Bounded Geography, Bounded Decision-Making

A Study of Coffee Cultivation in Rural Uganda by
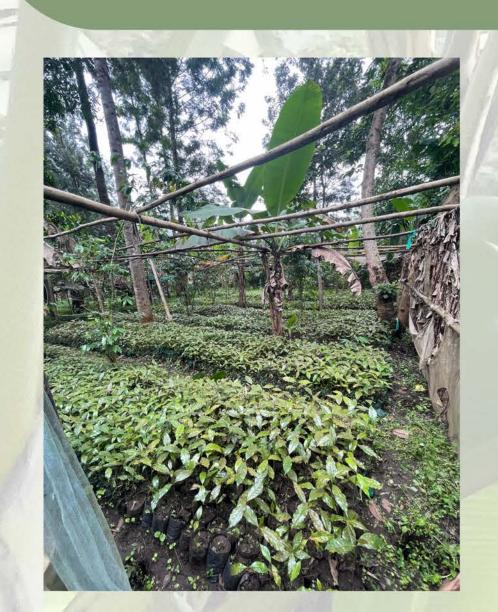**Vincent Polignano** (under the direction of Dr. Kelly Austin)

Introduction/Methods

Coffee's arable land is finite, restricted to areas sourrouding the equator. Coffee's reach is global, while produced over-whelmingly by small-holder farmers in the global south. Planetary boundaries inform how much *can* be grown in a given plot, but socio-political/economic considerations determine *what* is grown. Land availability, government support, chemical usage, and degradation patterns, are especially interesting dynamics worthy of political/environmental inquiry. Economic globalization and shifting demography influences growers' choices to prioritize export/cash crops over subsistence crops. I explored these mechanisms via 32 *in-depth, translated qualitative interviews* with growers and buyers in Bubiita, Uganda.

Results

- government extension services are uneven
- fertilizer use is haphazard & price dependent
- young generations show little interest in farming, preferences towards urban lives, office jobs
  - "coffee will *die*" & "the youth are lazy"
- uneven awareness of global mechanisms (ex. bumper foreign crops) affecting prices
  - growers vulnerable to predatory buying
- climate change, its causes, and implications are misunderstood, discounted, or attributed to God
- belief that any harms/risks to growing coffee will be ameliorated by a "good season"
  - all but one respondent would *ever* stop growing coffee

Conclusions and Future Research

The decisions of individuals, in aggregate, create supply. Those tasked with growing one of the world's top agricultural commodities *do not make decisions in a vacuum*. Government support or its absence, perceptions of value of the farming possession, and incomplete *information* on global realities inform, but also *bind* the decision making abilities of farmers. As youth leave this profession, the role and prominence of coffee in Bubiita will evolve. **This is an ongoing project.**