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# **Spices, Exotic Substances and Intercontinental Exchanges in Early Modern Times**

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# *Introduction*

The phenomenon of globalization has been the subject of a remarkable number of academic publications since the last decades of the twentieth century, which range from political and economic analysis to sociology and history accounts. The most fascinating points of view on the subject are perhaps those adopting a global or also a multidisciplinary approach, since it provides a comprehensive and wide understanding of this concept and the separate elements that constitute it. This dissertation attempts to look at globalization as a wide concept and in particular as an ongoing process, proposing to investigate its nuances through the study of the early modern trade and diffusion of spices and exotic substances such as cacao, coffee and tea. Observing the direct and indirect effects generated by the endeavour to reach and obtain these luxuries by European powers is the general target of this dissertation, while an effort to consider a view both on global exchanges and local contaminations is made.

The following pages are organized as below: the first chapter contains the clarification of the meaning of “globalization” adopted throughout the dissertation and a general description of the academic debate around its historical beginning and its definition. Then, the history of the spice trade is introduced by reconstructing its importance between the late Medieval period and the early modern one and the geographical routes it followed. This is followed by an anticipation of the impact which exotic substances had on European consumers and a general timeline of the European powers’ competition in the spice commerce throughout the centuries: first the Iberian nations, then the Dutch and finally the British.

The second chapter is entirely devoted to spices, their trade and most importantly the local and global consequence their demand from European consumers caused directly and indirectly. An important section of the chapter deals with geographic discoveries and how these milestones of global history started many processes which shaped the following centuries and even our contemporary history.

Lastly, the third chapter revolves around the history and diffusion of tea, coffee and chocolate in Europe and the global effects their demand on the European market affected global processes and history.

# I

## *Soft globalization and intercontinental exchanges*

### **1.1 Debates on the definition of globalization and its beginning**

The concept of globalization has gained increasing attention since the late decades of the twentieth century, yet there is still confusion around the definition of it as well as its history. The versatile nature of the matter in question causes that the wide set of viewpoints on globalization is diverse to say the least and it encompasses insights and contributions from almost every field of humanities. It has been studied among others by sociologists, historians, economists, geographers and some has also chose – as we will see – a multidisciplinary approach exactly because, they sustain, a concept that refers to and embodies a global phenomenon can not be studied but in a comprehensive, multi-faceted outlook<sup>1</sup>. As to the history of globalization, there is similarly no consensus. Some conceive of it as a phenomenon that almost parallel human history while others juxtapose it to the birth of contemporary technology in postmodern times and therefore consider globalization as unprecedented.

Among those who believe in the opposite, namely that this phenomenon belongs to the past as well as our present, there can be found an array of different theories too<sup>2</sup>. Some write about globalization recurring in waves, some other pinpoint a beginning in meaningful history events. As to early modern and modern history, the leading debate about globalization appears to be the one between Flynn and Giráldez and O' Rourke and Williamson, a lively exchange of different, if not opposite, opinions started in the early 2000 and that continued until 2008, when it ended with the latest word to the

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- 1 Dennis O. Flynn and Arturo Giráldez, "Born again: Globalization's Sixteenth Century Origins (Asian/Global versus European Dynamics)," *Pacific Economic Review* 13, no. 3 (August 2008), <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1468-0106.2008.00403.x>.
  - 2 Charles H. Parker, *Global Interactions in the Early Modern Age, 1400-1800* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2010) provides for a broad discussion about the raise and fall of early modern global empires and intercontinental exchanges of peoples, knowledge and fauna and flora. French scholar Serge Gruzinski focuses his studies around early modern Euro-American encounters and interactions specifically. The scholar Sebastian Conrad explored in detailed global history and globalization as approaches and offers an overview of the separate concepts as well as their possible relation.

former scholars. This might not by any means be the most important debate on early modern globalization but it is taken into consideration because its content, I believe, helps in understanding some of the points of contention around globalization and what are the difficulties that academics with different beliefs on the matter have while discussing them with each other. The two lines of thought clash in more than one aspect and, for the reason explained above, a review on differences between the two perspectives is worth mentioning. First of all, the two sides define globalization in very different manners and the two definitions are reported below. O’ Rourke and Williamson write:

[...] we defined globalisation the way all economists are trained, as the integration of markets across space; and [...] we concentrated on one dimension of globalisation, namely commodity market integration. The best way to gauge that historical process of market integration is to measure the extent to which prices of the same commodities converge over time worldwide. Where there is evidence of price convergence [...] then world market integration is at work.<sup>3</sup>

While Flynn and Giráldez write:

Globalization began when all heavily populated land masses initiated sustained interaction – both directly with each other and indirectly through other land masses – in a manner that deeply and permanently linked them.<sup>4</sup>

Because of this evident difference in the definition of globalization, the two sides have a divergent theory on the beginning of globalization too: Flynn and Giráldez sustain that globalization started in sixteenth century and O’ Rourke and Williamson argue that it did not begin before the 1800s. These latter authors do not deny the importance of Columbus’s discoveries and its aftermath but, precisely because of their heavily economy-based definition of globalization, state that “the most dramatic change by far took place in the nineteenth century” or in other words “[g]lobalisation became

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3 Kevin H. O’Rourke and Jeffrey G. Williamson, “Once more: When did globalisation begin?,” *European Review of Economic History* 8, no. 1 (April 2004): 109.

4 Flynn and Giráldez, “Born again,” 360.

economically meaningful only with the dawn of the nineteenth century”<sup>5</sup>. Finally, they conclude that “the world environment was poorly-linked and anti-global before 1800. It became better linked and more pro-global only afterwards.”<sup>6</sup> As far as Flynn and Giráldez are concerned, in their article they are determined “to show that globalization is a historical process with sixteenth century origins”<sup>7</sup> and on the beginning of globalization explain that “[r]econnection to the Americas with the Old World – via both the Atlantic and Pacific Oceans – began in the sixteenth century, thereby giving birth to today’s phase of globalization.”<sup>8</sup>

At this point it appears clear that from the start, there are irreconcilable differences between ideas of both globalization and its beginning that these authors have. Though, the subjects of divergence do not end here, because it is now time to focus on the debate on globalization and multidisciplinary approach. In fact, if on the one hand O’ Rourke and Williamson adopt a definition of globalization exclusively based on economic elements, on the other hand, Flynn and Giráldez give a paramount importance to interdisciplinary stance in defining and studying globalization. This is because of two main reasons: firstly, because it is how they conceive globalization that implies they take into consideration a set of different features from varying fields of study and secondly, because they also take into account trends in global and globalization studies contemporary to them in the academic literature. In their words, “to restrict conceptualization of globalization to the sphere of economics alone” is an error because “global economic forces have evolved in a deep and intimate intermix with noneconomic global forces”<sup>9</sup>. Moreover, a narrow definition as the one by O’ Rourke and Williamson greatly limits the interdisciplinary discussion around globalization provoking “further isolation of economic historians from historically minded scholars in other disciplines.”<sup>10</sup> They conclude by stressing how “trade developments have been tied to ecological developments – as well as epidemiological, demographic and cultural developments – in a manner that influenced virtually everyone throughout the globe”

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5 O’Rourke and Williamson, “Once more,” 109.

6 Ivi, 116.

7 Flynn and Giráldez, “Born again,” 361.

8 *Ibidem.*

9 *Ibid.*

10 Flynn and Giráldez, “Born again,” 383-4.

and “an interdisciplinary approach is required in order to identify globalization’ s origin.”<sup>11</sup>

It goes without saying that, considering the clashing theories highlighted above, also the way the scholars measure globalization is very different. In the case of O’ Rourke and Williamson, as explained before, globalization is measured by means of over-time price convergence in commodities worldwide. On the opposite, measuring globalization is a much more complex task for Flynn and Giráldez since it amounts to observing if and how “events originated in one part of the world generated permanent and systemic effects on societies around the globe.”<sup>12</sup> Of course, such a measurement cannot be compared with the one used by O’ Rourke and Williamson and, considering the opposing conceptions of globalization between the two, Flynn and Giráldez state that “it would thus be meaningless to apply their [that is O’ Rourke and Williamson] statistical techniques to sweeping issues that we deem central. Empirical evidence of a non-statistical nature will have to suffice.”<sup>13</sup> That is the reason why the two authors find evidence of their argument in the great impacts – unfortunately mostly negative – that European explorers had on societies living in the American continent, in other words “decimation of the majority of the labour force of the Americas qualifies as a significant economic and social factor by any standard”<sup>14</sup>; but at the same time also in the spread of flora and fauna between the Old and the New Worlds which in turn “led to immense population expansions outside of the Americas” because “New World crops spread worldwide – via the same ships that transported commodities and diseases – leading to population explosions throughout the Old World and elsewhere.”<sup>15</sup>

By the comparison presented above it comes easy to understand how difficult it is to find a common ground of discussion around what should be the same subject, globalization, that yet, depending on the different outlooks, may have so many nuances in it. In fact, returning on the Flynn and Giráldez-O’ Rourke and Williamson debate, the latter argue that “globalization has evolved since Columbus”<sup>16</sup> but insist on their thesis

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11 Ivi, 374.

12 Ivi, 368.

13 Ivi, 362.

14 Ivi, 371.

15 *Ibid.*

16 O’Rourke and Williamson, “Once more,” 109.

based on price convergence implying the beginning of globalization much later and moreover, they emphasise their divergence from the former authors by stating that “there is no reason why different dimensions of globalization should not progress at very different rates.”<sup>17</sup> So, despite an agreement on the importance of geographic discoveries in the fifteenth century, not only the scholars’ respective conclusions are opposing but by the citation reported above, they feel like they are assessing different subjects. This is especially because a univocal definition of globalization has not been established, and the implications are that many of the conclusions one study reaches heavily depend on the type of definition one decides to assign to the concept of globalization.

In 2010, economic historian Jan de Vries discussed the aforementioned debate in his article *The limits of globalization in the early modern world* in which he proposed a synthesis, or better a potential solution, between the two contrasting parties. He did not consider exclusively Flynn and Giráldez and O’ Rourke and Williamson’ s theories, although he refers to their respective definitions of globalization to build his argument, but to all of the most influential schools of thought about globalization. He arrives at a mitigating compromise between the two contrasting positions by addressing them separately as “soft globalization” and “hard globalization”, where the first relates to the kind of definition formulated by Flynn and Giráldez, and the second addresses the economic point of view offered by O’ Rourke and Williamson. In de Vries’s words “Processes of contact, interaction and exchange” that can also go beyond the economic sphere, and even “Evocations of a compressed and intensified world”<sup>18</sup> are the general elements that constitute soft globalization. Moreover, this concept “embraces a broad array of indirect developments” and “beckons to interdisciplinary study as it evades modelling and testing.”<sup>19</sup> On the other hand, the hard globalization concept ensures to offer arguments rooted in economic concepts and measurement parameters to capture “the essence of globalization” that remains “integration of markets across space”<sup>20</sup>, as we already saw discussing O’ Rourke and Williamson’s work.

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17 Ivi, 114.

18 Jan de Vries, “The limits of globalization in the early modern world,” *The Economic History Review* 63, no. 3 (August 2010): 711.

19 Ivi, 713.

20 Ivi, 714.



De Vries notes an additional dimension in the globalization debate that creates confusion, which is “its simultaneous definition as a process and an outcome”<sup>21</sup> and incorporate it into the soft-hard dichotomy: he associates globalization seen as a process to soft globalization, while globalization as an outcome is linked to hard globalization and he adds “Globalization-as-outcome is a measure of the direct impact of an historical process” and elaborates on social scientists argumentations “in a testable, measurable form.”<sup>22</sup> All this considered, we end up with a rich and detailed view on globalization condensed in a dichotomy: on the one hand there is a *soft globalization* that embraces multidisciplinary studies and is to be conceived as a process and, on the other hand, a *hard globalization* that measures the direct outcome of this phenomenon through economic tools and concepts.

We now move on to analyse the advantages that de Vries’s theory brings with it and how this twofold definition of globalization, under certain aspects, solves the opposition of the Flynn and Giráldez-O’ Rourke and Williamson debate. Briefly stated, the main merit to this dichotomy is that, by dividing the concept of globalization in two separate subcategories, it brings the two outlooks on the same level of relevance, allowing them to develop along their specificities but meanwhile keeping these inside the globalization debate. According to economists, de Vries explains, “the vocabulary of conventional trade remains wholly adequate” to explain the dynamics behind world integration in history and therefore, scholars who share O’ Rourke and Williamson economy-based approach tend “to reduce the concept of globalization to an umbrella term”<sup>23</sup>. It follows that, the downside identified by the author is that, by using the term globalization as a mere accessory in their argumentation, economists tend to reduce this concept to “a short-hand reference to the underlying phenomena that for the exponents of soft globalization are the object of primary interest.”<sup>24</sup> In other words, soft globalization comprehends not only economic dynamics but also, among others, socio-cultural – direct or indirect – impacts of early modern intercontinental exchange, as opposed to hard globalization, that inevitably shrinks the argumentation to economic factors only.

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21 Ivi, 711.

22 Ivi, 713.

23 Ivi, 714.

24 *Ibid.*

Therefore, it can be concluded that the definition of globalization given by Flynn and Giráldez, or soft globalization in de Vries's view, enriches and gives a broader perspective to the economic-only discourse provided by O' Rourke and Williamson. More importantly, de Vries's work widens the debate around globalization by incorporating contrasting theories and validates into this discussion both conclusions and findings from the economic-only discourse and those arriving from a multidisciplinary approach to the same subject. I find that the concept of soft globalization is particularly useful to the scholars that include economic elements in their research but at the same time pose indispensable importance to the sixteenth century intercontinental exchanges of other nature. When discussing the connections and dynamics that together give shape to the global interactions of the early modern world, it is difficult to deny the lasting and profound changes that derived from it, and the abundance of scholars that stress the crucial importance of the networks that were created in this epoch testify it. However, by adopting a definition of globalization based on economic integration, therefore excluding parameters that highlight other types of contact and exchange, there would be a dilemma to solve: either using the word and concept of economic globalization or discussing cultural, social, ecological and demographic element but giving up the term 'globalization'. The great upside the dichotomy by de Vries's have can be find in the solution of the dilemma presented above, namely that non-economic factors in early modern period development and interconnection are to be called globalization as well, and should therefore be part of the wider globalization debate. In de Vries's words: "This was an age of soft globalization, not of hard globalization."<sup>25</sup>

This two-fold definition was discussed and reviewed recently, in 2018, by scholars Pim de Zwart and Jan Luiten van Zanden in their book "The Origins of Globalization". They are the perfect example of scholars who recognize the paramount importance of sixteenth century globalization but without renouncing to discuss economic mechanisms in their argument. In fact, they are clear in stating that in their book they "focus on economic globalization and its effects on economic development in the early modern

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25 Ivi, 731.

era.”<sup>26</sup> Considering that their approach is comparable to a synthesis between Flynn and Giráldez and O’ Rourke and Williamson, meaning that they discuss the economic globalization in early modern period without ignoring the broader picture – or, if you will, the indirect developments happening in the same centuries – it is reasonable that de Vries’s conception of globalization is used. According to them, “this ‘soft globalization’ was almost everywhere, and as a broad process, its consequences could be far reaching”, alluding to the fact that in some instances, “this also led to global economic integration, or ‘hard globalization’, as measured by price convergence, but not always.”<sup>27</sup> But not only do they refer to de Vries’s theory, but more precisely they “will move beyond the dichotomy of hard and soft globalization” by looking at “the direct effects that globalization may have had, as well as the indirect effects”<sup>28</sup>.

Apart from few exceptions – one of which being the one displayed above – however, the term globalization and its concept remains not completely agreed on, nor the twofold definition by de Vries found much continuation in subsequent works. The following year, for example, the scholar Yun-Casalilla, even though without proposing a personal definition of globalization, mentions the Flynn and Giráldez and O’ Rourke and Williamson debate, expressing he finds the definition by the former authors “somewhat restrictive”<sup>29</sup>. Nevertheless, as already mentioned by some of the authors cited above, the early modern period and especially the sixteenth century marked a fundamental step in the process of global connection if not in the whole of human history. From the discovery of the American continent and the tremendous impact European colonizers had in it, to the sustained commercial traffic both in the Atlantic Ocean and in the Pacific, and finally to the spice trade along historically established maritime routes as well as new ones around the African continent. All these historical events and processes might not be accurately measured by economic laws or parameters but still “over this period, the world economy was radically restructured and global

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26 Pim de Zwart and Jan Luiten van Zanden, *The Origins of Globalization. World Trade in the Making of the Global Economy, 1500–1800* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2018), 2.

27 Ivi, 3.

28 Ivi, 4.

29 Bartolomé Yun-Casalilla, *Iberian World Empires and the Globalization of Europe 1415–1668* (Singapore: Palgrave Macmillan, 2019), xxiii.

interaction played a role in this”<sup>30</sup>. This is why it can and should be studied in the framework of globalization as well, regardless it being a soft or a hard one.

