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CONSUMPTION OF COFFEE IN THE COFFEE CULTURAL LANDSCAPE OF COLOMBIA (CCLC): THE "BAD CONSUMER" & THE RISE OF SPECIALTY COFFEE[*]

CONSUMO DE CAFÉ EN EL PAISAJE CULTURAL CAFETERO DE COLOMBIA (PCCC): EL "MAL CONSUMIDOR" Y EL AUGE DE LOS CAFÉS ESPECIALES

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Abstract

Drawing from the results of a three months anthropological fieldwork research in the area of *the Eje Cafetero*, this article aims to dive into the question of local coffee consumption patterns in the Coffee Cultural Landscape of Colombia. The main object is to reflect on strategies of consumption in a patrimonial context by examining different discourses, ranging from the average "bad coffee consumer" to the slow rise of the chain of *cafés especiales*. Furthermore, the present article aims to offer a comprehensive analysis on how the structure of the coffee chain impacts consumption patterns, including a reflection on the benefits and limits of the development of specialty coffee.

Keywords: CCLC, patrimonialization, patterns of consumption, specialty coffee, imagined community.

Resumen

Basado en los resultados de un trabajo antropológico de investigación de campo de tres meses en la zona del Eje Cafetero, este artículo tiene como fin profundizar en las prácticas de consumo de café en el Paisaje Cultural Cafetero de Colombia. El objetivo principal es presentar una reflexión sobre las estrategias de consumo en un contexto patrimonial, examinando diferentes discursos, desde la imagen del "mal consumidor" hasta el desarrollo de la cadena de los cafés especiales. El enfoque del presente artículo ofrece un análisis comprensivo sobre cómo las estructuras de la caficultura impactan en las prácticas de consumo, incluyendo una reflexión sobre los beneficios y los límites del desarrollo de los cafés especiales.

Palabras-clave: PCCC, patrimonialización, prácticas de consumo, café especial, comunidad imaginada.

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Introduction

During the past three decades, Colombia has experienced a general drop in its coffee growing activity. It remains, however, one of the most prominent producers of coffee worldwide. Since the early institutionalization of coffee farming, and the creation of the National Federation of Coffee Growers of Colombia[1], the country has built a solid reputation of producing the "best mild coffee in the world", with a long-standing tradition in hand-picked, small-scale family farming. Nonetheless, in terms of both academic research and international media attention, it appears that the image of Colombia as a country of coffee growing has been left relatively unexplored compared to its depiction as a foyer of drug cartels[2] and guerilla violence. Moreover, it seems that little focus has been given to practices and processes like coffee farming, that has been at the core of the country's economic and cultural existence for numerous decades. Indeed, aside from the part that the coffee-related economy has played in raising Colombia's international power, coffee appears as a crucial element of national identity, a factor of unity in an otherwise vast, diverse and divided country. Historically, the core of this coffee identity was located in the traditional coffee region, the «*Eje Cafetero*», which comprises the three departments of Caldas, Risaralda and Quindío. Since 2011, parts of this traditional coffee region, as well as some areas of the neighboring department of Valle del Cauca, have been officially declared as a Unesco World Heritage Site (WHS), under the label of *Coffee Cultural Landscape of Colombia* (CCLC).

The processes resulting in the WHS declaration can be partially explained as a response to a series of shifts in the regional economy that took place during the rough decade of the 1990s and early 2000s. On the one hand, the deployment of an intensive farming strategy linked to the techniques of the green revolution resulted, amongst other things, in farmers being increasingly dependent on coffee. Because of this dependence, when the International Coffee Agreement (ICA) broke down in 1989, results on the regional coffee activity were devastating[3]. In addition to that, merely a decade later, an important part of the area was deeply affected by a murderous earthquake. Armenia, the capital of Quindío, was at the center of the tragedy, and the impact on the city and its surroundings strengthened the already urgent need to generate economic opportunities outside of the coffee growing chain[4]. The recent development of mass tourism in the *Eje Cafetero*, which is now a top national destination, can also be understood within this frame of mind.

For many a decade, the area of the *Eje Cafetero* was one of the most affluent parts of the country, largely due to its coffee economy. The progressive drop in profitability of the coffee sector, and by consequence the decline of the area's position as a national economic leader, seems to be an important source of the original desire to inscribe it to the list of Unesco's World Heritage Sites. This decline, which also brought on concerns about the potential threats of extinction and cultural alienation of traditional coffee farming, lead to a

[1] The *Federación Nacional de Cafeteros*, which will be referred to as the FNC, is the main coffee-related institution in the country. Sometimes referred to as «a State within a State», it is considered one of the strongest actors of the country's past and present history.

[2] One recent example amongst many would be the international popularity of the Netflix series *Narcos.*

[3] Angelika Rettberg, "Global Markets, Local Conflict: Violence in the Colombian Coffee Region after the Breakdown of the International Coffee Agreement", *Latin American Perspectives* 37, n. º 2 (2010): 111-132.

[4] The earthquake cost close to 2000 lives and affected about 8000 coffee farms. For a more detailed analysis, see ONU-CEPAL, *El terremoto de enero de 1999 en Colombia: Impacto socioeconómico del desastre en la zona del Eje Cafetero* (México, 1999).

necessity to rethink issues like land management policies and tourism planning, but also became an opportunity to reconsider new ways to increase the profitability of the small scale coffee growing business. Moreover, it became an opportunity to rethink the complex relationship that both farmers and consumers maintain with the coffee chain in general.

