

El Habano: The Global Luxury Smoke

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As civil liberties triumphed and political constitutions were guaranteed, the cigar came into ascendancy once more, coinciding with the advent of economic liberalism in Cuba, which threw the port of Havana open to all nations. And in this atmosphere of free industrial and commercial enterprise Havana tobacco, by the unanimous plebiscite of the world, was awarded the imperial scepter of the tobacco world. Havana tobacco from then on became the symbol of the triumphant capitalistic bourgeoisie. The nineteenth century was the era of the cigar.²

Cuban ethnographer Fernando Ortiz blazed new ground in the Cuba of 1940 with the publication of his seminal work on transculturation, by fashioning a Cuban *contrapunteo* (counterpoint) out of Cuba's two major commodities: tobacco and sugar, encapsulated in the proud cigar band versus the lowly sugar sack. He used tobacco and sugar as metaphorical constructs, highlighting the fetish power of the commodities and a counter-fetish interpretation that challenged essentialist understandings of Cuban history.

The fetishism and counter-fetishism are of particular significance when it comes to understanding the history of the Cuban cigar, which in Spanish came to be called simply *un tabaco* (a tobacco), *un puro* (pure in that it was made wholly with Cuban leaf), or *un habano* (a Havana, by virtue of the port city through which it made its entrée into the world). For Ortiz, tobacco and the cigar most 'transcultured' and most came to symbolise Cuba and Cubans' quest for freedom, independence and national sovereignty. By the same token, both lay at the heart of un-freedoms, dependence, and a highly contested island/offshore history, one that took on new dimensions with the nineteenth-century meteoric rise of *El Habano* (the Havana) as the world's luxury smoke, competing with pipe and ousting snuff.

The lifting of the Spanish monopoly on Cuban tobacco in 1817 heralded the Havana cigar's coming of age. Nineteenth-century Spanish, German, British, French and US capital backed the vertiginous expansion of cigar manufacturing for export in Havana and palatial Havana cigar factories,³ and the Havana conquered European and North American markets. It became de rigueur in the male entrepreneurial world of the rapidly growing industrial, trading and financial conurbations of London, Amsterdam, Bremen, Hamburg, Madrid, Paris, Lisbon and New York. With its fine taste and aroma, and its smoke assuaging the senses, it was one

¹ For the ideas expressed here I am indebted to my colleagues in the Commodities of Empire British Academy Research Project, and sister collaborative projects Plants, People and Work (International Institute of Social History, Amsterdam) and Global Commodity Chains (University of Konstanz). My research has been facilitated by many other colleagues and institutions, more recently the Center for Latin American Studies, University of Florida, where I spent the 2011 Spring Semester as the Bacardi Visiting Scholar. My special thanks go to Karin Hofmeester and Bernd-Stefan Grewe for facilitating my participation in the 2010 and 2011 commodity-chain workshops in Konstanz and encouraging me to frame my work on the Havana cigar in the context of luxury commodities.

² Fernando Ortiz, *Cuban Counterpoint: Tobacco and Sugar*, Durham and London: Duke University Press, 1995 [1940], p.309.

³ As beautifully illustrated in Adriano Martínez Rius, *The Great Habano Factories*, Select Publications, 2005. See also Carlos Venegas Fornias, 'La Habana: ¿ciudad industrial?', *Catauro*, 7, 12 (2005), a special issue of the journal published by the Fundación Fernando Ortiz, which was given over to tobacco.

of life's pleasurable luxuries that sent out a message of wealth, power and distinction across the world.

Its beginnings, however, were far different; and what follows explores how the Havana came to establish itself at a later and not earlier stage in life as the coveted luxury smoke, doing so amidst moral and mythical discourses, ranging from bodily and spiritual uplift to harbinger of death. It first traces cigar 'pre-history': the social life and discourse, changing values and meanings, surrounding tobacco and the cigar, which was but one of the forms in which tobacco was consumed, as their materiality was forged in a global commodity chain.⁴ It then enters the nineteenth-century 'golden age' of the Havana and its aggrandised, mythicised and contested history. It ends with how this luxury handcrafted smoke, whose *non plus ultra* was El Habano, made a comeback in the fiercely competitive, highly mechanised and ultimately proscribed world of tobacco.