One observation that is easy to make while examining the debate around early modern globalization that has been presented above, is that the definition given to the term itself defines much of the arguments and conclusions of a study about this topic. Therefore, it is reasonable that some authors cited either decide not to specify a particular definition of ‘globalization’ in their works or, on the opposite, they define the term in detail and from that definition they carefully build their arguments. As far as this dissertation is concerned, the definition offered by Flynn and Giráldez and, even more, the concept of soft globalization by de Vries will constitute an adequate enough tool to explore and interpret the specific theme on which the following pages will be devoted to: the spices commerce and subsequently, the trade in exotic substances like tea, coffee and chocolate. The concept of soft globalization borrowed from de Vries, in particular, will allow me to incorporate into the discussion both direct and indirect impacts that these exchanges and processes that followed brought to many of the actors involved and in general to the dynamics between global players. Hence, it is with this definition of globalization in mind that early modern global world will be looked at in the following pages.

## **1.2 The spice trade between the Levant route and the Cape route**

Among all the items exchanged between the West and the East since ancient times, whether material like manufactured goods or abstract like knowledge, one could ask, why pick spices? What do spices have to do with early globalization? The answer, of course, can be delivered only because we can observe the fascinating impacts – both direct and indirect – and consequences of the spice trade in retrospect. The bridge between the European and Asian continent has a long history and takes different forms: merchants with their cargoes took overland routes, like the consolidated one Marco Polo travelled on, the Silk Road, or followed the Mediterranean path to the Red Sea and Indian Ocean or finally, since the late fifteenth century, they travelled along newly discovered ocean lanes such as the Cape route to the Indies. The goods exchanged were

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<sup>30</sup> De Zwart and van Zanden, *The Origins of Globalization*, 10.

a vast variety, spanning from luxuries to manufactured items, from textiles to precious stones and of course drinkable exotic goods and spices. However, because of a number of reasons mainly related to the geography of this specific good and the perception of Europeans who consumed it had, it will be shown that focusing on the spice trade is useful as it involves both economic and other types of integration that together exemplify the concept of soft globalization. As it will be explored in the next pages, spices have been for a long time the undisputable protagonist of the trade between the Western maritime powers and “the Indies” as Portuguese, Dutch and English nations embarked and launched their merchants in risky but profitable overseas ventures to not only get a share of the precious spices but to obtain the monopoly over it too. Needless to say, this process of conquest will not limit to commercial exchange but will inevitably have a wider impact on both Europeans development and their global trade partners’ development and overall on world ties and future historical events.

Francesco Antinucci writes an interesting analysis about the history of spices and how the desire for this luxury made it pour into European cuisine throughout the centuries from antiquity to modern times. He tells us that pepper had been highly demanded since Roman times and constituted an ingredient consistently present into Roman élites meals<sup>31</sup>, as it is possible to verify from the recipes contained in a cookbook dating back to the I century AD. During this epoch the commercial route used by merchants was mainly on water and leaving from Rome crossed the Mediterranean Sea to reach Alexandria of Egypt, after a small portion on land it continued on the Red Sea and then reached the Indian Ocean aiming at Muziris, in South-western India<sup>32</sup>. Pepper continued to play a central role in the Middle Ages but, as opposed to previous centuries, it was now transported to the West by Venetian merchants, who were able to rise as primary traders of Eastern luxuries and maintain a commercial link with Constantinople, evade Muslim control over the Mediterranean and survive the political turbulence of the dismantlement of the Western Roman Empire and the barbarian invasions<sup>33</sup> until the fifteenth century. At this point, notes Antinucci, pepper was not the

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31 Francesco Antinucci, *Spezie. Una storia di scoperte, avidità e lusso* (Roma-Bari: Gius. Laterza & Figli Spa, 2014), 25.

32 Ivi. The commercial route summarized in few lines are discussed by Antinucci in the paragraph titled “Da Alessandria a Muziris”.

33 Ivi, 43.

only spice bought and consumed in the West, on the contrary, new types of spices started to appear: cookbooks dating to the late Middle Ages testify the presence of cloves, nutmeg-mace and cinnamon. On this last spice Antinucci writes, referring to Venice commercial traffics that “for cinnamon it virtually has a monopoly.” [my translation]<sup>34</sup> Another change which distinguishes ancient spice trade from the Medieval one is the route merchants used. As mentioned above, since the V century AD, the Mediterranean Sea is no longer safe for mercantile ships as barbarian armies, Muslims conquerors and Saracen “pirates” start to progressively take control over it<sup>35</sup>. Venetian trade exchanges were able to survive by keeping a commercial link with Constantinople, where they could load the spices. Constantinople was and have been a key nodal point, accessible by sailing through the Adriatic and Aegean Seas, until the fourteenth century. It is in the late 1300s, reports Reid, that

“Venice concluded a treaty with the Mamluke rulers of Egypt which for the first time established reliable purchases of spices in Alexandria by the annual galley fleet from the Adriatic.”<sup>36</sup>

Therefore, it appears that the ancient sea route to India was restored but with a difference, in fact Venetian merchants did not travel directly to the coasts of India themselves because “the Muslim-dominated routes to the Red Sea”<sup>37</sup> constituted the rest of the commercial chain transporting the spices from the East to the West. It seems that from this period on, the trail followed by Asian pepper and spices was a chain of intermediary exchanges of which Arab merchants were part of, this explains why some scholars refer to it as the “Arab-Venetian spice monopoly”<sup>38</sup>. Global historian Charles Parker confirms the dominance of Venetians in the Mediterranean who “acquired Asian and African merchandise from their agents in Egypt, Constantinople” and “Italian merchant houses, particularly Venetian ones, maintained a virtual monopoly on the

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34 Ivi, 57.

35 Ivi, 43.

36 Anthony Reid, “An ‘Age of Commerce’ in Southeast Asian History,” *Modern Asian Studies* 24, no. 1 (February 1990): 5.

37 Ivi, 8.

38 De Zwart and van Zanden, *The Origins of Globalization*, 40.

Mediterranean mercantile economy”<sup>39</sup>. It might sound unbelievable how many risks and difficulties merchants and traders were willing to face in order to have access to the pepper and spices market, nevertheless, the answer to why these products were worth the voyage and all the risk that came with it can easily be provided, as it will in following pages.

Spices were and had been for a long time a peculiar good, or better a luxury good, meaning that it was not economically accessible to everyone and those few consumers who were interested in purchasing such an expensive product were willing to pay high prices to get their hands on it. It is again Antinucci who explores the role and the social meaning played by spices: pepper and spices in general, speaking of nutritional value, are useless, they do not contain any kind of relevant nutrients to the human body. Not only at the nutritional level, pepper also was wrongly believed to have a use in preserving meat, to which the scholar replies by arguing that not only pepper was and is not an adequate preservative as salt is, but it is also not plausible that pepper was “wasted” for such a use because of its high price<sup>40</sup>. Parker agrees and adds that “[t]he old tale that European craved spices to preserve meat and cover the taste of spoiled food is no more than a tale.”<sup>41</sup> The role of pepper and spices, goes on to explain Antinucci, was not about practicality and it much rather laid in representing the consumer’s social status, in one word, their wealth<sup>42</sup>. This is why, according to the scholar, this good was demanded and kept being demanded for many centuries, so that wealthy buyers were able to represent their status by means of spices to flavour their meals with<sup>43</sup>.

This constitutes the social and economic mechanism that lays behind the demand for this luxury good, but how about its high price? We can start to answer by talking about the meaning of luxury, or in other words what this definition entails. In the Collins Dictionary, we read: “Luxury goods are things which are not necessary, but which give you pleasure or make your life more comfortable.”<sup>44</sup> Moreover, we can add to this the definition given by the Cambridge Dictionary to capture an additional

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39 Parker, *Global Interactions*, 73.

40 Antinucci, *Spezie*, 20-21.

41 Parker, *Global Interactions*, 88.

42 Antinucci, *Spezie*, VIII-IX.

43 *Ibid.*

44 “luxury goods,” Collins Dictionary, accessed April 9, 2021, <https://www.collinsdictionary.com/it/dizionario/inglese/luxury-goods>.

feature: “expensive things, such as jewellery and make-up, that are pleasant to have but are not necessary”<sup>45</sup>. Therefore, a good is said to be a luxury when it is not necessary, as already seen above, and when it is expensive. Once again Antinucci provides a further contribution which helps to get the complete picture with regard to pepper but more broadly to luxury goods. He explains that these products were greatly desired and were difficult to obtain and therefore their price was accordingly high and, in conclusion, “their value lays, paradoxically, right in the fact that they are difficult to access.” [my translation]<sup>46</sup> Historian Eliyahu Ashtor provides a rich collection of data about prices and margin of profits of the spice trade in the period of the late Middle Ages and the cities taken into consideration are Venice, Alexandria and more by the Mediterranean Sea. About pepper he finds that “prices on the Levantine markets [in this case Alexandria and Damascus] and in Venice leaves no doubt as to the normal difference: it averaged 50%”<sup>47</sup>, namely in Venice pepper price was 50% higher than in Levantine cities. The same appears to be the case for other spices too. “It seems that cloves were 72% more expensive in Venice (and of course also in other South European commercial centres) than on Levantine markets.”<sup>48</sup> The difference is even greater for nutmeg, whose “usual difference in price between Alexandria and Venice was not less than 220%.”<sup>49</sup> As for net profits, Venetian merchants trading pepper during the fifteenth century could expect returns spanning from 10% to 60%, depending on the Levantine city they concluded business with, since each of them imposed tariffs and duties independently and therefore offered different margins of return. The average net profit, though, stayed in the range of 20% to 40% although Ashtor noted how “[t]he proceeding in the trade of certain spices and other Indian articles were no less higher [than 300%]”<sup>50</sup>.

From the pieces of information gathered we can imagine how spices in ancient times – being luxury goods – even in small quantities, were difficult to obtain and therefore with the prospects of a high profit, merchants were willing to embark in a

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45 “luxury goods,” Cambridge Dictionary, accessed April 9, 2021, <https://dictionary.cambridge.org/it/dizionario/inglese/luxury-goods>.

46 Antinucci, *Spezie*, 4.

47 Eliyahu Ashtor, “Profits from Trade with the Levant in the Fifteenth Century,” *Bulletin of the School of Oriental and African Studies* 38, no. 2 (June 1975): 255.

48 Ivi, 257.

49 *Ibid.*

50 Ivi, 272.



risky voyage as much as travelling long distances, because it is by going as close as possible to the source of production that merchants can expect the highest economic return. In fact, it is by bypassing intermediaries – and therefore skipping additional costs they would impose – that a merchant can expect not only to cover his voyage expenses but also to make a profit. In this way the merchant can purchase the good at low production price and charge a high retail price on the wealthy European market. He can exploit the gap between low prices at the production site and high prices that the rich Europeans are willing to pay, in order to make the highest possible profit<sup>51</sup>. As can be seen by the data provided by Ashtor, we can imagine how at each exchange between different intermediaries additional costs were applied in order to make a profit. As the end of the Middle Ages came closer, pepper and many other spices started to be increasingly spread and available, to the point that “[p]epper and ginger were no longer luxuries”<sup>52</sup>, however prices and so profits remained high. A solution to this counterintuitive state of affairs is to be attributed to the high demand by European consumers:

The upper and middle classes in many European countries had become so accustomed to the consumption of spices that the Levant traders could ask for high prices, and always find costumers.<sup>53</sup>

So, with the certainty to find customers willing to purchase Levantine spices, Venetian traders kept transporting this good and kept imposing relatively high prices which would translate into satisfactory enough profits.

There is yet another interpretation to the high and growing demand of spices from European consumers that adds to the sociological and economic one given by respectively Antinucci and Ashtor. Food chemist Udo Pollmer provides an array of reasons that could explain the persistently high demand of spices driven by European consumers. One interpretation tackles the matter of preserving or covering gone-off meat, that we already encounter before discussed by Antinucci and Parker. Pollmer

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51 Antinucci, *Spezie*, 12.

52 Ashtor, “Profits from Trade with the Levant,” 272.

53 Ivi, 273.

agrees with the points of view considered above and regards this argument as highly doubtful because meat is cheaper than pepper and, moreover, he too points out that meat was consumed right away, otherwise “[e]ating meat that has gone bad would have caused severe food poisoning.”<sup>54</sup> He goes on to point out that the “pungent active ingredients are usually extremely effective against microbial pathogens, and above all, intestinal parasites.”<sup>55</sup> However, the most interesting interpretation given by Pollmer has to do with the physiological reaction the human body undergoes when consuming the most popular spices, which not only could make a meal more flavourful but, without the consumers knowing, might have become much more than an irresistible condiment, namely an addictive substance. In fact, by consuming pepper, the pungent feeling in one’s mouth is actually perceived by the body as pain to which reacts by producing and releasing endorphins. These substances in turn give an overall sense of comfort and well-being while their primary function is to help tolerate the pain given by the spice.<sup>56</sup> If pepper and other pungent spices are regularly consumed what happens is that “the body adapts to them by learning to provide opiates immediately”<sup>57</sup> and therefore, there is no surprise in the high quantities of pepper and spices demanded and consumed by Europeans which, if not addicted are indeed accustomed and enjoy the taste and feeling provided by these substances. Pollmer concludes by drawing a line linking spices and their properties to new exotic goods that will substitute the former in popularity later on:

A fundamental change occurred when easily digestible stimulants such as coffee, tea, chocolate, and tobacco became available. They displaced saffron, nutmeg, and pepper as narcotics.<sup>58</sup>

At this point we have discussed the different reasons motivating the high demand for pepper and spices more generally, pushed by insatiable European society: they wanted to represent their wealth by offering spiced meals to their guests, they were eager to consume the daily dose of an unsuspected drug, and lastly traders were more than happy

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54 Udo Pollmer, “The Spice Trade and its Importance for European Expansion,” *Migration & Diffusion* 1 no. 4 (2000): 62.

55 *Ibid.*

56 *Ibid.*

57 *Ibid.*

58 *Ivi*, 67.

to transport this good for an appropriate compensation which they knew was guaranteed.

It was mentioned before in this paragraph that the study of spices is useful in exploring the many facets of soft globalization because of their geography, meaning that fine spices were discovered to grow only in specific and secluded areas of the present day Indonesian archipelago, and pepper initially was only grown in Southern India. For this reason and for the economic reason according to which the highest profit from trade is earned by going as close as possible to the supply site of the good, Europeans were more than interested and, to a certain degree compelled, to have a direct contact with the source of pepper and fine spices in South-eastern Asia. It will be explained in the following pages that this economic mechanism and the geographic circumstance regarding the source of pepper and fine spices are in part at the basis of European powers maritime ventures and their involvement into the maritime spice trade since the late fifteenth century. As a result, the spice trade, especially after the discovery of the Cape route, was carried out by Europeans by means of a direct contact with the local producer or, in some cases with a physical and direct geographical link with South-eastern islands. It appears to be a certain degree of consensus among authors already cited that cinnamon grew in Ceylon (modern day Sri Lanka), cloves grew on the island of Ambon, mace and nutmeg not too far, on the Banda Islands<sup>59</sup>. These tiny islands in modern day Indonesia are also referred to as Spice Islands or cumulative, as the Moluccas. As far as pepper is concerned, its cultivation and diffusion was wider and its origin less clear. It is presumably endemic of the South of India and only later on was transplanted to other areas in south-eastern Asia. In fact, it was Chinese interest in this spice to be “responsible for the introduction of Indian pepper plants to northern Sumatra, and the enormous growth in Southeast Asian pepper production”<sup>60</sup> in the fifteenth century.

It might seem an easy task to establish if the discovery of America and the conquest of the Cape route by Spain and Portugal is a direct consequence to the desire to match the demand for spices coming from Europe. Nevertheless, there are contrasting points of view around the matter and a brief review of them worths to be mentioned. Some

59 Antinucci, *Spezie*, 97. And de Zwart and van Zanden, *The Origins of Globalization*, 25.

60 Reid, “An ‘Age of Commerce,’” 6.

scholars appear to take this for granted and never actually question or develop further on their opinion, while other analyse more in detail the degree of importance the spice trade had in the great geographical discoveries of the late fifteenth century. There are two main stances on this matter: on the one hand, there is the idea that spices were the main reason and catalyst justifying the voyages and expeditions that resulted into important geographical discovery; on the other hand, the argument that spices were the protagonist driving force is incorrect, or at least incomplete as an explanation since it actually constitutes only a part of the ensemble of circumstances and factors that enabled the crossing of the Atlantic or the circumnavigation of the African continent.

Scholars who represent the first group are both de Zwart and van Zanden and Parker: the fist authors lists the main voyages sponsored by monarchs in the late fifteenth century such as Columbus' voyage in 1492, Caboto's travel in 1497 and of course da Gama's expedition in 1498. All three share a common aim that is "to control the world's supply of spices"<sup>61</sup>. Moreover, it is a recurring suggestion in their work that both the circumnavigation around Africa by hands of the Portuguese and the discovery of America in 1492 were a consequence of the attempt by European nations to get a share of the spice trade and circumvent the Venetian monopoly. As for Parker, although he mentions other circumstances and historical developments prior to the Age of Discovery – for example, mercantilism and technological development in navigation and military might – he recognizes that "The basic purpose behind all European imperial enterprises in Asia and the African east coast was to control as much of the lucrative trade in spices and luxury items as possible"<sup>62</sup> and that "Portuguese mariners had dreamed of finding a much quicker all-water route to the trading centers in Asia since the 1300s."<sup>63</sup> He writes about Atlantic discoveries that the Spanish crown "consented to sponsor Spain's first voyage to Asia under the leadership of [...] Christopher Columbus."<sup>64</sup> The fact that Columbus reached a whole different continent does not take away that the aim of the travel was indeed Asia and its markets.

