



# Coffee people in Tehran, Glasgow and Amsterdam

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## Abstract

Despite the diversity of consumption and class practices of the new urban middle classes within and between societies, they share some qualities. Focusing on the lifestyles and mentalities of regulars of specialty coffee bars in Tehran, Glasgow and Amsterdam, this study explores common characteristics of this group. Our ethnography suggests that through their everyday consumption practices, coffee people share a set of ethical dispositions and cultural practices among which this article focuses on the metropolitan body, cosmopolitanism and environmentalism.

## Keywords

Specialty coffee, coffee people, the new urban middle classes, the metropolitan body, cosmopolitanism, environmentalism

## Introduction

While cities continue to be places for some forms of manufacturing and production, they are increasingly built around their utility as places for service and consumption. This transformation coincides with the growth of the new urban middle classes and the concomitant emergence of new forms of public urban culture. The proliferation of cities as theatres of the spectacle also allows for the development of polymorphous public culture organised around the consumption of a range of goods and services such as yoga, artisanal beer, olive oil, tea, ice cream, bread and coffee.

There is a growing body of literature connecting the rise of the new urban middle classes to the development of the cognitive–cultural economy and gentrification, on the one hand, and the proliferation of new consumption practices and identities, on the other hand (Scott, 2012; Zukin, 2010). A growing number of case studies, additionally, highlight particular aspects of these processes in different cities such as Amsterdam (Gelmers and Rath, 2015), Glasgow (Shaker Ardekani and Rath, in press), Tehran

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(Shaker Ardekani, 2016b), Hong Kong (Kharas and Gertz, 2010) and Cape Town (McEwan et al., 2015). Although the literature provides valuable insights into local contexts and idiosyncrasies of the new urban middle classes, little comparative work has been done so far. Despite the fact that they live in sometimes totally different cities with different contextual opportunities, we argue that the new urban middle classes have particular qualities and characteristics in common, some of which expressed through consumption practices. Comparative studies between different societies are of importance for understanding what the potential convergences are and what may be contributing to the convergence among the new urban middle classes.

We decided to ethnographically examine some of the shared characteristics of the new urban middle classes in diverse urban environments by focusing on a particular consumption space: specialty coffee bars. As demonstrated by Hyra (2017), Rath and Gelmers (2014, 2016) and Zukin et al. (2015), specialty coffee is a beverage rich in identity value and popular among the new urban middle classes. Focusing on specialty coffee bars opens up an interesting window to engage with this group, closely observe their styles of consumption, decipher their polysemic rituals of consumption and to eventually identify their common traits. Moreover, the cosmopolitan nature of coffee as a global commodity as well as the ubiquity of specialty coffee bars in urban settings in different parts of the world demonstrates that these social spaces of lifestyle are highly relevant sites to study the class practices of the new urban middle classes in a cross-national investigation.

We have selected sites in three cities: Tehran, Glasgow and Amsterdam. Situated in both the Global South and North, these cities vary highly in terms of levels of engagement with globalisation, class relations and social, cultural and political positioning of coffee bars. Our ethnographic sites provide us with an opportunity to explore any common grounds among the new middle-class coffee people. Overall, through a small-N cross-national ethnography of regulars of specialty coffee bars in Tehran, Glasgow and Amsterdam, the research contributes to the literature on the proliferation of the new urban middle classes and the ways in which they are developing particular urban lifestyles. After situating the research in the current literature on the new urban middle classes, consumption, class expression and specialty coffee, the methodology and findings of the research will be presented.

## **The new urban middle classes and their polysemic rituals of consumption**

The new urban middle classes are not 'new' according to their social composition as they are part of the broader middle classes; as a social classification, they constitute a rather heterogeneous, ambiguous, elusive category of people. Engaged in occupations that require significant levels of human capital, they are typically categorised as neither too rich nor too poor, broadly able to lead a comfortable

life, enjoying stable housing, healthcare, educational opportunities and discretionary disposable income to spend on vacation and leisure pursuits (Kharas and Gertz, 2010; Mathur, 2010). Their newness is considered primarily by their professional class, based on knowledge rather than property, which is highly related to post-industrial societies and post-Fordist production logics. They appear to constantly redefine middle-class identity and are often celebrated for having liberal attitudes yet marked by new consumption practices associated with resource-intensive lifestyles (Lange and Meier, 2009). Their educational background, additionally, assists them to subjectively differentiate themselves from old, traditional middle classes through their engagement with political debates as well as a broad, eclectic taste in cultural items. Thus, the concept refers to more than just an income group: it comprises social, political, environmental and economic dimensions and likewise operates as a cultural construct combining both tradition and modernity in its ideologies and consumption styles (Anantharaman, 2014; Jayne, 2006).

