the similar colour to the habit of the Cappuccin friars.³¹

The timing, along with the absence of any reference to the milk having been heated, yet alone steamed, in the definition, suggests that cappuccino was at this stage used as a term for a simple domestic beverage. That appears to have changed by the latter 1930s as a drinking out culture based around espresso took hold. A posthumous updating of Panzini's 1935 dictionary contained an appendix claiming that by 1938 "*cappuccio*" was used as a slang term for cappuccino 'almost as a recommendation to the *barista* not to make it too small' (the joke being the omission of the suffix '-ino' whose addition implies smallness in Italian).³²

²⁹ Alfredo PANZINI, *Supplemento ai dizionari italiani*, (Milan, 6th ed. 1931), p.229.

Revised editions of Panzini's original 1905 volume were produced in 1908, 1918, 1923, 1927, 1931 and 1935. "Espresso" does not feature in the 1918 edition, but appears as given above in 1931. As I have been unable to consult the 1923 and 1927 editions, I cannot date its appearance more precisely.

³⁰ Alfredo PANZINI, *Dizionario moderno delle parole che non si trovano nei dizionari comuni* (Milan, 1950) p.97. This is a reprint of the 1935 edition with an additional appendix of words entering the language thereafter.

³¹ Alfredo PANZINI, *Supplemento ..*, (3rd ed. Milan, 1918), p. 108.

³² Alfredo PANZINI, *Dizionario moderno ...*, p. 801.

The reference to the “*barista*” here is doubly important: firstly because it makes clear that we are dealing with a situation in a bar outside the home, and secondly because the use of “*barista*” itself is an innovation – until this point a “*bar*” had been tended by a “*barman*”. It seems probable that this was the result of the Fascist campaign for the Italianisation of foreign words (interestingly the word ‘*bar*’ itself was exempted from this because of the intrinsic differences between the American format and those of the traditional Italian *caffè* and *taverna*).³³ Oral history suggests that, following the fall of Fascism, the term ‘*barman*’ regained popularity in the 1950s and ‘60s.³⁴

The extent to which coffee culture had become rooted in Italy should not be overestimated, however. Although branded coffee products such as Caffèol and Moretto produced by Crastan in Pontedera began appearing in this period, these were essentially surrogates whose principal components were orzo, chicory, molasses and coffee essence (today marketed as a ‘traditional’ decaffeinated alternative to coffee).³⁵ Actual coffee consumption per capita declined after 1929 as a consequence of the Great Depression and the impact of the Fascist campaigns against imported luxuries.³⁶ Over the course of the 1930s per capita consumption fell to just 0.8kg per annum, lower than that in Spain, less than half that in Germany, and under a quarter of the figure for France.³⁷ The trend continued as Italy shifted to an autarchic wartime economy, despite the acquisition of territory in Ethiopia after the 1935 invasion. By 1941, having lost control of her African colonies and the sea-borne trade routes, the country ceased to import coffee altogether. A reprint of Panzini’s dictionary in 1950 contained an appendix describing how, after 1945, when coffee began to reappear in the country, Italians asked each other if this was ‘*caffè caffè*’ as opposed to the surrogates to which they had become so used during the war.³⁸

³³ Alfredo PANZINI, *Supplemento...* (6th ed., 1931), p. 56

³⁴ Interview with Sergio GUARNIERI, Manager LaCimbali, Binasco (MI), 27 January 2005.

³⁵ See <http://www.crastan.com> accessed 9 February 2011.

³⁶ ISTAT, *Sommario ...* tav. 119. COMITATO ITALIANO CAFFÈ, *Relazione del Presidente*, (Rome, 2008), Allegati Tav. II.

³⁷ William UKERS, *All about Coffee*, (2nd ed., New York, 1935), p. 520.

³⁸ Bruno MIGLIORINI, “Appendice” in PANZINI, *Dizionario moderno ...*, p. 797.

The Crema Revolution

Several innovations had been patented in the 1930s to try and improve the quality of the beverages produced by the pre-war espresso machines by addressing the problems caused by the contamination and burning of the coffee by the steam used to drive the hot water through it.³⁹ In 1935 Francesco Illy, founder of the eponymous roastery in Trieste, registered the Illetta, a machine that instead employed compressed air to generate the pressure for the process, while Achille Gaggia, a Milanese bar owner with a particular interest in coffee, registered a patent for a rotating handle piston to do the same job in 1938. However with the decline in coffee consumption, and moves to a war economy, there was little incentive to begin manufacturing these commercially.

The revolution in the history of espresso came in 1947 when Gaggia registered a new patent, this time for a lever operated piston incorporating gearing and a spring.⁴⁰ This was simple to operate by hand, and would force hot water, drawn directly from the boiler, through the coffee puck. The use of the piston meant that brewing now took place under much higher pressures, rising and falling from three to twelve atmospheres of pressure during the extraction. This resulted in essential oils and colloids from the coffee creating a mousse or *crema* on top of the resultant beverage. Today crema (the word has passed into English) is seen as the defining sensory characteristic of espresso; however at the time the new beverage was renamed *crema caffè*, cream coffee, in order to distinguish it from the extractions produced by the pre-existing espresso machines.