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61 De Zwart and van Zanden, *The origins of Globalization*, 21.

62 Parker, *Global Interactions*, 18.

63 Ivi, 20.

64 Ivi, 28.

On the contrary, Yun-Casalilla and historian Ronald Love put the emphasis on other factors leading up to the maritime ventures in the late fifteenth century, in fact “Something more than the desire for these products was needed before the leap overseas could be made”<sup>65</sup>. The former scholar underlines the that a “cross-cultural fertilization was crucial for expansion”<sup>66</sup>, implying that without a preliminary knowledge contamination from different civilizations and a certain degree of development, Portuguese maritime expeditions could have had a different conclusion or even they could not have been possible. Among others, the scholar mentions improvements in cartography and geography, better navigation instruments such as the compass and the astrolabe, the invention of the caravel and the Chinese printing press and gun powder which gave a significant advantage in military capacity. Yun-Casalilla goes on to clarify that the desire for spices – which although not primary remained a secondary goal – was taken over by an overseas expansion that in a way continued the Reconquista and therefore assumed both political and religious undertones. The economic drive behind the initial expansion, moreover, was not Asian spices as much as African gold and the slave market.<sup>67</sup> Love agrees on this part and adds:

“More than anything else, Henry was eager to reach the so-called River of Gold [...] Only later did Portuguese mariners and their royal sponsors make finding a sea route to India around the African continent an explicit goal. Henry’s interest in exploration thus derived from a narrower focus and a mixture of motives that included religion, profit, and simple curiosity.”<sup>68</sup>

Thinking about the theories and argumentations presented above, it would be more than interesting to have a chance in observing what would have happened if technological innovation and exchange of knowledge did not happened between European and Asian continents before the Age of Discovery: would the sole crave for spices have caused the same repercussions we observe from today’s perspective? Or, on the contrary, would the

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65 Yun-Casalilla, *Iberian World Empires*, 6.

66 *Ibid.*

67 Yun-Casalilla, *Iberian World Empires*, 7-8.

68 Ronald S. Love, *Maritime Exploration in the Age of Discovery, 1415-1800* (Westport: Greenwood Press, 2006), 13.

mere technological advance in navigation have sufficed to the discovery of American and the Cape route without the motivation of circumventing the Venetian-Arab monopoly? Unfortunately there is no way to conduct researches on such hypothetical circumstances and probably there won't ever be an answer to these scenarios. For now the conclusions we can draw are that spices might not have constituted the only, nor the primary reason to the geographic discoveries at the end of the fifteenth century. The reasons behind Portugal's maritime expansions were many, as we noted above – especially as far as the circumnavigation of Africa is concerned. The voyage carried on by the Portuguese crown leading to the discovery of modern-day Brazil, on the other hand, could be considered indirectly or even directly linked to the crave for pepper and exotic goods since its objective was finding Asia and therefore among others, the spice market. The same could be argued for the discovery of the Northern part of the continent since the desire to reach access to the Asian spices almost surely drove the accidental discovery of modern-day United States, since the sole goal Columbus had in mind was to reach Asia.

### **1.3 Exotic substances and a timeline**

The discovery of America undoubtedly marks the beginning of a period of intercontinental contact and exchange never witnessed before and it ignites a sustained flow of commerce and dissemination of different nature. As suggested by Flynn and Giráldez's work, the first contacts and the subsequent dynamics between Europeans and indigenous peoples and lands in other continents can not be neglected nor they can be explained by an analysis based on mere economic variables, nevertheless they sure are worth to be discussed as important elements in the process of globalization. In this regard, de Vries poses a difference between intercontinental trade across the Atlantic, namely trade between Europe and Americans colonies and Western Africa; and intercontinental trade between Europe and Asia, following the Cape route. He states that “the real test of early modern globalization, by any definition, requires a study of Eurasia”<sup>69</sup>, this because the trends between the two webs of commerce had relevant differences and “the New World trades were from the outset colonial in nature”<sup>70</sup>. This

69 De Vries, “The limits of globalization,” 715-6.

70 Ivi, 715.

dissertation indeed takes into consideration the Eurasian exchange and commerce – an entire chapter will be devoted to the spice trade which took place in and across the Old World – however, it keeps a global and interdisciplinary outlook as well. It is for this simple reason and because the definition of “soft globalization”, which comprehends the discourse around flora and fauna exchange across the Atlantic, that some pages will be devoted to Euro-American contamination and connections as well. In particular, the lenses used for this task will be the theme of the drinkable exotic goods or groceries, which will spread and get increasingly popular in the eighteenth century: coffee, tea and chocolate. These new colonial goods will be in some ways remarkably different from pepper and fine spices, partly because of the intricate relationship they share with the American continent, but they both provide a useful framework of interpretation for early global exchanges, which encompasses economic impacts as well as social, environmental and demographic processes that shaped both global interaction and the separate actors taking part in it.

Utilizing the theme of commerce in spices and exotic drinkable goods (coffee, tea and chocolate) to study early modern globalization might be deemed not appropriate or not sufficient because of an open discourse between scholars regarding the validity of luxury goods to assess and measure early globalization. On the one hand, scholars O’Rourke and Williamson, whose definition of globalization and method of measuring it can be considered particularly specific and rather strict, question the usefulness of luxury goods and therefore also pepper and spices as a means to evaluate the impact of intercontinental exchange and globalization. They state that these non-competing – on European markets – goods and “by definition, their presence or absence in Europe had an impact only on the living standards of the very rich who could afford expensive luxuries.”<sup>71</sup> Spices, tea, coffee, chocolate and more broadly all luxuries were consumed by a limited amount of the population, they sustain, and therefore they can not count as a measure of globalization since their impact on the overall population was minimal. On the other hand, scholars such as Jan de Vries and historian Anne McCants have to disagree and point out the significant impact that these goods, throughout the early

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71 O’Rourke and Williamson, “When did Globalization Begin?” cited in Anne E. C. McCants, “Exotic Goods, Popular Consumption, and the Standard of Living: Thinking about Globalization in the Early Modern World,” *Journal of World History* 18 no. 4 (December 2007): 440.

modern times, progressively gained among not only élites but also lower classes of the population in European society. Antinucci and de Zwart and van Zanden agree on the not-so-negligible role played by new colonial stimulants in the new society that was coming to life in the eighteenth century. On this matter, de Vries writes:

Globalization affected European consumers in this period primarily by increasing consumer choice. This is sometimes dismissed, by Williamson and O'Rourke among others, as a matter of concern only to elite consumers. This charge, valid enough in the sixteenth century, is not compelling thereafter as cotton textiles, tea and coffee came to dominate the return cargos from Asia.<sup>72</sup>

Hence, O'Rourke and Williamson's argument could be made for spices but not so much for other colonial goods which progressively found their way to poorer consumers. De Zwart and van Zanden echoes de Vries argument, explaining how the commerce in colonial luxuries and their consumption in European society sparked in turn important consequences. They note how the popularity of new drinks from overseas spread not only among the wealthy but the middling and lower classes as well and they conclude that "import of luxuries [...] led to a consumer revolution, impacted European production patterns, pushed works efforts and specialization, and increased living standards."<sup>73</sup> The effects of colonial groceries import in the Netherlands has been studied by historian Anne McCants: she provides interesting data for the lowest classes of Dutch society between the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, in fact her attention falls to the study of domestic consumption of tea and coffee, among other goods. Her findings testify a widespread presence of these so called luxuries among the poorest fractions of the society and moreover demonstrate a change in the living standard of middle to poorest shares of the Dutch population because of these new exotic groceries and their numerous impacts on economies and people. If McCant's work focuses more on domestic consumption, Antinucci, on the contrary, highlights the social and public impact these new drinkables had when they started to become increasingly popular: he dedicates his attention to the birth of coffee houses, cafés and other public spaces where

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72 De Vries, "The limits of globalization," 722.

73 De Zwart and van Zanden, *The Origin of Globalization*, 252.



coffee and tea are sold and consumed by customers, but more importantly these goods come to symbolize a social status, as spices did in ancient times and in the Middle Ages. Moreover the number of cafés and coffee houses, which grows exponentially in the first decades of the eighteenth century, become gathering spaces for intellectuals and businessmen from the rising bourgeoisie where ideas and business were exchanged together with a hot cup of coffee.<sup>74</sup>

The extensive works and data offered by these authors and many more are a clear sign that colonial luxury goods are not to be discarded as a valuable interpretation of global interactions and exchanges of the time. On the contrary, goods like spices initially and drinkable goods later on provide a unique framework for the study of commerce between East and West but also of social and environmental impacts on the colonial lands in the Indies and Americas. The study of chocolate and coffee, in fact, allows to look at colonization and the plantation system introduced by European colonizers in Central and South America – together with the exchange in plants across the continents since coffee has Old World origins – on one side, and the trade links with China and Japan which were essential for the provision of tea. In turn the arrival of the exotic substances from overseas impacted European consumers in numerous ways, as already mentioned above.

All this being said, it is now important for the following argumentations, to draw a general and synthetic timeline for the commerce in spices and coffee, tea and chocolate between European nations such as Portugal, Spain, the Netherlands and Britain and global commerce partners. More precisely, it will be pointed out that not in each case a proper commercial exchange will be carried out between local suppliers and European buyers because, as underlined above, some commercial relations overseas were born as and kept being colonial from the start and therefore comprising an exchange between Europeans only.

In previous pages, it was summed up how the history of the spice trade saw the raising of Venetian merchants as primary carriers of Asian spices into the broader European markets and actually holding the monopoly of purchase and transport of the good from the Levantine main trade centres and Alexandria in Egypt. Venice merchants

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<sup>74</sup> Antinucci, *Spezie*.

however saw a possible threat to the heyday of their activity when news reported the Portuguese inauguration of the Cape route, meaning that Portuguese crown was able to reach directly the West coast of India, the biggest producers of pepper at the time, and purchasing it at much lower prices than their Italian counterparts had to pay in Egypt. It will be explained how this threat had in reality few concrete consequences and Venice, although it underwent a significant decline in its commercial exchanges, managed to survive and re-invent itself in the aftermath of its decline.

As far as Portugal is concerned, after an initial exploration of the West coasts of Africa motivated by the economic aim of gold and slaves, also pushed by religious fervour together with a pure curiosity for the unknown, crown-sponsored explorers finally surpassed the Southernmost tip of the continent and reached the coveted pepper producing region of India. It is the starting point of approximately a century (from late fifteenth century to the late sixteenth) of primacy in the pepper and spices imports to the European market. While reaping the huge profits, however, the Portuguese crown faced a difficulty in transforming a primacy in trade into a proper monopoly, mainly because of an active involvement and a strict control of the Red Sea and Persian Gulf sea routes by the Arab and Ottoman Empires. Spices and Far Asian products constituted an important market for Near East powers too, in fact the Ottoman authorities implemented different strategies to keep a hold on maritime traffics in the Red sea basin, exclusively accessible by Muslim ships, and in the Persian Gulf, aiming at collecting taxes and revenues and exploiting the profitable trade in Asian spices as much as possible. They were also able, in the same period, to build an economic link with Aceh in Sumatra<sup>75</sup>, posing a further obstacle between Portuguese ships and the Southeast Asian market of spices. At this point, between the end of the sixteenth century and the beginning of the seventeenth, European ships with different flags started to appear both in the Mediterranean and on the Cape route, attracted by the great economic possibilities the spice trade promised to those courageous enough to accept the challenge. Dutch and English ships undertook their venture towards the profitable business in spices and the emerging market of new luxuries, coffee and tea. Portugal presence and influence decline in the waters of the Indian ocean marked the undisputed progress in Dutch

75 Cesare Casale, "The Ottoman Administration of the Spice Trade in the Sixteenth-century Red Sea and Persian Gulf," *Journal of the Economic and Social History of the Orient* 49 no. 2 (May 2006).

conquest of previously controlled Portuguese outposts along the coasts of Africa and India. However, the Iberian overseas colonies didn't limit to the Old World and in fact, Portugal was able to grow and develop its New World lands in modern day Brazil, where the crown was able to start a successful enterprise based on the indiscriminate exploitation of natural resources, land and men for the production of colonial produce such as sugar, brazilwood and of course chocolate, among the others.

Meanwhile, across the Atlantic and Indian oceans, Dutch and English mercantile ships protected and regulated by the official national companies of respectively VOC and EIC conducted their trade between Southeast Asia for spices, China for tea and the Middle East port cities for coffee. The Dutch in particular implemented an intransigent attitude in their relationships with local rulers and didn't hesitate to enforce even violent operations to reach satisfactory trade agreements (satisfactory for their part, obviously), for example the Banda massacre.<sup>76</sup> Given their determination and disputable methods, it didn't take long to reach a point where they were able to obtain a monopoly over the production of fine spices in the Moluccan islands, where they took control of the geographic space and ways of production of the spices. There were litigations and episodes of tension between Dutch and English over the access to the spice-producing islands and the Dutch made sure to impede a British involvement and temporarily exclude and discourage further attempts in sharing the rich production islands of the fine spices.

The British interest had, at this point, turned to imports of Canton tea from China, besides other important goods like textiles, and Indian colonies which will become an important part of the future history of the nation.

The following pages will be devoted to a more detailed analysis of the spice trade in early modern times, by hands of the European powers of Portugal, the Dutch and the English. It will be posited that the direct and/or indirect contact between Europeans and local peoples in Asia and Southeast Asia, which does include an economic exchange but does not limit to it, constitute an important connection and can be considered globalization, if this concept is declined according the multidisciplinary and broad approach of "soft globalization" proposed by de Vries. It will be tackled how European

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<sup>76</sup> Antinucci, *Spezie* and de Zwart and van Zanden, *The Origin of Globalization*.

contact across the coasts of the Indian ocean will impact the local communities and, in return, how the precious goods imported and brought back to the European societies made merchants and state-owned companies rich and powerful colonial leaders.

The following section of the dissertation will be devoted to discussing exotic substances such as coffee, chocolate and tea, which gained increasing popularity since the middle decades of the seventeenth century, how they made their way into the broader European society, from being consumed by closed élite circles to a medicinal usage and eventually to beverages of mass consumption. In this case, as for the spices the century before, these exotic luxuries will generate huge amounts of profits and global repercussions too. As opposed to spices, these colonial goods were soon transplanted in favourable geographic areas where their cultivation and production would be more convenient to European exporters, thus generating a biological exchange as well between continents. For example, coffee plants were displaced from the origin land to Dutch colonies in Southeast Asia and in Central America. Soft globalization encapsulates a broad range of contamination between geographic places as well as distant cultures by means of maritime commerce. Spices and exotic substances provide an interesting outlook for the study of this multifaceted phenomenon that shaped early modern times in ways that can be felt in and have repercussions to the present day.

## II

### *The spice trade and its global implications*

#### **2.1 Opening the Cape route and Portuguese expansion**

Spices like cinnamon, nutmeg, cloves, we learnt in previous pages, have a long history and pepper in particular was consumed in large quantities since ancient times. Throughout the centuries their popularity increased and little by little they became more available yet their trade kept yielding high profits. It should not be a surprise, therefore, that European nations importing increasing quantities of this exotic products were more than interested in having access to it, though by paying it at the lowest price possible. This economic incentive, in combination with other reasons related to the desirability of owning and consuming the spices discussed above, and of course an improvement in maritime technology, made Iberian powers and later on the Dutch and the English decide to venture overseas and establish posts and colonies closer to the primary sites of production destined to last, in some cases, until the twentieth centuries.

It was mentioned before that the Portuguese were able to raise as the most prominent European importers of Asian spices as soon as Vasco da Gama secured the maritime route leading to India by the circumnavigation of the African continent. Following the Cape route to reach the 'Indies', Portuguese authorities and merchants were able to establish a steady and reliable quantity of spices to supply in the European market throughout the sixteenth century. The Portuguese supremacy over the European supply of Asian spices, however, was only total for a short amount of time given that the challenges posed by the Venetian and the old overland routes on one hand, and the Ottoman and Arab involvement in the spice trade on the other were never completely overcome by the Iberian nation<sup>77</sup>. In fact, Parker explains:

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<sup>77</sup> Antinucci, *Spezie* and Yun-Casalilla, *Iberian World Empires*.

Egyptian and Ottoman competitors bedeviled the *Estado [da India]* at the western end of the Indian Ocean; merchants in India took action to sidestep Portuguese controls; and the sultan of Aceh (Sumatra) mounted a major challenge to the east.<sup>78</sup>

Moreover, due to the economic threat they represented to the traders and merchants already conducting business in the Indian Ocean, the Portuguese encountered resistance and hostility by local inhabitants. This hostility in turn made monopolization of the commercial traffic and the political management of the colonies and the spice trade more difficult. Love notes how the tension towards Portuguese, that is *Christian*, merchants became palpable almost immediately:

the cordial reception initially extended to Da Gama by the [...] ruler of Calicut, had turned sour when the Muslim community lobbied him to reject the Portuguese as predators in disguise [...] As a result, when the fleet sailed for home in 1499, a climate of hostility and mistrust had developed between the Europeans and their royal host.<sup>79</sup>

The prospect of a massive profit, however, did not stop Portugal and in subsequent years some other suppliers of spices would be found along the Indian coasts. This tension between Christian Portuguese and Muslim Arabs at sea and on the commercial sites on land, and therefore the obstacle that it could constitute in conducting exchange deals with local rulers, would constitute one of the reasons which motivated Portuguese authorities to use force in order not to be excluded from the Indian ocean trade webs and to secure their commercial interests against competitors<sup>80</sup>.

