
Dossiê: A história das mercadorias no mundo pré-industrial:
potencialidades e limites de uma abordagem

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***Fetishizing the Past to Imagine the Present:
Mesoamerican Chocolate and Pulque in the World***

**Fetichizando o Passado para Imaginar o Presente:
O chocolate e o pulque mesoamericanos no mundo**

***Fetichizar el pasado para imaginar el presente:
El chocolate y el pulque mesoamericanos en el mundo***

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ABSTRACT: This article focuses on Spanish colonialism in Mexico to compare the way that the Mesoamerican beverages chocolate and pulque have been fetishized in the modern global world. While global consumers have seen both beverages as powerful substances with magical properties, they have fetishized them differently. Chocolate has undergone the process of commodity fetishism, alienated from its Mesoamerican origins and the labor that produces it. Pulque has become an ethnic fetish, connected to an idea of the Mexican past rather than the present. Both commodity fetishization and ethnic fetishization began in the colonial period and serve capitalist ends by making their products appeal to consumers while alienating the creators and producers of these goods.

Keywords: Mexico. Colonial. Capitalism. Chocolate. Pulque

RESUMO: Este artigo se concentra no colonialismo espanhol no México para comparar a forma como as bebidas mesoamericanas chocolate e pulque foram festejadas no mundo global moderno. Embora os consumidores globais tenham visto ambas as bebidas como substâncias poderosas com propriedades mágicas, eles as fetichizaram de forma diferente. O chocolate passou pelo processo de fetichismo da mercadoria, alienado de suas origens mesoamericanas e do trabalho que o produz. O pulque se tornou um fetiche étnico, ligado a uma ideia do passado mexicano e não do presente. Tanto a fetichização de mercadorias quanto a fetichização étnica começaram no período colonial

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e atendem aos objetivos capitalistas, tornando seus produtos atraentes para os consumidores e, ao mesmo tempo, alienando os criadores e produtores dessas mercadorias

Palavras-chave: México. Colonial. Capitalismo. Chocolate. Pulque

RESUMEN: Este artículo investiga el colonialismo español en México para comparar la forma en que las bebidas mesoamericanas, el chocolate y el pulque, han sido convertidas en fetiches en el mundo global moderno. Los consumidores globales han visto ambas bebidas como sustancias poderosas con propiedades mágicas, pero las han fetichizado de manera diferente. El chocolate ha pasado por el proceso de fetichismo de la mercancía, alienado de sus orígenes mesoamericanos y del trabajo que lo produce. El pulque se ha convertido en un fetiche étnico, vinculado a una idea del pasado mexicano más que del presente. Tanto la fetichización de las mercancías como la fetichización étnica comenzaron en el período colonial y sirven a los fines capitalistas al hacer que sus productos atraigan a los consumidores mientras alienan a los creadores y productores de estos bienes.

Palabras clave: México. Colonial. Capitalismo. Chocolate. Pulque

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The Mesoamerican beverages chocolate and pulque have satisfied consumers' appetites for thousands of years.¹ Chocolate and pulque have also powerfully captured the imaginations of these consumers through their flavors, textures, physical effects, and symbolic meanings. This article investigates how consumers have described and imagined these beverages, and the role that colonialism has played in this process. Chocolate and pulque share similarities: both are processed beverages that have physical effects on the human body; chocolate as a stimulant, pulque as an inebriant. Both are native to Mesoamerica. Both are the result of extensive Mesoamerican innovation and development. Both have been exchanged and commodified for millennia, and both continue to be consumed today. Yet despite these similarities, the paths of chocolate and pulque have diverged markedly in the centuries since Spain colonized Mexico and these beverages entered the capitalist market. This article argues that, while both chocolate and pulque have been fetishized, seen as powerful substances with magical properties, they have been fetishized differently.

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Chocolate has undergone the process of commodity fetishism, alienated from its Mesoamerican origins and the labor that produces it. Pulque has become an ethnic fetish, connected to an idea of the Mexican past rather than the present. Both outcomes are linked to colonialism and capitalism.

