

# 1 Introduction

when to be free  
would cease to mean  
the ones in power shall gain  
delhi  
you will cease to be.

—G. J. V. Prasad, *Sati*

'I am amazed at how many times in its centuries long journey Dilli has been plundered and resettled,' wrote Intizar Hussein in *Once There Was a City Named Dilli* (2016: 6). Delhi has witnessed the rise and fall of Indraprastha, of the Delhi Sultanate, an invasion by Tamerlane, the rise and fall of Shahjahanabad, and then the Rebellion of 1857, the rise of Lutyens' Delhi, Partition, and its aftermath. With each rise and fall of empire, 'a new Dilli is inhabited in the midst of the old Dillis' (Hussein 2016: 36). Each leader of this new city claims that 'this Dilli will have such vigour and brilliance that all the preceding Dillis and the Dillis to follow will fade before it' (Hussein 2016: 36). However, 'not one of these cities was loyal to its founder ... whoever built a new city on the land of Dilli would very soon have to lose it' (Hussein 2016: 46). Ahmed Ali, in the introduction to his novel *Twilight in Delhi* (1940), describes how after Partition, the new state of India, continuing in the British legacy, moved Delhi further away from its designation as the Mughal capital, Shahjahanabad, towards Indraprastha, the ancient seat of the Hindu empires rumoured to have been located in what is now called Delhi. Ali writes, 'Seven Delhis have fallen, and the eighth has gone the way of its predecessors, yet to be demolished and built again. Life, like the Phoenix, must collect the spices for its nest and set fire to it, and arise resurrected out of the flames' (1940: 20). The Emergency created yet another Delhi built by Indira Gandhi, and just two years later, another fallen Delhi with the election of the Janata Party in 1977. But what was resurrected from the flames this time?

Delhi has been the capital of several historical world-empires and states. It is a place where many political fortunes rose and fell. Political change

is manifested in the landscape of the city; the remains of the old empires crumble to ruin in clear view of new construction. While much has been written about the fall of the Delhi Sultanate, the Mughal Empire, the British Raj, and other historical rulers of Delhi, the end of the Emergency marked the conclusion of yet another Delhi, one that continues to echo against the architecture of everyday life in the city, even as its remnants remain hidden in plain view. For example, the space in Connaught Place where the Indian Coffee House stood until 1976 remains empty, adorned only with a flagpole that flies an oversized Indian flag. At the site, underground, is Palika Bazaar, built after the Emergency: an underground market that has seen better days and sells mostly illegal items including pornography and sex toys, stolen goods, fake designer handbags, and pirated DVDs. This erasure of the Indian Coffee House remains visible and palpable, but only to those few who have an historical memory of the coffee house. Just like the Mughal monuments across the city of Delhi that stand unmarked, falling into disrepair by the roadside, the significance of the green, empty space above Palika Bazaar is known only to a select few. Amidst the ever-changing landscape, quotidian life in Delhi goes on as before.

During the 1970s, several social movements played a key role in resisting Delhi's totalitarian moment, known as the Emergency (1975–7). These movements subsequently affected the political legacy of the Emergency and, with it, the trajectory of postcolonial political economy in India. Several of the more notable movements that emerged during this period include the Dalit Panther Party (1972–4), the JP Movement (also called the Bihar Movement) (1974–5), the Railway Workers' Strike (1974), the Turkman Gate Uprising (1976), the Students' Federation of India Strike at the Jawaharlal Nehru University (1975), and the Coffee House Movement (1975–6). The resistance against the Emergency in the Indian Coffee House was inextricable from other contemporaneous social movement activity but not without its unique facets. The space of the Indian Coffee House was a crucial resource for this crucial movement at a crucial time in postcolonial India, but how was this space forged from a British colonial firm and why did it become one of several spaces that fomented resistance against the Emergency?

The key advantage of the Indian Coffee House as a space of resistance against the Emergency, I contend, is that it is an autonomous zone. Autonomous zones are important resources for social protest movements because (a) they serve an ideological function of educating the uninformed and uninitiated; (b) they provide a physical space in which like-minded

individuals can meet in order to form a group to engage in a protest action, to form a social movement, and/or to debate what is to be done in response to a particular event or existing struggle; and (c) an autonomous zone is a resource to existing struggles as a meeting space, hideout, and support network (support that could be articulated through awareness raising, fundraising, expressions of solidarity, and so on).

The Indian Coffee House is a particular type of autonomous zone—a worker-occupied and self-managed workplace—which not only are spatial interventions in the capitalist world-system but also a direct intervention into the organisation of the workplace in which ownership of the means of production is transferred from capital to labour. It is thus one of the most important occupations, as it strikes at the heart of capitalist political economy. Worker self-management reorganises production horizontally and, by so doing, eliminates the wage relation, and, with it, eliminates the expropriation of surplus value from labour. But rather than refusing to labour, worker self-management withholds labour (and therefore surplus value) from *capital*, and workers continue working while reaping the total value of their efforts. The worker-occupied and self-managed workplace is an autonomous zone that is a revolution at the level of everyday practices and lived experiences for which Henri Lefebvre and the Situationists called in May 1968 (Lefebvre 2008: 10).