With this in mind, the CCLC label emerges as a relevant tool in an effort to induce a conceptual change, a paradigm shift in the differential perception between production and consumption. The former has been historically seen as positive, with the traditional, small-scale family coffee farmer being at the core of the CCLC's imagery, while the latter has been seen as mostly negative, the average Colombian being widely declared a « bad consumer » of coffee. One of the key strategies of CCLC politics has thus been the promotion of a shift from the perception of coffee as a *commodity*, as a raw material, to coffee as an end product of craftsmanship, that is to say, coffee as a *specialty*.

This article is based on the results of a wider fieldwork research on the background, politics and stakes associated with the CCLC, which took place between June and September 2017. The research was conducted in collaboration with the History department of the Technological University of Pereira (UTP). The methodological framework is typical of most anthropological research, namely participant observation, fieldwork, and semi-structured interviews with twenty respondents. The respondents were selected based on the ECRIS method[5] of identification of strategic groups, three of which will be mentioned in the case of this article: coffee farmers, particularly those who have or are looking to specialize their production, traders implicated in the business of specialty coffee, and academics working on CCLC policies. Fragments from these interviews will be cited in the course of this article. All names have been changed in order to preserve the anonymity of the respondents.

Drawing from the results of this wider research, this article will focus on the perception of consumption practices, on the ways with which these consumption practices are related to the structure of the coffee chain, and thus, on how CCLC politics aiming to modify one end of the chain cannot be understood without examining the implication this has on the other end. The aim of such an analysis is to reflect on the complexity of implementing policies when it comes to agroproductive cultural landscapes, and the necessity to examine macro-social phenomena in the crafting of such policies.

I will first present the structure of the coffee chain, in order to provide a comprehensive view of what it means to be a «bad coffee consumer», and how this designation is conceived by local actors. I will then introduce the notion of specialty coffee, and how it can be linked to an underlying discourse on countering a historical exclusion from the surplus value chain, acted out by the reclaiming of coffee as an end product. I will ultimately expose the counter-arguments to CCLC specialization politics, centered on how both average farmers and consumers lack the means to participate in this reclaiming effort.

The «bad coffee consumer»

The concept of the CCLC promotes the idea of preserving and promoting typical coffee farming, the cultural practices that have grown around it as well as the ecosystems that have hosted these practices. However, the various assets that have come to characterize the CCLC are a mixture not only of tradition, but also of adaptation and innovation

[5] Jean-Pierre Olivier de Sardan, La rigueur du qualitatif. Les contraintes empiriques de l'interprétation socio-anthropologique. Louvain-La-Neuve: Academia Bruylant, 2008.

corresponding to certain traditional values[6]. Thus, the vision of coffee farming that is promoted by CCLC politics is a vision of small-scale traditional and fair family farming that makes respectful use of local resources and preserves the environmental equilibrium while maintaining a strong sense of community. The vision that is promoted is a vision of coffee as an artisanal craft. Consequently, intensive coffee farming, widely spread during the peak of the «green revolution» is hardly compatible with the values of the CCLC. In other words, quality, not quantity, specialty rather than commodity, become the basic attributes for what can be deemed as patrimonial coffee. Nonetheless, local ways of consuming coffee are often perceived as incompatible with this view, no matter how deeply rooted in tradition. In order to understand why there appears to be such a separation between a valued tradition of production and a depreciated tradition of consumption, it is necessary to examine the structure of the coffee growing process, from plant to cup.

The coffee chain

The process of coffee growing can be separated into various stages. In Colombia, a considerable part of that process is done manually and within the space of the coffee farm. The majority of coffee farms typically export the beans in dry parchment form, that is to say, sufficiently processed as to be exportable but not marketable. They are thus sold as a commodity, usually to the FNC. In order to reach the form in which the coffee is commercialized, the bean must go through another series of transformations; these are the processes that give coffee the majority of its surplus value. In most cases, this part of the chain is located outside the farm, which means that most coffee farmers, by selling their coffee as raw material, have no access to the most profitable part of the coffee chain.

The coffee bean is enveloped in various layers, the first of which is the coffee fruit. In Colombia, the harvest of coffee fruit is done manually, because it is the best guarantee that only red, mature, quality fruit are reaped, thus enhancing the country's reputation as an excellent coffee producer; it is a rough task, which is considered impossible to mechanize, both because such a mechanization would lower the quality of the harvest and because of the particular conditions of regions such as the *Eje Cafetero*, known, amongst other elements, for its sloping topography.

The coffee then undergoes various processes in order to extract the bean from its subsequent layers. It is stripped of the fruit by a manually controlled pulping machine, then of its mucilage[7] by being fermented, washed, and dried. At this stage, the beans should reach a 10-12% humidity rate, a state at which they are fit to be exported.

During these processes, beans are categorized according to their quality, which can be established through various criteria, including fragrance, aroma, taste, body, acidity, bitterness and astringency. The price and destination of the beans depends on this classification: first and second quality beans are overwhelmingly exported and consumed outside the country, usually through the FNC; three out of four of the producers I interviewed keep at least part of these beans to commercialize them through their own channels as

[6] The management and policy-making of the CCLC is centered on defined values, as can be seen through various of its presentation documents, some of which are referenced at the end of this article.
[7] A sweet, honey-like layer also called the *parenchyma*.

specialty coffee[8]. As a general rule, only the defective beans, of third quality, known also as *pasilla* beans, are destined for the internal market.

That is the coffee that is consumed by the average Colombian, including the coffee farmers themselves; indeed, to maximize their profit, it is frequent that the *cafeteros* sell the entirety of their production and instead buy supermarket coffee. The average Colombian coffee farmer has thus never tasted the result of his own work.