In 1948, the first Gaggia lever machines appeared, manufactured for him by Ernesto Valente, proprietor of the Faema light engineering company. The slogans on the Gaggia machine made clear its revolutionary nature – ‘*Crema caffè naturale*’ and ‘It works without steam’.

³⁹ The best technical account of the evolution of espresso machines can be found in Ian BERSTEN, *Coffee Floats, Tea Sinks*, (Adelaide, 1993), pp. 99-146. The most detailed visual record is Enrico MALTONI, *Espresso Made in Italy*, (Forli, 2001).

⁴⁰ Versions of these two patents can be downloaded at:

http://www.comunicaffe.com/le_copie_dei_documenti_trovate_negli_archivi_di_un.html
accessed 25 February 2011.

Over the next decade innovations within the industry took place at a remarkable rate as manufacturers attempted to appropriate and improve the new technology. Nearly all of the leading companies were based in or around Milan where ideas, components and personnel flowed between the various workshops. The Cimbali company replaced the spring-loaded piston that required considerable manual strength to operate with levers that harnessed hydraulic power. The company again sought to highlight the advance by attempting to dub the resultant beverage with a new name – in this case ‘*cimbalino*’.⁴¹

Valente began manufacturing his own machines with Faema, after disagreeing with Gaggia over strategy. Gaggia regarded his machine (and the *crema caffè* it produced) as a niche product targeted to the high end of the market, whereas Valente wanted to expand the market for espresso by designing cheaper machines.⁴² In 1961 he came up with the radical innovation of fitting his Faema E61 machine with an electric pump that was operated by a simple on/off switch. The machine was described as ‘semi-automatic’ as it left the barman in control over the length and parameters of the extraction, but did not require him to provide the power for the process. Instead of taking the water from the boiler, the pump drew it directly from the mains, pressurized it, and then passed it through a heat exchanger before it reached the group-head. This machine was therefore capable of ‘continuous erogation’ in that it could produce one cup of coffee after another without needing to pause to reheat the boiler – making it a genuine ‘espresso’ service.

The E61s low price facilitated its diffusion, as did the fact that large swathes of Italy were being connected to mains electricity for the first time. Its ‘pop’ styling chimed with the new colourful and informal culture of the 1960s, while the fact that it utilised a horizontal, rather than vertical boiler, meant that operators could now maintain eye contact and conversation with customers while preparing their beverages.⁴³ The introduction of machines such as the E61 played a major role in the social and physical reconfiguration of the coffee bar that took place in the 1960s.

⁴¹ Decio CARUGATI, *La-Cimbali*, (Milan, 2005), pp. 37-40.

⁴² “Espresso on the Run”, *Time*, 19 April 1968 - available online at <http://www.time.com/time/magazine/article/0,9171,838255,00.html> .

⁴³ On Faema see Enrico MALTONI, *Faema Espresso 1945-2010*, (Forli, 2009).

At this point, then, the relationships between three of the ‘M’s – *macchina*, *macinazione* and *mano* – resembled that later codified by INEI as forming the basis of for the preparation of Italian espresso. The introduction of the pump meant that, for the first time, espresso was now being produced under a relatively constant 9 bars of pressure, while the barman utilised the grinder to adjust the coffee’s resistance to the water flow, and controlled the length of the extraction through the switch on the machine, thereby enabling him to adjust the volume and body of the eventual beverage to achieve the desired taste. Semi-automatics became, and remain, the standard operating tools in Italy, to the point these are now known in the trade as ‘traditional’ machines.

What about the *miscela*? The espresso process might be said to make ordinary coffee taste good, but good coffee taste ordinary. The intensity of extraction under pressure enhances the flavour profile of the relatively bland-tasting unwashed Brazilian ‘naturals’, but magnifies the acidity in some of the speciality washed arabicas, such as Kenyan coffee, to the point that this overwhelms the desirable fruit notes.⁴⁴ Robusta coffees perform well in espresso, adding body to the beverage and increasing the volume of crema on top of it, thus enhancing the visual appeal. Part of the attraction of the espresso process for Italian roasters, therefore, was that they were able to save money by using cheaper coffees in their blends, without this necessarily having an adverse effect on the perceived quality.

A report on the Italian coffee industry in the late 1950s identified three main types of blend: a ‘domestic’ for household use consisting primarily of robusta; an ‘extra’ used in bars in which robusta from Congo and Uganda was combined with Brazilian unwashed arabica; and a ‘fine’ i.e. luxury blend of arabica combining unwashed Brazilian or Ethiopian coffee with ‘milds’ from Central America.⁴⁵ Even then, the major source of such ‘milds’ was Haiti, which produced largely natural processed coffees that, according to one veteran importer, often included crushed and broken beans because the small-scale producers, unable to afford machinery, carried out the de-hulling using the hooves of their mules.⁴⁶

⁴⁴ Antony WILD, *Coffee. A Dark History*, (London, 2004), pp. 271-76.