The reasons behind consumption practices of the new urban middle class are many and anything but univocal or coherent and can be configured in various ways. From theories of practice, this class can be grasped as a class-in-practice, defined by its everyday, mundane consumption practices through which they perform their social position (Warde, 2014). According to Bourdieu's (1984) theory of distinction, this class employs consumption as a communicator and a sign of distinction in order to subjectively and objectively define and demarcate their social position. In so doing, members of this class express their identities through symbolic representation in taste and lifestyle and a desired focus on symbolic rather than material rewards (Warde, 2015).

Besides public performance and symbolic class expression, they share a vision of consumer sovereignty, a desire for a certain quality of life that involves both collective goods (the neighbourhood and the city where they live in as well as environmental concerns, equality and democracy) and private happiness. Today's new urban middle classes tend to operate around the idea that they can and must control themselves through, among other things, looking after their bodies, state of health and the environment (Sassatelli, 2007). They are what Cohen (2000) would call 'citizen consumers', who simultaneously fulfil personal desires and civic obligations through their consumption practices.

Concepts of identity, lifestyle, distinction and consumption practice of the new urban middle classes, moreover, converge in the aestheticisation of everyday life. Within contemporary consumer culture, lifestyle connotes individuality, self-expression, aesthetic reflexivity and stylistic self-consciousness. One's body, clothes, speech, leisure pastimes, eating and drinking preferences, choice of holidays, environmental concerns and political orientation are to be regarded as indicators of the individuality of taste and aesthetic sense of style (Featherstone, 2007; Latham, 2003). Arguably, the new urban middle classes engage an invisible ink strategy to objectively and subjectively demarcate their class boundaries, the symbolic, embodied and experiential aspects of their class aesthetics (Guthman, 2003).

With their high cultural and economic resources, the new urban middle classes reject mass-produced, standardised and impersonal commodities and embrace goods and services that are designed to cater to a personal sense of worth. They increasingly look towards emotional and intimate commodities, exemplified by the recent proliferation of artisanal goods, the move towards quality in gourmet food and beverages, the growth of personal fitness and beauty products, the expansion of the tourist trade and travelling agencies, the exponential rise of the catering and hospitality industries, the growth in the home-improvement sector and the personalisation of pharmaceuticals (Michalski, 2015; Townsend and Sood, 2012).

Socially constructed and socially maintained, the new urban middle classes manage their identities through the processes of public performance via placing an emphasis on frequent visits to the everyday social spaces of lifestyles where they can express, perform and practice their embodied and symbolic sense of class. The new interest in artisanal market and recent engagement with aesthetic goods and services, such as, among others, craft beer bars, specialty coffee bars, wine bars, fusion restaurants, artisanal bakeries, vintage shops, ethnic catering and ethnic therapies, indicate a fundamental shift in the consumption practices of the new urban middle classes. In fact, through focusing on artisanship and sensual experience, these new urban consumption spaces seem to be attractive for the new urban middle classes who prefer natural, quality goods and services. Highly visible signs of gentrification, these consumption spaces not only supply the material needs of the new urban middle classes, but also the aesthetics of their offerings and atmosphere provide cultural capital for these groups, validate the judgment of their tastes and lifestyles and reinforce a sense of authentic self-expression and creative cultural distinction (Zukin et al., 2015).

Despite the existing rich literature and current thick description of the new urban middle classes, their consumption practices and styles of living, there are few international studies on them. What qualities do they share? As a first intervention to answering this broad question, we have narrowed down our scope of investigation and focused on specialty coffee bars and their patrons. Coffee has long been a part of daily diets and social rituals; however, like craft beer, cocktails, tea, chocolate and bread, coffee is experiencing an artisanal spring. Some coffee aficionados call this the third wave of coffee. Manzo (2010) provides a timeline about the different coffee waves:

The first wave, according to the coffee geeks, refers to how coffee was prepared and consumed in, say, the 1950s until, say, the early 1990s, when coffee was a caffeine delivery system prepared in percolators or massive urns in offices and banquet halls. The second wave refers to that period, starting in the early 1990s, when coffeehouse chains (Starbucks, Gloria Jean's, The Coffee Bean and Tea Leaf, Second Cup, etc.) were founded and became common features in urban storefronts and suburban malls. The second wave purveyors, this history claims, laid the groundwork for the third wave, which comprises small-batch artisanal coffee roasters and independent or small chain coffeehouses that are themselves part of a supply chain including a collection of

field-to-cup actors starting with direct-trade growers with whom the coffee brokers, roasters, and cafe owners are understood to have relationships. (p. 143)

Trendy, hip espresso bars and cool specialty coffeehouses are mushrooming in almost all big cities across the globe, becoming synonymous with contemporary urban living (Bookman, 2014). They have marked a distinct break with a past characterised by mass production and consumption, distinguishing themselves by providing high-quality coffees derived from distinct processes of planting, harvesting, washing, drying, milling, roasting, grinding, brewing and cupping (Specialty Coffee Association of America (SCAA), 2015).