Worker self-managed firms and other autonomous zones have been important sites of resistance against the state during moments of Fascism, authoritarianism, and other forms of democratic occlusion, including India's Emergency. These spaces, while effective in launching resistance against the state, also make the resistance movement more visible, provoking state violence. Thereby, these spaces can escalate social protest from mainly symbolic protest to forms of protest that use symbolic violence to confront the non-democratic state.

## World-Historical Coffee Culture

Coffee houses have long been a type of autonomous zone that fostered resistance against Fascism. In the 1920s and 1930s intellectuals in Fascist Europe soon found that traditional expressions of leftist politics were ill-suited to everyday life under Fascism (Schnapp 2001: 259). This frustration pushed intellectuals from spheres of traditional leftist politics and into the café culture, where a modernist avant-garde offered a potent form of intellectual expression that could and did coexist with life under Fascism (Adamson 1990: 368; Bronner and Kellner 1982: 93). In Berlin, 'the café remained, to protest

against the cruelty, the loneliness, the vacuity of the city' (Bronner and Kellner 1982: 97), and even though Nazi repression initially energised coffee house culture, it ultimately decimated the movement that was launched from the German coffee houses (Bronner and Kellner 1982: 108).<sup>1</sup> In Italy, the Fascist regime, in attempts to repress this oppositional coffee house culture, banned the installation of new espresso machines in coffee houses and restricted imports of coffee (Morris 2008). Instead, the Italian state subsidised private firms who were competing to create the first espresso machine for home use (Morris 2008), which promised to lure men away from the coffee houses and back into the home (Schnapp 2001: 264). One such firm, Bialetti, claimed in its advertisements, *in casa un espresso come al bar*, which promised that 'the home would become a cafe, instead of the cafe becoming a home away from home' (Schnapp 2001: 264).

During the democratic reversal across Latin America in the late 1960s and early 1970s, coffee houses were spaces in which intellectuals and artists gathered to discuss politics and plan activities (Carrillo 2006: 78–9). While the literature on coffee in Latin America tends to focus more on the exploitative conditions of coffee production rather than coffee house culture (Hough 2010; Hough and Bair 2012; Paige 1997; Roseberry 1983; Roseberry, Gudmunson and Kutschbach 1995; Topik 2000: 225), the coffee house had already amassed a centuries-long essential role in Latin American culture and politics (Tocancipá-Falla 2001: 429–30). Latin American coffee house intellectuals resisting dictatorship benefited from this past as well as being explicitly inspired, as Carillo (2006: 79) notes, by both the coffee house culture of the Fascist states of the 1930s and the life and work of Antonio Gramsci and Jean Paul Sartre.

Of the cases across the globe in which café culture played an important role in fostering opposition to Fascism, the Indian case is the least well known. While India has had a vibrant coffee culture since the sixteenth century (Government of India 1941: 1; Krug and De Poerck 1968: 369; Mauro 1991: 21, 145) and is currently one of the world's largest producers of coffee (International Coffee Organization 2019), only recently has a literature emerged that analyses coffee house culture and politics in India (Bhattacharya 2017; Plys 2017; Robinson 2014; R. Sharma 2016; Venkatachalapathy 2006). This project is the first to examine the role of India's coffee house culture during India's Emergency (1975–7).

Coffee was introduced to India in the late sixteenth century by the Sufi saint Baba-ud-din, who brought the Arabica strain of the plant back to Mysore with him from his pilgrimage to Mecca (Government of India 1941: 1; Krug and

De Poerck 1968: 369; Mauro 1991: 21, 145). However, European colonisers were the first to establish coffee plantations in India. This task was more complicated in the Indian context compared to other colonial contexts since India has many small coffee-growing regions dispersed across the country rather than one large coffee-growing region as is commonplace elsewhere in the coffee growing world (Mauro 1991: 145). The Dutch East India Company established the first coffee plantations in India in Malabar in 1696. And it was a Portuguese colonial official, João Alberto Castello Branco, who brought Indian Arabica coffee from Goa to Rio de Janeiro, thereby introducing coffee cultivation to Brazil in 1760 (Government of India 1941: 1; Mauro 1991: 26). The first British coffee plantation was established in 1840 and that same year the French established a coffee plantation in Pondicherry (Mauro 1991: 21, 146). Though coffee in India predated European colonialism, by the turn of the twentieth century, coffee was generally regarded as 'the drink of the Europeans', according to radical Dalit intellectual Ayothidas Pandithar (Venkatachalapathy 2006: 13, 27).

Before coffee houses became an important part of European colonial expansion, they were inseparable from Arab-Islamic cultural expression. The first written record of coffee is found in the writings of the Persian physician and philosopher Abu Muhammad ibn Zakiriya El Razi, who lived from 850 to 922 (Mauro 1991: 27; Wild 2005: 29). By the fourteenth century, coffee had developed a particular cultural meaning related to its popularity among Sufi scholars across the Arab-Islamic world. Sufi scholars in Yemen would drink coffee to stay awake late into the night for prayer and the study of religious texts (Ellis 1956:14; Wild 2005: 31), and cities in Yemen were the first to develop an urban coffee culture (Mauro 1991: 20). Coffee culture then spread across the Pan-Islamic world through long-distance trade. By 1500, the world's first coffee houses had opened in Mecca and Cairo (Tucker 2011: 143); soon, nearly every mosque in large cities had a coffee house attached or nearby where worshipers could discuss theology (Wild 2005: 35). Venetian traders first brought coffee beans to Europe in the early seventeenth century via North African trade routes, which linked African and Asian trade to Venice via Cairo. While some Vatican clergy appealed to the Pope to ban coffee as an invention of Satan because of its strong cultural associations with the Muslim world, Pope Clement VIII famously wrote, 'This Satan's drink is delicious ... it would be a pity to let the infidels have exclusive use of it. We shall fool Satan by baptising it.' Pope Clement VIII resolved to reinvent coffee as a Christian drink, thereby popularising coffee in Europe (Mauro 1991: 30).