⁴⁵ BANCA NAZIONALE DEL LAVORO, *Il Caffè...*, p. 111.

⁴⁶In 1958, Haiti accounted for 8.5% of all Italian imports and was the country’s fourth largest supplier after Brazil (24.4%), Indonesia (19.4% - largely robusta) and the Belgian Congo (15.5%). Just 1.4% came from Colombia whose milds are traditionally viewed as the highest

Between the 1950s and the 1970s, unwashed Brazilian naturals dominated Italian blends, accounting for some 60% of all imports by the early 1970s. These beans formed the basis of the commodity coffee trade, and their low cost reflected the extensive cultivation practices in their country of origin. In the 1970s, however, severe frost damage in Brazil reduced the harvest and forced up prices, leading roasters to turn elsewhere for supplies. This led to a turn towards robusta coffees which by the mid 1990s made up some 44% of imports (compared with 33% in the 1970s) while those of Brazilian naturals had fallen to 27%. Further wholesale price rises during the 1990s compounded this trend as the retail price of a cup of coffee was still regulated by local authorities (albeit acting in consort with the bar proprietors association), thus incentivising roasters to lower their costs by changing the blend composition in order to retain their margins. This was made easier because Italian customers proved relatively insensitive to the quality of coffee they were served, choosing bars primarily on the basis of the services offered at the bar, notably their rapport with the proprietor.⁴⁷

Italy today continues to import an overall portfolio of what would generally be classified as inferior quality coffees: over the three years 2006-08, Brazil was the leading supplier, providing 35.8% of total imports, followed by the new robusta producing nations of Vietnam (17.4%) and India (12%).⁴⁸ Using the coffee quality index described above, Italy scores 199 – putting it just above France, but significantly below Germany, let alone the Nordic countries.

Making Espresso Italian

How, then, did Italians begin to acquire a taste for this new style of coffee? An early market research survey of winter coffee drinking habits conducted in 1953 found that 71% of survey in quality. BANCA NAZIONALE DEL LAVORO, *Il Caffè...*, p. 254. On Italian use of Haitian coffee in this period see Sergio MORANDO, “Ma al torrefattore italiano servirebbero ancora i naturali”, *Comunicaffè* (email newsletter - Milan), 29 January 2009, available at http://www.comunicaffe.com/il_puntaspilli_-_una_rassegna_degli_articoli_scrit.html.

⁴⁷ Benoit DAVIRON, Stefano PONTE, *The Coffee Paradox. Global markets, commodity trade and the elusive promise of development*, (London, 2005), pp. 143-44.

⁴⁸ COMITATO ITALIANO CAFFÈ, *Relazione del Presidente 2008*, Allegati Tav. VI.

respondents reported that they drank coffee, suggesting that 32 million of the 48 million adult population were consumers.⁴⁹ Asked how many cups of coffee they had drunk the day before, the average response was 1.5 cups, which, after excluding the non-drinkers rose to 2.1 cups per person. However, as the survey itself recognised, these figures were almost certainly overestimates as respondents did not necessarily distinguish between coffee and the various surrogate products. Indeed *caffèlatte* – the combination of ‘coffee’ and milk that 42% of the population reported they consumed immediately after getting up – was explicitly excluded from the survey, presumably because of its lack of genuine coffee content.⁵⁰

Coffee was still primarily a beverage of the urban male, upper-middle classes, who consumed a significant portion of their daily intake outside the home. Men drank an average of 1.7 cups of coffee a day whereas women reported an average of 1.3 cups. 50% of all the coffee drunk by men was consumed outside the home, compared with just 14% of that taken by women. The highest proportion of coffee drinkers (82%) was to be found in the Central zone of the country, which the survey suggested reflected ‘the weight of Rome and its ministries’, as did the fact that the highest levels of out of home consumption were found among the upper middle classes – the classification that included civil servants, professionals and managers. In cities of over 250,000 over 90% of people consumed coffee, compared to around 65% in towns with fewer than 50,000 inhabitants. The lowest proportion of drinkers among the population was recorded in the South (60%), the most heavily rural of the zones, This was a time when 65% of agricultural workers still drank wine at midday, and it was noticeable that while the number of those drinking coffee between meals rose in direct relationship to the class hierarchy, the proportion consuming wine moved in the reverse direction.⁵¹

The creation of a mass coffee culture occurred as a result of the ‘economic miracle’ that began in the second half of the 1950s when the agrarian workforce abandoned the countryside for jobs in the expanding industries of the city. In 1951 42% of the active population worked in agriculture, by 1961 this was down to 29%, with just 17% left working

⁴⁹ Pierpaolo LUZZATTO FEGIZ, *Il volto sconosciuto dell'Italia. Dieci anni di sondaggi Doxa*, (Milan, 1956), pp. 123-31.

⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 64.

⁵¹ *Ibid.*, p. 67.

in the fields by 1971.⁵² As the 1960s progressed so too did consumer spending – a per capita index of consumption, linked to 1963 prices, rose from 280 in 1951 to 393 in 1961, reaching 640 in 1970.⁵³

Over the course of this period, the number of bar and café licences in Italy rose from 84,250 in 1956 to 95,727 in 1961, reaching 118,029 in 1971, whereas licences for restaurants, *trattorie* and *osterie* (the typical drinking places of the peasantry) increased only marginally from 93,958 to 94,608 over the same period.⁵⁴ Overcrowded housing led many migrants to adopt bars as a place for socialisation, as well as a location in which they could watch the first Italian television transmissions. Many of these were known as ‘Bar Sport’ – places in which the customers gathered to watch or listen to their favourite teams, set up fan clubs and place bets on the government-operated, football results game, Totocalcio, introduced in 1946. As coffee was one of the cheapest items available at the bar, it often served as the effective price for admission, not least among women. Coffee consumption became sufficiently widespread that a successor volume to Panzini published in 1963 reported that the term *caffèista* was now being used in a jocular fashion to indicate ‘one who drinks a lot of coffee’, and even distinguished between a *cappuccinista* and an *espressista*.⁵⁵

The arrival of the *crema caffè* style of espresso therefore marked not only the creation of a distinctive Italian-style coffee, but also the institution of a ‘drinking-out’ culture, based on the fact that coffee prepared outside the home now tasted very different from that made within it. Many town dwelling Italians effectively adopted Artusi’s dietary dictums, taking little beyond a cup of coffee when waking, and then calling in at the bar for a breakfast of cappuccino and a *cornetto* (croissant) on the way to work. While factories and large offices might set up a *bar interno* (internal bar) for the refreshment of workers, smaller establishments were hardly in a position to do so. Instead a coffee break was usually taken in the nearest bar, facilitated by the fact that the short time necessary to consume an espresso

⁵² DeAgostini *Compact Storia d’Italia*, (Novarro, 1991), pp. 546, 771.

⁵³ ISTAT, *Sommario...*, tav. 115.

⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, tav. 91.

⁵⁵ Bruno MIGLIORINI, *Parole Nuove. Appendice di dodicimila voci al “dizionario moderno” di Alfredo Panzini*, (Milan, 1963), pp. 45, 50, 108.

could not provide the pretext for a significant interruption of productive activity. The speed of consumption also obviated the need for much in the way of furnishings or service, as was recognised in the price control legislation that imposed a maximum price for coffee consumed standing at the counter in the manner of the American bar, but allowed proprietors to charge much more for that served to customers sitting down.⁵⁶

Domestic coffee drinking also underwent a quantitative and qualitative revolution during these decades. Until the 1960s coffee was an expensive commodity in Italy, not least because it was taxed as a luxury item: in 1958 import duties amounting to US\$1.21 on a kilo of green coffee compared with \$0.17 in neighbouring Switzerland (whose roasters often exported their wares into Northern Italy).⁵⁷ The institution of the European Common Market in 1959, however, saw coffee import duties start to fall at the same time as disposable incomes rose. The retail price for a kilo of roasted coffee fell from 5,862 Lire in 1955 to 3,917 in 1970 (indexed to 1975 values) while annual consumption per capita doubled from 1.5 kg to 3.0 kg in the same period.⁵⁸

Increasingly this coffee was no longer being prepared in the *napoletana*, but using the aluminium stove-top brewer commonly known as the *moka*, or *machinetta*.⁵⁹ Steam pressure generated in a lower chamber as the water was heated up, eventually forced the remaining hot water up through a funnel, at the top of which a plug of compressed coffee was contained, before being collected in an upper chamber. Although the *moka* was first produced by the Bialetti company in 1933, it was not until the 1950s that sales began to take off as a result of heavy marketing, notably the nightly half-hour of advertising shown on state television known as *Carosello*. Bialetti's publicity made much of the claim that the *moka* made "an

⁵⁶ The administrative norms for the system are set out in Guido MINUTELLI, *La disciplina del commercio*, (Milan, 1967), pp. 42-43.

⁵⁷ BANCA NAZIONALE DEL LAVORO, *Il Caffè...*, p. 92.

⁵⁸ ISTAT, *Sommario...*, tavs. 104, 106, 119.

⁵⁹ On Bialetti see Jeffrey SCHNAPP, "The Romance of Caffeine and Aluminium", *Critical Inquiry*, Vol. 28, no. 1 (2001), pp. 244-69.

espresso better than that at the bar”.⁶⁰ This comparison was false: the pressure in the *moka* pot was no more than 1.5 atmospheres, so it could not produce crema, although the aroma and body of the brewed coffee were significantly stronger than those obtained using a *napoletana*.