Chocolate is globally ubiquitous; Africa is the main growing region for cacao beans today but processed chocolate, both beverage and candy, is produced all over the world. Because chocolate is so widely consumed, most chocolate devotees do not associate chocolate with Mesoamerica and Mesoamericans, nor do they think of chocolate as a beverage, instead associating it with the candy developed in Europe in the mid nineteenth century. If any countries are strongly identified with chocolate, they are European countries like Switzerland and Belgium which have a reputation for producing high quality chocolate. The modern history of pulque is very different from that of chocolate. Pulque is a mildly alcoholic beverage fermented from the sap of the maguey plant, a type of agave in the same family as those used to make tequila, and Mesoamericans have consumed pulque for millennia. Pulque remained popular in Mexico, especially among Indigenous and working-class groups, until the 1920s when government officials encouraged policies meant to replace the beverage with beer, which they saw as more modern and hygienic than pulque. (Gaytán 2014; Wright 2009). In the twenty-first century pulque has become popular again in Mexico. Mexican and international consumers and marketers characterize pulque as quintessentially Mexican and celebrate the drink for its origins in the distant, pre-conquest, past. Thus, while chocolate has been divorced from the idea of Mesoamerica, pulque has been linked to the region. This article begins by describing how chocolate and pulque are prepared and discusses the concepts of commodity fetishism and ethnic fetishization. Then we explore how these processes of fetishization began by looking at colonial ideologies surrounding these drinks. The conclusion offers some thoughts about how consumers understand these products today.

Production

Cacao comes from the *Theobroma cacao* L. tree, which first grew in South America and then spread to Mesoamerica where the beans were used to make chocolate. Cacao trees produce large pods containing beans surrounded by a fleshy pulp which is removed through fermentation. Producers then dry and roast the beans before grinding them to a powder. Consumers mix the powder with a liquid (water in Mesoamerica) to make the drink chocolate, called *cacua-tl* in the Nahuatl of central Mexico. Beginning long before the Spanish invasion Mesoamericans have served chocolate with flavorings such as achiote (also called annato), chile, and vanilla, and other ingredients including honey (and, after Spanish colonization, sugar), adding corn meal to make the drink *atole*. Mesoamerican consumers have blended and frothed chocolate with special pouring

techniques and with wooden tools. Like chocolate, pulque also requires significant processing. The mildly alcoholic drink is made from the agave plant, native to the Americas and more commonly known as maguey, a term especially used to refer to pulque agaves. The maguey is a succulent, with long thick spiky leaves growing out of a central base. When the plant flowers it produces a long stem which *tlachiqueros* (pulque harvesters) remove along with the leaves of the plant. They then scrape the heart of the plant, which eventually produces a sweet clear liquid called *aguamiel*. The aguamiel is fermented for 1-12 days depending on a variety of factors, resulting in a thick cloudy drink with 4-7% alcohol content. Flavorings like fruit and herbs are often added as well. Pulque must be consumed within a few days after fermentation is complete because it begins to spoil quickly, although beginning in the late twentieth century a few companies began to use preservatives and pasteurization to can and export pulque.

Fetishization

Karl Marx's concept of commodity fetishism provides a framework for understanding the place of chocolate and pulque in the modern global marketplace. According to Marx, when objects become commodities whose value is equated to money rather than use value or labor value they become fetishized: consumers see the commodity as a magical thing with an inherent value that is not derived from its utility or the labor that produced it. Instead, the commodity's value is expressed through its place in the market relative to other goods that are similarly seen as autonomous (Marx 1887, 26-101). Chocolate went through this process of commodity fetishism, with the result that global consumers see chocolate as a product with intrinsic worth deriving from its taste and appearance. Chocolate has also gained associations with childhood, love and romance, indulgence, and even recently health, as advertisers and others tout the antioxidant benefits of dark chocolate. Consumers generally enjoy chocolate without thinking of the intellectual or physical labor that produced it; Marcy Norton describes how chocolate became one "of the first commodity fetishes of the modern world" (Norton 2008, 12). Swiss chocolate manufacturer Lindt claims that "the chocolate that initially arrived in Europe was unrecognizable to the chocolate we know today; it was coarse and dry – it certainly did not melt in the mouth!" ("Explore the Innovation of Lindt" n.d.). This claim ignores the Mesoamerican origins and development of chocolate. The Belgian chocolate manufacturer Neuhaus emphasizes the Belgian lineage of their chocolate, writing that "the creation of our chocolates is carried out only in Belgium, in our atelier in Brussels," again making chocolate represent European innovation. ("About Us | Made in Belgium | Neuhaus Belgian Chocolate History" n.d.).