Compared to other lifestyle goods and services such as chocolate, designer goods or yoga classes, specialty coffee bars have not only appeared to be more visible in the everyday urban sphere and attracted a wider section of urbanites but have also shown how production and consumption has shifted from quantity towards quality and from mass to niche markets. Providing high-profile products that reflect a creative, aesthetic production and consumption, specialty coffee bars seem to be the local manifestation of a certain mentality in which coffee is a way of life. In other words, drinking specialty coffee is a way of actualising a philosophy of life and a nonverbal communicative act of identity. As such, it entails elaborate codes of conduct, sociability and aesthetic appreciation which are institutionally sustained and enforced as well as subjectively learned through a self-disciplining process.

The consumption of relatively expensive specialty coffee, moreover, is understood to contain numerous social, cultural, sensual, embodied and symbolic meanings by which everyday needs and consumption are linked to identities and lifestyles of the new urban middle classes. Coffee people seek to practice their sense of class and to differentiate themselves from the dullness of mass culture by consuming quality products. In other words, sipping coffee is not only about drinking coffee but also about navigating through countless tastes, flavours and smells of coffee, selecting a specific coffee bean coming from a specific country and farm, derived from a distinct process, brewed and cupped by a skilled, professional barista, using a certain type of machine and equipment, enriched by adding a specific type and amount of sugar, syrup and milk. This occurs in a particular space with a specific interior design fostering a leisurely ambiance within a particular neighbourhood. Simply put, where to go and what to drink have become key avenues for class distinction and practice.

## **Data and methodology**

What is assumed within the reviewed literature is that links are present between the aesthetic consumption and class practices of the new urban middle classes and the human capital derived from their educational background, occupational class and social networks. The literature has little to say about shared traits and characteristics that appear across seemingly vastly different contexts, with different

combinations of and interplays between their cultural and economic capital. In this respect, via focusing on a cross-case analysis, this research investigates the shared consumption practices and characteristics of new urban middle-class coffee people in three cities crossing the conventional Global South and North research divide: Tehran, Glasgow and Amsterdam.

These cases vary highly in terms of engagement in the global currents of economy and culture. As a global city, Amsterdam has been involved with the cognitive-cultural economy since the early stages of deindustrialisation (Shaker Ardekani, 2016a). The city has managed to boost its economy through fostering investment in cognitive and cultural sectors as well as advanced producer services (Van der Waal, 2013). Under the banner of the creative city (Florida, 2002), Amsterdam has successfully attracted a huge number of urban professionals with high cognitive and cultural skills. Deindustrialisation, on the other hand, has left Glasgow with some of the worst socio-economic problems in Britain. Yet, now the city seems to be alluring the new middle classes through a process of re-urbanisation, seemingly finding its place amidst economic and cultural globalisation through a host of energetic cultural-financial initiatives (Turok and Bailey, 2004). On the other side of the spectrum stands Tehran which, for a variety of reasons, has weak connections with the global process of urban development, and the current literature has little to say about its local specificities particularly regarding the class practices of its new urban middle classes (Shaker Ardekani, 2016b).

The selected cities, moreover, differ in terms of the rigidity of their class systems. Economic background and the class of origin hierarchically differentiate social groups within Tehran; however, the class compositions in Glasgow and, to a higher degree, in Amsterdam derive mostly from occupation, education and cultural competencies. The nature of public urban culture also varies considerably and casts an important role for frequenting coffee bars. It could be argued that specialty coffee bars in Glasgow and Amsterdam are more or less gender-neutral urban spaces, and patronising them goes along with Bourdieu's theory of distinction as well as theories of practice. In Tehran, however, coffee shops are evidently a more gendered urban space and encourage the pseudo-emancipation of women promoting a sense of aesthetic socio-political resistance (Shaker Ardekani, 2015a, 2015b, 2016b).