The coffee roasting industry was also fundamentally transformed during the 1960s. Until this point, roasteries were small, locally-focussed enterprises, supplying neighbourhood bars and grocery stores with non-branded loose coffee. The take-off in domestic consumption, combined with improvements in packaging and preservation, created new opportunities for expansion. Lavazza became the first roaster to break out of a regional market, building its position via the emergence of new communication and distribution channels that appeared in the period such as television and supermarkets. In 1951 the Turin-based company was selling 1.9m kg roasted coffee, over half of which was destined for the surrounding regions of Piedmont and Valle d’Aosta. By 1960 this had reached 3.5m kg., while in 1966, following the opening of its new production plant (the largest in Europe) the company was selling over 10m kg per annum.⁶¹

There was one further obstacle to roasters expanding into the national market, however – the fact that consumer tastes in coffee differed significantly from one region to another. The quantity of robusta utilised within coffee blends tends to rise the further south one travels in within Italy.⁶² To counteract the resultant bitterness, the beans are more highly roasted, resulting in a much darker appearance in the cup – the ‘black’ espresso of popular imagination, rather than the hazel-coloured foam favoured by INEI (which is based in the northern city of Brescia). As robusta contains almost twice the concentration of caffeine found in arabica, southern blends also convey a greater ‘kick’. As a result southerners have developed a somewhat different drinking style, and display greater preference for a *ristretto* or small espresso of around 15 ml, as the shorter extraction time reduces both the bitterness

⁶⁰ See examples of Bialetti’s publicity at http://gallery.panorama.it/gallery/bialetti/2877_la_donna_1957.html#defloater, accessed 10 May 2010.

⁶¹ *Lavazza Coffee Magazine. Special Issue 110 years*, n. 31 (2005), pp. 14-17; *Notizie Lavazza. Special Issue. From 1895 to the Third Millenium*, (Turin, 2000), pp. 20-30.

⁶² Vincenzo SANDALJ, “The art of Italian espresso”, *Café Europa*, 15 (2003), p. 3.

and the volume of caffeine. It is customary for a *ristretto* to be drunk heavily laden with sugar which is often placed in the cup prior to delivery. Interestingly, lever machines remain a common sight in the south, perhaps because their variable pressures produce gentler tasting extractions, particularly in the hands of an experienced barista.⁶³

While it is easy to argue that these tendencies are essentially expressions of the relative ‘backwardness’ of the regions, resulting in the use of lower quality coffee, it remains the case that in order to conquer the South it has been necessary for national roasters to develop their own blends and brands for this market. Lavazza, for example, introduced the ‘*Crema e Gusto*’ blend in order to target the Southern market in 1985, which went on to achieve a 30% market share.⁶⁴ Illy, the most upmarket of the major Italian roasters, whose single blend is heavily promoted on the basis of containing only arabica coffee, nonetheless also felt it necessary to introduce a ‘darker’ roast that was again targeted to the Southern market.

It was only really by the mid-1970s that Italian espresso had fully assumed those sensory and cultural characteristics with which we associate it today. Consumer ‘strikes’ against bars deemed to be charging excessive prices during the inflationary years following the ‘economic miracle’, were proof of the extent to which coffee outside the home was seen as an integral part of Italian existence.⁶⁵ In 1976 this rite of life was immortalised within Italian literature with the publication of Stefano Benni’s *Bar Sport*.⁶⁶ A symbolic turning point was reached in the same year when Lavazza altered its advertising strategy, abandoning the use of the animated Latin-American coffee beans Caballero and Carmencita whose antics had entertained a generation of *Carosello* watchers to replace them with campaigns featuring

⁶³ Carlo GRENCI, “The other Italian coffee tradition”, *Café Europa*, 38 (2009), pp. 3-6.

⁶⁴ <http://www.lavazza.com/corporate/it/company/history/1973-1986.html>, accessed 10 May 2010.

⁶⁵ Patricia CLOUGH “Romans boycott coffee in protest over price” *The Times*, 15 April 1977, p. 5.

⁶⁶ Stefano BENNI, *Bar Sport*, (Segrate, 1976).

endorsements by Italian celebrities in settings that stressed domestic consumption of the product rather than the distant origins of the bean.⁶⁷ Espresso had been ‘made Italian’.