Nevertheless, all of these challenges do not discredit the influence and commercial achievements secured by Portuguese authorities during the end of the fifteenth century and the first half of the sixteenth, who either took control or built from scratch many settlements and posts that were useful as trade sites or as coastal stopovers along the endless sailing on the Cape route. Portuguese established their presence along both the East and West coasts of Africa to facilitate voyages on the Cape route and managed to

78 Parker, *Global Interactions*, 22.

79 Love, *Maritime Exploration*, 24.

80 Ivi, 25.

conquer strategic positions along the coasts of India and Ceylon, modern day Sri Lanka, and even in Southeast Asia. After control was established on supply sites of pepper and spices, Portuguese ships would sail annually to Lisbon and back carrying the precious Asian luxuries to Europe in a regular crossing that took the name of “Carreira da India”. So, more specifically, how did the Portuguese endeavour to get a share of Asian spices trade contributed to and constitute an instance of soft globalization? Or, in other words, how did Portugal involvement in the spice trade contributed to soft globalization in the early modern period? The first thing that should be noted is that, as far as the opening of a new direct sea lane to the closest geographic place of the spices production, the Portuguese crown and their seafarers bore the status of “first movers”<sup>81</sup>. This means that although they were the ones who had to endure and overcome an intimidating sea route never explored before – and hence experience geographical uncertainty, adapt to and survive in unknown waters swept by winds never experienced before and lastly get into contact with new civilizations – their role as forerunners in European maritime expansions allowed them to claim the land they were interested in without worrying about competitors, at least European ones, and lay the foundation of a commercial and political network which will open a walkable path to the future European colonizations. According to de Vries, Portugal’s status of first mover also provided an advance in that the opening of the Cape route caused a brief interruption of the spice commerce on overland routes and take away the monopoly of Asian spices from Venetian hands<sup>82</sup>.

It appears safe to argue that, although the wider scope and hopes for the leap into the Atlantic Ocean was to find a direct way to the Indies, initially Portugal’s crown focused on getting access to African gold and slave markets. However, even if spice demand does not account as a primary motivation – but indeed it does as a secondary – in this phase of Portuguese expansion, the conquest and colonization of many islands and continental posts along the whole West coast of the continent constitute a preliminary foundation of what would later develop into the Triangular trade. Portuguese maritime expansion begins with the conquest of the Muslim port city of Ceuta in 1415, since then they continued south in the Atlantic to conquest the island of Madera in 1418. These islands were soon colonized and designated later on, around

81 De Vries, *The limits of globalization*, 724.

82 *Ibid.*

the middle of the century, for the establishment of sugar and wine plantations, whose export was useful in funding further expeditions. There is agreement among scholars that the plantation system of production was not a novelty, it already existed in the Mediterranean basin, but it can be plausible that for the first time this system of harvesting was transplanted, together with the plants of sugar cane and grapevine cultivated in it, into the new Europeans land in the Atlantic<sup>83</sup>. Parker sustains this argumentation by stating that “the Portuguese transplanted the plantation system, ideal for the production of sugar, from the Mediterranean to several Atlantic islands to Brazil by the early sixteenth century.”<sup>84</sup> These first attempts and tests on this strategy of production entailed the exploitation of large plots of land devoted to monoculture plantations and the implementation of underpaid or exploited labour imported from African slave markets who were forced to perform intensive work. It is reasonable to think how this may be looked at as an embryonic stage towards the construction of what would become in future centuries the much more extended plantation system of production in many parts of the New World put in place not only by Portuguese themselves but by virtually every European nation involved in overseas colonization of the Americas.

In 1434, Portuguese explorers secured another milestone for the African coasts exploration, they were able to reach and round Cape Bojador, just south the Canary Islands. In fact, until that moment this Cape was considered a dangerous navigation area and even “the end of the world” [my translation]<sup>85</sup>. The explorations proceeded south, motivated by a desire to find gold mines, but along with that intent, Portuguese seafarers became progressively involved in the local slave markets which would play an important role in the economic sustainability of Portuguese expansion. Throughout fifteenth century, the expeditions reached modern day Mauritania and the first permanent settlement was built on the island of Arguin. According to Love and Antinucci, this settlement comes to constitute the first Portuguese *feitoria* and becomes an important, and most of all permanent, trade centre that allows Portuguese merchants to conduct trade with the local communities, mainly Arabs. The decision to establish a

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83 Antinucci, *Spezie*.

84 Parker, *Global Interactions*, 103.

85 Ivi, 74.



permanent fort to conduct safe and protected trade reflects the transition or evolution of Portugal's strategy in asserting its presence: if initially the maritime exploration were accompanied by raids and quick attacks to Muslim cities on the coast as a way to combat and defeat the infidel enemies, towards the second half of the century, the priority shifts to building peaceful connections with the commercial authorities in nearby coasts<sup>86</sup>.

Explorations of the coast and nearby islands continues with the taking of Capo Verde archipelago in 1456. In 1460, Henry the Navigator who had directed and supervised all of the exploration since the taking of Ceuta, died and Portugal's expansion along the West coast of Africa had reached modern-day Sierra Leone. At this point, highlights Antinucci, "something very important happened, something that cannot be ignored" [my translation]<sup>87</sup> which would motivate further explorations: the African coast seems to deviate towards east instead of continuing southward. Needless to say, this realization makes navigators hope that the water way to the Indies is close to be fully sailed and therefore the rhythm of expeditions accelerates. The theories about a possible direct maritime route to India progressively became more and more attractive and concrete to Portugal's mariners who kept exploring African coasts while waiting to reach the southernmost point of the African continent. Antinucci explains that up to this point the strategy implemented by the Portuguese crown to explore and approaching the ultimate goal of reaching India appeared to be sustainable both from an economic, a material and geographical point of view. As a result, Portugal's control expanded along the whole West coast and established a permanent presence in Cape Verde, Elmina – which will become an important centre for both slaves and gold exchange – and São Tomé, among others, where a flourishing plantation economy was instituted. By 1481, Portugal's expeditions and presence had reached Capo Lope in today Gabon, however the speed of research southward along the coasts would undergo an exponential growth under the rule of king John II which will witness the rounding of Cape of Good Hope in 1488<sup>88</sup>.

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86 Love, *Maritime Exploration*.

87 Antinucci, *Spezie*, 76.

88 Ivi, 77.

In the last decades of the century, points out Parker, the impact of Portuguese settlement in the sub-Saharan coastal region, specifically in the Kongo, became much more than superficially limited to commerce. He goes on to report how the Portuguese explorers and merchants settling in this area built alliances with the local nobles and over time gave rise to a deeply integrated society which had repercussions both to African communities and European settlers. First of all, it was Portuguese who exported Christian religion to Kongolese rulers, who in turn “converted to Christianity, allowing the spread of Portuguese language and customs into the region.”<sup>89</sup> Over time, “a number of Portuguese married Kongolese women and resided permanently in the Kongo” where “their children formed an important merchant class”<sup>90</sup>. They come to create a commercial bridge whose role was that of facilitating deals between Portugal and Kongo. This relation was beneficial for both parts, however things changed in late sixteenth century when Portugal’s demand for slaves could not be provided by the Kongo and as a consequence, Portuguese merchants moved to other African territories. Parker claims that these developments in the relationship between the two nations “led to the collapse of Kongo and Ndongo at the end of the 1600s.”<sup>91</sup> This in turn led to the establishment of a Portuguese settlement in what would become known as Angola, where a thriving commercial centre developed around commerce of slaves.

Portugal’s expeditions on the Cape route to India continued under king Manuel I who, in 1495, organized the famous voyage led by Vasco da Gama which will constitute the final part of the all-sea route to the Indies the crown was waiting for. Da Gama sailed the East coast of Africa, he stopped and explored a number of African cities on the coast which would later host Portugal’s presence such as Kilwa, Mombasa and Malindi and finally arrived in Calicut in 1498. It was already pointed out above how the initial hospitality Portuguese mariners received at their arrival, quickly turned into hostility, especially by Muslim merchants who were afraid of their competition. In fact, the Portuguese presence was felt like a potential threat to the historical role Muslim merchants exerted in the Indian Ocean basin and beyond, where they had always linked the Levant, Middle East, Africa and South and Southeast Asia. This is the reason why,

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89 Parker, *Global Interactions*, 27.

90 *Ibid.*

91 *Ibid.*

de Zwart and van Zanden write, after the first voyage, which was an economic failure, “subsequent Portuguese endeavours quickly acquired a violent character and the aim became to create colonies rather than to conduct trade via diplomatic means.”<sup>92</sup> Moreover, when da Gama realized that Asian authorities did not attribute the concept of property or jurisdiction to the sea in 1499, he claimed the entire Indian ocean for the crown of Portugal. As noted above, the first voyage to India through the Cape route might have not been economically profitable, however it proved the undeniable possibility to reach the spices-producing lands across a reliable, direct and from now on controlled sea passage around Africa. Not only the route is successfully inaugurated but the potential profits are huge: the price paid by da Gama in India, reports Antinucci, is over 26 times lower than the price paid in Lisbon for cinnamon, and as a result a second expedition is immediately launched in 1500<sup>93</sup>.

Portugal expansion did not end with the pepper production sites on the Indian coast, however, because of two reasons: firstly, it was understood that some spices, namely nutmeg and cloves, grew on islands further away and therefore Portugal’s seafarers were interested in establishing their presence closer to those islands; and secondly, if Portuguese explorers were to keep a control over the spice commercial flows throughout the Indian Ocean, as they were, then it was needed that settlements and posts to control the basin were present from East to West. In the first decades of the sixteenth century, therefore, Portugal’s ships and soldiers would attack and seize their control on a number of new locations. Under Afonso de Albuquerque’s command, Portugal were able to conquer Goa in Western India 1510, Melaka – known also as Malacca – in today’s Malaysia in 1511 and Hormuz in the Persian Gulf in 1515. Moreover, in this same period, more feitorias would be set up along the East coast of Africa and on the West coast of India<sup>94</sup>, their purpose being that of provision sites for ships sailing on the Cape route and that of fortified permanent posts for trade as well. Moreover, Antinucci notes how Portugal’s goal is not only that of taking part into the spice trade but it would soon become to gain a monopoly over it. This wide territory studded with Portuguese controlled settlements would become known as Estado da

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92 De Zwart and van Zanden, *The Origins of Globalization*, 150.

93 Antinucci, *Spezie*, 82.

94 Locations and diffusion of Portuguese *feitorias* are discussed both in Parker and Antinucci.

India, managed by a viceroy from Goa, an institution that enabled Portugal to achieve a paramount importance in the spice supply to the European markets. In fact, the constant voyages launched from Lisbon to reach the spices supplies centres in Portuguese posts in India sailed the Cape route at a rhythm of one a year and their cargoes were of an unprecedented measure.

As already mentioned, although for a limited stretch of time, the Portuguese impact on the east-west spice flows resulted in a halt of the Levantine trade and even, in 1515 Venetian merchants had to go and buy pepper from Lisbon since they were not able to obtain it otherwise<sup>95</sup>. The first decades of the sixteenth century therefore saw the raise of Portuguese captains and merchants as the principal importers of fine spices but mainly pepper to Europe via Lisbon, which in turn supplied these luxury goods to the rest of European buyers. Scholar C. H. Wake, in his in-depth article on pepper and spices trade in early modern times, reports how Portuguese were able to enforce an actual monopoly on pepper more than other spices<sup>96</sup>: although I was not able to find a source which explicitly draw a causality, that is enice having to go and purchase pepper in Lisbon, Wake reports that since the turn of the century, “the Venetian spice and pepper imports were down to 58% and 15% respectively [i. e. with Beirut and Alexandria] of the averages in the earlier period.”<sup>97</sup> He continues by stating that “The pepper trade with Alexandria was practically extinguished and the Portuguese [...] made further inroads into the spice trade.”<sup>98</sup> Considering this analysis, it could be supposed that this might explain why Venice had to purchase it from Lisbon instead of the usual suppliers in Levantine cities, which were undergoing serious shortage of spices. He further underlines how Portugal’s export of spices and pepper constituted about half the market supply, if not more, in Europe in the first decades of the sixteenth century<sup>99</sup>. Although their attempt to keep a monopoly over pepper and spices did not lead to the desired outcome, indeed Portugal was and would be a primary supplier of Asian spices to the European market over the century.

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95 Antinucci, *Spezie*, 88.

96 C. H. H. Wake, “The Changing Pattern of Europe’s Pepper and Spice Imports, ca 1400-1700,” *Journal of European Economic History* 8 no. 2 (Fall 1979).

97 Ivi, 373.

98 *Ibid.*

99 Ivi.

It has been tackled how the presence of Portuguese ships in the Indian Ocean benefited Lisbon's position on the European market for spices as primary supplier, but what about the Southeast Asian suppliers? Did Portuguese demand for pepper and spices had some type of effect on their economy? Scholar Anthony Reid argues that between approximately 1400 and 1700, the spice-producing regions and more broadly Southeast Asia underwent an "age of commerce", earlier on pushed by Chinese demand and later on by European maritime powers<sup>100</sup>. On the complex relationship, or better rivalry, between Portuguese commerce along the Cape route and Arab-Venetians who continued to ship their goods on the Levantine route, he states:

indeed, if we look at the customs revenue in Portuguese Melaka, which includes private Portuguese trade as well as official trade of the crown, the figures double from about 10 million reals per year in the 1540s to 20 million in the 1580s (Thomaz 1979:116). However, the Muslim routes had revived by the 1560s to the point where they took as much pepper and spices to the Mediterranean as they ever had, and in general more than the Portuguese.

In the second half of the sixteenth century, therefore, Southeast Asian exports to Europe by these two routes were more than double those which had gone by the old Suez route in 1490s.<sup>101</sup>

This passage shed light on how paradoxically the intense competition between the two routes favoured producers and consumers of pepper and spices by both enlarging the quantity supplied to European markets and by stimulating production in Southeast Asia. This is a further example of the impact felt in different parts of the world because of global commerce in spices, or as it should be called, soft globalization during early modern times. It was explored in previous pages how Portuguese merchants, explorers and authorities sent by the Crown impacted both the coasts of the African continent and their possessions along the coasts of the Indian Ocean. It will be discussed below how other European powers entered the profitable trade and who they contributed to the process of soft globalization.

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<sup>100</sup> Reid, "An 'Age of Commerce'".

<sup>101</sup> Ivi, 9.

## 2.2 The Dutch enter the spice trade

The opening of the Cape route around Africa and the important role Portuguese commercial enterprise had gained throughout the sixteenth century, makes other European nations interested in entering the transcontinental trade in spices, which maintained the position of primary European import long after Vasco da Gama shipped the first load of the luxury goods to Lisbon in 1499. As a consequence English, French and most notably Dutch ships would start to appear in Asian waters, conducting their journey to obtain a share of the profitable commerce with Asian exporters. The following pages will be devoted to the Dutch maritime conquests and developments along the Cape route, which would embody a critical challenge to the Portuguese control in the Indian Ocean and finally would build a solid overseas empire. The United Provinces were able to attain a degree of control which Portugal could not achieve despite its struggles and, most importantly, Dutch authorities could secure a constant and controlled supply of fine spices by monopolizing their production in the seventeenth century.

It appears that, before the launch along the Cape route, Dutch ships were already main participants of the commercial exchange and shipping in North Atlantic waters such as the Hanseatic ports and in Mediterranean ones. They transported Portuguese spices since 1530 and by two decades, Dutch seamen were the “main agents” of Portugal’s spices<sup>102</sup>. The first voyage to the Southeast Asian islands responsible for the supply of fine spices took place in 1595, when a small fleet of four Dutch ships sailed the Cape route to land in today Java. Cornelis de Houtman who lead the fleet was to sail until Cape of Good Hope and from there, following Magellan’s example, the ships would cross the Indian Ocean to drop anchor directly on East Indies coasts. As had already happened to the first Portuguese expedition to India under da Gama, de Houtman too returned to Amsterdam in 1597 with a small cargo of few spices<sup>103</sup>. The poor outcome of the first voyage, however did not discouraged Dutch investors from their interest in obtain pepper and spices directly. For this reason, in 1602 they

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102 Antinucci, *Spezie*, 93.

103 Both Parker and Antinucci tell the same course of events about the first Dutch voyage in the East Indies.

pleasantly supported the foundation of and invested in the Vereenigde Oost-Indische Compagnie (VOC), namely the Dutch East India Company. Under this joint stock company, Dutch ships and the men in charge of them gained not only commercial rights, in order to conduct trade with local producers and rulers, but also a wide array of other rights which enabled the Company to serve another scope, namely constitute an adequate competitor to Spain and Portugal's overseas empires. German historian Claudia Schnurmann draws a comprehensive picture around the foundation of the VOC and the historical context surrounding the end of the sixteenth century and the beginning of the seventeenth. She explains how the competition that the VOC was to exercise upon the Portuguese was twofold, one being an economic competition in the spice trade and the other being a military competition. In fact, Portugal between 1580 and 1640 became part of the Spanish empire, which the United Provinces were at war with, becoming therefore a political enemy as well as an economic competitor. For this reason the VOC enjoyed commercial rights but also military and political rights to challenge Portuguese forces overseas<sup>104</sup>.