Pulque has not become a commodity fetish in the way Marx described. Rather than being alienated from its origins, pulque is strongly associated with Mexico both within the country and in the small international markets it occupies. Literature aimed at Spanish-speaking audiences emphasize the historical importance of pulque. A July 2020 article in Mexico's *La Prensa* introduces pulque as the "Ancient drink that they gave Quetzalcóatl to get drunk" clearly referencing the pre-colonial past with the mention of Quetzalcóatl, the Mesoamerican feathered serpent god that many Mesoamerican groups have venerated, including but not limited to the Nahua leaders of the fifteenth and early sixteenth-century Aztec empire. The *La Prensa* article bring the discussion up to the present, however, with anthropologist Jaime Cabrera reporting that, although pulque production has declined, it is still sold in bars in Mexico City, and directly by producers, "where several generations have extensive knowledge on how to handle this product" ("Repleto de Nutrientes, Curados de Pulque, Un Dulce Tormento" July 18 2020). Thus within Mexico pulque is clearly associated with Mexico, Indigenous history, and rural producers. The Mexican company Pulque Penca Larga advertises its product to Spanish and English-speaking audiences as "an icon of Mexico," and with the commonly-used descriptor "drink of the Gods," explaining that "pulque is the blood of Mexico." ("Quienes Somos - Penca Larga" n.d.). Outside of Mexico pulque is just as identified with Mexico but the connection to Mexican history tends to be flattened into an Aztec past.² An English language article about "pulque's comeback" in Mexico City explains that "pulque ... dates back to when the Aztecs and their gods ruled the roost. Consequently, the milky white substance is known in Mexico as the drink of the gods" (Lee 2015). Producers and consumers always describe pulque in relation to Mexico, and usually in relation to the pre-contact imperial past, particularly the Mexica-led Aztec empire that ruled central Mexico when the Spanish invaded.³

Thus advertisers and consumers have not fetishized pulque in the way that they have fetishized chocolate. If anything, pulque seems to challenge the idea of Marx's commodity fetish – this is a commodity whose value is derived precisely from its identification with a place, Mexico, and a people, Mexicans. Instead of becoming a commodity fetish, pulque has become an ethnic fetish, as devotees inside and outside of Mexico see the drink as representing an essential Mexicanness that is tied up in ideas about the Indigenous past. The pre-colonial central Mexican

² The Aztec Empire was made up of three central Mexican city-states that conquered large parts of what is today Mexico; the ethnic group is Nahua, but when people talk about pulque they often reference the Aztecs as if it is an ethnic group rather than the name for a political confederation.

³ Tequila, distilled from maguey, represents an interesting comparative example. Unlike pulque, tequila has become a global commodity: while tequila must be produced in Jalisco, many brands are owned by U.S.-based companies. Mexican companies seem to be focusing on other kinds of mezcal (tequila is a form of mezcal). Yet tequila remains associated with Mexico, with many U.S.-owned tequilas touting names like "Don Julio," and "Casamigos." Thus, while tequila is a global commodity it represents a kind of ethnic fetishization.

Aztec empire, rather than the modern Indigenous population of Mexico, is often the touchstone in advertisements and discussions about pulque, particularly those aimed at foreign audiences, even though almost 20% of Mexico's population identifies as indigenous and includes 68 different Indigenous groups ("En El País, 25 Millones de Personas Se Reconocen Como Indígenas: INALI" n.d.). Celebrating the imperial past can obscure the present.

Before Spanish colonization

Chocolate and pulque have had religious, social, and economic importance in Mesoamerica for millennia. Before colonization many Mesoamericans used cacao beans as currency and as a tribute good for imperial rulers. Indigenous Mesoamericans considered chocolate sacred, in part because its red-brown color and thick texture looked like blood and the blood sacrifices needed to placate the gods (McNeil 2006, 15). Elites often limited cacao consumption: according to one section of the sixteenth-century Florentine Codex only rulers or great warriors were allowed to drink chocolate, in part because it was rare and thus precious, although in another section the Franciscan friar Bernardino de Sahagún claimed that chocolate was given to servants during celebrations. Scholars have claimed that these limitations were probably ignored in areas where cacao was more abundant, however (McNeil 2006, 17-18).