Over the subsequent three decades the market for coffee has matured to the point of saturation. Italy currently has an annual per capita consumption rate of 5.82kg and contains around 150,000 bars.⁶⁸ The doubling of per capita consumption since the 1960s is, at bottom, a reflection of the fact that while real incomes are now around two and a half times greater than then, the real retail price of coffee has fallen by over a third.⁶⁹ The home market is now dominated by a few large brands, notably Lavazza whose total share of the market is just under 50%.⁷⁰

The most distinctive feature of Italian coffee culture, however, is that 30% of consumption still takes place outside the home, mostly in the bar on the way to work in the morning, although better quality vending machines have seen significant growth in consumption at the workplace itself.⁷¹ The ‘out of home’ sector accounts for 70% of total coffee sales by value yet remains highly fragmented: in 2001 the top four brands controlled 75% of the domestic market but only 15% of the out-of-home one. Similarly the bar sector is itself dominated by independents – mostly family-owned enterprises whose preparedness to accept low margins and absorb labour costs makes it uneconomical to establish integrated coffee house chains on the American model. Indeed the brand available, and probably the objective quality of the coffee served, plays little role in the customer’s choice of coffee bar: according to market

⁶⁷ A wide selection of Lavazza television commercials can be watched at <http://www.lavazza.com/corporate/it/lavazzastyle/spot>, accessed 21 February 2011.

⁶⁸ ICO, *Italy: Country Profile, 2009*, <http://www.ico.org/countries/italy.pdf>, accessed 21 February 2011; “Host 2009” *Comunicaffè*, 15 October 2009.

⁶⁹ ICO, *ICO Coffee Profile Italy – September 2000*, available in ICO Library, London.

⁷⁰ Antonio GALDO, “Emilio Lavazza. Half a Century at the Company with a Focus on Innovation, Internationalisation and Marketing”, *Lavazza Coffee Magazine*, n.41, July-December 2010, p. 14.

⁷¹ “Prima colazione”, *Comunicaffè*, 10 October 2006.

surveys over 75% of the consumers coming out of a bar were unable to remember what brand of coffee they had just drunk.⁷²

Internationalising Espresso

It has become usual to distinguish two phases in the expansion of espresso beyond Italy. The first during the 1950s saw the volume of the standard espresso shot frequently being enlarged to suit local tastes within surrounding European markets, while Italian-American coffeehouses started serving an '*espresso romano*' featuring the addition of a slice of lemon – a decorative touch that may have been intended to evoke Southern Italy, even though in Italy itself such a beverage would only ever be used as a purgative.⁷³ The second phase began in the 1990s as a result of the international spread of the branded coffee house format developed by the Starbucks chain in America. There is no space to discuss this globalisation of espresso here, but it is important to note the ways that altering the sensory qualities of the beverages was one of the main reasons for this success.⁷⁴

The key to expansion was the addition a fifth 'M' to the espresso equation – milk. The strength (experienced as the intensity of flavour) and the small size of espresso were the key obstacles to its success in global coffee markets, notably those of the Anglophone world. By switching the emphasis to milk-based beverages such as cappuccino and caffè latte, the entrepreneurs driving the so-called 'specialty coffee' revolution in America and elsewhere were able to overcome these by providing customers with coffee drinks that were sweeter tasting and longer-lasting, but still substantively different from the coffee beverages prepared at home. Whereas well over 80% of the coffee consumed in Italy takes the form of straightforward espresso; in the new adopter markets, such as those of the Anglophone world, at least 90% is made up of the milk beverages.

⁷² Benoit DAVIRON, Stefano PONTE, *The Coffee Paradox*, p. 147.

⁷³ PAN-AMERICAN COFFEE BUREAU, *Fun with Coffee*, (New York, 1956), pp. 7-8.

⁷⁴ See Jonathan MORRIS, "La globalizzazione dell'espresso italiano", *Memoria e Ricerca*, XIV, 23 (2006), pp. 27-46.

Increasingly the proportions of these beverages have also been adjusted. The Starbucks standard ‘tall’ cappuccino of around 350ml contains over twice the amount of milk of the usual Italian serving of 150-180ml, while still only containing a single shot of espresso.⁷⁵ The ‘recipes’ used by the coffee house chains to produce these beverages, rather than the quality of espresso at their base, have become part of their brand identity. Many include a significant portion of Robusta within their blend, utilising a high dark roast so that some taste of coffee can still be perceived through the volume of the other ingredients.

The balance between the original 4 ‘M’s within the equation has also changed. During the early years of the speciality coffee movement the additional role of the *mano* of the barista in the ‘texturing’ and pouring of the steamed milk was emphasised by devices such as the use of latte art (designs drawn in the foam on the top of the beverage). This reinforced the perception of a hand-crafted product – again produced expressly for the consumer – and hence justified the higher price requested over conventional coffee. However, as these beverages have become established as part of the mainstream coffee menu so the role of the *mano* in operating the *macchina* and determining the *macinazione* has been progressively decreased. Automatic machines, first pioneered in Switzerland, in which the machine, rather than the barista, determined the temperature, pressure and duration of the extraction, have become much more widespread with the development of micro-chip technology.⁷⁶ Subsequently this has been extended with the integration of the grinder into so-called ‘super-automatic’ or ‘bean to cup’ machines that perform the entirety of the espresso process at the push of a button, thus eliminating the need for a trained barista. These are particularly popular in the so-called non-specialist catering operations such as supermarket cafés and fast-food outlets.