The first European coffee house was then opened in 1683 in the Piazza San Marco in Venice (Mauro 1991: 31). From there, it spread through Europe and later diffused to the colonial world, rebranded as a European cultural tradition.

Coffee was introduced to the Americas in the early eighteenth century when it was brought to Martinique by French colonisers in 1727, after a failed attempt to grow coffee in Saint Domingue in 1715. By 1777, there were nearly 19 million coffee plants growing on the island of Martinique (Mauro 1991: 24). By 1790, coffee was cultivated across the Americas by colonial enterprises in Martinique, Brazil, French Guyana, Jamaica, Santo Domingo, Cuba, Guatemala, Puerto Rico, Venezuela, and Mexico. By the early nineteenth century, coffee had shifted its cultural meaning from being the preferred drink of Muslim scholars to becoming the world's second most valuable agricultural commodity, one produced across the Global South but mainly consumed by the Global North (Topik and Clarence-Smith 2003: 2). Coffee, through this lens, can be seen as one of several key commodities that were central to capital accumulation organised first through colonial rule and then later through dependent development (Beckert 2015; Mintz 1985).

Under colonial rule, and then later in response to postcolonial authoritarianism, coffee houses flourished as autonomous zones of contentious politics across the colonial and postcolonial Pan-Islamic world. In colonial Zanzibar, Central Development Authority officials utilised the popularity of coffee houses in the capital of Zanzibar City to gather intelligence on nationalists and their politics (Meyers 1995: 1351). These policies were termed the 'Coffee House Gossip Intelligence Ring' (Meyers 1995: 1351), indicating the importance of the coffee house for political deliberation among nationalists in colonial Zanzibar. In the postcolonial period, Zanzibar City's coffee houses remained important spaces of political deliberation. So much so that after independence from Britain, when Zanzibar became a constitutional monarchy under Sultan Jamshid bin Abdullah Al Said, the Sultan's agents placed informants only in two spaces: political party offices and in coffee houses, because coffee houses continued to be one of the most significant spaces of political deliberation and anti-state political discourse in postcolonial Tanzania (Meyers 1995: 1352). In colonial Malay, coffee houses became havens for guerrilla fighters resisting colonial rule. Guerrillas organised their resistance movement from the coffee houses and coffee house owners allowed them to eat for free and sleep in the coffee houses while launching their resistance against the colonial state (Aljunied 2014: 67). In contemporary Malaysia, the *kopitiam* (Hokkien for coffee house) remains a space that attracts

people of all ages, ethnicities, genders, and social classes to engage in critical democratic discourse despite the fact that Malaysia remains a constitutional monarchy (Khoo 2009: 87). In Cairo, Egypt, one of the first places in the world to open coffee houses, coffee houses once again became important sites of political deliberation and meeting places for those organising the Tahrir Square protests during the Egyptian Revolution (Lim 2012: 243).

The history of the worker-occupied and self-managed firm, the Indian Coffee House, is a fascinating one in this vexed context of the autonomous zone, the worker-occupied and self-managed firm, and postcolonial authoritarianism. In 1947, during the Indian Freedom Movement, workers of Coffee House, operated by the British colonial coffee board, occupied their workplaces and changed the name to *Indian* Coffee House. They self-managed production and then, a decade later, they formally became a workers' cooperative. Indian Coffee House workers appropriated a colonial institution, transforming it from an instrument of colonial exploitation to one of national liberation through the praxis of economic democracy. Today, the Indian Coffee House remains the largest worker self-managed firm in the world.

## Indian Coffee House

### *Consolidated Coffee Estates*

The story of Coffee House begins with Ivor Bull (see Appendix I), Chairman of Consolidated Coffee Estates, President of the United Planters' Association of Southern India, and founder and Chairman of the Coffee Board of India. Ivor Bull, as an employee of the Edinburgh-based management company Matheson and Co., was appointed the Chairman of Consolidated Coffee Estates in 1936. He was then sent by Matheson from Edinburgh to Coorg to manage the coffee estate. Consolidated Coffee had been founded in 1922 when M/S Coorg Co. Ltd., London, and M/S Pollibetta Coffee Estates Co. Ltd., London, were purchased by Matheson and Co., Edinburgh, and then merged into one single plantation, the largest coffee plantation in India, both then and today. In 1943, after having managed and having lived on the plantation in Coorg for seven years, Bull purchased the company from Matheson and then registered it as an Indian company based in Pollibeta, Coorg. Bull owned and managed the company until it went public in 1966. He then retired to a farm in Suffolk, England, where he died in 1971. In 1991, Tata Tea Ltd. purchased a controlling interest in Consolidated Coffee Ltd. and then in 1999 purchased the company. In 2000, Consolidated Coffee Ltd. was renamed



Tata Coffee Ltd. Tata Coffee Ltd. now holds the largest coffee plantation in the world, with all of its coffee estates located throughout the state of Karnataka in India. Tata Coffee's special partnership with Starbucks allowed Starbucks to enter the Indian market in 2012, and as part of the partnership agreement between Starbucks and Tata Coffee, along with Starbucks' agreement with the Coffee Board of India, all coffee beans purchased for Starbucks locations in India originate from Tata's coffee plantations in Karnataka (JP Morgan 2013; Starbucks 2012, 2013; Tata 2013).