The rest of the coffee transformations usually happen outside of the *finca*, and often outside of the country itself. These operations, of a more industrial type, require an investment that most *cafeteros* do not have the capacity to make. This part of the chain, which gradually becomes more profitable, first consists in milling the coffee, a process that separates the final bean from the parchment layer. The beans are then roasted. This final stage is particularly important because it has a great impact on the final quality of the brew; in order to reach quality coffee, a medium roasting is recommended, because it protects the attributes of the beans. However, third quality coffee is usually subject to high roasting; it is "burned" in an attempt to hide the bad flavors resulting from defective beans.

Therefore, it appears that the average Colombian has access to coffee which is already of a doubly low quality: of the worst class of beans and burned during the roasting process. It appears that this observation directly relates to why coffee has not been an object of sophisticated preparation in the *Eje Cafetero.* All of my respondents stated this more or less as follows: while Colombia has a tradition of being an excellent producer of coffee, it is also qualified as a "bad consumer". Those of my respondents who were engaged in any sort of dealings with international tourists and coffee experts were quick to point out the shock experienced by most visitors arriving in Colombia when they first taste the average local coffee cup. What seems to be shocking is that the already low quality coffee is "badly" brewed, burned once more and drowned in *panela*[9].

The depreciation, on a local level, of traditional consumption patterns as "bad" appears to be fairly recent. It can be traced back to the discourse of many institutional actors on the necessity to promote a different view of coffee consumption and offer the average Colombian the opportunity to discover the "proper ways" of appreciating coffee. Declaring the region a World Heritage Site seems to have reinforced such discourses. Indeed, the patrimonial discourse seems to further exacerbate a distinction between traditional coffee production, which is valued and protected, and traditional coffee consumption, which is seen as in need of change. Yet both these traditions are but two interdependent aspects of the same process, both are results of the particular structure of the coffee chain, and thus it is vital to understand the former in order to understand how coffee is locally consumed.

Conflicting views of consumption practices

In the *Eje Cafetero*, coffee as it is consumed both at home and in most coffeeshops are usually coffee of low quality and high roasting. It is burned again during the brewing,

[8] Some of the coffees labeled as specialty are subject to a longer and more complex processing. That is the case primarily for *honey* and *natural* coffee. In the case of *honey* coffee, the bean is dried with its mucilage, which leads to a coffee of sweeter flavor. In the case of *natural* coffee, the bean is not depulped; it is dried with the fruit, which leads to a more intense flavor. These types of coffee are harder to produce, but are also commercialized at higher prices.

[9] *Panela* is unrefined cane sugar in solid form, produced by boiling and evaporating sugarcane juice. It is very popular in Colombia and used as a primary sweetener in drinks and sweets.

and diluted in sweeter substances, like milk and most importantly *panela*, in order to further hide its bitter taste. If it is served outside of a meal, it is often served black, and if it is served with food, it is more often drunk with milk. In all cases, it is consumed very sweet, added or prepared in *panela.* It appears to be commonly agreed upon that adding *panela* to coffee is not an option; it is a norm. During my visits to various coffee farms, as well as in most of the homes I was invited to, I was served coffee without being asked how I drink it. This happened constantly during my fieldwork. When I explained that I am used to drinking my coffee with neither sugar nor milk, and asked if it was possible to have a cup without *panela,* I was looked at with surprise, and was told that «no, sorry, this is how we made it».

Furthermore, it appears that the chief preoccupation when brewing is the quantity of cups one can extract from a certain amount of coffee rather than the quality of each cup. When brewed coffee is sold, either in the street or in shops, it is frequently prepared once during the day, and then stored or reheated when someone asks for a cup. Carmen, an academic working on the CCLC and related issues of land management and ecotourism, explains to me that what people value in a cup will be less related to the taste of the coffee and more to its color, which is seen as representing its profitability, its ability to produce large quantities of brew at a low cost; it appears that the darker the cup is, to a point where one could "paint" with it, the more it is appreciated[10] :

> If you give a pound of specialty coffee to a coffee shop, it will make ten cups out of it. But with a pound of common coffee, it will make twenty-five, because it is the darkness of the coffee that is valued here. […] So if you serve a good coffee, to my mum for example, or to a normal person from here, if you prepare it with all the good techniques and all, she's going to discredit it, she's going to say "wow that's bad! […] She'll say "I don't like this coffee, because it doesn't paint". Because it's the color that people here want to see in a cup, even though the color that a good coffee should have is more of a caramel shade…

Jenny, a student who also works on CCLC-related issues, goes as far as to mention that according to certain rumors, «supermarket coffee is much more profitable, because they put dye in it, […], so it appears even darker».

What many interviewers point out is a relationship to coffee as a basic product not worthy of specialization, a commodity that people consume regardless of taste, at low prices, with minimal variation in brewing techniques. Because of this relationship, the average Colombian is seen as a "bad consumer" of coffee.

A considerable portion of CCLC politics is dedicated to the creation of strategies that aim to change this image. A wide range of actors like the FNC, the cultural institutions and the academic networks promote these strategies, targeting youth in particular. By encouraging, amongst other activities, training courses in *barismo*[11] and coffee tasting, the idea is to fight the legacy of commodity coffee in order to develop a local culture of coffee as a specialty. In these discourses, there is a tendency to draw a generational line between a modern, change-prone youth and older generations of whom it is considered that consumption modes are very difficult to change. Like Carmen says:

[10] The idea of a coffee that « paints » must be understood as the coffee being so dark that it can leave a significant stain. One of my respondents, a producer of specialty coffee, experiments with using coffee beans or ground coffee as actual paint. During my visit, she was working on a painting of a dark haired woman, on which she made the following comment: « So the hair, I didn't know how to do it, I couldn't do it with the farm's coffee, it's more of a caramel color […] and so I bought some supermarket coffee, which is all burnt, and that did it*…».*

[11] The art of coffee brewing.