Meanwhile at the high-end of the speciality coffee industry, the so-called ‘Third Wave’ espresso movement deviates from conventional Italian practices by experimenting with increasing the dosage in the portafilter, altering the length of the extraction, the temperature

⁷⁵<http://www.starbucks.com/menu/drinks/espresso/cappuccino?foodZone=9999#size=38&miIk=63>, accessed 25 February 2011.

⁷⁶ The Swiss manufacturer Franke claims to have produced the first fully automatic coffee machine in 1984. *Franke Magazine: Coffee Bar, 100 Years of History*, n.1 2009, p. 5.

at the group head and even the pressure under which the coffee is extracted to produce the so-called ‘god shot’ of perfect-tasting espresso.⁷⁷ Third wavers’ refuse to use robusta, create ‘seasonal’ blends rather than attempt to achieve a consistent branded taste, and serve ‘single-origin’ coffees that produced highly flavoured, if often ‘unbalanced’ tastes in the cup. These developments have been showcased in at the World Barista Championships – established in the mid-1990s and now contested by over 50 countries – which have never been won by an Italian despite concerted efforts by the industry to train a champion up to do so.⁷⁸

Nonetheless the Italian espresso industry has been able to exploit the explosion in international interest in espresso. Ernesto Illy, head of the eponymous Trieste coffee-roasting firm, travelled to Seattle to give a keynote address to the Specialty Coffee Association of America’s annual conference in 1992 effectively blessing the new movement while informing them, as he later did *Scientific American* that “the quintessential expression of coffee is espresso”.⁷⁹ The combination of the specialty movement’s concern with quality, and its use of Italian-style beverages to appeal to new customers, created a perfect opportunity for Illy to promote his expensive 100% Arabica blend in the United States. Since 2005 Illy has generated over half of its income outside Italy.⁸⁰ Machine makers have also benefitted from the globalisation of espresso – none more so than the high-end manufacturer La Marzocco which exports 97% of its output.⁸¹

⁷⁷ See Michael WEISSMAN, *God in a Cup: The Obsessive Quest for Perfect Coffee*, (Hoboken, 2008).

⁷⁸ For a short history of the WBC visit <http://www.worldbaristachampionship.com/about-the-wbc>, accessed 10 May 2010.

⁷⁹ A recording of Illy’s speech is available in the SCAA Library, Longbeach CA, USA. See also “Java heads converge on Seattle”, *Tea and Coffee Trade Journal*, 1 June 1992; Ernesto ILLY, “The Complexity of Coffee”; and Antony WILD, *Coffee. A Dark History*, p.274.

⁸⁰ Interview with Giacomo BIVIANO (Direttore Commerciale, Illy), Trieste, 29 October 2004; <http://www.illy.com/wps/wcm/connect/us/illy/about-illy/company> accessed 21 February 2011.

⁸¹ Interview with Ron COOK (President, La Marzocco), Florence, 7 February 2006.

This international success has also changed the image of espresso within Italy. In essence, the foreign acclaim for espresso has enabled it to become a veritable icon of Italianess for Italians themselves. This has become evident in the domestic marketing strategies of several industry players who have created spots in which foreign celebrities are initiated into the mysteries of espresso making. Dustin Hoffman, for instance, has appeared in commercials for Caffè Vergnano since 2005, while in 2010 Lavazza allegedly paid Julia Roberts €1.2m to pose as a sulky model for Botticelli's Venus whose smile is restored by two Italian comics serving her an espresso which they explain is 'good' because it is 'Italian'.

'Beautiful lady in Italy we know how to do three things well: we know how to make love, we know how to laugh, and we know how to make coffee'.⁸²

The very corniness of the clichés bears witness to coffee's centrality within Italy's banal nationalism.

One celebrity advertising campaign infuriated the Italian coffee industry, however, – that of George Clooney for Nespresso. Indeed Lavazza filed a civil suit against Nespresso in 2010 complaining that by setting a series of adverts featuring Clooney with John Malkovitch in Heaven they had infringed upon Lavazza's intellectual copyright as its 'Paradise' series of adverts had been running for many years.⁸³ As well as the annoyance with Clooney, perhaps Italy's most famous foreign resident, for endorsing a Swiss product, there was considerable bitterness that Nespresso was itself a form of 'passing off' of espresso. Apart from not using freshly ground coffee (as is the case for all such systems) the Nespresso capsule contains only 5 grams of coffee, and its standard espresso shot is delivered as 40ml of liquid as opposed to the 7 grams and 25ml suggested by INEI: unsurprisingly therefore the end product tastes more 'watery' than the ideal 'espresso italiano' although the handbook presented to

⁸² Shirley BRADY, "Watch Julia Roberts Get Paid \$1.8 Million for 45 Seconds' Work", 30 November 2010, posted at <http://www.brandchannel.com/home/post/2010/11/30/Lavazza-Julia-Roberts.aspx>. This linked to a video on YouTube which Lavazza have subsequently asked be withdrawn, although it can still be found elsewhere on the web: for example, <http://www.redbalcony.com/?vid=27797> accessed 21 February 2011. Hoffman's Caffè Vergnano spots can be seen at <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=aSlaEUDnfeI>.