It is in this complex context that the first Dutch conquests in Southeast Asia should be looked at, considering both the VOC's goals of strike as much damage to Portugal's ship and colonies as possible, and seize a share of the spice trade if not obtain a monopoly over it. It does not come as a surprise hence, the fact that the Dutch military and commercial involvement did not restrict to the Indonesian archipelago, where almost the global supply of fine spices was grown, but it would extend from West to East, from the Atlantic to the Indian Oceans, wherever it was profitable or there could be Portuguese ships to plunder and colonies to bombard.

The Dutch conquest of the Spice Islands began with Ternate – where cloves grew – in 1607, then in 1619 they settled in Jakarta on the island of Java, which was renamed Batavia and would become the headquarter of the VOC. In 1621 was the small Banda Islands' turn, secluded and known for the presence of nutmeg and mace. Here, Dutch men displayed violence and ruthless aggression in their conquest methods, they “massacred almost all the natives, and subsequently imported African slaves to cultivate

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104 Claudia Schnurmann, “‘Wherever profit leads us, to every sea and shore...’: the VOC, the WIC, and Dutch methods of globalization in the seventeenth century,” *Renaissance Studies* 17, no. 3 Special issue: Asian Travel in the Renaissance (Septembre 2003).

nutmeg and mace.”<sup>105</sup> Unfortunately, this is not the only instance where the VOC employed such harsh approach in seizing its power. In fact, two years later in 1623 they brutally massacred the inhabitants of a British colony in Amboina, on the Ambon Island. Antinucci reports that this tragic event “poisoned” the relationship between the two nations and the British would ask reparations for the atrocity suffered for decades<sup>106</sup>. The Dutch were able to oust the Portuguese from Melaka in 1641, conquering in this way a strategically important post in the Indonesian archipelago and in 1656 they took control of the former Portuguese colony of Colombo, on Ceylon. It follows that by the half of the century, Dutch presence was scattered throughout today’s Indonesia – and most importantly the VOC were in control of the small yet important islands where nutmeg and cloves grew – and the Portuguese’s overseas empire faced Dutch rivalry on South India coastal posts and modern-day Sri Lanka.

Nevertheless, the VOC activity did not limit to the Indian Ocean, in fact the Cape route to the East Indies, as we read in previous pages, comprised the whole Atlantic African coast, where an abundance of Portuguese settlements and feitorias were establish during the sixteenth century. In accordance with the perspective of damaging Portugal as an economic competitor, when not a political rival, the Cape of Good Hope became a target as well and in 1652 the VOC founded there the Cape Colony which would constitute “a refreshment station for ships sailing between Europe and the East Indies.”<sup>107</sup> However, De Zwart and van Zanden report how in 1657 “a number of VOC employees were released from their contracts in order to become free burghers and farmers”<sup>108</sup>. In time the colony became the destination of growing numbers of Dutch immigrants who eventually were able to sustain themselves both in demographic term and, with extensive employment of indentured labour in extensive agricultures, economically as well. The flourishing economy and wealth which developed in Cape Town also benefited from the frequent passage of VOC ships that contributed to the overall development of the colony. The scholars conclude by noting how the well-being of the Dutch colony paralleled with the enslavement of local tribes, import of slaves

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105 Parker, *Global Interactions*, 91.

106 Antinucci, *Spezie*, 102.

107 De Zwart and van Zanden, *The Origins of Globalization*, 118.

108 *Ibid.*



from the wider region of the Indian Ocean, appropriation of interior lands and the development of inequality between European settlers and the locals<sup>109</sup>. The consequences carried by the Dutch presence in the colony do not limit to demographic growth and inequality between Europeans and enslaved locals or imported slaves: Parker highlights how the European settlers affected their surroundings in other way and their activity impacted African wildlife as well as human lives. According to the scholar, Dutch settlers were responsible for a drastic decline of big mammals in South Africa because settlers needed to protect their cattle, which in time was spreading outside Cape Town, but mostly because of hunting. In some cases, hunters were interested in hides and exotic valuable parts of some animals but the initial abundance of large land mammals allowed the settlers to engage in hunting as a hobby. In fact, Parker writes:

The Dutch, however, sought out South African animals far beyond colonial needs, since big-game hunting became a very pleasurable sporting activity among colonists. For a variety of reasons, then, Dutch settlers took up killing South African wildlife with great enthusiasm and with little restraint. By the end of the 1700s, these large animals retreated beyond the frontier of colonial settlement [...].<sup>110</sup>

There is yet another instance of Dutch influence in the Cape settlement which exemplifies again how the early modern times marked an intensification in different forms of global exchanges and mutual influence between peoples. In 1713, working slaves entered into contact with smallpox and a pandemic outbreak was responsible for the death of few Dutch but many indigenous. The virus arrived at the colony through dirty laundry which was unloaded from a VOC ship and subsequently washed by slaves who were infected and spread the disease in the colony. A pandemic broke out and both Dutch but mostly the indigenous population suffered the consequences of the disease which in turn “seriously undermined Khoikhoi [i. e. the main local indigenous people] social and political organization.”<sup>111</sup>

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109 *Ibid.*

110 Ivi, 176.

111 Ivi, 154.

As far as the West coast of Africa is concerned, The Dutch too became involved into the Atlantic slave trade system, entering the competition with the Iberian powers in the seventeenth century. It was already mentioned before that Portuguese settlers were present along the West African coasts at different locations and they had a particularly remarkable impact in Sub-Saharan Africa, most particularly in the Kongo kingdom. Later on, however, Portuguese settlers moved and found a most suitable supply of slaves southward in Angola, while the Dutch settled and established their headquarters on the Gold Coast in order to manage their exchanges and operations. While the Portuguese would control and conduct business in Angola, their Dutch competitors would install in northern regions, the same left prior by the Iberian nation. These two regions constituted one of the biggest slave exporting centres and remained under Portuguese and Dutch control during both seventeenth and eighteenth centuries<sup>112</sup>.

Going back to Dutch presence in Southeast Asia, it was already stated that their activity in those lands dates back to the early seventeenth century, when the first operations organized by the VOC led to the settlement and colonization of former Portuguese outposts and strategic positions in the archipelago. After consolidating its presence, the Company immediately moved to secure commercial connections in key goods to be exported to the European market, and notably to establish a monopoly over the production of the “fine spices”, namely cloves, nutmeg and mace. The establishment of a monopoly was possible because of the geographical features of the islands where these spices grew: the fact that Ternate, Tidore and the Banda Islands were and are small in their extension and relatively isolated allowed the Dutch company to conquer, re-organize and most importantly monopolise the production of the plants growing the luxury goods, other than to monopolise their export and shipment<sup>113</sup>. Most scholars agree on the fact that by the half of the seventeenth century, the Dutch VOC had successfully monopolized production and trade of the precious spices, but de Zwart and van Zanden are the authors who give a more precise chronology of this process: they position the “monopolisation of clove production and trade”<sup>114</sup> after 1656 and much earlier, in the 1620s the monopolisation of “the production and trade of nutmeg and

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112 Ivi, 98.

113 Antinucci, *Spezie*, 101.

114 De Zwart and van Zanden, *The Origins of Globalization*, 183.

mace from the Banda Islands”<sup>115</sup>. As the Portuguese had done before throughout the Indian Ocean, the Dutch Company too assumed an important role in the Asian economy and political systems. If the Portuguese though played the role of first movers, the Dutch consolidated the European control on coastal areas of South and Southeast Asia. The VOC and its commercial objectives caused the beginning of a process of colonization which in turn brought with it consequences affecting the political environment, the economic development and also the labour market of the region.

We can begin to analyse the economic and political consequences brought by Dutch intervention in Southeast Asia by considering the opposing theories put forward by Reid on the one hand and de Zwart and van Zanden on the other. Although historians cited in this dissertation find a common ground in the intensification of commercial exchange and integration in the time period going roughly from 1500 to 1800, there can be found different points of view with regards the role played by the European interference in Asian markets and their effective degree of influence over Asian economic development and commercial relationships. According to Reid, who writes about an “Age of Commerce” for Southeast Asia stretching from 1400 to 1680, the advent of the Portuguese but even more so the Dutch arrival caused the contraction and the end of the this time of flourishing commerce. Paradoxically, Europeans were both main responsible actors in the processes leading up to the expansion in trade of Southeast Asian regions and at the same time the agents of its decline. Although this might sound contradictory, Reid explains how the high demand for fine spices and pepper, which began to rise in the fifteenth century, pushed a further increase in production of the goods and higher prices. This in turn stimulated a reinforcing cycle which caused the commerce in these luxury to take off: first the Portuguese and later “the Dutch and English joined the competition for pepper and spices from 1596, leading to high prices and an enormous expansion in production.”<sup>116</sup> This economic mechanism, although in unequal degrees, initially benefited local territories as merchants could earn as much as 100 % of profits and even more by trade and shipping of merchandise, while producers usually did not enjoy much of those profits<sup>117</sup>. This increase in quantity and

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115 Ivi, 185.

116 Reid, “An ‘Age of Commerce’”, 9.

117 Ivi, 10-11.

intensity of trade constituted a benefit not only to private merchants but to the commercial net of the archipelago as a whole since “the multiplier effect of the boom in long-distance trade was felt throughout the trading ports of Southeast Asia, and often far into the interior where commercial goods were gathered for export.”<sup>118</sup> Hence, spices demand by Europe acted as a catalyst for growth in production of these goods and growth in profits for those involved in the commerce of them. However this lasted only until the Dutch were able to appropriate production and trade of cloves, nutmeg and mace, and establish a considerable control over production and trade of pepper. By so doing, all the profits deriving from the additional costs on merchandise from the different steps of shipment fell under the hands of the VOC, monopolizing the revenues as well as the spices market. As a result, Reid reports,

“By the mid-seventeenth century the Dutch were able to sell spices in Europe at about 17 times, and India at about 14 times, the price for which they had bought them in Maluku, with none of the profit at all passing into Asian hands [...]”<sup>119</sup>

It follows that, according to Reid, the Dutch and their company’s activities in Southeast Asia are the cause of the expulsion of local merchants from the spice trade and coincidentally he reports the beginning and progression of a crisis in the second half of the century. It was because of the Northern European powers (the Dutch and the English) that the Southeast Asian spice trade and its profits fell from the local rule to the colonial companies, which caused in conjuncture with other factors, poverty and an overall crisis in the Indonesian archipelago. The author concludes by noting how the process of monopolization of the spice trade by the VOC extorted an important and lucrative activity from the locals and “a period of of difficulty began which had become a severe crisis by the 1660s.”<sup>120</sup> This crisis continued until the 1680s when “the ‘Age of Commerce’ was decisively over, and international trade played a more modest role in the lives of Southeast Asians in the century which followed.”<sup>121</sup>

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118 Ivi, 11.

119 *Ibid.*

120 Ivi, 25.

121 *Ibid.*

The argument put forward by de Zwart and van Zanden follows a different trajectory and sustains that firstly, they recognize and agree to an extent on the economic “slump”<sup>122</sup> pointed out by Reid in the mid-seventeenth century but deem it as a temporary phenomenon and secondly that the Dutch arrival ousted the role of local or indigenous merchants is not an enough accurate depiction. Building on literature by Lieberman and Knaap, de Zwart and van Zanden find themselves in disagreement with Reid’s conclusions and note that “European traders played a limited role, compared with Asian merchants, and that they were therefore in no position to fundamentally alter trading patterns there.”<sup>123</sup> In fact, they draw the attention to the fact that the Dutch company was mainly involved in selected products such as pepper, Moluccan spices, cane sugar, coffee which constitute a limited set on goods and moreover belong to the category of luxury goods more than to subsistence crops. The commerce of these latter, on the contrary, remained in the hands of local and Chinese merchants who “were by no means driven out of business by the VOC in the eighteenth century, even in the Dutch-controlled parts.”<sup>124</sup>

Lastly, they further their stance regarding a continuation of commerce well after the supposed end of the Age of Commerce by looking at trade growth data relative to the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. Although they recognise that a slight decline can be detected in the mid-eighteenth century, building on aforementioned figures, they conclude that “Overall trading value by the end of the eighteenth century most likely exceeded that during the ‘Age of Commerce’”<sup>125</sup> and “it seems that European trade complemented rather than substituted Southeast Asian trade.”<sup>126</sup> In conclusion, it seems safe to argue that since the fifteenth century and progressively more with the advent of the Portuguese initially and the Dutch thereafter, a constant trade growth took place in Southeast Asia.

It is needless to say that, particularly if we consider the goods traded by the European companies and private merchants – which we established them being mostly pepper and Moluccan spices, among others – high quantities of these goods were

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122 De Zwart and van Zanden, *The Origins of Globalization*, 186.

123 Ivi, 190.

124 Ivi, 191.

125 *Ibid.*

126 Ivi, 192.

needed to match the ever growing European demand. Therefore an increase in production was necessary and indeed was implemented in areas held by Europeans authorities and destined for crop cultivation. The literature presented below helps to shed light over the workforce exploited by the Dutch company, where did it come from and how was managed by the VOC which, as it will be explained, relied on the pre-existing slavery practice and slave commerce throughout the ports of Indian Ocean. On the one hand, Dr. Markus Vink's work provides a broad overview on the different trade circuits of slavery in the Indian Ocean basin during early modern times and different insights about slaves, their occupation, where they were bought and where they were employed. On the other hand, global labour historian Matthias van Rossum takes a different approach and focuses on labour relations under the influence of the VOC inside the context of globalizing early modern centuries. According to their works, the Dutch East Indies' enterprises made extensive use of slaves and indentured workers to carry out their commercial traffics. It can be useful to begin by giving a quantitative figure regarding the share of slave inhabitants of the Dutch colonial lands and the annual import to maintain a sufficient level of labour:

In 1688, there were about 4,000 company slaves and perhaps 66,000 total Dutch slaves in the various settlements spread out across the Indian Ocean basin. [...] Batavia (26,000) and Ambon (10,500) made up over half of the total 66,000 Dutch slaves, with Ceylon (4,000), Banda (3,700), Malacca (1,800), and Makassar (1,500) as significant second-rank slaveholding societies.<sup>127</sup>

The scholar also reports annual imports of enslaved workers which amounted up to 6,430, in order “to replenish or increase these numbers”<sup>128</sup>. It is worth mentioning that Ceylon and Banda were the most important production sites and exporting areas of respectively cinnamon and nutmeg and mace, therefore – as it will be confirmed below – it can be assumed that slaves were employed in the spices plantations. On this matter, he notes:

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127 Markus Vink, ““The World’s Oldest Trade”: Dutch Slavery and Slave Trade in the Indian Ocean in the Seventeenth Century,” *Journal of World History* 14 no. 2 (June 2003): 167.

128 *Ibid.*

In the environs of Batavia, thousands of Asian and free burgher slaves cultivated the sugar, rice, and pepper gardens in the late seventeenth century. In eastern Indonesia, the centre of spice production, thousands of free burgher and Asian slaves worked the clove gardens in Ambon and the nutmeg plantations in Banda. In 1694, for instance, 1,879 free burghers slaves laboured on some 70 nutmeg gardens or *perken* of Banda, though 2,500 were deemed necessary.<sup>129</sup>

Van Rossum echoes Vink in the degree of intricacy linking Dutch management of labour in their colonial territories and old consolidated networks of slavery already present in the Indian Ocean, which provided a structured market from where to draw workforce necessary in every step and activity needed to the VOC functioning. In fact, slaves were not only employed in agriculture but they were widely involved in port cities where they worked to load and unload cargoes from VOC vessels<sup>130</sup>. These works confirm how the VOC was much more than only a commercial entity, on the contrary it enjoyed political rights and affected Southeast Asian economy, demographics, labour relations and much more. The influence however were mutual as Dutch colonizers would have had a different impact if they had not have the possibility to rely on the abundant workforce found in South and Southeast Asia and also and to strike alliance with local rulers to reach the company's goals.

### **2.3 The spice trade and soft globalization in early modern times**

The history of European maritime expansion and colonization carried out by Portuguese explorers in the fifteenth and sixteenth century and Dutch seafarers in the subsequent, described in previous pages, provides a part of the globalizing effect these interactions brought to far away nations and territories. In other words, the direct contact which happened between Europeans and local populations along the coasts of Africa and Asia constitute only a part of the process of exchange connecting the globe in early modern

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129 Ivi, 161.

130 Matthias van Rossum, "Labouring Transformations of Amphibious Monsters: Exploring Early Modern Globalization, Diversity, and Shifting Clusters of Labour Relations in the Context of the Dutch East India Company (1600-1800)," *International Review of Social History* 64 Special Issue 27 (April 2019), <https://doi.org/10.1017/S0020859019000014>.

times. A wide array of more complex processes of interconnectedness was triggered by encounters, trade and even sheer navigation inside the framework of soft globalization. First of all, it must be kept in mind that this soft globalization was a two-way process: while European fleets sailed the Oceans, settlers established their forts and merchants bought exotic goods, inevitably the local populations received the goods which Europeans were willing to sold in exchange, learned new languages and religions, and endured much worse kinds of contact with Europeans. In other words, the contamination and influence was mutual, even if in most of the cases, it benefited one party over the other.