> When you're used to that, and you don't know if it's well made or poorly made, that's what you like. That's what happens to all of us here. Burned coffee, in panela, badly prepared…that's how we love it. Because…that's the way it's been, since we've been kids. So it's a very hard habit to break… […] mostly for older people, it's harder to change.

Other respondents, like Jenny, also speak to me of a tasting difficulty to adapt to specialized coffee:

> When people drink a specialty coffee, at first they don't like it. Because it's got a very different taste…supermarket coffees, they all taste the same…they're bitter. Without sugar they are no good. But specialty coffees, they all have a different taste… […] let's say it would be very difficult, starting from scratch, to tell someone to trade common coffee for specialty coffee, because they're used to the coffee always having the same taste, and not to a taste that varies with production, time of year, from farm to farm, etc.

Many of my respondents also mention the fact that little by little, the act of drinking specialty coffee is turning into a trend, particularly for the targeted younger generations. Because it is linked to patrimonial approval, but also to a certain kind of "western" model of expertise in brewing methods, the act of being a "good coffee consumer" seems to acquire a certain form of prestige. It appears that this model is primarily developed and followed in urban settings, in the networks associated with a certain social elite. Nonetheless, for those of my respondents who do engage in these efforts, it also appears that the negation of traditional modes of consumption generates a situation that is felt as a struggle with the self. Many of those working in academia and on patrimonial politics have made, in the last few years, a change in their consumption, trying to switch from common coffee to specialty. This change is mentioned as a difficult lifestyle decision; to eliminate *panela,* to accustom the senses to the raw variability of specialty coffees is often described as a long and permanent effort. This effort appears to be more spread in the urban landscape, in which the majority of coffee shops selling and preparing *café especial* are located.

Despite the strategies to end the image of the Colombian "bad consumer", many of my respondents, particularly those having a more intimate connection to the rural milieu, display a sense of belonging to the traditional modes of consumption. They describe these practices as associated with their ancestors, their history, and talk about traditional coffee using an olfactory lexical field associated with memory. The description of coffee as an agent of remembrance seems to provoke a sort of Proustian awakening of memory[12]; their descriptions evoke a childhood filled with the smell of burnt coffee and *panela,* often channeled through the recurring figure of the grandmother or grandfather preparing the morning brew. In this case, the quality of the cup pales in comparison to the importance of the environment in which it is drunk. Agustín, both a coffee producer and a local heritage guide, declares: «You know what a good cup of coffee is? It's the love of the people that made it, the landscape you are looking at when you're savoring it…». With similar feeling, Javier, a young student from Pereira, comments: «Me, I have drunk a lot of specialty coffee

[12] «No sooner had the warm liquid mixed with the crumbs touched my palate than a shiver ran through me and I stopped, intent upon the extraordinary thing that was happening to me. An exquisite pleasure had invaded my senses, something isolated, detached, with no suggestion of its origin. And at once the vicissitudes of life had become indifferent to me, its disasters innocuous, its brevity illusory—this new sensation having the effect, which love has, of filling me with a precious essence; or rather this essence was not in me, it was me». Marcel Proust, *In Search of Lost Time: Swann's Way* (New York: Modern Library, 1998), p.60.

in Pereira, and in the end, it's really not what makes it good coffee. The best coffee I've had, that was a basic coffee, in a farm, watching the sunset». Consequently, for some of my respondents, the idea of a "bad consumer" is an urban, modernistic, west-centered perspective that aims to impose itself over local tradition; they see it as an essentially top down discourse that tries to make the average consumer feel guilt and shame for what has been the consumption practice of generations.

And indeed, in the CCLC context, the patrimonial discourse over coffee consumption is not devoid of contradiction; on the one hand, it aims to preserve, protect and value the traditions of coffee production, while simultaneously devaluating, and even downright rejecting the traditional ways of consuming it. However, for many of my respondents, regardless of whether these practices are "good" or not, negating them means negating the reality of the structure of the coffee chain, and thus negating what is often perceived as a history of exploitation and inequality.

Indeed, as aforementioned, the average coffee producer has little control over the profitable part of the coffee chain. Furthermore, the emphasis put on exportation, at the expense of the development of the internal coffee market, has led to the average Colombian having access almost exclusively to low quality coffee; the commercialization of specialty coffee being somewhat of a novel and marginal kind of business, this type of coffee has been the only one historically accessible. According to my respondents, acknowledging this allows for an explanation as to why Colombia, despite being one of the biggest coffee producers worldwide, is not a major consumer country[13].

Therefore, the majority of my respondents explain the absence of sophisticated brewing and the constant use of *panela* as necessary adaptations to the conditions of the product itself. In consequence, it appears that the origin of the problem is not located in "bad" consumption, but in the fact that the production of coffee in Colombia is such that it excludes the possibility of developing a relationship to coffee as a specialty. Rogelio, a sociologist working on questions related to the coffee chain, explains:

> We don't have access to the transformations of coffee, we only see it as raw material; we extract it in commodity form, we export it in commodity form. Even coffee farmers have not learned to consume their own coffee, they export everything, and they buy supermarket coffee. How can we then be expected to have a real relationship with coffee, as a beverage, to taste and savor?

It thus appears that the questions of production and consumption of coffee in the CCLC cannot be treated as separate issues, because strategies aiming to "improve" the consumer's behavior cannot be envisioned as successful without going hand in hand with strategies related to the structure of the coffee chain. It is then essential to examine the ways in which the "bad consumer" discourse is related to a desire to induce a change in coffee production; from this angle, the WHS declaration seems to be a very adequate tool. For most of my respondents, especially in the academic sector, the patrimonial recognition and promotion of a coffee growth rooted in ethical small-scale production and sustainability is an important tool in order to implement a gradual change in the collective imaginary, so as to switch from a vision of coffee as a commodity to coffee as a specialty. A coffee of higher quality, and hence, higher price, yet also a coffee resulting from fairer conditions.