The United Planters Association of Southern India (UPASI), in which Ivor Bull played a key role, was founded in 1923 and registered in Madras under the Indian Companies Act VII of 1913.<sup>2</sup> The goal of this unlimited liability company was to promote the interests of south Indian plantation owners by uniting them to strategise how best to promote their industries. UPASI, then and today, promotes legislation to help plantation interests, conducts research on agricultural crops commonly grown by UPASI members, collecting and disseminating statistics about the plantation industry, and acts as an arbitrator in disputes arising out of commercial transactions among members.<sup>3</sup> Plantation owners' membership contribution to UPASI is an annual fee based on their plantation size. In 1930, tea plantation owners paid 1 rupee per acre (as measured at the beginning of each financial year), coffee plantation owners 12 annas per acre, and rubber and all other plantations contributed 6 annas per acre.<sup>4</sup> Subscription fees are paid in quarterly payments on the 1st of April, July, October, and January of each fiscal year. In case that the payment is not made by the due date, that plantation loses the ability to attend and vote at meetings of UPASI until the payment and arrears are paid to the association.<sup>5</sup> Each district association can nominate two representatives to serve on the general committee. Coffee district associations were Mysore, Coorg, Madras, Travancore-Cochin, Nilgiri, Malabar-Wynaad, Shevaroy, and Palni-Bodi-Sirumalai. These representatives on the general committee have the power to admit new members, raise or lower subscription costs, and elect members of the executive committee to represent one committee member for tea interests, one for coffee interests, two for rubber interests, and three members for the general interest of south Indian plantations.<sup>6</sup> Most crucially, the general committee develops schemes to promote south Indian plantation interests. The executive committee addresses legal proceedings, arbitration, bankruptcies and insolvencies, and generally manages the affairs of the association.<sup>7</sup> Each year, a general meeting is held for plantation owners, committee members and other interests to discuss routine business of the association.



### *Coffee in the British Empire*

In the mid-1930s (see Table 1.1), British East Africa was India's main intra-empire coffee competitor. In terms of volume, Kenya exported the most coffee, followed by Tanganyika, and then India. India had the greatest amount of acreage under cultivation, followed by Tanganyika, and then Kenya. And Keynan coffee production was also similar to Indian coffee production in that planters were well organised.

In 1932, Indian coffee growers wrote a petition to the Home Department in London requesting that all coffee consumed in the United Kingdom (UK) originate from India.<sup>8</sup> At the time, the largest coffee-producing countries across the empire (in order of largest producer) were Kenya, Tanganyika and India. Production in the West Indies was relatively negligible, and 90 per cent of that was consumed by the United States (US) and Canada, making the British market relatively irrelevant for West Indian coffee growers.<sup>9</sup> A monopoly in the UK could greatly benefit India and East Africa, as one of the top export destinations for East African and Indian grown coffee was the UK. British East Africa exported 139,842 hundredweights (Ctw) of coffee to the UK in 1934, and India exported 50,682 Ctw, while the British West Indies exported only 2,682 Ctw to the UK in that same year.<sup>10</sup> Once the Kenyan Coffee Board learned of Indian coffee growers' petition to the Home Department for monopoly rights, they offered a counter-petition that all coffee consumed within the UK come from the colonies, as throughout the 1920s and 1930s, a little less than 50 per cent of coffee consumed in the UK originated from the colonies<sup>11</sup> (see Figure 1.1).

Table 1.1 Coffee in the British Empire 1930–4.

Territory	Acreage under cultivation	Average production (tons)	Productivity of land (tons per acre)	Estimated Investment (in-millions of £)	Average amount exported within Empire (in Cwts.)	Average declared value (in £)	Price per Cwt.
Kenya	103,000	13,000	0.13	6	255,127	990,001	4
Tanganyika	106,337	11,928	0.11		227,930	406,487	2
Uganda	41,200	4,606	0.11		92,133	208,692	2
India	182,851	15,454	0.08	8	202,553	951,840	5
Jamaica	5,800	3,731	0.64		74,627	188,618	3
Trinidad	1,000	278	0.28		5,563	13,457	2
Guiana	5,000	363	0.07		7,267	10,477	1

Source: Author's calculations based on data from IOR/L/E/8/546, IOL.