It follows that not only Europeans influenced the colonial territories by imposing their political control, trading with local elites, exporting their religion and language and establishing plantation worked by slaves; but also Europe felt the backlash of new imported goods which played a remarkable role into dietary habits, medicinal practices and in many fields of European academic literature. As it was discussed for Portuguese influence over political entities in Western Sub-Saharan Africa and Dutch colonial empire in modern day Indonesia, it can be noted how exotic produce impacted over Europe, although the former exchange brought about much deeper and profound repercussions as opposed to the latter. Nevertheless, curiosity over the newly discovered lands and their flora and fauna among Europeans had a part in furthering the exchange of plants, animals and their use and consumption so much that Flynn and Giráldez note how this exchange, in particular with the New World, “eventually led to immense population expansions outside of the Americas”<sup>131</sup>. Scholars such as Flynn and Giráldez and Parker take into account and note in their works how early globalization or soft globalization cannot limit to economic effects and political influence of Europeans over colonial territories they took control over. Intercontinental voyages and sea lanes around the globe allowed movement of people, plants, animals and diseases and overall shaped the history of peoples and contributed to create new landscapes across global continents.

This being said, it is worth now to analyse more in depth the impact of the spice trade over the European market and its consumers. In other words, how did pepper and fine spices from South and Southeast Asia affected Europe, its economy and its

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131 Flynn and Giráldez, “Born again,” 371.



peoples? It was already mentioned above how much the spice trade was and kept being profitable throughout the centuries, from late thirteenth century until over the eighteenth. Involvement in commerce with spices assured high earnings, whether it was performed by private merchants or by state-run (i. e. in the case of Portugal) or joint-stock companies (such as the VOC or the British East India Company, EIC).

It can be supposed, therefore, that a result from a constant involvement in the spice trade in the aforementioned centuries resulted in a consistent flow of wealth in European cities and their merchant class' pockets, contributing as well to the raise of merchants in the society as an influential share of the population which were moreover sustained by the economic theory of mercantilism. Huge quantities of precious spices poured into Europe both through the overland route which moved the merchandise to Levantine port cities and by means of re-export from the capitals of the European maritime nations. Initially Venice enjoyed the monopoly over peppers and Asian spices, later it was paralleled by Lisbon which became an equally important centre of these luxuries re-export into Europe, and finally Amsterdam entered the trade and was the only nation able to obtain a monopoly over the fine spices of the Moluccan islands. Important means by which spices and goods of all kinds were bought and sold, and in time distributed in continental Europe were fairs and later open-access markets in cities, the most notable one being Antwerp. Parker too mentions cities and oases as well as fairs and circuits of fairs as a common means of commercial exchange along global trade circuits. In time these means of exchange contributed to urbanization and a tighter commercial integration between continents and their main commercial centres<sup>132</sup>. On the other hand, de Vries mentions the practice of auctions as a means of sale: he writes that merchandise of which ships were full of "determined the financial fortunes of the companies, which until the late eighteenth century depended overwhelmingly on the revenue generated by the sale at auction of Asian goods."<sup>133</sup>

Since there is no further explanation of what share of – if at all – "Asian goods" was made up by pepper and spices, it cannot be quantified or even concluded that this particular good was sold at auctions. As to city markets and fairs, however, some degree of inquiry has been made and can be found in recent sources: professor Jeroen Puttevils,

132 Parker, *Global Interactions*, 81.

133 De Vries, "The limits of globalization," 717.

for example, reports tax records from Antwerp commercial exchanges in the years 1544-5. From his work we come to know that the Flemish city in fact played a central role in providing merchants with an open-access market space secured by a structure of rules and rights which allowed a vast variety of participants, as he goes as far as defining it “the foremost commercial metropolis of the sixteenth century”<sup>134</sup>. The history of the Antwerp open-access market traced back to the Middle Ages, precisely to the early thirteenth century, and owed initially to the Brabant fair which was held in the city four times a year and eventually evolved into the sixteenth century Antwerp market<sup>135</sup>. This matches with the account on fairs and market offered in Parker, and testimony the transition of some fairs to a permanent market into a city progressively urbanized and cosmopolitan. The author’s analysis highlights how pepper and spices indeed represented one of the main goods transiting through the Antwerp market: his sources reporting taxation on products present on the city market testimony that sugar and spices appeared as the second category of goods exported with pepper being the third good most exported after cloth and English kerseys<sup>136</sup>.

The scholar’s study also supports the discussions previously mentioned about a Dutch involvement in Northern Europe commercial circuits since the sixteenth century, because a remarkable share of tradable goods in Antwerp market came from Low Countries sellers: “Transit goods [among whom appears pepper] [...] make up 70.90 per cent of all Antwerp’s (re-)exports, while Low Countries products account for 29.10 per cent.”<sup>137</sup> Another piece of information provided, which gives coherence to the previously addressed spice trade flows and dynamics, notes how Portuguese pepper exports took over the Venetian ones and even became the source of Italian imports of this good, or at least part of it, while Venice remained an important supplier to the European market of other kinds of spices. Puttevils in fact argues that “Venetian merchants were still sending large quantities of other spices (such as cinnamon, ginger, camphor, mace, cumin, and the like) to their Antwerp agents.”<sup>138</sup> Lastly, as to the final

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134 Jeroen Puttevils, “‘Eating the bread out of their mouth’: Antwerp’s export trade and generalized institutions, 1544-5,” *Economic History Review* 56, no. 4 (November 2015): 1340, <https://doi.org/10.1111/ehr.12103>.

135 Ivi, 1341.

136 Ivi, 1348-9. These data relies on personal interpretation of the tables presented in these pages.

137 Ivi, 1349-50.

138 Ivi, 1349.

destination of the pepper exported from Antwerp, the author notes how it was widely bought and re-sold by a variety of German merchants who in turn spread the spice “throughout central and Eastern Europe”<sup>139</sup>. It recurred many times throughout these pages how the European appetite for pepper and spices had no limits, but by this last work it appears clear the actual geographic extension these luxury goods – which were however becoming more and more popular and available – reached, even in areas far from the main export centres such as Venice, Lisbon and later Amsterdam.

In some rural areas in modern day North-eastern Italy, at the time under the Venetian Republic, the arrival of such particularly exotic and interesting goods, as well as potentially very profitable, might have stimulated in the local community – most commonly dedicated to agriculture – the engagement in commerce and retail of spices across the border in Habsburgic territories. Professor Igino Piutti mentions the involvement of inhabitants of Carnia (the Northernmost mountainous area in Friuli region, Italy) in Venetian spices re-export to “Europe”, namely in Northern German-speaking territories. The author goes on to explain that this profession gained a specific denomination and increasing popularity, the Venetian spices were followed by silk cloth and other small items as trade merchandise and the community of small merchants migrated in winter to conduct exchanges and at the same time perform agricultural work in summer. The profits deriving from this commerce flowed into the construction of relatively important buildings, which for sure differentiated the small merchants who could afford such houses from the wealth they earned by selling their export goods, and the agricultural workers<sup>140</sup>.

The establishment of a sea route to the East which progressively developed into a constant, annual navigation along the Cape route and throughout the Indian Ocean basin by a number of both private and company ships, which hosted mariners and explorers from virtually every corner of Europe, carried a number of consequences and marked the beginning of a process of knowledge creation in different fields. As opposed to the local impact of spices and the spice trade mentioned above, it is worth to note some of the consequences of it which reverberated on national and even global levels. For

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139 Ivi, 1358.

140 Igino Piutti, *Storia della Carnia. Dalle origini ai giorni nostri* (Pordenone: Edizioni Biblioteca dell'Immagine, 2019), 137-8.

example, how navigation techniques and technology improved especially during the fifteenth century, when Iberian navigators were to take the first steps into the Atlantic Ocean. But while ships were able to progressively secure more and more coastal reach, cartographers quickly took note of the newly discovered lands, waters and winds. In the same way, explorers in time dedicated to a deeper discovery of the territories fell under European control. They took note of fauna and flora, local peoples, their habits and customs as well as the way these peoples politically subdivided their lands, among other observations. An example of this meticulous description of the foreign lands is given by a rich volume containing an extensive and detailed description of Japan, the Philippines and the Moluccas published in 1738 in Italy. The volume contains the position of the archipelago and the political power dynamics between the single islands and their rulers, of course it is reported how Europeans entered these dynamics by imposing their rule and how they, in particular the Dutch perceive the local authorities. A geographical description of the islands is offered and there can be found a mention of some volcanoes and the damage they periodically inflict to the nearby area. After a brief description of the luxuriant “greenery” [my translation]<sup>141</sup> the attention is posed on the Dutch control over labour and land, in fact it is stated:

The Dutch Company seldom employs them [i. e. the local inhabitants] into uprooting and exterminating cloves and nutmegs trees on some of those islands, so that they almost will not grow in any other part of the world.<sup>142</sup> [my translation]

This report supports the argument according to which Dutch authorities were working towards establishing a monopoly over production and distribution of the fine spices. Although this source is partial, meaning that the observations made openly expose the – what today we would call – Eurocentric understanding towards the local populations and their behaviours, it indeed provides interesting and nonetheless useful remarks as how the Dutch VOC established its spice-producing enterprise on the Moluccan islands. More specifically, the island of Ambon – or “Amboina” as it is called in the volume – is

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141 *Del Giappone, Isole Ladrone, Filippine, E Molucche, Regni Di Kochinchina (etc.)*, (Italia: Albrizzi, 1738), 254.

142 Ivi, 255.

the primary and might be the only producer of cloves, since the Dutch company eradicated all clove trees from any other island in the Moluccas; and the Band islands are too described as abundant of both nutmeg and clove trees, which the Dutch have a full control over and protect diligently<sup>143</sup>. The work provide an exhaustive account on everything there is to know about the Indonesian archipelago, their geographic location and configuration, the societies who inhabits them, goods and fruits there can be found on them, the degree of control and interaction local peoples have with European settlers and much more. In the pages dedicated to the description of Ambon island, it is even reported the presence of a common disease:

A certain disease reigns over the Moluccan Islands, which it is not known if not under the name of *Vajuoli, or buboni d'Amboina* [italics in the original]. [...] Nationals alone undergo that disease, it is not known if because of the climate, or whether because of their faulty manner of living.<sup>144</sup>

Due to this brief account of the disease, we are not to know for certain if it is indeed smallpox or some other kind of illness. However, it can be concluded that it is at least plausible and moreover, in support of this argument there is the fact that many territories far away from the Eurasian land mass did not develop immunity to an array of diseases to which Europeans had on the contrary greatly known for centuries and therefore got for the major part, immunity against.

In different sources there can be found a recurrence on the argument that spices were considered efficient medicines to soothe a number of symptoms, it is however in the following source that a more detailed account of the subject can be read. The authors draw their conclusion by an analysis of French literature by six different authors, five of whom lived in Asia and argue that “Some of the foods, spices, dyes and woods which began to reach Europe directly from the East in the sixteenth century were believed to have curative properties.”<sup>145</sup> It is reported, along with the location of plantation and the time of the year for harvesting, all the alleged curative powers and use of many spices.

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143 Ivi, 277 and 285-6.

144 Ivi, 279.

145 Eugene Flaumenhaft and Mrs Eugene Flaumenhaft, “Asian Medicinal Plants in Seventeenth Century French Literature,” *Economic Botany* 36, no. 2 (April – June 1982): 147.

Pepper as a medicine was useful in very different ways, especially when compared between its purpose in Asia and in Europe: it was thought that Indian women used this spice, with the addition of many others, as a aphrodisiac; while in Europe it would seemingly cure anything, other than being a condiment for meals. The fact that pepper was thought to cure virtually any type of unwellness for it was used as abortive to digestive, from diuretic to general tonic, helps in explaining “the seemingly insatiable appetite of Western Europeans for it in this period.”<sup>146</sup>

Then cinnamon is mentioned and, as it was noted previously by Pollmer, here too we find that to this spice it is attributed an antiviral property and in fact, the authors argue, it was for long used also in embalming. As for cloves, they were used both by local peoples and of course Europeans and moreover are described to be used in both the dried form and green: its purposes were many, such as sweetening the breath and, in the form of green clove water, as useful for headaches, good digestion and helpful in opposing the pox since it helped in sweating. About the nutmeg it can be said that it has drawn contemporary attention because of its hallucinogenic properties and therefore can be defined “as a psychoactive drug”.<sup>147</sup> As to its medicinal purposes, it is indicated for illnesses to the liver.<sup>148</sup> Medicine experts in Europe, in this case France, also recommended the most important spices to have at home to prevent and cure diseases and minor discomforts: it was recommended to rich people to have availability of pepper, ginger, clove, nutmeg and cinnamon, among others; while to the poorer it was suggested to have rhubarb, ginger and cinnamon. A shorter list with respect to that of the wealthy people<sup>149</sup>. Although the contents of these sources might suffer from old views about health and medicine, it is nevertheless important to acknowledge that the mere presence of this kind of literature, or better the fact that pages and pages of extensive and meticulous reports of the tropical lands which produced these luxury spices were published and even offered as gifts to the European royalty and nobility, testify the impact of the newly discovered lands and their products had on the societies

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146 Ivi, 149.

147 Ivi, 150.

148 Ivi, 159.

149 Ivi, 160.

in the West. It appears to me as yet another example corroborating the importance of the process called soft globalization.

It has been explained and analysed in previous pages how Europeans embarked in long and dangerous maritime voyages to reach Asian luxury goods, among other commercial networks, when important although unexpected geographic discoveries were made and in time global interactions with the local peoples took place. The Portuguese were responsible for the colonization of the majority of the West coast of Africa and meanwhile responsible for a great degree of involvement with the slave exporting centres on the coast. They were also responsible for the discovery of South America and specifically the country today known as Brazil. The Iberian power went as far as Southeast Asia, establishing factories and forts along the coasts of the Indian Ocean basin and also became, for a short amount of time, in the first half of the sixteenth century the most important pepper importer for Europe. The Dutch control overseas was supported and regulated by a joint-stock company, the VOC, which extended its domain over almost all the former Portuguese Indies. Their main operations however concentrated in the Indonesian archipelago, for the spices they most desire to get their hands over were to be found only on those islands.

By the course of the seventeenth century, the Dutch Company achieved its goal of imposing a monopoly over the production and shipment of cloves, nutmeg and mace, which were imported to the European market where they yielded indescribably huge economic returns. The way in which Europeans affected global balances everywhere they settled did not limit to a direct impact over the economy and political mechanisms of the local civilizations. In particular, European presence – I. e. both Portuguese and Dutch – on the West coast of Africa laid the foundation of and later properly started the slave trade across the Atlantic Ocean whose repercussions on African population are well known. As it is was explained, Europeans affected the locals in various ways: they moved, together with their precious merchandise, diseases which proved fatal to different populations around the globe, they transplanted crops and agricultures across the Oceans and proved a threat to the wildlife too.

In later centuries this flows did nothing but intensify as the novelties from the East and West Indies captured the attention of Europeans. Their appetite for spices gave way to the curiosity and interest for tea, coffee and chocolate.



### III

## *Cacao, coffee and tea's global diffusion and commodification*

### **3.1 From the decline of spices to the raise of exotic substances**

It comes with no surprise – and it was briefly mentioned in previous pages – that, after the extensive commerce in spices and pepper in particular, by Venetian, Portuguese and Dutch merchants, these tradable goods started to decrease in value and ceased to be a luxury for its large demand in Europe resulted in lower prices and increased availability to a wider share of the population. Extensive data provided by historian James Tracy shows how, although the monopoly and trade in fine spices (or Moluccan spices) by the Dutch VOC resulted in high profits, by the last decades of the seventeenth century their prices underwent decline and stabilization which were paralleled by low levels of sales. It appears to the author that the struggle for the establishment of a monopoly on mace, nutmeg and cloves repaid the VOC in immediately subsequent decades but resulted in a stagnant market thereafter, remaining a more important item of trade within the intra-Asian trade than in Europe<sup>150</sup>.

This is a trend noted by a number of scholars<sup>151</sup> who agree on a closeness in time of, on the one hand the downfall of spices and, on the other, a rise in other kinds of exotic produce, namely luxury foodstuffs necessary to produce beverages: coffee, tea and cacao. It would be false to believe, however, that the arrival of these new exotic goods did substitute the use and consumption of pepper and the other spices. In fact, as we will see, these beverages were consumed with the addition of spices to them. There is also a certain agreement among scholars<sup>152</sup> on the fact that tea, coffee and chocolate

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150 James D. Tracy, *The Rise of Merchant Empires: Long Distance Trade in the Early Modern World 1350-1750* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990), 120-3.

151 De Vries, "The limits of globalization". De Zwart and van Zanden, *The Origin of Globalization*, 40-9. Suraiya Faruqi, "Coffee and Spices: Official Ottoman Reactions to Egyptian Trade in the Later Sixteenth Century," *Wiener Zeitschrift für die Kunde des Morgenlandes* 76 (1986). Bennett A. Weinberg and Bonnie K. Bealer, *Tè, caffè, cioccolata. I mondi della caffeina tra storie e culture*, trans. Giovanni Tarantino (Roma: Donzelli Editore, 2009).