Using qualitative ethnographic research methods in a small-N cross-national study, the investigation analyses regulars of specialty coffee bars within and between the selected cities. The within-case comparison is of central importance and contributes to the depth of the research and guides the study to identify common patterns of regulars, their characteristics, motivations and social practices. In other words, our ethnographic research has provided us with a means through which it is possible to analyse the culture of coffee people from the perspective of its members. Unlike ethnographies in one setting, cross-national ethnography allows us to directly reflect upon the structural, underlying factors that explain the shared class practices of the new urban middle classes in different urban societies.

The article draws upon research conducted between July 2015 and March 2016 on specialty coffee consumption. As signs of gentrification, coffeehouses were selected based upon their location in gentrified/ing neighbourhoods and/or areas where the middle classes live. It is also noteworthy that specialty coffee markets are increasingly differentiated, along with fine lines such as between chains and branded coffeehouses and a host of so-called third wave, more independent hipster cafés. In order to capture this substantive variety, we have focused on both types. As there are no global chain coffeehouses in Tehran, local chain and independent specialty coffee establishments in all three cities have been investigated. Four coffeehouses within each city, one locally chain-based and three independents, in total, 12 cases, have been selected.

The methodology involves unobtrusive observations in conjunction with interviews to examine the attitudes, characteristics and consumption practices of coffee people. Both the narrative accounts of respondents and direct observations of their class practices have been employed. Interviews have been conducted with both baristas and visitors. First-timers, passer-by visitors and people who are not engaged with the specialty coffee culture and, for instance, come to espresso bars only for Wi-Fi have been excluded from the study. Participants have been recruited from different socio-economic and cultural backgrounds based on age (between 17 and 64 years old), gender, ethnicity and social activities they are engaging in (socialising, leisure and working/productivity; Gelmers and Rath, 2015). In total, the qualitative data consist of 240 hours of observations and 60 semi-structured in-depth interviews. Lasting between 60 and 180 minutes, observations were made at different times on both weekdays and weekends as a source for observing variations based on customers and social practices. Out of 60 interviews, 12 were conducted with baristas and 48 with regulars. The questions were primarily open-ended, in a semi-structured fashion. Participants were asked about their socio-economic backgrounds, their choice of coffeehouse, coffee connoisseurship, as well as consumption and cultural practices to explore the ways in which they understand, rationalise and respond to their everyday urban living.

### **The shared characteristics of coffee people in Tehran, Glasgow and Amsterdam**

The new urban middle classes, as an extraordinarily complex group with unclear boundaries, employ myriad forms of, sometimes, competing cultural capital, mainly through aesthetic consumption in order to practice their social position and/or hierarchically differentiate themselves. In this light, the consumption of specialty coffee within relaxed, conspicuous environments has become a component of their expressive class identities bound up with the performance of cultural capital and processes of distinction. For instance, Rosa, 29, a social worker in Amsterdam explains the self-reflexivity of patrons of coffee bars:

I think there is a kind of culture to go to such a scene like this to kind of not showing off but kind of to say 'Hello, here I am' ... I guess because people want to be part of a



community or group to tell that 'Hey, watch me, I'm successful; I have that iPhone, that MacBook, or clothes'. I think it's a subculture very similar to cocktails... It is interesting, which shows you have a lot of time and money and know about coffee. I also think a part of people [being here] here [is] to show themselves.

It seems that specialty coffee bars can be considered as a space of representation or a space of practice within which particular representations of identity, power and hierarchy become visible. These urban spaces cater to a 'certain crowd' as Maryam, 24, an architect in Tehran argues:

We are going towards specialised, professional products... for example, this place with fresh, quality, homemade sweets, sandwiches, and salads, which is its pride, serves mostly for a certain type of people... As far as I know about this place and its managers, they are all professional in their jobs. They are highly selective and restrictive about their baristas, staff, coffee beans, and equipment... It is not a small, little sinking coffee shop; they play good music and the crowd is a certain crowd... I think it entices you to maybe stay longer or even order more ...

James, 36, a barista in Amsterdam, describes the certain coffee crowd in Amsterdam:

They are mostly white and middle-class people, I would say. They would have some sort of more educated background, so lots of people who like wine tasting and food tasting also like specialty coffee... Here also a lot of start-up people and creative people come... Young professionals also use the place as their office. You know, they sit here with their laptops... I have some customers coming two times a day, in the morning and afternoon and spending about €10. Like, you usually see people come in wearing nice clothes, expensive shoes, nice watches, very expensive laptops, the latest smartphones, that's kind of a package and inventing in everything with quality... We also have a lot of expats and students here... Another category might be like housewives and moms [who] don't work. Moms with kids and housewives come here to meet friends and have a cup of coffee together ...