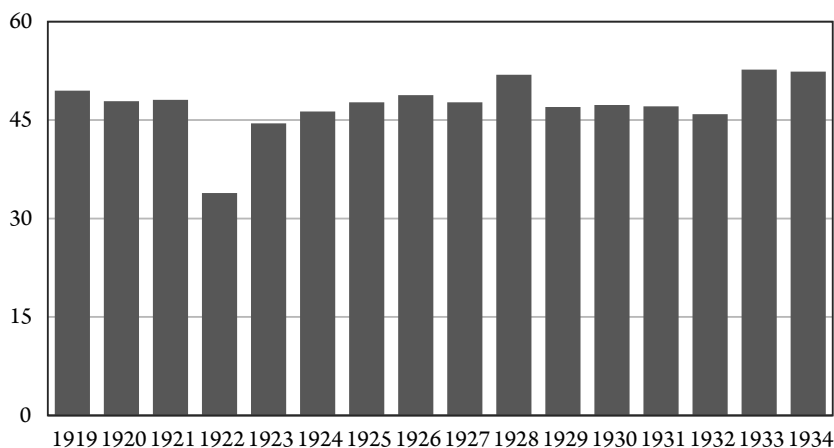


Figure 1.1 Percentage of Empire-Grown Coffee Consumption in the UK.

*Source:* Author's calculations based on data from IOR/L/E/8/546, IOL.

While, publicly, Indian officials supported the Kenyan Coffee Board's petition, behind closed doors, they sent letters to the Home Minister asking that India's previous petition still be considered and that India be given exclusive monopoly rights to sell coffee in the UK, as India was the crown jewel among the British colonies, and Indian growers were worried about competition from the now seemingly more organised and better advertised East African coffee growers.

In response to the perceived Kenyan attack on Indian coffee's consumer market, Sir Muhammed Zafarullah Khan, Indian Department of Commerce, founded the Indian Coffee Cess Act Committee in 1935.<sup>12</sup> The goal of the committee was to reduce tariffs on Indian coffee and create a marketing scheme for Indian coffee across the British Empire and within India.<sup>13</sup> M. J. Simon Avergal, from Travancore, was appointed Secretary of the Indian Coffee Cess Committee's marketing wing. As part of his approach to domestic marketing, he created 'Coffee House' in order to increase domestic consumption, advertise Indian coffee, and engender a taste for coffee among the Indian public.<sup>14</sup> The first Coffee House was opened in Bombay in 1936 (see Appendix I), quickly followed by locations in Hyderabad and then Lahore, both in 1937.<sup>15</sup> By 1939, Coffee House had 14 locations<sup>16</sup>—Simla, Lahore, New Delhi, Old Delhi, Calicut, Cochin, four locations in Bombay, two locations in Hyderabad, and two locations in Secunderabad—all overseen by the Indian Coffee Cess Act Committee and all entirely staffed by labourers from Simon's home state

of Travancore. Simon made an agreement with Chithira Thirunal Balarama Varma, the Maharaja of Travancore, that all coffee and coffee husk served at all locations of Coffee House would originate from Travancore.<sup>17</sup>

But the threat to Indian coffee did not emanate only from intra-empire competition. By 1939, coffee plantation owners were concerned that the Second World War would pose a problem for the export market. And in fact, these concerns were shared by agricultural producers across the British Empire. An impending agricultural commodity surplus was a concern for economic and political stability across the empire, as British and European consumption levels were destabilised as a result of the war. In 1940, growing concern over commodity surplus was presented as a report to the War Cabinet on 14 November 1940.<sup>18</sup> In early November of 1940, the coffee surplus empire-wide was estimated to be 1,150,000 tons and valued at 30–70 pounds per ton according to quality.<sup>19</sup> In a handwritten remark on the report, it was noted that the US ‘will take the surplus’.<sup>20</sup> The conclusion of this preparation meeting was that ‘we must work in closest possible cooperation with the United States of America’.<sup>21</sup> A copy of the report from the War Cabinet was sent to the US Secretary of State, and they responded in a 15 July 1940 telegram stating,

... if we were going jointly to consider how the United States, Pan-America, and British Commonwealth were to be fully equipped to resist totalitarian aggression we ought not to bother at present too much about capacity to pay. It was for us to put in a statement of what we wanted if we were to do our side of the job. It was for the United States to determine how far she could go in financing it as part of her own policy of defence.<sup>22</sup>

On the eve of the Pan-American Conference in Havana, Britain devised a plan to leave the US uncommitted to Latin America so that it could absorb the colonial surplus if matters were to worsen. In a telegram on 29 June 1940, the British Embassy in Washington D.C. was told that the strategy going into the Pan-American conference was to use Canada as a pawn against the US and tell the US that if they refused to commit to absorb the colonial surplus, Canada would.<sup>23</sup> They also wanted to bar the US from sending cheap commodities to Germany and Italy, to set up an independent diplomatic meeting to convince the US to deport all German and Italian immigrants, and to stop all commodity shipments to Germany and Italy.<sup>24</sup> The British ambassador to the US, Phillip Henry Kerr, the Marquess of Lothian, was given the authority to threaten that Britain would blockade any American

shipments to Europe, but was told that a diplomatic solution was preferred.<sup>25</sup> On 1 July, Britain learned that Canada was not invited to participate in the Pan-American Conference—they were invited only to observe—and so the strategy of using Canada to create leverage against the US was no longer viable.<sup>26</sup> In a telegram on 7 July 1940 to Kerr, a new strategy was outlined, that the British would blockade any measures at the conference that would commit the US to take on Latin American surpluses. But before the meetings even occurred, British intelligence learned that the US had set up private meetings with South American states to form trade agreements to be finalised at the conference.<sup>27</sup> For example, there was a private meeting between the US and Argentine representatives to discuss an agreement regarding Argentine corn, linseed, and tinned meat. British intelligence claimed that Roosevelt gave the go-ahead for the US to commit up to one thousand million dollars from the war reserves for the purchase of Argentine commodities. The British were unsuccessful at the Pan-American conference and, as a result, one of the most desired solutions to prevent the colonial surplus crisis was closed off to the British.