Like cacao and chocolate, pulque was important in pre-colonial Mesoamerica (Corquera de la Mancera 1991, 11-14). The Nahuatl and other Mesoamericans used pulque as an offering to the gods (Boone 2007, 57). Mesoamericans also drank pulque as a ritual intoxicant and may have administered it to sacrificial victims to encourage compliance as they went to their deaths. The importance of pulque to the militaristic Mexica, leaders of the Aztec empire, is further indicated by the fact that it was often associated with warriors, a group of central importance to the conquering Mexica and their allies, and with agricultural and human fertility (Boone 2007, 62). As with cacao, pre-contact pulque consumption was limited in some areas; Aztec law restricted pulque consumption to nobility and religious authorities because its intoxicating qualities were seen as potentially dangerous. The numerous prohibitions against pulque consumption by commoners and young people, however, suggest that such rules were often violated, particularly on the frontiers of imperial domination (Taylor 1979, 28-30).

Colonial Rule and Commodification

The paths of chocolate and pulque began to diverge under Spanish colonialism and mercantile capitalism. At first Spaniards were not sure what to make of these beverages and they

debated the merits of both products (Norton 2008, 59; Bristol 2017, 131-132). It is in these sixteenth- and seventeenth-century discussions about religion, health, value, and money that we see colonial narratives emerging around chocolate and pulque. By the end of the sixteenth century Spaniards began exporting cacao to Spain and by the mid seventeenth century chocolate became part of elite European cultural practices. Spanish, French, and other Europeans learned to drink chocolate in the morning and in social occasions and to whip the chocolate into a foamy brew, just as Mesoamericans had (Norton 2008, 177). Pulque, however, was not exported to Europe, although it was commodified in the colony. Colonial Spaniards, Indigenous, and African-descent people drank pulque in Mexico, often in pulquerías, pulque bars that were popular gathering places. Both Spanish and Indigenous sellers made money from the sale of pulque; although Spaniards controlled pulque sales in Mexico City by the early eighteenth century, Indigenous sellers controlled the trade in Oaxaca through the late eighteenth century (Kicza 1980, 194-195). Colonial officials tried to regulate pulquerías to better tax and make money from the sale of pulque. They were also concerned about potential disorder arising in these establishments (Viquiera Albán, 1999, 44). Despite the wide market for pulque, however, colonial Mexicans of all groups often associated the drink with Indigenous Mesoamericans and their practices. This is discussed below.

There are material and ideological reasons to explain why chocolate became a global commodity and pulque did not. The material explanation is simple: pulque is hard to transport. It always exists in heavy liquid form and it is perishable. In contrast, the dried cacao beans used to make chocolate are long-lasting, durable, and relatively light. The Spanish Jesuit José de Acosta, writing about the cacao trade between Guatemala and central Mexico in the late sixteenth century, recognized this quality, writing “[cacao] is ... one of the richest and the greatest traffickes of New Spaine, for being a drie fruite, and [one] that keepes long without corruption, [and] they carry whole shippes loaden from the province of Guatimala” (Markham 2017, 211). This material explanation for the differences in commodification does not fully explain the trajectories of these drinks, however. These goods were fetishized differently because of the way that Native Mesoamericans and later Spaniards incorporated chocolate and pulque into their epistemologies as well as their diets.

Valuing Cacao and Chocolate

One reason that Spaniards commodified cacao and pulque differently is because they learned to value these substances from Native Mesoamericans. As Marcy Norton has shown, Indigenous Mesoamericans taught Spanish colonizers how to make and consume chocolate and tobacco. Europeans might not have understood the value of these products if Indigenous people

had not taught Spaniards how to think about these products as well as how to use them (Norton, 2008, 107-128). The same is true for pulque. We have already seen one reflection of the way that Indigenous Mesoamericans understood the different values of chocolate and pulque: while both were at times restricted, elites limited chocolate consumption because cacao was seen as precious. Pulque was restricted because of its potential dangers as an intoxicant. These pre-contact Indigenous ideas about the value and the nature of chocolate and pulque influenced the colonial ideas that followed.