Alireza, 28, a PhD graduate also lists the similar fraction of society frequenting specialty coffeehouses in Tehran:

I cannot see all types of people here... Mostly young people like us, students, you know... I also can see a certain type of people based upon their income, which is obvious to me from their behaviours, clothes, and styles... They are mostly high-income and from upper-middle families, they have enough money to spend on these expensive coffees... There are some schools around here, so a lot of students, a lot of families with or without children... It's mostly people, I think, between 20 and 40.



Not surprisingly, Maria, 23, a general practitioner in Glasgow classifies coffee people as

Coffee people with higher education because, first of all, you do have to have money... Also, people are here like looking good and careful about their clothes... I think people here are self-conscious and educated in general.

Specialty coffee bars in studied cities seem to predominantly attract a certain group: students, university staff, high-income urban professionals, managerial workers (the so-called knowledge workers), entrepreneurs, other (well paid) private sector workers, cool creative hipsters. They tend to be mostly young and well educated, having high human capital and working in sectors such as software, IT, finance, personal services and a wide array of cultural industries ranging from music and media to fashion-intensive crafts.

Our empirical data also suggest that coffee people tend to insatiably search for new and different aesthetic experiences. Converting their human capital into an abstract taste, they navigate through a broad set of culturally expressive activities, bodily self-surveillance and environmentally awareness. Although the ethnographic data acknowledge the diversity of class practices, regulars share a set of interrelated qualities visible through their everyday consumption practices. Three of these key qualities involve the body, cosmopolitanism and environmentalism.

### *The metropolitan body*

Bourdieu (1984) has argued that bodies and their associated consumption practices are classed. Rosa, James, Alireza and Maria have implicitly mentioned that coffee people tend to pay close attention to the surfaces which are under their direct control, that is, the body. The tendency of coffee people towards the public performance of self is most noticeable in their engagement in their public bodies, in how they present themselves in their clothes, speech, manners, posture, appearance and decoration of bodies (Featherstone, 2010). Analyses of the behaviours of coffee people suggest that appearance, body shape and physical control as having become increasingly central to their sense of identity. A variety of bodily norms of appearance in the form of clothing and adornment or even tattooing and piercing are fundamental to mark social identity.

Almost all of the participants reveal that they place a great emphasis on their appearance, display and the management of impressions, a form of body-conscious style through methods of somatic improvement such as diet, sports, yoga and a whole host of bodily practices and disciplines. For example, Angela, 35, a fashion designer in Amsterdam explains her attention to balancing health, appearance and happiness:

When I was younger, I tended to do a lot of exercise like ballet, and extracurricular [sports]. But I think when you are working full time, it is kind of hard to go to the gym

as much as you want to . . . but I try to exercise, so I go to the gym and do yoga but half of it for fitness and half of it for like stress relief . . . I also go running for being fit and healthy . . . just like an old way of being fit and organising thoughts.

Clair, 28, a post-doc student and a young mom in Glasgow also expresses how she uses the available opportunities to work on her body:

As a mom, I am trapped home for the whole day taking care of my baby girl so it's nice to be somewhere else if I could . . . so I go to buggy fitting. With a group of other moms, we go to Kelvingrove Park buggying.

If the previous waves of coffee have been about common tastes, mass production and massive bodies, the artisanal, third wave of coffee seems to be about construction and representation of refined (or reflexive) tastes, craft production and crafted bodies. For instance, Morteza, 25, a barista in Tehran defines his body as an instrument, a professional, portable toolkit for his job:

For improving my tasting and sensory skills, I have stopped smoking and drinking alcohol, become a vegetarian, and also started exercising and hiking . . . I have devoted a lot of my time to sports which is really important to me and my job . . . I go for swimming, volleyball, football, table tennis, and parkour . . . I am also following a healthy diet and even use some sports and diet apps on my iPhone to keep track of my progress . . .

It shows that the body has changed from a biological fact into a project (Giddens, 1991), a performance (Goffman, 1959), a lifestyle accessory to be sculpted, shaped and 'stylised' (Featherstone, 1991). As a vehicle of pleasure and self-expression, the body needs to be maintained and requires servicing, regular care and attention to preserve maximum efficiency. The body as a malleable phenomenon reflects social and cultural forces, a fleshy testimonial to the aestheticisation of everyday life.