In other memos and letters about the colonial surplus, India was singled out as a special case, first, because it produced a lot of many kinds of commodities, but also because it was large in terms of area and population. London was confident, as of September 1940, that India would easily weather the surplus crisis. In an October 1940 memo, it was projected that among India's export surplus, coffee was the least problematic of India's export commodities, with only a 16,000 ton surplus.<sup>28</sup> Wheat was estimated to pose the largest potential problem with a 10,000,000 ton surplus.<sup>29</sup> There was still a lingering concern expressed in internal memos that the surplus in India could lead to price decreases across sectors and spur a second Great Depression for India and the rest of the colonies, which could then lead to 'agitation'.<sup>30</sup> The Indian government's Department of Commerce wrote to the Secretary of State for India asking for assistance with the surplus but received a reply saying that the African colonies were in far worse shape and, so, London could not help India because of its commitments in Africa.<sup>31</sup> In a telegram from December 1940, it was again stated that India was expected to be self-sufficient with regard to its surplus,<sup>32</sup> and the Secretary of State for India mentioned that while they had asked the US for help, the US had refused, and, therefore, there was not much that could be done from London.

Other letters from December 1940 mention that Indian coffee is the least problematic among all of India's agricultural commodities, because, as one

letter stated, the 'well-organised plantation industry has enabled them to devise a scheme with the assent of all parties concerned'.<sup>33</sup> But letters and telegrams kept coming from India expressing concern about the surplus problem. The Economic Department assured the Secretary of State that India has its own resources to weather the surplus crisis, while the Department of Commerce writes, on the contrary, that the Empire has a duty to buy all surplus commodities from India.

In the 'Export Surplus Progress Report' on 11 June 1941, another plan was outlined in which the US would consume Britain's colonial surplus. However, the US had signed an agreement in August 1940 at the Pan-American Conference in Havana in which they agreed to annual import quotas of up to 80 per cent of many Latin American commodities including coffee and petroleum.<sup>34</sup> The US cited this previous agreement as the reason why they could not absorb much of Britain's colonial surplus but agreed on an import quota for West African Cocoa adding that 'gradually, cooperation can be built up' with regard to other commodities.<sup>35</sup> The alternate strategy developed after this latest failed negotiation with the US was to extend credit to European countries devastated by the war so that they would consume Britain's colonial surplus. On 23 July 1941, an all-empire broadcast addressed the surplus issue, stating that the British government had a three pronged plan: (a) to have the US buy the colonial surplus, (b) to send the colonial surplus to 'Nazi-dominated and Nazi-looted Europe' as food aid and (c) that the colonies should develop consumer markets to absorb excess supply.<sup>36</sup>

### *Coffee House*

London had a good basis for making these claims about the strength of the Indian agricultural sector. Most of that success was due to the presence of agricultural cooperative societies in India. Agricultural cooperatives were implemented across British India in 1904, with the Cooperative Credit Societies Act (X 1904). This act was modelled after Sir Frederick Nicholson's reports written between 1895 and 1897 to the Madras government advocating the introduction of credit societies similar to those found in Germany (Strickland 1922: 35). By 1912, there were over 8,000 societies across rural India, and by 1920, there were 47,000.<sup>37</sup> The British cooperative societies inspired imitators, and soon many different types of cooperatives—credit, insurance, producers' and consumers' cooperatives—were established. The Bombay Act VII of 1925 legalised housing cooperatives along with general

societies, thereby further encouraging the Indian cooperative movement. In the late 1920s, this democratic means of organising agricultural production was producing great results (Government of India 1943). A *Punjab Administration Report* from 1926 stated that the agricultural cooperatives in the state had about 405 lakh (40.5 million) rupees in working capital.<sup>38</sup>

By 1930, there were nearly 100,000 agricultural societies with a total of 3,000,000 members across India employing about 350,000,000 rupees in working capital. Most of these agricultural cooperatives were located in Punjab and in Travancore, where by 1938, more than 15 per cent of the population in these two states was involved in agricultural cooperatives (Government of India 1943). There was also a significant number of agricultural cooperatives in the United Provinces, with 64,160,000 members of agricultural cooperative societies as of 1951, and in Madras Presidency (which comprised modern-day Tamil Nadu, northern Kerala, and part of coastal Andhra Pradesh), where there were 58,050,000 members of agricultural cooperative societies (Government of India 1943).