[13] For a statistical example, see: Oliver Smith, «Mapped: the countries that drink the most coffee», *The Telegraph*, 1 October 2017, consulted in February 2018, https://www.telegraph.co.uk/travel/maps-and-graphics/countries-that-drink-the-most-coffee/

A reoccurring theme in my respondents' discourse, regardless of their occupation, is that of an activation of a "feeling of belonging" to the cultural landscape of coffee. They explain that while the legacy of coffee growing has been part of the local identities, it was not the object of a conscious affiliation; it was something ordinary, unremarkable, it was "part of the landscape"[14]. It appears that the concept of the CCLC has raised a sense of belonging to the "imagined community[15]" of coffee, but not just to any such community; to a community that would intrinsically have the right to appreciate its own coffee to its rightful potential. It is in this sense that the paradox of appreciation/depreciation should be understood, as an observation that would allow to pave the way towards a reappraisal of the coffee chain, and consequently, towards a reclaiming of coffee as an end product.

The direct materialization of the desire to shift both production and consumption practices towards the small yet growing wave of specialty coffee. Being at crossroads between modern and traditional, the chain of *cafés especiales* is a sector that adequately illustrates the opposing ways in which the patrimonial discourse can be considered: on the one hand, it is seen as an imposed alienation of tradition via a top down approach, and on the other, as a repossession of the coffee identity by taking control over the productive chain. Moreover, a close examination of this somewhat recent phenomenon, with more or less a decade of activity in the area, also allows to open up a conversation on the limits of patrimonial processes, which are sometimes very far away from the day to day realities of the concerned actors.

The benefits and limits of specialty coffee

The notion of specialty coffee, as defined by the Specialty Coffee Association of America (SCAA)[16], refers to the final result of a control of each stage of the coffee production, from tree to cup, in order to reach a brew of maximum quality with a unique profile, of which it is possible to trace the entire trajectory. Indeed, one of the peculiarities of coffee, as opposed to other specialized products such as wine, is that this trajectory generally depends on a multitude of actors, and does not end when the end product is put on the market: brewing techniques factor in the final quality of the drink almost as much as the way it is produced. The rhythm and rigorous control of each action are essential. The more the coffee is transformed, the smaller the room for maneuver. As Agustín explains:

> In dry parchment form, the beans keep their qualities for months, but once milled, these qualities last weeks, once roasted, they last days, and once ground, it is considered that the finest attributes of coffee only last for a few hours.

Once brewed, it appears that the room for maneuver that allows for the final specialized quality drink lasts mere minutes.

[14] The expression "*Se volvió paisaje*" is used to describe an object so common it has become unremarkable, which would roughly translate to "blend into the landscape".

[15] Benedict Anderson in referring to the birth of nationalism, uses the term of "imagined community" to signify the sense of belonging to a set of similar social symbols, which forms a commonly imagined social horizon. Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities: reflections on the origin and spread of nationalism* (London: Verso, 1991), 240 p.

[16] For the full definition, see «Because great coffee doesn´t just happen», Specialty Coffee Association of America (SCAA), consulted in March 2018, http://scaa.org/?page=RicArtp1

To be considered as a specialty, the production of coffee must therefore necessarily satisfy a number of criteria that set it apart from commodity coffee. Yet the designation of « specialty » is only fully achieved once the coffee is properly brewed. Hence, the commercial spaces of specialty coffee, as I observed them in the context of the *Eje Cafetero,* are coffee shops that offer the possibility to savor a variety of specialty coffees prepared with a wide range of sophisticated methods. Some of the shops of this kind limit themselves to typical expressions of *barismo* like the various *espresso*-based methods, but others display equipment of higher dexterity.

A case and point would be the use of the Chemex Coffeemaker[17]. Because it is a slow brewing method, the process takes a certain time, and in some of the shops I had the opportunity to study during my fieldwork, this time was used in conversation. The Chemex was suggested as an educational activity; a barista brewed the coffee in front of the client while providing an explanation on the art of coffee-making and the tradition of coffee-farming. The use of the Chemex can thus give the baristas the occasion to demonstrate not only their art, but also to generate a conversation on cultural legacy, usually aligning themselves with the patrimonial discourse on the traditional methods of coffee growing and the environmental equilibrium that make such a coffee possible. More than simple coffee-making, the use of the Chemex is a typical example of how, in the local context, preparing specialty coffee is in part about the coffee itself, and in part about the social philosophy that goes along with it.

According to the 2016 data published by the National Federation of Coffee Growers of Colombia (FNC)[18], about 17% of the country's exported coffee was designated as *café especial.* This term can correspond to different subcategories of labels; the FNC denotes four: *origin coffee, sustainable coffee, certified coffee* and *preparation coffee*[19]. Without getting into the technical ramifications of each of these labels, it is nonetheless interesting to note what they share: they must all uphold certain standards of quality, traceability and both social and ecologic sustainability. This triple desire of control is representative of the logic of *cafés especiales,* whether affiliated to the Federation or commercialized independently, as was the case for most of the producers I had the chance to interview during my fieldwork.

In the case of said producers, to be affiliated to the specialty coffee chain also means an opportunity of access to more than the simple growing of coffee, and therefore to a more substantial part of the added value profit. For the actors implicated in these processes, the patrimonial discourse appears to be a considerable ally in promoting their activity; these are people who are usually informed of the existence, means and issues of the CCLC, and who are or are looking to be a part of the touristic showcasing of cultural legacy. The ideal way to do that is to have optimal control on both ends of the chain, which is possible in the cases

[17] The hourglass-shaped Chemex Coffeemaker, created in 1941, is made of glass, and is a slow-brewing coffeemaker in which the coffee is poured manually.