Europeans understood immediately upon contact that Indigenous people valued the cacao from which chocolate was made. In 1502 Christopher Columbus captured a Maya merchant's canoe off the coast of Honduras; cacao beans were among the merchant's goods. Columbus's son wrote "They seemed to hold these almonds at a great price; for when they were brought on board ship together with their goods, I observed that when any of these almonds fell, they all stooped to pick it up, as if an eye had fallen" (Keen 1934, 232). Later Spanish chroniclers similarly noted how the Nahua, Maya, and others valued cacao as currency. When sixteenth-century Spanish chronicler (and fawning biographer of Cortés) López de Gómara described the abundance of the goods for sale in Mexican markets, including the huge number of fruits, he noted that "the most principal, that serves as money, are some like almonds, that they call cacauatl, and ours [call] cacao, like in the islands, Cuba, and Hayti." (López de Gómara 1554, 118). Sixteenth-century Franciscan friar Toribio de Motolinía noted that in New Spain "this cacao is food and drink, and currency [moneda] of this land." (Motolinía 2014, 184). The so-called anonymous conqueror discussed "cacao, that are some almonds that they use as currency [moneda], from which they make their brew [brebaje]" (Motolinía 2014, 463). In the late sixteenth century José de Acosta reported that "unto this day the custom continues amongst the Indians, as in the Provinces of Mexico, in steede of money they use cacao, which is a small fruit, and therewith buy what they will" (Markham 2017, 189). This seems like a precursor to commodity fetishism; even before Spanish invaders arrived the value of cacao was already defined in relation to other objects in the market place, rather than deriving solely from its labor or use value.⁴

Spaniards also noted how Indigenous people valued cacao as a tribute and trade good alongside other precious and important items. López de Gómara described how the Aztec emperor Moctezuma tried to appease Cortés before his arrival in Tenochtitlan by sending him a lavish gift

⁴ Kathryn Sampeck discusses what happens when the two money systems come into contact. She explains "the difference between the general form of value, which has money-like characteristics, vs. the money form of value." (Sampeck 2019, 539). The use of cacao here is a general form of value, in which the value of cacao is measured in relation to other goods rather than serving as a fungible representation of value.

of “ten gold plates, fifteen hundred cotton blankets, a large number of turkeys, bread, and cacao, and a certain wine that they made of those cacaos and centli [maize]” (López de Gómara 1554, 97). López de Gómara also reported that Moctezuma’s vassals sent him cacao as tribute, along with gold, silver, gems, and other food items, all things of value that represented their submission to the emperor (López de Gómara 1554, 111v). As a way of describing the wealth of Apoxpalón, the “most prosperous merchant” and ruler of Izancanac in Acalán, López de Gómara explained that Apoxpalon had been chosen because of his “huge trade in the land, of cotton, cacao, slaves, salt, [and] gold although little and mixed with copper and other things” (López de Gómara 1554, 257v). López de Gómara’s Spanish informants learned that cacao was economically valuable by seeing how Indigenous people valued it alongside other items that both Spaniards and Indigenous people valued. López de Gómara then publicized this value to his audience in Spain.

Spaniards also learned about other values of cacao from Mesoamericans, including its spiritual importance. In describing pre-contact rituals, which he saw as demonic, Franciscan friar Toribio de Motolinía described the lavish offerings that Mesoamericans made, writing “they bought many roses, and vials [cañutos] of perfume, cacao, which is another good brew [brebaje], and fruits” (Motolinía 2014, 41). Motolinía described how cacao remained a valuable offering to honor deceased ancestors under colonialism, noting that “in place of wine they give cacao” (Motolinía 2014, 75). Finally, Spaniards learned to appreciate the taste and experience of chocolate from Mesoamericans. López de Gómara described how “the best, most delicate and precious [cara] drink that they have is made of cacao flour and water. Sometimes they mix in honey, and flour of other legumes. This does not intoxicate but in contrast is very refreshing with heat and sweating” (López de Gómara 1554, 319). López de Gómara also described chocolate as a good drink for warriors because it was not inebriating (López de Gómara 1554, 312v). This praise of chocolate for its sobering rather than intoxicating qualities foreshadows the discussion of pulque, whose power to inebriate was not prized by Spaniards, particularly when the drinkers were Indigenous.