Engagement with specialty coffee in itself represents an embodied practice or a set of ongoing practices of corporalisation. Coffee people's embodiment is a life process that requires the learning of bodily techniques such as walking, sitting, drinking, tasting and so forth. The coffee embodiment is the ensemble of these corporal practices that produces and gives the body its place in everyday coffee spaces. Coffee people, furthermore, are feeling bodies rather than disembodied minds; this embodiment requires an acquired taste, a certain type of connoisseurship, a sensual experience and expertise of navigating through different tastes and flavours of coffee. The third wave of coffee is about sourcing beans from farms instead of countries, and roasting is about bringing out rather than incinerating the unique characteristics of each bean and its flavour. Simply put, embodiment is the lived experience of the sensual or subjective body (Turner, 2008). Coffee people through the conversion of their cultivated disposition into distinct types of embodied capital, that is, sensual and physical, grasp a sense of self-esteem and

confidence to be better able to move through interpersonal spaces of sociability to enjoy the full range of lifestyle opportunities and pleasures on offer (Shilling, 2003). Marco, 41, a university professor in Glasgow, for instance, shows his sensual embodiment:

There is so much variety and by now it is very difficult for me to navigate. But if you ask me what is your favourite by recollection, I would tell you it is the Colombian blend that they have here. I am not a huge fan of AeroPress and I mostly stick to espresso . . .

Our observations, additionally, suggest that the presentation of the body within specialty coffee bars seems not to be just about the embodiment of cultural capital but also the power to affect others (Featherstone, 2010). The use of refined goods, appropriate body style, crafted coffee taste, clothing, make-up, adornment and, in general, the representation of cultivated sensual and physical capital are some sort of signs, the constructed bodies of what coffee people want others to see. They represent what Laura Mulvey (1975) has called scopophilia (the love of gazing), affective metropolitan bodies. In this sense, specialty coffee bars change into a stage of gaze, a cultural place to see and to be seen. In return, as the spectator stands as a co-creator (Wegenstein, 2012), coffee people provide an outward image and seek confirmation through returned glances and exchanged smiles.

### *Cosmopolitanism*

Having access to rich cultural and economic resources, the interviewees have shown to be culturally flexible and aware. The taste-making capability of human-capital-heavy groups enables them to associate with a wide range of cultural engagements and leisure activities (Wright, 2011). They appear to be curious and hold an abstract taste for a variety of cultural items, a specific attitude towards the appreciation of various (non)local goods. As an aesthetic disposition, they possess cosmopolitan/multicultural capital, which makes it a tool to assert their distinctive identity, an orientation of openness towards cultural others, systems of beliefs and competencies (Meuleman and Savage, 2013). Participants elaborate that they search for new cultural experiences such as dining out and trying different cuisines, travelling, learning new languages, listening to vast musical genres, watching various types of movies, reading practices and following a variety of news. For example, Pepijn, 35, a financial manager in Amsterdam explains his very broad tastes in cultural activities:

I listen to almost anything. I'm interested in lots of 80s and 90s, rock, metal, jazz, hip hop, punk, blues, and folk music . . . I also love travelling, yesterday my girlfriend said 'I want to go to a holiday', and then we decided to go to Kazakhstan. We['] go there for 3 weeks. I guess it is a cheap place to go to . . . We also love different foods, and it doesn't matter what kitchen it is; we go everywhere and try different

things... Tomorrow we'll go to a Mongolian restaurant. I've been there like three times but it is really amazing. We also have an Afghani restaurant but I guess the Mongolian kitchen is rougher... When I go out with friends, we try the Lebanese kitchen and why not even Chinese. If we have time, we would also check out Greek, Albanian, Thai, Spanish, French, and Turkish food.

Mina, 35, a sales manager in Tehran also describes her taste in news:

For my profession, I follow the economic news of the world... I follow the news every day at 8 a.m. and also read the paper when I'm here. I have some news apps on my phone, so I could check to see what's happening. Also on the Internet, I check all the headlines. But I follow a lot of economic news, and I go really in depth by reading economic articles... We are also subscribed for some newspapers and receive them on the daily basis, so we are constantly reading the news, and know what's going on... I also follow the news you cannot ignore like the refugees, wars, political situations. I'm also interested in cultural news, like about movies.

The presence of omnivorism (Peterson, 2005) among high-status groups requires of individuals a form of 'cultural tolerance' (Lizardo, 2014), the ability to cross between 'high' and 'low' cultural boundaries in their cultural choices. For instance, Sachi, 31, a post-doc student in Glasgow describes his reading habits:

I read a lot of different books such as the New York Times bestsellers. I also like to read the classical English literature. However, in general, although I'm curious about different things, I'm not interested enough to go deep into them. That's why I read a lot of different texts such as humanities, philosophy, history, urban stuff, theology, religion, sociology, cultural stuff, anthropology... Because my work is based on the philosophy of technology, understanding technology and the relationship between humans and technology, so I have to understand so many things... Also because of the time pressure, I'm a big fan of short stories.