152 Antinucci, *Spezie*. Rudi Matthee, "Exotic Substances: the Introduction and Global Spread of Tobacco, Coffee, Cocoa, Tea, and Distilled Liquor, Sixteenth to Eighteenth Centuries" in *Drugs and Narcotics*

(in the form of beverage) all started to be noticed and exchanged around the same time, in the middle of the seventeenth century and their first employment was in the medicinal field, as they were believed to have curative properties. It did not take them long however to spread across the globe and become the pleasant beverages we know well today, which although could not suffice as a medicine against all illnesses, they indeed have a stimulant effect which proves helpful in everyday life.

It is worth to spend some words on how and when the European merchants and companies got involved into the trade in these new products and where they were produced. We can start by de Vries's article, where he notes how "company merchants repeatedly shifted locus of their buying activities within Asia and altered the mix of goods they shipped to Europe."<sup>153</sup> This occurred because of a reason of profitability, meaning that one of the main objectives merchants aimed at was to increase their margin of profit and to increase the volume of their intercontinental exchanges. In order to achieve this goal, tradesmen implemented different strategies such as moving – in some cases even relatively long distances – to sellers who provided more profitable prices or changing and mixing the selection of goods in their return cargoes<sup>154</sup>. Although de Vries does not explicitly mention the shift from spices – which as we know started to lose the status of luxury goods to approach more and more that of commodities – to coffee in his analysis, it can be plausible that this might be a reason of the introduction of coffee as a trade item into the European Companies' imported goods. In other words, coffee might not have been a profitable business per se, but it might have constituted a good with a potential for a further market development with respect to the, at this point saturated, spices market and a relatively more profitable item to include into the return cargo directed to Europe than spices were.

This of course cannot be considered the sole reason to why coffee and the other exotic beverages were gradually making their way into European import cargoes. In fact, it can be found a general agreement between a number of sources<sup>155</sup> on the

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*in History* ed. Roy Porter and Mikuláš Teich (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995).

153 De Vries, "The limits of globalization," 722-3.

154 *Ibid.*

155 Antinucci, *Spezie*; Matthee "Exotic Substances"; Nadia Fernández-de-Pinedo, "Global Commodities in Early Modern Spain" in *Global History and New Polycentric Approaches. Europe, Asia and the Americas in a World Network System*, eds. Manuel Perez Garcia and Lucio De Sousa (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2018).

important presence beverages like tea, chocolate and coffee played in the religious practices around the globe. Scholars explain that stimulant effect of these drinks helped in enduring fasting periods, meditations and religious wakes: coffee for Muslims, tea for Buddhists and Taoists and lastly chocolate for Christians, particularly of Iberia and mostly Iberian colonies in America.

After, at this point, extensive and constant contact between European missionaries, explorers and merchants with local populations and their lifestyles, their consumptions of and habits surrounding these drinks were observed, well known and they also raised a great deal of curiosity. Progressively, these drinks were tasted and spread through Europeans living overseas as well as in the European continent. In fact, Matthee addresses cocoa as a “Catholic” drink, which for a long time was “prepared exclusively by Spanish monks in their cloisters”<sup>156</sup> while tea found appreciation among Calvinists, especially British ones, who “welcomed tea as an emblem of sobriety and moral restraint, almost a divine alternative [i. e. to alcohol].”<sup>157</sup>

These plants are originally from three different continents from where they quickly spread to become an important share of the colonial plantations across the Atlantic as well as in African and Asian colonies. Coffee cultivation was predominantly found in Yemen, although the plant appears to be endemic of the Horn of Africa, more precisely of Ethiopia<sup>158</sup>; tea plants have a Chinese origin while cacao trees are originally from South America. All three substances had been used for centuries in their respective local societies, where in time they became integral part of daily life as well as gained religious connotations and they were even believed to have healing effects against an array of sicknesses. For example, in the case of cacao, “The Aztecs did indeed use cocoa as a medicine against diarrhoea and dysentery”<sup>159</sup>. For all three substances, the first contacts which took place with Europeans occurred long before the beverages extracted from the plants became popular and widely consumed. An explanation of this trait of initial disinterest which is common to all the three substances is not extensively investigated, however it can be attributed to cultural reasons, their unusual and strong

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156 Matthee, “Exotic Substances,” 35.

157 *Ibid.*

158 Both Matthee and Antinucci agree on this point: Matthee, “Exotic Substances” and Antinucci, *Spezie*.

159 Matthee, “Exotic Substances,” 30.

taste in conjunction to the fact that these herbs were initially marketed as medicine more than beverages. The European belief considering these substances as medicinal ingredients would keep them from becoming items of almost mass consumption until the mid-eighteenth century. Before reconstructing the history of the introduction into Europe of these exotic substances and the first instances of consumption by Europeans, one more remark should be made clear. These plants or the beverages produced by them were encountered relatively soon after the first contacts during the Age of Discoveries but, as explained above, struggled to find appreciation and popularity right away. This is also partly explained because it was only later on, with the creation of an extensive intercontinental cultivation of these cash crops that the beverages would become more economically accessible and therefore more widely consumed by different strata of the population.

It was stated in previous pages that coffee, tea and chocolate, although coming by different continents – Africa, Asia and America respectively –, shared a communality in the historical moment they found appreciation and started to be regularly imported and consumed, namely they all three simultaneously conquered Europe in the middle of the seventeenth century. As it can be imagined, however, their voyage from the respective place of origin and the history behind their importation into Europe differs in many ways.

It is both Matthee' contribution and Weinberg and Bealer's work which give a detailed account of the first contacts with the exotic beverages in general and it is possible to follow the introduction of cacao and cocoa, the beverage obtained by the cacao beans, into Europe, and specifically in the Iberian peninsula. It is no surprise that chocolate first arrived in Spain, since it is Christopher Columbus, at the service of the Spanish crown, who reached for the first time the only continent where cacao trees and their fruits can be found. It appears that during his fourth voyage to what he considered to be Asia in 1504 he came into contact with cacao seeds which were highly considered in the Mayan community he was stationing at and therefore decided to bring back to the Spanish monarchs a sample of this good<sup>160</sup>. Due to a lack of information about the produce and its use, it did not received a great deal of attention at court until Cortés

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160 Weinberg and Bealer, *Tè, caffè, cioccolata*, 65-6.

suggested its cultivation in Europe. There is a divergent view on the subject between the authors' two accounts: it is not clear if Cortés was responsible for the subsequent introduction of chocolate to the Spanish royals. On the one hand Matthee argues that the conqueror of Mexico, Hernan Cortés "reintroduced the bean as well as the knowledge of its application to the Iberian peninsula"<sup>161</sup>; on the other hand, Weinberg and Bealer argue that there is no clear historical records proving this. On the contrary they explain how the *conquistador* commented on the tonic effects cocoa had on his troops and they argue that the only verifiable role played by Cortés is that of having suggested to Charles V the cultivation of the plant<sup>162</sup>. The two scholars go on to add how the first documented appearance at court of chocolate was in 1544, under the form of a gift to the royal family offered by Mayans spokesmen. While the first commercial import cargo reached Seville in 1585<sup>163</sup>. It appears true, therefore, what Matthee writes about the jealousy for cacao in the Iberian peninsula, namely that "it was kept a secret during the entire sixteenth century"<sup>164</sup> because its appearance and consumption in other European nations would have to wait until the next century. It is argued by Weinberg and Bealer that chocolate reached the French court in 1615 and only became a habit later on in mid-sixteenth century, the Netherlands got their share of the exotic beverage with the beginning of the century while in London cocoa was served by a French immigrant at the first chocolate room in the city in 1657<sup>165</sup>.

The history of the diffusion of tea appears as more straightforward than the other two foodstuffs because, as opposed to chocolate and coffee, plantations and commerce of tea was completely and well controlled by the Chinese Empire. Considering this, Europeans did not play any role of discovery or appropriation and instead had to purchase the good from Chinese merchants. Matthee explains how tea was introduced in Europe by means of the Dutch VOC imports, which arrived at and travelled further into the continent from Amsterdam. The first import shipment is dated 1610, three years after an intra-Asian shipment of tea from the Chinese port city of Macao to Bantam

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161 Matthee, "Exotic Substances," 27.

162 Weinberg and Bealer, *Tè, caffè, cioccolata*, 66.

163 *Ibid.*

164 Matthee, "Exotic Substances," 27.

165 Weinberg and Bealer, *Tè, caffè, cioccolata*, 68-70.

(also called Banten) in the Dutch East Indies<sup>166</sup>. Weinberg and Bealer agree with this account and add to the discussion the irony behind the Portuguese-Dutch competition dynamics: although the Portuguese were the first to reach Macao with commercial related intentions they were not the first to think about a possible import of tea, which it is documented they came in contact with<sup>167</sup>. Once more we see how the Portuguese played the role of “first movers” and opened the way to future European operations which were happy to take advantage of the “footprints” left by predecessors.

Coffee has yet a different history: it had already spread and become very popular throughout the Ottoman Empire when it first appeared in Europe, arriving both from the Atlantic and the Mediterranean. In fact, imported beans of coffee entered in ports cities of the Italian peninsula and France such as Venice and Marseille while the VOC imported cargoes of the substance in Mocha to ship it to Amsterdam. Import flows of coffee therefore travelled along two separate passages, much like the spice trade, which moved both on the overland route from the Red Sea and the Persian Gulf to the Levantine ports and the Cape route opened by the Portuguese. We come to know by Ottoman historian Suraiya Faroqhi that in Cairo “when spice imports by the Red Sea-Mediterranean route definitely ceased in the early years of the seventeenth century, the importation of coffee rapidly took their place”<sup>168</sup>. She goes on to explain how coffee-drinking spread all over Ottoman Empire starting from the end of the sixteenth century and reached not only the big cities of Istanbul and Cairo, but also – by the late seventeenth century – the smaller cities of Anatolia, the countrysides: even relatively poor people enjoyed the caffeinated drink<sup>169</sup>. Not in contrast with Faroqhi argumentations, Matthee too writes about the diffusion of coffee through the Ottoman Empire and dates the first contact of the drink with Europe in the 1640s, when Venetian and Armeninan merchants introduced it in Venice and Marseille, respectively in 1640 and 1644. As far as the Dutch import of coffee is concerned, Matthee traces it back to the 1616 but remained an exchange confined to the intra-Asian system until 1661 that “the home country received its first substantial supply.”<sup>170</sup>

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166 Matthee, “Exotic Substances,” 28.

167 Weinberg and Bealer, *Tè, caffè, cioccolata*, 76-7.

168 Faroqhi, “Coffee and Spices,” 88.

169 Ivi, 89-90.

170 Matthee, “Exotic Substances,” 27.

On the other hand, Weinberg and Bealer, although reconstruct the same narrative, provide slightly different dates: Venice and Marseille were indeed able to import notable quantities of produce before the VOC could and in 1624 Venice received, among other goods, one of the first cargoes of coffee to reach Europe. According to these scholars, the first regular imports of coffee carried out by the Dutch Company, travelling from Yemen to Amsterdam started not before 1663<sup>171</sup>. Nevertheless, it appears to be a general consensus about the beginning of considerable and regular imports by the VOC, namely the last decade of the seventeenth century. Lastly, it is not before the 1700s that the commerce takes off in the Ottoman Empire because of the rise in demand by the near European market, providing a flow of coffee from the overland route<sup>172</sup>.

More data on the increase of importations of tea and coffee are given by de Zwart and van Zanden and diffusion of the same goods by de Vries, the same scholars which give a perspective on the global diffusion of production. It must be kept in mind that the decrease in prices of a given good is associated, in de Vries arguments, with the increase in consumption and in general with a popularization of the same good. In this case, decrease in tea and coffee prices – or in other words price convergence – as argued by de Vries goes in parallel with a growth in supply in the quantity of the given good, pointing towards a general commodification of these goods. The scholar explains that “Once the port of Canton was opened on equal terms to all European traders after 1701, tea shipments to Europe grew rapidly” and adds how in the late decades of the century, “English gained a privilege position in Canton”<sup>173</sup>. A different story is that of coffee since “Coffee prices in Europe declined substantially across the eighteenth century”<sup>174</sup> and

the VOC (Verenigde Oost-Indische Compagnie), followed shortly by the French East India Company (Compagnie des Indes), encouraged coffee production on territories under their direct control (Java and Reunion, respectively) to

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171 Weinberg and Bealer, *Tè, caffè, cioccolata*, 78.

172 Faroqhi, “Coffee and Spices,” 90.

173 De Vries, “The limits of globalization,” 721.

174 *Ibid.*

circumvent the inelastic supplies and high prices at Mocha, which had been the unique source of coffee beans.<sup>175</sup>

On this subject, it is explained in other sources how at the beginning of the eighteenth century “the Dutch succeeded in smuggling coffee seedlings to Java and started the production of Java coffee.”<sup>176</sup> It is by this time that diffusion and popularity of coffee skyrocketed, because of an extension of production sites across the Atlantic which, as one can imagine, largely related on the employment of cheap workforce of slaves in Europeans-controlled plantations, providing therefore coffee at a “popular price” [my translation]<sup>177</sup>.

It is with the beginning of the eighteenth century that imports and consumption of coffee, chocolate and tea come to take a prominent role in the European societies, not only among elites and nobility, but also into lower classes who at this point can afford cheaper colonial goods imported from overseas to consume them as medicines or as a substitute of previously popular drinks. The intensification of the trade in exotic substances brought with it consequences which had an impact well beyond the economy of trade partners and provoked repercussions both to Europe, to its colonies around the globe and the respective societies.

### **3.2 Local and global influence of exotic substances**

As it was already examined for spices, exotic substances too affected directly the global areas they were found and grown by European colonizers and indirectly, they affected the local economies, the course of ecological history and demographic history as well as standards of living, consumers’ behaviour and the course of literature production back in Europe. Tea, coffee and cacao were part of an array of goods which not only came to constitute what historian Alfred Crosby calls “the Columbian exchange”, but their trade undoubtedly parallels an exchange in slaves and goods of a quantity unprecedented to contemporary observers. Some scholars even associate the early modern centuries economic developments with the debate of the Great Divergence, which refers to the

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<sup>175</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>176</sup> De Zwart and van Zanden, *The Origins of Globalization*, 41.

<sup>177</sup> Weinberg and Bealer, *Tè, caffè, cioccolata*, 78.



divergence in development – mainly economic – between European and Asian cities and nations<sup>178</sup>. Others scholars (Acemoglu) focus specifically on the Atlantic trade and point at figures sustaining the thesis of an institutional change and an economic development resulting from it in favour of European nations<sup>179</sup>. Some other scholars, such as Flynn and Giráldez, have pointed out the importance of the discovery and employment of precious metals reserves in the New World, which played a pivotal role in the trade between European powers and rich Asian Empires, since for a period of time silver one of the few items China and other Asian actors were willing to accept as trade exchange.

As part of this ever-expanding flow of goods, people and luxuries we find of course tea, coffee and cacao, which were undergoing an increase in export because of the high demand from Europe. Although the spice trade had lost its absolute primacy by the end of the seventeenth century, de Vries reports a constant – despite mild – growth throughout the whole of early modern Eurasian trade, meaning that tea from Canton and coffee from both Java and Mocha constituted a big contributor to the flows of exchange in the period, together with the textiles imports from India<sup>180</sup>. For example, the share of textiles in British East India Company's (EIC) Asian trade declined from 70 per cent in late seventeenth century to 30 per cent at the end of the following century “mostly due to the rising tea share”<sup>181</sup>. The British were not the only European nation to import tea from China, on the contrary the good as a whole and the new exotic substances were overall emerging as consistent and important European imports in the wider global commerce. In fact,

The amount of tea imported by the VOC from China increased dramatically from 7 tons annually at the end of the seventeenth century to some 1,500 tons annually in the closing decades of the eighteenth century [...]. British imports of tea increased even more spectacularly from 2.5 tons in the 1670s and 1680s, to 3,700 tons<sup>182</sup>

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178 De Zwart and van Zanden, *The Origins of Globalization*.

179 Daron Acemoglu, Simon Johnson, James Robinson, “The Rise of Europe: Atlantic Trade, Institutional Change, and Economic Growth,” *The American Economic Review* 95, no. 3 (June 2005).

180 De Vries, “The limits of globalization,”.

181 De Zwart and van Zanden, *The Origins of Globalization*, 40.

182 Ivi, 41.

The centre of tea trade for European imports was no longer Macao – where Portuguese first secured their presence – but it was the Chinese port city of Canton.

Coffee has a significantly different story because, as it was anticipated above, its production was developed in different parts of the globe, besides its origin area. The British kept importing it from Mocha, however Dutch and French were able to start their own cultivations in their respective colonies. In fact, “VOC coffee imports increased from 30 tons annually in the closing decades of the seventeenth century to 2,000 tons in the 1770s and 1780s.”<sup>183</sup> It is from the Americas, however, that the VOC carried out its most substantial import. More specifically the Dutch imported from their colony in Surinam “over 5,000 tons in the second half of the eighteenth century.”<sup>184</sup> The new production sites of coffee which were instituted by European colonizers, did not limit to Java and Réunion but extended to the Atlantic coast of Central and South America, where the British, but mainly the Dutch and French West Indies colonial territories laid. Surinam, Saint Domingue – modern day Haiti –, Jamaica and Brazil, among others, contributed greatly to the overall global production of coffee, probably even in more significantly great quantities of the Mocha and Java markets.