[18] Available on: «El comportamiento de la industria cafetera colombiana 2016», Fundación Nacional de Cafeteros de Colombia, consulted in March 2018, https://www.federaciondecafeteros.org/particulares/es/quienes_somos/publicaciones/

[19] *Origin coffees* are focused on the guarantee that they originate from only one farm (instead of a blend) with a specific microclimate. *Sustainable coffees* are oriented towards a guarantee of social and environmental protection. *Certified coffees* are thus named because they reflect the standards of international organizations, and have obtained labels like FLO, Organic, Rainforest Alliance or UTZ. For a fuller description, see the FNC's website, in the section «Nuestros cafés especiales», consulted in July 2017, https://www.federaciondecafeteros.org/clientes/es/nuestra_propuesta_de_valor/portafolio_de_productos/nuestro_cafe_especial/

where producers of *café especial* commercialize their own coffee *and* manage their own coffee shop. However, these cases represent only a very small portion of activity in the area.

Repossession, autonomy & taste

Producing quality coffee and brewing it have very different implications; however, a theme that appears to be recurrent in the discourse of both producers and traders of *café especial* is perceiving it as a way to become actors of the coffee chain rather than subjects. According to my respondents, an overwhelming part of coffee farmers in the region, especially after the repetitive crisis of the last few decades, are in a dire economic situation[20]. They point out how the historical structure of Colombian coffee growing has disadvantaged both the producer and the consumer, allowing neither to fully access the benefits of coffee as a product of craftsmanship. In these discourses, belonging to the « imagined community » of the CCLC means recognizing that its central human pillar is the coffee farmer. They therefore display a desire of protection and repossession of the cultural legacy using a language of farmer's rights defense.

This repossession goes hand in hand with a desire of autonomy from major institutions, which are seen as giving little support to coffee growers while absorbing most of the benefits of coffee. The notion of autonomy also refers to the dependence that was generated by intensive coffee farming in previous decades, as opposed to the traditional mixed farming and environmental protection supported by the CCLC. It thus follows that those who trade in *café especial* seem to adhere to the patrimonial motto of sustainability, protection and equity. But some respondents also call for a larger, national movement of autonomy; projects linked to *café especial* may also become meaningful as an opportunity to resist, on a local level, to the transnational corporations that dominate the international coffee market. Marcos, implicated in specialty coffee both as a producer and as a coffee shop manager, explains that:

> We started to weave strategies to buy ethically, to find out how to export this type of product…[…] it shouldn't be a business of three people that buy the entire coffee of Colombia to sell it…and it's not even Colombians, it's foreigners, Nestlé, Starbucks, McDonalds […] they come, they buy the coffee from us at low prices, and they sell it back to us at a really expensive price…and we are not aware of that, and we go and consume it…it doesn't make sense.

Up until some years ago, for the coffee producer, it was possible to export only in dry parchment form; commercializing a finished product directly from the farm was not an option. On the other hand, the internal market of specialty coffee was extremely limited. It seems that the FNC held an almost complete control over exports, buying from producers

[20] This observation varied amongst my respondents, ranging from «they are less well off than in the times of the bonanza» to «they are in a situation of extreme poverty». While it seems relatively easy to access information on the benefits of the coffee sector, or how much it represents in terms of local agricultural activity, it has been nonetheless impossible to establish a concrete, number-supported portrait of the global state of coffee farmers. However, it is possible to assert that the average size of coffee farms, and the percentage of the zone sowed in coffee has considerably declined since the 1990s, rendering the activity far less profitable. Another significant event would be the strike of 2013: to protest against what is seen as a bad management of the consequences of the coffee crisis, the Colombian coffee farmers call for a strike which lasts 11 days. While not being the last or more recent strike in this regard, what is significant is that it appears to be the first time in the country's history that such a strike occurs, which can be perceived as an indicator of a growing feeling a discontent of coffee farmers regarding their declining condition.

only as raw material; yet untransformed coffee, specialized or not, makes little profit. This is how Leticia, whose farm has been commercializing its own *café especial* on a small scale for some years now, explains to me her choice to specialize:

> The Federation, because they know it's good coffee, they're going to export it. But for me, whether it is good coffee or not doesn't mean that they're going to pay me much more, you see? More, yeah, but not enough compared to what it is. So, I told myself, I'm going to sell it by myself.

A recent relaxation of the FNC's exclusive control over the coffee market has made it possible to now export one's own coffee independently or through local farmers' organizations. Furthermore, the aforementioned rise of a desire to consume better quality coffee has slowly paved the way for the development of the internal market of specialty coffee.

For Leticia, as well as for all specialty coffee shop managers I talked to, this opening is an unprecedented opportunity in the history of Colombia, a possibility to actively participate, on an organized scale, in the making of coffee as an end product. From this perspective, *barismo*, the art of brewing, is also seen as a symbolic reclaiming of the production structure via taste: Marcos underlines the gratification he feels when he can give the opportunity to a farmer to discover the optimal taste of his own coffee beans, the overwhelming emotion that lies behind the simple act of drinking a properly brewed cup of one's own lifework, of bridging, for the first time, the radical gap between fruit and cup. Therefore, speeches associated with *café especiales* seem to include an underlying aspect of retribution, of « doing justice » to the coffee farmer. In addition to that, this reclaiming of taste seems intrinsically linked to a philosophy of environmental balance; Cristina, the manager of a specialty coffee shop in Pereira, explains to me that preserving the diversity and balance of each coffee plant allows for a diversification of tastes, that are «as rich as the landscape itself; because in the end, when drinking a good coffee, it is its landscape that we drink ». So, it seems that inside the logic of *café especial*, the taste of coffee becomes a true « site of memory»[21]. The cup holds in its fragrant content all the memories of regional coffee farming, those that are respected and valued and those that are perceived as lengthy historical injustice.