In the 1939 annual meeting of the UPASI Coffee Section, Indian coffee plantation owners discussed a proposal by the Indian Tea Market Expansion Board to carry out an intensive tea propaganda campaign in order to improve the sales of hot liquid tea. A group of coffee plantation owners had approached the Tea Board inquiring whether coffee could be included in the sales scheme, as there was concern about access to European and North American markets if another war on the scale of the First World War broke out again.<sup>39</sup> The Tea Board replied that 'tea propaganda, by encouraging the idea of hot drinks, will indirectly help the sales of coffee'.<sup>40</sup> Coffee planters were hopeful, stating that 'it is hoped that this will prove to be true'.<sup>41</sup> But coffee planters became increasingly concerned about coffee being left out of marketing schemes in both Britain and India.<sup>42</sup>

It was in the context of this colonial surplus crisis, in 1939, that Ivor Bull, then president of the Coffee Section of UPASI, called upon his section to establish the Coffee Market Expansion Board in order to create a monopsony for coffee in India at a time when coffee consumer markets in Europe and North America were destabilising as a result of the Second World War.<sup>43</sup> The Coffee Market Expansion Board, of which Ivor Bull was appointed Chairman, subsumed the Indian Coffee Cess Committee of 1935.<sup>44</sup> Further expansion of Coffee House through the Coffee Market Expansion Board was a local solution implemented by plantation owners to the global problem of colonial commodity surpluses, especially in the absence of help from the

colonial centre or the US. London's rationale for the lack of intervention was that the unusually well-organised south Indian coffee plantation owners and the institutions they created were better suited than many other colonial agricultural producers to weather the surplus crisis, and, in the end, London proved to be right in their assumptions about the Indian coffee sector. These institutions—UPASI, the Coffee Cess Committee, and the Coffee Market Expansion Board—ensured that Indian coffee growers would survive the colonial export surplus crisis, even in the absence of support from the imperial centre.

In 1942, the Coffee Market Expansion Board became the Coffee Board of India. M. J. Simon, Secretary of the Indian Coffee Cess Committee's marketing wing, was appointed Secretary of the Coffee Board and set with the task of further expanding Coffee House across India.<sup>45</sup> While the Lahore location of Coffee House was a great success from the start, the locations in Bombay and Hyderabad floundered in their infant years. In 1941, new Coffee Houses were opened in Trivandrum, Cochin and Malabar as those locations were, according to Simon, more likely to succeed. In 1942, new Coffee House locations opened in Benares, Lucknow and Calcutta, and in the Calcutta location 'particularly good progress has been recorded'.<sup>46</sup> In 1943, the Coffee Board reported that 'appreciative reports have been received on the Coffee House locations in New Delhi, Lucknow, Benares, Calcutta, Hyderabad, etc.'<sup>47</sup> By 1944, Coffee House was a success, as 'good progress has been made from all centres'.<sup>48</sup> The coffee sold at the Coffee House locations continued to be sourced from Travancore, which was deemed by one board member as a 'very good market for Robusta', despite some complaints lodged by Coffee Board members that there was some illicit coffee trading in Travancore that affected the price and reliability of supply.<sup>49</sup> In order to improve the quality of coffee powder supplied to the Coffee Houses, M. J. Simon approved a request from the Maharaja of Travancore to supply coffee growers with electric grinders and electric power in order to produce higher quality ground coffee. Simon responded by providing electric coffee grinders with 2–5 horsepower (h.p.) motors in Coffee House locations in Alwaye, Kottayam, Alleppey, Quilon, Trivandrum and Nagercoil for use by coffee growers by April 1946, as Travancore's Electrical Department claimed that there were other demands for power that should be given priority.<sup>50</sup>

As a result of various nodes of state support, by the mid-1940s, Coffee House was a thriving firm with locations across British India. This firm would



undergo several major transformations in the decades to come and continue to be a critically important reflection of India's postcolonial political economy.

## Overview of the Book

The politico-economic history of the firm Indian Coffee House provides an interesting lens by which to analyse the economic and social history of the 'Third World' of the mid-twentieth century. Initially, the Third World was charged with the optimism of decolonisation by national liberation movements that sought radical social transformation. But by the 1970s, authoritarian regimes had, in many instances, replaced the national liberation state. The initial optimism of national independence had eroded in just a few decades. The very movements that had seemed so full of possibility had themselves tipped into political repression. India's experiences during the Emergency exemplifies the broader historical trajectory of the Third World in the mid and late twentieth century. In these periods of democratic reversal—including coups, state-declared emergencies that abridge democratic rights, and genuinely totalitarian moments—what are the possibilities for contentious politics given state repression of dissenting views? I look to the social unrest in India just before the Emergency (1975–7) to analyse the possibilities for social protest during this particular totalitarian moment. I follow one particular instance of social protest, the Coffee House Movement (1975–6), which is more important than commonly recognised, but is not the only important resistance movement against the Emergency. One of the biggest puzzles of the Coffee House Movement is: why was it organised around the Indian Coffee House, a colonial institution, rather than a space with more radical origins?

I contend that, during colonial rule, labour and left movements push for not just national independence but also a reconfiguring of social relations to redress hierarchies introduced and/or reinforced by colonialism. The radical social justice aims of national liberation are typified by anti-colonial labour movements that push back against both colonialism and the capitalist relations of production that colonialism introduces and intensifies. After independence, the class structure largely remains the same, and the same radical left and labour-oriented anti-colonial movements continue, therefore, to push for the radical aims of national liberation. Postcolonial states attempt to quell this social unrest through the ideology of 'economic development'. In other words, the new ruling class makes claims that for the good of the nation, the radical

aims of national liberation are secondary to the newly independent state's economic success in the world arena. While the anti-colonial working class initially accepts economic development as a worthy objective, over time, as the anti-colonial working class becomes increasingly militant in their struggle to fully decolonise postcolonial society, it offers alternative ideologies of development that would realise the anti-colonial working class' radical social objectives. Therefore, one key form in which the postcolonial class struggle is articulated is through competing ideologies of economic development. However, in situations where postcolonial movements to fully decolonise become more militant and oppositional, postcolonial states abandon the project of liberal economic development and instead resort to authoritarian rule in order to protect the status quo. In this moment of state repression, the repertoire of contentious politics is limited, but certain autonomous spaces preserve the spirit of national liberation, which then animates movements against the postcolonial authoritarian state.