Pulque and Ethnic Fetishization

As with cacao and chocolate, Spaniards learned about the value and uses of pulque from Indigenous people. They learned about the drink’s ubiquity, with Bernal Diaz describing “maguey fields [magüeyales], that is what they make wine from” several times over the course of his description of the Spanish invaders’ march toward Tenochtitlan in 1519 (Díaz del Castillo 2011, 153, 205, 388). López de Gómara noted the popularity among the Nahuatl of “aguamiel, or their common wine” (López de Gómara 1554, 319v). The so-called Anonymous Conqueror, probably a member of Hernán Cortés’s forces, described “pulque, that is a wine that they drink,” and

“pulque, that they take as wine” (Motolinía 2104, 450, 461). Spaniards also learned that pulque could have both good and bad qualities from observing Indigenous consumption. Motolinía expressed his understanding of pulque’s multivalent qualities, writing “Before the wine is cooked with some roots that they put in it, it is clear and sweet like aguamiel. After cooking, it becomes sort of thick and smells bad, and those that get drunk with it, much worse” (Motolinía 2104, 34). Motolinía returned to this idea of purity and pollution, describing the process of harvesting the maguey juice by writing “This liquor then as it is taken from there is like honey water [aguamiel]: cooked and boiled on the fire, it makes a sweet wine, pure [limpio], which Spaniards drink and they say that it is very good and very substantial and healthy.” However, he went on to say that when it is “cooked in a jar like wine,” or fermented, and when “some roots that the Indians call ocpatlí” were added, it became stronger and led to drunkenness. Motolinía wrote “in their gentility the Indians used this wine to get very drunk, and to be more cruel and bestial. This wine has a bad odor, and worsens the breath [el aliento] of those who drink a lot of it; [although] in truth drunk moderately [templadamente] it is healthy and gives strength” (Motolinía 2104, 232). This double-sided approach, in which Motolinía acknowledged both good and bad values of pulque, reflects the pre-contact restrictions on pulque consumption discussed above, in which only certain people were allowed to drink pulque because of potential dangers.

While Spaniards celebrated the economic and spiritual value of cacao as well as its effects on the body, when Spaniards discussed pulque they focused more on its physical effects and potentially dangerous qualities. Their focus on the negative effects of pulque reflects ideas about indigeneity. It is clear that Spanish chroniclers associated pulque with Indigenous people. Despite the fact that many colonial residents drank pulque, including Spanish and African descent people, the drink was clearly linked to Indigenous people in the minds of Spaniards. The connection to indigeneity is obvious in the 1691 *Recopilacion de leyes de indias* which described the drink as “the beverage pulque, used by the Indians of New Spain,” warning that “the Indians of New Spain use a drink, called pulque, distilled from the maguey, plants that are very beneficial for many effects, and although [when pulque is] drunk with temperance it can be tolerated, because they are accustomed to it, many damages have occurred” (*Recopilación de Leyes de Los Reinos de Las Indias* 1973, 193). As others have shown, drinking and drunkenness were inextricably linked with ideas about Indians in the minds of Spaniards. This connection persisted long after the conquest and in places other than New Spain (Garrard-Burnett 2000; Earle 2014). This association of pulque with Indigenous people and the need to control its use helps explain why pulque did not become a commodity fetish; it was deeply rooted to a place and a people. This connection to indigeneity also begins to explain why pulque did become an ethnic fetish. When nineteenth and twentieth-century

Mexicans began to celebrate Mexico's Indigenous origins pulque became a symbol of Indigenous identity. The strong connection between indigeneity and pulque was strengthened and narrativized in the writings of Spanish colonizers.