Following this logic, it ensues that reclaiming the coffee chain can only be done by meeting certain standards of production and trade that echo the concepts of preservation, protection, sustainability and ethic that are promoted and encouraged by CCLC politics. For example, all the merchants I interviewed state that they have personal relationships with the farmers who supply them; they claim a preference for small scale, environmental friendly family farms. They describe this choice as not only a question of buying coffee that meets specialty standards, but that the point is rather to consider the human element, the manpower hiding behind this production, as equally special. It is about putting forward a sense of solidarity with the traditional coffee farming community of the *Eje Cafetero.*

All this tends to join the previously mentioned discourses on the necessity to shift from a vision of coffee as a commodity to coffee as a craft. Marcos supports:

[21] Pierre Nora, in Jacques Le Goff, *La Nouvelle Histoire* (Editions Complexe, 1978), defines sites of memory as the topographical, symbolic, functional and institutional places in which a society voluntarily assigns its memories.

> We have to acknowledge the farmers committed to the environment, to family, to society. […] Identifying the cost of something is one thing, identifying its value is another; what we want is that coffee be no longer understood as a cost, but as a value, the intrinsic value of things.

For Eduardo, a specialty coffee shop manager in Pereira:

> The coffee has more value if the producer lives in the farm, and works with his wife, his son, his cousin, his son-in-law, his cat, his dog, rather than if he is a producer who lives in the city and employs a lot of rotating workers. […] For me, coffee has more value if it's harvested and treated with the love of a family.

It also follows that these merchants claim that they pay the farmers better, fairer prices. This claim is mostly used in comparison to the prices of the FNC. Most of the traders and producers of *café especial* I talked to seem to have at least mixed feelings towards the Federation; while they all admit the crucial historical role that it has had in promoting farmer rights, they also criticize its control over the coffee chain, and point out a certain lack of concrete support towards the specializing of coffee production. When it comes to State institutions, the discourses take a somewhat harsher edge: «there is little support», «support? None. We're on our own» or «All this is our initiative. Help from the government, we're still waiting for it» are some reccurring statements from my respondents. One can also point out a will to extract themselves from large top down structures, so that if the relationship to coffee changes, it changes from the bottom, in a community effort. It then seems that behind the discourse on specialty coffee lies a desire to show the rest of the world, the dominant national structures and the impoverished coffee farmers that it is possible for the average Colombian to be an actor in the coffee chain.

For the managers of specialty coffee shops, it appears to be obvious that such a repossession of the coffee chain has to happen from both ends: reclaiming taste thus appears just as important as reclaiming fairer production structures. This is because it appears that in order for small-scale coffee farmers to make fairer profit, in other words, to match the cost of their work, the taste of coffee has to be reclaimed as something that has unique value. Marco's previously quoted statement on value sheds considerable light on this point: « what we want is that coffee be no longer understood as a cost, but as a value ». Indeed, the specialty coffee chain has an important stake in the development of a consumption model far from the aforementioned "bad consumer". It relies heavily in the development of a middle and upper class audience, one that is sensible to the craft of coffee, to its *value*, and is therefore inclined to pay a cup at a considerably higher *price* than that of the supermarket coffee, making the trade effectively profitable for both farmers and coffee shop managers. However, while encouraging this model can be seen as a positive enterprise, a beneficial act of repossession, it also frequently clashes with the current realities of the coffee sector, particularly in rural areas.

Capital, knowledge, and the cost of repossession

In the area of the *Eje Cafetero,* coffee shops that identify with the wave of specialty coffee are primarily located in urban areas, in the three capital cities (Armenia, Manizales and Pereira) and in central towns. Specialty coffee shops as I observed them in various parts of the region have a tendency to differentiate themselves from average coffee shops by adopting symbols of the CCLC, both in their aesthetic and in their philosophy. This is shown

via a tendency to favor recycling, the use of material such as *guadua*[22], but also by displaying objects directly related to the material culture of the *Eje Cafetero*[23]. Careful attention is paid to decoration, each shop putting forward its own aesthetic concept. Specialty coffee shops tend to be conceived as spaces that promote small-scale coffee farming tradition as well as modernity, technical expertise and innovation.

It is therefore not only the coffee that sets specialty coffee shops apart from regular coffee shops, but also the layout of the places themselves, and their adherence to broader cultural trends. Furthermore, this layout also aims to attract the attention of a specific public, one that is receptive to thrice specialized coffee: by origin, process and brewing. A cup of such a coffee can reach up to ten times the price of an average cup. Consequently, it appears that the global strategies aiming to change the consumption paradigm from commodity to specialty only manage to reach specific parts of the socio-spatial landscape.

The findings of this research tend to show that the audience of *café especiales* is a mix between, on the one hand, a local urban middle and upper class, and on the other, national and international tourists. Indeed, a certain purchasing power is required in order to consume specialty coffee on a regular basis. Furthermore, to favor such consumption habits also requires having somewhat of a preexisting affinity with the idea of appreciating coffee as a sophisticated drink. As previously seen, neither of these elements seems to represent the majority of the local population. Moreover, it is important to bear in mind that this type of shop corresponds only to a minority of coffee shops; if we set aside chance encounters, the mere knowledge of their location implies a preexisting interest for this type of project. Given these circumstances, it is difficult to envision a future rise of *cafés especiales* as the general paradigm of consumption.

But the development of the specialty coffee chain also encounters issues on the other side of the spectrum. For the average coffee farming family, the requirements of specialization often appear as out of touch with day-to-day reality. In order to produce *café especial*, one must have a farm that is sufficiently productive so that the conversion of at least part of the production into specialty can be ultimately profitable, a farm whose ecosystemic conditions can produce beans labeled as a specialty.

