

## **Fear, desire and the perils of globalization: alternatives to neoliberal interpretations of coffee consumption in eighteenth-century England**

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Since the early 1990s, the application of Habermas' theory of the rise of the bourgeois public sphere to interpret the social and economic changes that took place in eighteenth-century England have provided the dominant mode of analysis. The neoliberal premise that there was an inexorable rise in the expansion of capitalist entrepreneurship, the commercialization of culture, and the emergence of a politically-informed middling sort has not been fundamentally challenged. For the past three decades, this interpretation has been politically useful in a contemporary context, with the rise of a globalized economy facilitated by free trade networks driven by powerful commercial interests. Yet in the wake of a supposed 'clash of civilizations' and emergence of deep divisions within and between Europe, the United States and the Middle East, the time is ripe to look again at the premise that modern civic culture, and a politicised 'polite' society, was based in England upon cultures of consumption that were unproblematically receptive to global exchange of commodities, peoples and ideas. Taking the example of coffee consumption, this paper explores the tensions inherent in the reception of coffee drinking and coffee house culture in London and provincial England. Drawing upon primary evidence from Lambeth Palace and Guildhall archives relating to the immigrant populations who made their living in the coffee trade, and polemical commentaries against their wares, this paper highlights the fierce contestation between desire for novelty among Georgian consumers, and their antagonism towards immigrants and fear for/desire of 'foreign' commodities. Though some, including the distinguished economist Amartya Sen, have lauded the rise of the English public sphere as a form of proto-democracy, the presence of the fear/desire nexus towards 'exotic' foreigners and the commodities and consumer practices associated with them, was a constituent faultline within the neoliberal project *ab origino* that may yet prove its downfall.