European Context

Finally, we must look beyond Mesoamerica at the global context to understand the way chocolate and pulque became fetishized in such different ways. In the seventeenth century Europe was continuing the process, begun with the voyage of Vasco da Gama in 1498, of more directly integrating into the economy centered around the Indian Ocean, Middle East, and China. Europeans admired Asian culture and they eagerly consumed novel products from these regions, in part because they wanted to share in the sophistication of the Asian consumers of these products (Schivelbusch 1993, 8). In the mid seventeenth century when Europeans began importing coffee from the Middle East and tea from India and China, regular imports of chocolate had begun arriving just a few decades before, in the first half of the seventeenth century. The sugar that enhanced these drinks had been available in Europe for centuries but in the seventeenth century it was becoming more abundant and accessible due to colonial plantation production fueled by the labor of enslaved Africans. Thus seventeenth-century Europeans had increased access to new products that invigorated their palates and made them feel part of a global community oriented toward Asia and the Middle East.

That these new, bitter, hot, stimulating beverages were linked in the minds of Europeans is obvious in Philippe Dufour's 1671 French treatise, translated to English in 1685, *The manner of making of coffee, tea, and chocolate as it is used in most parts of Europe, Asia, Africa, and America, with their vertues* (Dufour 1685). Dufour collected three European-authored texts to provide a description of these newly arrived drinks "the use whereof has been but lately known amongst us, yet they become more famous every day ... by the frequent and dayly use we make of them, and with a success which is no less wonderful than profitable." (Dufour 1685, n.p.). The authors of the treatises on coffee and tea explicitly discuss the Asian origins of their subjects, writing of a "certain Bean of *Arabia* called *Bon*, whereof they make a Drink termed *Coffee*, which was heretofore in use amongst Arabians, and Egyptians; and which is now a dayes in very great request amongst the English, French, and Germanes" (Dufour 1685, 2-3). The treatise also offers suggestions on how to consume these drinks, describing how Turks and Arabs drank coffee in social settings: "they divert themselves in their Conversations, in publick Feasts or particular Recreations, sometimes the space of seven or eight hours" (Dufour 1685, 17). The author of the tea treatise similarly discusses how "The *Chinese* praise it wonderfully, and set a great value on the vertues and qualities of this drink,

for they use it Night and day, and present it as a great rarity to those they would regal” (Dufour 1685, 39). The sections of tea and coffee repeatedly emphasize their non-European origins and describe how and in what contexts Middle Easterners and Asians drank coffee and tea as if to instruct their European readers on the correct way to consume these beverages and how to think about them.

The treatise on chocolate included in Dufour’s text differs in significant ways from those on tea and coffee, however. As with the other treatises, the author discusses chocolate’s origins, describing how “*Chocolate* therefore, or *Chocolatl*, is an Indian word,” and explains how Indigenous Mesoamericans dissolved the cacao in water to make the chocolate beverages (Dufour 1685, 58). However, unlike the treatises on coffee and tea, the bulk of the chocolate treatise deals with the health value of chocolate and the way it influences the humors. Discussing the “fat parts” of chocolate and its effects on “the little Veins of the Liver,” the treatise advised moderation. In addition, “if he that takes thereof is bilious and subject to melancholly, instead of drinking it with common Water let him use therewith *Endive* water, ... but he that is troubled with the coldness of Liver, and full of obstructions shall take the same *Chocolate* with Water of *Rhubard*” (Dufour 1685, 112). Dufour’s treatise suggests that, although Europeans adopted chocolate as part of a complex of new drinks that were arriving in the seventeenth century, they understood chocolate in a different way than they understood coffee and tea. While Europeans wanted to share in Asian and Middle Eastern culture by drinking tea and coffee, they were not interested in sharing in what they saw as the inferior Indigenous culture of the Americas. Dufour’s book suggests that Europeans divorced the idea of chocolate from its Mesoamerica origins and that, while all three drinks went through processes of commodity fetishism, chocolate went through the process earlier. Norton describes how Europeans did not merely separate chocolate from its Mesoamerican origins but in fact claimed to civilize the beverage; this process erased Mesoamerican origins and produced commodity fetishism (Norton 2006, 686, 691). Pulque of course was not included in this new beverage complex. Even if it had been possible for Europeans to import pulque, there was no reason to do so: Europeans already had wine, and in fact they imported wine-making to the Americas. While Spaniards in the Americas drank pulque it did not replace wine.