The analysis draws on a range of sources, which include my own work and that of Cuban scholars and writers, as well as academic and popular histories of tobacco⁵ and the glossy publications on the Havana cigar that proliferated in recent years.⁶ It thus 'smokes' its

⁴ Classics linking materiality and regimes of value remain Arjun Appadurai (ed.), *The Social Life of Things: Commodities in Cultural Perspective*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1986 and *Modernity at Large: Cultural Dimensions of Globalization*, Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1996; and Gary Gereffi & Miguel Korzeniewicz (eds), *Commodity Chains and Global Capitalism*, Westport: Praeger, 1994, which includes Terence Hopkins & Immanuel Wallerstein, 'Commodity Chains: Construct and Research'. See also Daniel Miller, 'Consumption and Commodities', *Annual Review of Anthropology*, 24 (1995); James G. Carrier and Josiah McC. Heyman, 'Consumption and Political Economy', *Journal of the Royal Anthropological Institute* 3:2 (1997); Mark Tungate, *Luxury World: The Past, Present and Future of Luxury Brands*, London and Philadelphia: Kogan Page, 2009; Maxine Berg & Elizabeth Eger (eds), *Luxury in the Eighteenth Century: Debates, Desires and Delectable Goods*, Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2003; and Christopher J. Berry, *The Idea of Luxury: A Conceptual and Historical Investigation*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994.

⁵ Stubbs, *Tobacco on the Periphery: A Case Study in Cuban Labour History, 1860-1958*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1985; 'Havana Cigars and the West's Imagination', in Sander L. Gilman and Zhou Xun (eds), *Smoke: A Global History of Smoking*, London: Reaktion Press, 2004; and 'El Habano and the World It Has Shaped: Cuba, Connecticut and Indonesia', *Cuban Studies*, 41 (2010). Cuban 'classics' are those by José Rivero Muñiz (*Tabaco: su historia en Cuba*, Havana: Instituto de Historia, 1965) and Gaspar Jorge García Galló (*El tabaquero cubano: psicología de las profesiones*, Havana, 1936; *El tabaquero cubano: psicología de las profesiones*, Havana, 1936 and, with Wilfredo Correa García, *The Story of Havana Cigars*, Havana: Editorial José Martí, 2001). A cultural studies approach can be found in Reynaldo González, *El Bello Habano: Biografía íntima del tabaco*, Havana: Editorial Letras Cubanas, 2004, akin to the earlier Guillermo Cabrera Infante, *Holy Smoke: A Literary Romp Through the History of the Cigar*, London: Faber and Faber, 1985. Examples of more general studies are Sander L. Gilman and Zhou Xun (eds), *Smoke: A Global History of Smoking*, London: Reaktion Books, 2004; Iain Gately, *Tobacco: A Cultural History of How an Exotic Plant Seduced Civilization*, New York: Grove Press, 2002; Jordan Goodman, *Tobacco in History: The Cultures of Dependence*, London: Routledge, 1993; and V. G. Kiernan, *Tobacco: A History*, London: Hutchinson Radius, 1991. See also Wolfgang Schivelbusch, *Tastes of Paradise: A Social History of Spices, Stimulants, and Intoxicants*, New York: Vintage, 1993 [1980] and James Walvin, *Fruits of Empire: Exotic Produce and Western Taste*, New York: New York University Press and Palgrave Macmillan, 1997.

⁶ The early 1990s saw the New York launch of the glossy magazine *Cigar Aficionado*, which was instrumental in engineering the 1990s cigar revival, and the late 1990s saw the publication of a spate of coffee table books by both Cuban and non-Cuban authors. These included Antonio Nuñez Jiménez, *The Journey of the Havana Cigar*, Neptune City: T. F. H. Publications, 1996 [1988]; Père & Fils Gerard, *Havana Cigars*, Edison: Wellfleet Press 1997 [1995]; Eric Deschodt & Philippe Morane, *The Cigar*, Cologne: Könemann Verlagsgesellschaft mbH, 1998 [1996]; Enzo A. Infante Urivazo, *Havana Cigars 1817-1960*, Neptune City: T. F. H. Publications, 1997; Eumelio Espino Marrero, *Cuban Cigar Tobacco: Why Cuban Cigars are the World's Best*, Neptune City: T.F.H. Publications, 1997; Charles del Todesco, *The Havana Cigar: Cuba's Finest*, New York, London, Paris: Abbeville Press Publishers, 1997; Nancy Stout, *Habanos: The Story of the Havana Cigar*, New York: Rizzoli, 1997; and Adriano Martínez Rius, *Habano el Rey*, Barcelona: Epicur Publicaciones, 1999. A later volume, most

way through a complex history of origin, production, transport, marketing and consumption of this luxury product as we have come to know it, as well as the myth and legend in which it is enveloped.