Such an exponential growth of production and import was possible mainly because of a reliability over extensive plantation systems of culture and the employment of exorbitant numbers of slaves, both the few locals who survived the arrival of Europeans and their diseases and imported slaves from Africa. Slavery was a resource used both in the “East Indies” and of course across the Atlantic, as the plantation economy was started and developed to provide for intensive and cheap production of cash crops. It was explained in previous pages how slavery was widely exploited for the spice trade, particularly in the Dutch territories of Indonesia where the VOC controlled the production and trade of pepper and fine spices. In the Americas the ever growing demand of coffee from the insatiable European market pushed investors and merchants to start new sites of cultivation and therefore set up new plantations. This subject is covered in a recent work by researcher Tamira Combrink, who draws a link between slave-based production of coffee in the French and particularly Dutch West Indies and the exponential growth of coffee import and consumption in Europe. More specifically,

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<sup>183</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>184</sup> *Ibid.*

she points at a causal link between the expansion of slave-produced coffee with the expansion of the VOC to a German market of consumption and writes that since the late 1750s, “The years of West Indian coffee production expansion coincided with a substantial expansion in the volume of Dutch Rhine trade”<sup>185</sup>. She continues by addressing the key importance of cheap labour provided by slaves to the Dutch trade value and argues how “leaving out the Javanese coffee that was based primarily on tributary labour exploitation and not chattel slavery, slave-based coffee represented 7.5% of Dutch trade value”, meaning that “Atlantic slavery – especially the coffee-with-sugar complex – played an important part in the trade-based growth of the Dutch economy in this period.”<sup>186</sup> The author provides an explanation to the increased coffee consumption and production by noting that it “became a booming business from the 1750s until the Haitian revolution.”<sup>187</sup>

In other words, production of coffee was recognized as an expanding market where investors were willing to dedicate their financial resources because of a guaranteed profit: theoretically, in fact, a high demand of a given good causes prices for that same goods to stay high therefore constituting a margin for profit. On the other hand, slavery was a cheap source of workforce and moreover it was, at this point, a widely used and secure system of production, for sure more profitable than the high prices imposed by Mocha. The scholar concludes by stating that “the history of the slave-based coffee production in Surinam and Saint Domingue was pivotal in starting the mass consumption of coffee in Europe.”<sup>188</sup> And lastly,

“Planters in the West Indies, fuelled by merchant capital from Europe, entered the coffee market, made it competitive one and sought profit in its expansion, producing more and more coffee for more and more consumers.”<sup>189</sup>

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185 Tamira Combrink, “Slave-based coffee in the eighteenth century and the role of the Dutch in global commodity chains,” *Slavery & Abolition* 42, no. 1 (February 2021): 24, <https://doi.org/10.1080/0144039X.2020.1860465>.

186 Ivi, 29.

187 Ivi, 30.

188 Ivi, 31.

189 Ivi, 32.

There is little doubt remaining on the fact that coffee and the history of its trade and consumption perfectly integrates in the process of soft globalization outlined in the first chapter: it started off as an exotic novelty only accessible to rich elites and wealthy classes, then it progressively took root on the European market and by the time of half a century became a product of mass consumption while coffee-drinking spread widely both in the big cities and in rural areas of continental Europe.

Chocolate production dynamics were not much different from those of coffee: this exotic substance was too cultivated in the New World, in plantations owned by European settlers but worked by enslaved people both from local communities and from the African continent across the Atlantic. Professor Timothy Walker studied the development of a production site of cacao in the Brazilian territories of Portugal and agrees on the centrality of European demand for coffee and chocolate, among other colonial goods, in the growth and magnitude of the slave trade across the Atlantic<sup>190</sup>. The author explains the evolution of cacao production throughout Portuguese settlers presence in Brazil: initially, Jesuits missionaries directed a small-scale production enterprise based on the gathering of cacao fruits from wild trees in the Amazonian forest by hands of the local population – who was experienced in picking the perfectly ripe fruits. Later on, during the seventeenth century, Portuguese authorities started to create organized plantations, which would constitute a more efficient system of production<sup>191</sup>. Cacao plantations were instituted as soon as 1665, when – Walker argues – cacao was for the first time obtained by an organized plantation set up in Bahia, and not gathered from the wild. After that successful experience, more cacao plantations were organized later in the century in other locations such as Grão Pará (in 1678) by a royal order and Maranhão, therefore provoking an enormous expansion of production, destined in large part to the European market<sup>192</sup>.

In his work, the scholar underlines several times how cacao production in Portuguese Brazil was heavily based on slavery and the workforce provided by exploited and indentured labour, mainly Indigenous local people and imported African

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190 Timothy Walker, “Slave Labor and Chocolate in Brazil: The Culture of Cacao Plantations in Amazonia and Bahia (17th-19th Centuries),” *Food and Foodways* 15, no. 1 (June 2007): 77.

191 Ivi, 83-4.

192 Ivi, 88

slaves. Both when cacao pods was gathered from wild trees in the Amazonian forest by Jesuit demand and when organized plantations were set up by royal demand, Europeans settlers made extensive use of cheap labour provided by the categories of workers described above. The author goes as far as describing Salvador da Bahia as “one of the top slave receiving ports of all time”<sup>193</sup> since “between a quarter and one third of Brazil’s total intake of foreign slaves, and nearly ten percent of the volume of the whole trans-Atlantic slave trade”<sup>194</sup> passed through the Bay of all Saints (where Salvador da Bahia was). This is yet another instance proving the extensive impacts caused by slavery and exploitation of enslaved people perpetrated by European colonizers in favour of European economy and society over the seventeenth and eighteenth century which did not end before the twentieth century.

However, the repercussions of colonial substances – like tea, chocolate and coffee – commodification do not limit to a global level but, as it will be showed, but extend to the local level, in particular to European standards of living, habits and consumption, leisure activities and literature production, among other aspects. First of all, it can be useful to observe how these new exotic substances were initially received by European medicine experts who were knowing them for the first time, since coffee, tea and chocolate were first regarded in Europe as medicinal ingredients. Matthee notes how the historical period were undergoing a transition from a outdated approach to one more “scientific”, based on experimentation:

Modern botany emerged from a commingling of the medieval herbal tradition, a new interest in the classics, and the influx of living samples of new plants and exotic crops, all of which gave rise to the systematic analysis and classification of plants.<sup>195</sup>

It appears, therefore, that the first encounters between European societies and the new colonial goods coincided with a wave of study and analysis of these goods, which reflects into contemporary literature. It was already cited for spices the work made by

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193 Ivi, 81.

194 *Ibid.*

195 Matthee, “Exotic Substances,” 29.

Flaumenhaft and Flaumenhaft, which contains also a mention of tea, which was spreading and becoming better known in the Dutch Republic during the seventeenth century. They report that a first European description of the plant arrived in 1623 and several indications on how to prepare, store and consume the beverage were spread in French literature of the time. Tea was also prescribed or suggested to a wide variety of ailments such as “stomach and bowel problems, insomnia, headache, fever and catarrh.”<sup>196</sup>

Professor and historian Alix Cooper also tackles the reception of the new exotic plants and their potential use in Europe by presenting the debate between the indigenous and the exotic. This debate, ensued in the community of physicians, opposed the enthusiasm – or at least acceptance – for new stimulants from the New World and in general global goods to a fear and distrust to any plant or good which was non-local. This latter party in the debate questioned the usefulness and safeness of exotic goods with respect to the indigenous, namely local products. Such a debate was followed by a backlash wave of those embracing a conservative approach who “began to issue appeals for the renewed study of ‘indigenous’ European nature.”<sup>197</sup> As a result, “the earliest explicitly local floras, or plants catalogues of a given area, began to be published in Europe, [...] where opinion tended to be especially suspicious of exotics.”<sup>198</sup> Lastly, the scholar notes how the first catalogues drafted in time would become more elaborate and extensive inventories which in turn would become important starting points for “modern environmental survey”<sup>199</sup>. She concludes on this subject by arguing that “The debate between the indigenous and the exotic would thus have considerable implications for the development of the environmental sciences.”<sup>200</sup>

By the results of Cooper’s resource, it appears that not only the arrival in Europe of exotic substances among which we find coffee, chocolate and tea sparked a wave of scientific curiosity which resulted in descriptions, analyses and accounts about flora, fauna and local populations’ lifestyles; but at the same time European physicians, who

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196 Flaumenhaft and Mrs Flaumenhaft, “Asian Medicinal Plants,” 154.

197 Alix Cooper, “The Indigenous versus the Exotic: debating natural origins in early modern Europe,” *Landscape Research* 28, no. 1 (August 2010): 53, <https://doi.org/10.1080/01426390306533>.

198 *Ibid.*

199 *Ibid.*

200 *Ibid.*

did not approve of the extensive consumption and use of those, were starting an opposing phenomenon of study and analysis of the indigenous, or local fauna.

Despite the various critiques accompanying the arrival of the caffeinated beverages, which came not only from upset physicians but also from concerned rulers and from indignant clergymen, their popularization was nothing but slightly delayed by them. Borrowing again from Matthee's work, we can see the common controversy surrounding coffee, chocolate and tea's consumption and the numerous bans that were imposed by different nations in and out of Europe. In agreement with Faroqhi, Matthee mentions for example disincentives on coffee imposed in the Ottoman Empire in the sixteenth century by Emperor Murad IV. Another reason to fear the fast ascent of these new colonial beverages for local rulers and monarch was the fact that their appearance on the market threatened the primacy of traditional drinks like beer, especially in Northern Prussia<sup>201</sup>.

The growing public consumption of coffee in seventeenth-century England worried King Charles II and his officials so much that he decided to suppress coffeehouses, which were considered "hotbeds of sedition and [the King's officials] watched their proliferation with suspicion."<sup>202</sup> Nevertheless, after the order of closing coffeehouses, the reaction from coffee-thirsted consumers was as follows: "Within ten days the measure had to be repealed over a storm of popular protest."<sup>203</sup> As occurred in many other instances, the European liking of exotic beverages was already rooted, too much to be eradicated so suddenly. It is for this reason that the future tendency was that of taxation instead of closing and banning, so that a disincentive was created which could meanwhile collect a revenue from the high levels of consumption<sup>204</sup>.

Researcher John Jordan reports data concerning tea and coffee consumption in the Swiss city of Bern and he also mentions how during the seventeenth century many bans were ordered on coffeehouses throughout Switzerland. Although the official presence of closing orders and bans, unofficially "the coffeehouses continued to operate, and the

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201 Matthee, "Exotic Substances," 35.

202 Ivi, 36.

203 *Ibid.*

204 Matthee, "Exotic Substances".

bans appear to have been neither very effective nor well adhered to.”<sup>205</sup> In general, in the case of Swiss big cities and Bern specifically “there were few options for the public consumption of tea and coffee to the local populace” and therefore “if one wanted to regularly partake in the consumption of these global goods, one had to do it domestically.”<sup>206</sup>

Despite the case presented by Jordan might suggest that public consumption in coffeehouses, pubs and taverns was under threat and not common, many scholars cited above report an exponential growth of these public locales, mainly in the big European capitals such as Paris, London, Vienna and others. According to Antinucci, in London there was 82 coffeehouses in 1663, number which would increase to several hundreds at the end of the century<sup>207</sup>. Moreover he underlines the velocity at which these public spaces were appearing at: “in the early seventeenth century London, coffeehouses could be counted not any more in the tens but in the hundreds and the same was true for Paris.” [my translation]<sup>208</sup> The phenomenon of coffeehouses diffusion is more than just the fact that many of these shops were opened in great numbers throughout European main cities, as this pattern brings with it, or better reflects, the raise of the new social class of European bourgeoisie with their new rituals of socialization. Cafés and coffeehouses quickly became centres of aggregation for gentlemen of middle to high social extraction were they could meet and conduct business or even just conversation with their peers, as if they were to attend to an exclusive club at the price of a cup of coffee, tea or chocolate. Antinucci explains that, particularly in London, coffeehouses quickly developed as reference point to poets and philosophers (in the second half of the seventeenth century it was Will’s Coffee House), businessmen and merchants who were regulars at Lloyd’s and Johnatan’s and even science experts and enthusiasts who could debate about any field of science at Grecian Coffee House<sup>209</sup>.

Since the beginning of the eighteenth century tea, coffee, and chocolate became progressively more and more popular and consumed in Europe both domestically and in

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205 John Jordan, “Global goods away from global trading points? Tea and coffee in early modern Bern,” *History of Retailing and Consumption* 4, no. 3 (December 2018): 219, <https://doi.org/10.1080/2373518X.2018.1549401>.

206 Ivi, 219.

207 Antinucci, *Spezie*, 135.

208 *Ibid.*

209 Ivi, 135-8.



public shops, their spread was encouraged by an insatiable demand and favourable economic conditions in their production and shipping. It should come with no surprise, therefore, the presence in contemporary novels and literature of these exotic substances which, although surrounded by an initial climate of scepticism and controversies made their way to the status of goods of mass consumption. For example, the colonial beverages appear in the description of Japan, Philippines and Moluccas already cited in previous pages where it can be read:

Their [i. e. the Moluccas muslim inhabitants] ordinary beverage is Water; otherwise they seldom drink Tea, Coffee, Chocolate, which is brought to them by Spanish of *Philippines* Islands.<sup>210</sup> [my translation]

It is worth mentioning again that the contents of this account might not be completely accurate but the mere fact that exotic beverages appear in the document can testify the level of popularity they already enjoyed in the mid-eighteenth century.

Another instance of literary work providing an insight on the relevance of tea and coffee in everyday life is the classic novel by Jane Austen *Pride and Prejudice*, which depicts realistic stories of middle-class and wealthy British families between late eighteenth to early nineteenth century. The novel was published in 1813 and contains in its pages thirteen mentions to tea, coffee and the activity of drinking the two beverages: the word coffee appears seven times throughout the work while tea is mentioned twelve<sup>211</sup>. It is true that such a recount neglects poorer strata of society however fully comprehend the middle class members who, as testified in the story, could indulge in tea- or coffee-drinking as much as they wished.

Lastly, a mention of chocolate can be found in Jeanne-Marie Leprince de Beaumont's version of *The Beauty and the Beast*, which dates back to 1756. The author does not make clear if the chocolate is in the beverage form or solid, however the context of consumption is breakfast at a luxurious castle<sup>212</sup>. Since the source is a fairy

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<sup>210</sup> *Del Giappone*, 302-3.

<sup>211</sup> Jane Austen, *Pride and Prejudice* (London: HarperCollinsPublishers, 2013).

<sup>212</sup> Jeanne-Marie Leprince de Beaumont, *La Bella e la Bestia*, trans. Carlo Collodi (Roma: Carlo Gallucci editore, 2014).

tale, it does not allow a comparison with reality of chocolate consumption but again, it testifies the capillarity of diffusion of these colonial goods which would become part of the everyday life of more and more consumers in the following centuries.

## *Conclusion*

Soft globalization manifested in different ways during the early modern period, a time which witnessed the Age of Discovery, the rise of Europe as a global conqueror and paved the way to the Industrial Revolution. The spice trade, which until the late Middle Ages knew only the Mediterranean and Levant routes, was now carried out along the African continent and across the Indian Ocean, a sea lane addressed as the Cape route. This luxury goods, in fact, and even more their demand and thirst from European consumers would push the early explorers to sail the Atlantic from Iberia to reach and claim African coasts and the New World for themselves. Along their way, Portuguese and Spanish explorers would secure territories for their monarchs and exploit the natural resources and riches of these new lands. However, they did not play the role of pure takers, as they unconsciously turned out to be vectors of diseases, plants and animals which travelled on the ships as well. Europeans participated in commercial exchanges with the local communities and diffused their own goods, religion and knowledge in every new land they visited, since the religious dimension of colonization was extremely important, especially for Christian nations. In this way, while looking for easy access to the Asian markets supplying pepper and spices, Europeans settled in Northern, Central and South America but also along the coasts of the Indian Ocean, Indonesian archipelago included, where they set their headquarters for commerce and political control. Their permanent presence affected of course also the labour markets of local kingdoms and communities, paving the way to the phenomenon called the Great Divergence.

Starting in the middle of the seventeenth century the spice trade was finally surpassed – but not extinguished – by other goods which would accompany the progression of this soft globalization: tea, coffee and chocolate became the colonial goods accountable for a big part of the Slave Trade across the Atlantic Ocean and responsible, with sugar and tobacco to an exponential growth and expansion of the

plantation economy. This economic system of production, in turn, caused immense reduction of fauna and flora around global European colonies – if it was not already caused by settlers’ hobby of hunting – and plantations were the graveyard of a unimaginable number of human lives captured in their homes and exploited beyond their limits.

Considering the bigger picture, these instances of interaction did indeed “deeply and permanently linked”<sup>213</sup> continents of the globe one to another.

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213 Flynn and Giráldez, “Born again,” 360.

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