Fetishisms today

In the end the two forms of fetishization work in similar ways: commodity fetishization discursively separated chocolate from Mesoamerican producers, so that it became unthinkable that aspects of European culture and economy could originate in Mesoamerica. Ethnic fetishization also served to discursively divorce indigenous Mexicans from the capitalist economy – while

Indigenous producers in fact participated in profit-making by selling pulque throughout the colonial period, Spanish chroniclers characterized pulque as something that was inextricably connected to Indigenous Mexicans and as such was backward, even diabolical, and outside of the realm of culture and commerce.

Within the past decades there have been changes in the way that chocolate is marketed that reveal the connections between commodity and ethnic fetishization. It has become popular for European and U.S. companies to advertise the origins of their chocolate, especially with reference to Mesoamerica. British company Green and Blacks, since 2005 a subsidiary of Cadbury, has a “Maya Gold” dark chocolate bar, described as “based on a traditional, spiced-chocolate drink from Belize, this rich, dark chocolate has a twist of orange, nutmeg, cinnamon and just a hint of vanilla” (“G&B Organic Maya Gold 90g Bar” n.d.). Of these flavors, only vanilla has American origins. Lake Champlain chocolates, a Vermont USA-based company advertises a “Spicy Aztec Organic Hot chocolate,” which invites consumers to “Discover the rich flavors of ancient Mexico!” These ancient Mexican flavors include Mesoamerican ancho and chipotle chilis as well as cinnamon, originally from Asia and imported by colonizers. (“Spicy Aztec Organic Hot Chocolate” n.d.). Godiva’s “Aztec Spice Truffle” is a “dark chocolate ganache flavored with cinnamon, vanilla, and exotic spices” (“Gourmet Dark Chocolate Truffles, 24 Pc. | GODIVA” n.d.).

This focus on Mesoamerican origins could be seen as an attempt to move away from commodity fetishism, in that companies are trying to turn the attention of consumers back to the Mesoamerican origins of chocolate and possibly toward innovators and producers in the global south. However, by referencing the fifteenth-century Aztec empire these products recall a remote imperial past, estranged from the consumer’s present with words like “exotic.” Perhaps the Maya Gold label is a reference to today’s Maya, but it is more likely that the advertisers are thinking of pre-contact Maya kingdoms. These companies seem to be engaging in the kind of ethnic fetishization observed in the marketing of pulque, in which chocolate production is romanticized with references to a hazy distant past. There are efforts to mitigate this effect; Neuhaus’s website has a section on “Honest Chocolate” which describes their cacao farm in Guayaquil Ecuador, efforts to improve working conditions for cacao producers, and efforts toward sustainability. Smaller fair-trade companies make these issues central to their message. For example, a Georgia USA-based “bean-to-bar” company called Xocolatl Chocolate emphasizes its work with Costa Rican chocolate producers (“Our Story Xocolatl Small Batch Chocolate” n.d.). More directly, Mexican non-profits such as Cacao Mexico work with growers to promote environmentally conservationist growing techniques and to ensure that Mexican growers, many of them in the Indigenous-identified state of Chiapas, are compensated fairly (“Cacao México” n.d.). Such

disparate for-profit and non-profit projects represent attempts to bridge the gap between labor and consumer and mitigate the effects of both commodity and ethnic fetishization.

Commodity fetishization and ethnic fetishization are closely related, perhaps different sides of the same coin, with roots in the colonial period. Consumers began to fetishize both chocolate and pulque when Mesoamerica was incorporated into the world capitalist system after Spanish colonization and these forms of fetishization function in similar ways to distance chocolate and pulque from their producers. Commodity fetishism distances cacao from its Mexican origins and its global south present; since cacao can only grow in within 20 degrees of the equator, it grows only in parts of Africa, South America, and Pacific Asia. Yet the companies that use cacao for chocolate are only beginning to reference its origins and the labor that produces it. Similarly, ethnic fetishization distances pulque from the Mexican present: when pulque is celebrated as an artifact of the distant past it is clouded with a romantic idea of Mexicanness that hides colonial and neo-colonial history as well as the stories of Indigenous people living in Mexico today. Thus both commodity fetishism and ethnic fetishism serve to present a carefully crafted narrative that makes their products more palatable to consumers and alienates the creators and producers of these goods.

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