The narrative of India's Emergency illustrates this general theory. I begin the book by detailing Indira Gandhi's political economy of development in the late 1960s and into the 1970s. Her strategies for economic development in India, as I will show, created adverse social outcomes that disproportionately disadvantaged India's urban poor, peasants, Dalits, Muslims and students. In reaction to these policies, as I detail in Chapter 4, several social movements, including the Dalit Panther Party, the Bihar Movement, and the Railway Workers' Strike, pushed Indira Gandhi and her administration to deliver the radical social justice promised for India's Dalits, students, workers and peasants but not yet realised in the nearly three decades since independence. Chapter 5 examines the relationship between the causes of the Emergency and these social movements to determine the role of social protest during the Emergency. Did these movements pose such a great threat to law and order that the Emergency was the only possible response (Dhar 2000; B. Chandra 2003), as Indira Gandhi and several historians have contended? Or was the Emergency Indira Gandhi's strategy to maintain power after the Allahabad High Court ruling that barred her from holding office (Guha 2007)? I assess these competing explanations for the cause of the Emergency and then detail the events of the Emergency, beginning in December 1975.

In Chapter 6, I examine the Coffee House Movement as one of several cases of social protest against the Emergency and analyse the Indian Coffee House at Connaught Place, New Delhi, as one of several sites of resistance against the Emergency. Why did the Connaught Place location of a former

colonial firm, Indian Coffee House, become one of several sites of Socialist resistance to the Emergency? I reconstruct the story of how the Indian Coffee House at Connaught Place became a centre of social protest during the Emergency to uncover what about that space made it such a crucial resource for those resisting the state.

If the organisational form of the firm as a workers' cooperative was consequential for its role as a space of resistance during the Emergency, how did it come to be a workers' cooperative and was this a likely historical trajectory for the firm? In Chapter 7, I take a step back in time to detail how the British colonial firm 'Coffee House' was occupied by its workers and then transformed into a workers' cooperative and autonomous zone. This chapter recovers the history of how after independence, India's first prime minister Jawaharlal Nehru's vision for India's economic development was distinct from that of the left anti-colonial movement generating uncertainty and conflict over the future of occupied Indian Coffee House. In examining Jawaharlal Nehru's political economy of development, it reveals why he was initially opposed to allowing Indian Coffee House workers to form a cooperative, but also why he eventually capitulated. Uncovering how Coffee House came to be a workers' cooperative explains how it became an autonomous zone capable of facilitating a movement against the Emergency state.

## Notes

1. In the Steven Spielberg Film and Video Archive at the United States Holocaust Museum, there is a video of coffee house patrons watching a political demonstration from the balcony of a coffee house ([https://secure.ushmm.org/online/film/display/detail.php?file\\_num=3958](https://secure.ushmm.org/online/film/display/detail.php?file_num=3958)) (Accession No. 1991.263.1, SSFVA).
2. Mss Eur F174/2031, IOL.
3. Mss Eur F174/2031, IOL.
4. Mss Eur F174/2031, IOL.
5. Mss Eur F174/2031, IOL.
6. Mss Eur F174/2031, IOL.
7. Mss Eur F174/2031, IOL.
8. IOR/L/E/8/546, IOL.
9. IOR/L/E/8/546, IOL.
10. IOR/L/E/8/546, IOL.
11. IOR/L/E/8/546, IOL.
12. IOR/L/E/8/546, IOL.
13. IOR/L/E/8/546, IOL.
14. IOR/V/24/663, IOL.
15. IOR/V/24/663, IOL.
16. IOR/V/24/663, IOL.

17. 6408/38/Development, KSA; 6408/38/Agriculture, KSA; 9426/38/Development, KSA.
18. L/E/8/2333, IOL.
19. L/E/8/2333, IOL.
20. L/E/8/2333, IOL.
21. L/E/8/2333, IOL.
22. L/E/8/2333, IOL.
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33. L/E/8/2333, IOL.
34. L/E/8/2333, IOL.
35. L/E/8/2333, IOL.
36. L/E/8/2333, IOL.
37. *Punjab Administration Report 1920*, HSA.
38. *Punjab Administration Report 1926*, HSA.
39. Mss Eur/F174/1984, IOL.
40. Mss Eur/F174/1984, IOL.
41. Mss Eur/F174/1984, IOL.
42. Mss Eur/F174/1984, IOL.
43. IOR/V/27/621/12, IOL.
44. IOR/V/27/621/12, IOL.
45. ST 344, IOL.
46. ST 344, IOL, p. 2, 1942.
47. ST 344, IOL, p. 2, 1943.
48. ST 344, IOL, p. 2, 1944.
49. 418/48/Development, KSA.
50. 21/46/PW, KSA.