Coffee can itself be straightforwardly cosmopolitan in the sense that, through its very substance, it invokes a certain worldliness. The consumption of specialty coffees can be also viewed as a narrow form of cosmopolitan practice in the way that it demonstrates the engagement in the otherness of the world. For Nima, 28, a musician in Tehran

Third wave of coffee is mostly about sharing information and cultures of the coffee you'd like to consume... With a shot of espresso, I can have a trip to Rwanda, Ethiopia, Kenya, Brazil, Indonesia or any other coffee countries. You could simply travel with just one cup of coffee to places you have never been.

In this regard, participants through reflexive engagement with the globe have created a privileged lifestyle through cosmopolitan omnivorism as an intellectual

disposition which can be conceptualised through aestheticising ‘the other’ elements and material practices and engagement with (non)local cultural goods in everyday urban living.

### *Environmentalism*

Another widely expressed characteristic of coffee people besides their bodily aesthetics and cosmopolitan omnivorism is their awareness about the earth, sustainability and environment. Our investigation suggests that the participants try to complement their concern with their ‘internal environment’ of bodily experience (Shilling, 2008) through ecological orientations and green movements via activities highlighting the importance of ‘looking after’ the environment in parallel with looking after themselves. For example, Aldert, 43, a manager in an insurance company in Amsterdam shows his interests in environmental preservation:

When I was going to the university, I was really politically active and there is still an ideology like that in me; but, of course, when you work, more energy goes to that direction than the other. Because we work, we have enough money, and it’s easier to be politically correct, so we buy biological products and green stuff. We separate our garbage and we do the stuff that is available to us but not much more... I also do some volunteering but not directly related to the environment but still humanitarian stuff, which relates, to some extent, to the environment.

The emergence of pro-environmental behaviours among the participants derives from their responsible consumption by which eco-conscious and socio-economically privileged individuals practice and promote environmentally friendly lifestyles as a way to contribute to the quality of life and better neighbourhood, city and environment (Soron, 2010). As an extended impersonal form of cultivated cultural capital that is embedded in the wider concept of civic responsibility (Lange and Meier, 2009), environmental awareness contributes to the protection of nature through redefining personal consumption patterns by taking the environment into account while making purchasing decisions. Sharon, 59, a social worker in Glasgow, describes her environmental practices:

From my personal, direct environment, I try not to make much trash, but I only use the channels that are available like separating my garbage and putting them into garbage bins or I don’t put litter out on the street... Subconsciously, I think I try not to pollute my direct environment. I also try to shop locally and use my bike for doing stuff within my area.

By reflecting critically on the environment and guiding their consumption patterns in sustainable directions, coffee people individualise and de-politicise the issue of environmental responsibility. Rather than following the normative narrative that environmental issues must be solved through political decision-making,

interviewees have typically expressed that they have personal actions to do and individual sacrifices to make alongside large-scale political solutions. For instance, Sahar, 25, an art student in Tehran describes her personal responsibilities to 'mother earth':

I agree with the existence of global warming and think it needs very serious large-scale political actions to be taken to tackle this threatening gloomy danger. However, personally, I believe that I have some responsibilities for mother earth. My actions are indeed small but still better than nothing and could make some small changes. I try to drive my car less, take the subway or public transportation to go to the university or when I go out with friends. I also walk a lot for short distances, try to eat a lot of vegetarian foods instead of meat... In general, I try to be kind to mother earth...

The consumption of transparent, fair trade coffee has appeared to be another moral regulator of coffee people. As a specific type of humanitarian value, our participants have argued that they are worried about the process of coffee production and people involved in, especially in countries or at the farms of origin. For example, Charlotte, 29, a freelancer in Amsterdam says,

There are certain concerns about the people who grow the coffee we drink. Coffee grows in specific countries and because of its high demand, more people are engaged with the process from planting and harvesting to brewing and cupping... I've heard that in some farms, children pick coffee beans in condition just like some sort of sweatshops... I don't like to drink coffee coming from that situation... I'm willing to pay some extra for my coffee in favour of those kids and for creating a more transparent coffee process.

There is a distinction between citizen consumers and customer consumers. Coffee people seem not to be mere consumers who seek primarily to maximise their personal interests but they also take on the responsibility through association with citizenship and considering the general good through their consumption.