Yet this label itself cannot be taken for granted; it presupposes a knowledge of what specialization is and how to meet its specific criteria, that is to say, a preliminary introduction to the notion, culminating in a specific training that is mandatory in order for a farm to consider undergoing such a conversion. The FNC, the SENA[24], and various regional Universities offer a wide range of adequate courses in this domain, yet it seems that this knowledge remains difficult of access for the majority of coffee farmers. Moreover, supposing this training is obtained, the next step, which would be to put the knowledge into action, requires a control over the conditions of production that implies the purchase of tools and resources. These elements ultimately point out to an essential pre-requirement of specialization: a certain economic capital.

Most coffee farmers simply do not possess the means to make this kind of conversion. Thus the upstream production of specialty coffee already appears unattainable for the average coffee farmer; yet if the producer also aims to commercialize his own coffee, he must factor

[22] The *guadua* is an endemic type of bamboo, and an important hydric resource for the area. It has been basis of traditional local modes of construction and is one of the most salient symbols of the CCLC.
[23] Some examples would be miniature *Willys* Jeeps, sculptures that use coffee beans, etc.
[24] The National Training Service.

in the costs of additional training and equipment that enable him to reach the final product, but also the knowledge of how to enter a network that allows for a downstream access to the market. Be it independently, or via a partner organization, commercializing specialty coffee is a considerable investment. Daniel, whose family farm recently launched its own brand of specialty coffee, primarily thanks to the salaries of various members of the family who work in the city, explains how hard it is for the average farmer to make such an investment:

> There is no support. Many families produce just enough to be able to feed themselves. For buying a pair of pants, a shirt, sometimes it's not enough. So, to invest…for the farmer, it's hard. It supposes he has to possess some knowledge…some tools, a team… [...] so he says to himself, I have coffee, I'd like to sell it…but who will help me? And he'll have to face the market…and practical issues, like where to find the bags[25], where to find the contacts? Because there's a world of difference between planting a tree and reaching that final product…

The opening and management of a specialty coffee shop inherently raises similar issues, that is to say, the access to specific training and to some capital: «Everything that is related to coffee is super expensive», explains Daniel. «A mill, a Chemex, a Dripper[26] […] these are not things you can get easily, and it's extremely costly». Beyond the necessary training in *barismo* mandatory for quality control, one must also consider the investment related to the acquisition of a business space, equipment costs, but also strategies of visibility and promotion; one must have access to social groups that already have an interest for specialty, one must form a network of clients ready to pay such a price; once again, the average coffee farmer appears to have few chances to integrate these networks. Therefore, to access the different parts of the chain of *cafés especiales* remains a marginal opportunity that does not correspond to the concrete realities of most producers, despite the fact that it represents a potential improvement in productivity and terms of trade.

Conclusions

In the general discourse of patrimonial politics, the switch to specialty coffee is conceived as both an alternative to a general decline of coffee farming in the past few decades and as an opportunity to improve what can be seen as a historical inequality in terms of trade. This potential switch is perceived as the key to a future in which coffee will no longer be seen as raw material. A conception of coffee as a specialty would allow for a raise in the value of the internal coffee market, which would in turn lead to an improvement of the living conditions of the coffee farmer. A change in the general consumption paradigm would help finance this improvement, channeled mainly through the affluent classes. Such a change would mean stepping away from the tradition of the "bad consumer" by recognizing a high value to the craft of coffee, as a specialty rather than a commodity. However, the image of the average Colombian's modes of consumption of coffee as "bad" has been criticized as being a top down, urban and west-centered perspective that negates a historical adaptation to the conditions of the coffee trade. Moreover, it has been perceived as an uprooting of tradition, one that depreciates the emotions and memories associated with ancestral practices.

Nonetheless, a specialization of both production and consumption would encourage the promotion and protection of a more ethical, small-scale, environmental-friendly coffee growing, thus protecting the label of the Coffee Cultural Landscape of Colombia.

[25] He is referring to the design and packaging of bags of beans or ground coffee as an end product.
[26] A Dripper is a manually regulated method of filter coffee. Its use in Colombia appears to be quite recent.

Furthermore, the development of the chain of *cafés especiales* is perceived by those associated with it as a way not to negate but to honor and perpetuate tradition. Rather than as a silencing of historical inequality, it is conceived as a way to draw attention to it by reclaiming a right to the taste of coffee and to a larger autonomy of the internal coffee market. Thus, specialty coffee can appear as an alternative of both economic and symbolic significance to counter the decline of coffee-related growth in the CCLC.

However, given the present conditions of both the average farmer and consumer, the development of the chain of *cafés especiales* as a generalized mode of production and consumption seems far-fetched. For the moment, the integration of such a chain remains marginal, on the one hand because the consumption habits and power purchase of the average consumer are too far away from this paradigm, and on the other because the general conditions of average coffee farmers and traders in the area are not favorable to such an investment. The two elements that appear necessary to the development of specialty, namely, a preexisting sensibility and training in coffee tasting and the possession of a certain economic capital, hardly seem to correspond to day-to-day reality in the field. Moreover, while it seems that the Unesco WHS label has favored and valued such projects, the interviewed actors implicated in these processes underline a difficulty to find concrete institutional support.

It then appears that for the various institutions linked to the management of the CCLC, one of the stakes of specialization materializes as the challenge of implementing strategies that would balance a desire to improve the conditions of the internal coffee market with the socioeconomic realities of the coffee sector. On the other hand, it appears important that these strategies are developed within a comprehensive frame of mind that does not negate or undermine the weight of the history that lies beyond the traditional, "bad" ways of consuming coffee.

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