⁸³ For a commentary see Luca D MAJER, "I have a Porsche – it's black", *Comunicaffè International*, 19 January 2010.

purchasers consistently refers to this as an Italian beverage.⁸⁴ The success of Nespresso in establishing itself as the global leader in the ‘single portion domestic coffee systems market’ the fastest-growing segment of the industry since 2000, has only served to reinforce the often-heard lament that:

French-Swiss and Seattle-based managers (not Italians) are introducing the global masses to espresso coffee All in all, espresso leaders are coming from countries other than the one where espresso was invented.⁸⁵

Globalisation, then, has raised concerns within Italy that it has lost both the ‘cultural ownership’ of the character of espresso, and the economic value that this represents. There have been a variety of legal attempts to win this back. Within the World Trade Organisation Italy has agitated to restrict the use of the term ‘Italian espresso’ only for this to be rejected on the basis that while coffee might be roasted in Italy, it did not originate there, while the Illy coffee company attempted to get court rulings in the US (and, apparently, in the UK) confining the use of the term espresso and cappuccino to Italian roasters.⁸⁶ The Italian parliament has now introduced legislation to enable inspectors to travel abroad and certify whether the espresso and cappuccino served in cafes is of ‘genuine’ Italian quality, while following the EUs approval of a Traditional Speciality Guarantee for pizza, work has begun to achieve a similar designation for espresso⁸⁷.

⁸⁴ “NESPRESSO - Parla Marco Zancolò direttore generale della filiale italiana” *Comunicaffè*, 23 September 2010; NESPRESSO.CLUB, *Introduction to the Art of Espresso*, (2009).

⁸⁵ MAJER, “I have a Porsche”. On Nespresso’s success see “NESPRESSO - Sales up 22.5% in 2010”, *Comunicaffè International*, 18 February 2011.

⁸⁶ John TAGLIABUE, “Taking on Starbucks, Italian Coffee Maker Steps Up to the Bar”, *New York Times*, 26 December 2006.

⁸⁷ “Il Cappuccino Italiano Certificato INEI alla Camera dei Deputati”, *Notiziario NIP - News ITALIA PRESS agenzia stampa* - N° 1 - Anno XIV, 2 January 2007; Luca MAJER, “Esprimersi o non esprimersi?”, *Comunicaffè*, 14 July 2009 – available in English as “To espresso or not to espresso?” at

http://www.lucamajer.com/en/caffe/scritti/esprimersi_o_non_esprimersi .

As this article has argued, in historical terms this is a difficult case to make: espresso is a preparation process, not a product, and none of the component elements required need to have been sourced from Italy; the process itself is a modern, rather than traditional one, and has continued to evolve over the course of the century - indeed the beverage as defined by INEI would not have been tasted in Italy prior to the 1960s. Furthermore the sensory parameters that INEI has specified allow for a significant variation within the roasting styles and coffee blends used in the *miscela*, even the relative proportions of arabica and robusta, if only to accommodate the wide regional variety in tastes within Italy itself. By introducing any sensory or other form of quality-based definition of ‘espresso italiano’, a TSG would be likely to exclude a portion of the Italian industry, while possibly conferring traditional status on a beverage prepared using machines and materials produced outside the country.

Not only would such a form of protectionism be difficult to devise, it would almost certainly not prove beneficial to the Italian industry. Over the last twenty years the sector has experienced high levels of export-driven growth that have more than compensated for the low rates of expansion within the apparently mature domestic market. Exports of roasted coffee rose from 12m kg in 1988 to 134m kg in 2008 while it is routinely stated that around 70% of commercial espresso machines are still manufactured by Italian companies (note this is not the same as being manufactured in Italy).⁸⁸ Altogether it is estimated that Italy earns around €1bn per annum from coffee related exports – 70% from roasted coffee, 20% from machines and 10% from related products and services.⁸⁹ Such services include those offered by INEI itself which admits non-Italian products to its certification process and organizes an extensive set of training courses for baristas and roasters abroad. This alternative model for valorising Italy’s espresso heritage, by trading on the know-how and expertise it has generated, demonstrates the real value of ‘making espresso Italian’.

⁸⁸ Calculated using ICO data available at http://www.ico.org/new_historical.asp, accessed 21 October 2009.

⁸⁹ Vincenzo SANDALJ, “Italy’s speciality coffee – challenges and prospects”, *Cafe Europa*, n.34 (2008), p. 7.