## **Discussion and conclusion**

Our study of coffee people in Tehran, Glasgow and Amsterdam suggests that class compositions are not entirely the same and occupational class, education, cultural know-how and class of origin all strongly condition the attributes of consumption and load heavily on the participants' lifestyles. Despite the different make-up, pace, scale and spread of the new urban middle classes within the studied cities, with regard to their everyday consumption patterns, they share some common traits, ethical dispositions and cultural practices. We have argued that coffee people show a remarkable convergence in their attitudes and behaviours in their everyday urban life. Patronising third wave coffee bars as an embodied practice revolves around a particular construction and representation of the physical and sensual body

through consuming a global commodity with environmental/moral connotations. Moreover, possessing adequate economic and cultural resources, our interviewees have revealed that, alongside their embodied expressive lifestyles, they participate actively in the engagement with the global cultural others via their omnivorous tastes and cosmopolitan attitudes as part of the global cultural capital in the context of environmental concerns and responsible consumption. Coffee people as a group within the new urban middle classes enjoy the consumption styles of life, feel comfortable with foreign/other cultures and value-systems and are aware of the environmental challenges.

Drawing upon several streams of research and scholarship and combining often weakly integrated analytical schools of thought including theories of consumption, practice, distinction, consumer sovereignty, the body, cosmopolitanism, omnivorism, sustainability and environmentalism, we have shown that the aesthetic consumption practices of the new urban middle classes are driven by a conscious reflexivity to develop their social identities and relations. Their embodied practices of consumption and orientation towards a wide range of cultural items and leisure activities in conjunction with environmental concerns suggest a new objective and subjective notion of class. In return, the urban landscape is now predominantly lined with hoardings non-local consumer goods, spaced out by fair trade and green consumption amenities and marked by leisure spaces, while the body is often shaped by the latest fashion items and somatic improvements and signalled by the latest portable technologies.

What we have observed in Amsterdam and Glasgow reflects a commonplace urban agenda in many other cities in advanced economies. Because of deindustrialisation, neoliberalism and globalisation, cities are now considering facilitating the clustering of advanced producer services and cultural amenities in order to boost their economies through attracting professionalised workforce with high levels of cognitive and cultural skills. These new social classes have gravitated to inner cities and transformed the retail landscape of neighbourhoods through their search for consumption spaces that fit their distinctive lifestyles. Additionally, the new urban middle classes have acquired more power and become agents of change, promoting new styles of consumption which potentially cut across traditional social divisions and may contribute to solve environmental challenges and transform towards more sustainable societies.

The rise of the new urban middle classes in Tehran, on the other hand, seems to be a result of increasing availability of disposable incomes in their hands and educational pursuits of young urbanites, which have modified their styles of living and consumption patterns. There are several other studies suggesting that during the past several decades consumption patterns in the Global South and the emerging economies such as China, India, South Africa, South Korea and Brazil have considerably changed with an increased proportion of expenditures being spent on housing, transport, recreation, education, clothing and other aesthetic commodities (Artigas and Calicchio, 2007; Dobbs et al., 2012; Drabble et al., 2015). It could be also argued that the rise of the new middle classes around the



globe is anchored in the convergent socio-cultural, political, economic and environmental values.

In addition to the meta-concepts such as cultural globalisation, the global spread of the new urban middle classes seems to be associated with the establishment of certain cultural infrastructures and institutions which give the middle classes opportunities of cultural reception, transmission and reproduction. The developments of transport infrastructures and communication technologies during the late 20th century have facilitated the global circulation of ideas, metaphors, sign systems and meaning-making practices. In return, the new urban middle classes who have money, time, confidence and motivation to catalyse significant transformations in their societies, especially within the Global South, through a cultural synchronisation emanating from the West and a combination of consumption and investment in their human capital have resulted in lifestyles which are not locally bounded anymore and the emergence of the North in the South.

Our study has highlighted that how comparing and analysing regulars of specialty coffee bars, their motivations, characteristics and activities could shed light on the larger societal trends and talk about structural changes in the composition of the world population, economy, values and ideology. It also draws attention to how micro-level analyses can provide macro-level insights on the class structural changes within individual societies and class dynamics brought about by globalisation. Nevertheless, it should be noted that the new urban middle classes are conceptually very complex and cannot be reduced to refer to a homogenised group with a clear boundary. Furthermore, our investigation has merely focused on the qualities that coffee people share through their mundane, everyday consumption patterns. We have observed some other common ground among the coffee people such as their liberal attitudes and political preferences fostering democracy and socio-political stability by improving social cohesion. As these shared mentalities could not be fully grasped through the consumption practices, further interdisciplinary investigation on the class practices of the new urban middle classes seems necessary.

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