Tobacco becomes a commodity

Histories of tobacco often start with the caveat that much of what is ‘known’ is little more than accepted wisdom, shrouded in myth and legend. It is thus ‘accepted’ that tobacco is native to the Americas, where it was found some 18,000 years ago by humans of Asiatic origin who crossed the Bering Strait. Plant geneticists identify tobacco’s ‘centre of origin’ – that is, the meeting place between the species’ genetic origin and the area in which it was first cultivated – in the Peruvian-Bolivian-Ecuadorean Andes around 5000-3000 BC. Archaeologists and ethnographers concur that nomads and settlers incorporated it into their arsenal of plants with medicinal and spiritual properties.

There is also ‘acceptance’ that of the many species of tobacco, two – later known as *Nicotiana rustica* and *Nicotiana tabacum* – were destined to travel the world and become major global commodities, the latter in particular. Yet there was striking diversity in the ways in which tobacco was grown and used. Depending on time, place and people, it was sniffed (or ‘snuffed’), chewed, eaten, drunk, smeared over body, inserted in enemas, and smoked. It was offered to the gods in ritual, and it was an everyday narcotic, both pleasurable and healing. The oldest form was most likely chewing followed by snuffing (as among the Incas), but as it spread towards Central America smoking cigars (as among the Mayans) would seem to have taken precedence over other forms, whereas in the northern part of the continent smoking by pipe was most prevalent.

Thus, by 1492 – the landmark year when Christopher Columbus made landfall in the Caribbean, discovering the New World for Spain and paving the way for the conquest of the Americas – tobacco was widespread and diverse in uses, the pipe predominating in North America and the cigar in South and Central America and the Caribbean. Tobacco and smoking were unknown to Europeans, such that when Columbus went ashore on a small island that is today part of the Bahamas, seeking precious metals, he seemingly attached no importance to the dried leaves included in the islanders’ gifts. Later arriving in Cuba, he was at least intrigued enough by islanders carrying firebrands of leaves to detail two of his expedition, Rodrigo de Xerez and Luis de Torres, to investigate in the interior and report back. They tried it for themselves, becoming the first Europeans to smoke tobacco, but none of this appears to have been recounted until almost twenty years later by Fray Bartolomé de las Casas.⁷

In Spain, the habit met with either indifference or opprobrium. Note was taken of its healing properties, but there were Spaniards who, in their crusading zeal, saw it as a vice of the infidel Indians: the Devil’s weed. The earliest account of what it felt like to smoke, as opposed to what it looked like or did to the Indians, is thought to have been written by Breton seafarer Jacques Cartier in 1534. Around the same time, lapsed Carmelite friar André Thevet

impressive of all for its sheer size, was Min Ron Nee, *An Illustrated Encyclopaedia of Post-Revolution Havana Cigars*, Sankt Augustin: AWM-Verlag, 2003.

⁷ Bartolomé de las Casas, *Obras Completas*, Madrid: Alianza Editorial, 1992. This was revisited in Armando Rangel Rivero ‘El tabaco en Cuba ¿único desde 1492?’ and Reynaldo González ‘La estela que dejó el tabaco en la cultura internacional’, *Catauro* (2005).

documented its use among Christians in Brazil, and Roman Catholic clergy in the Americas adopted snuff, resulting in what is thought to have been the first tobacco prohibition in the form of an ecclesiastical decree of 1588 issued in Lima. Rodrigo de Xerez himself faced the wrath of the Inquisition and was thrown into a dungeon for publicly smoking in Spain.

Accounts of the plant's medicinal properties began to outweigh spiritual misgivings, and as word spread, so did the plant. Its tiny seeds were carried to Spain and Portugal in the 1550s and grown as an exotic new addition to palace gardens, and the plant was studied by court physicians. Jean Nicot, sent from France to Lisbon in 1559 to arrange the marriage of Catherine de Medici, took an avid interest, and began experimenting medicinally; the French court began taking the 'Nicotian herb' as snuff; and its fame travelled back to Portugal and on to the Vatican, Italian states, Bohemia, Spain, the Lowlands and Switzerland.

Transmuted from Devil's herb to medical panacea, it was grown domestically, though small quantities of imported tobacco, especially from Cuba, were prized above all others. England was where it was seen to be most associated with pleasure and most commodified, thanks in no small part to the marauding ventures of Hawkins, Raleigh and Drake during the Elizabethan era. Sailors, corsairs and pirates popularised smoking, the English preference for pipe over cigar deriving from contact with and eventual colonisation of North as opposed to South America. At the English court, smoking symbolised that virile spirit of adventure, and even the Virgin Queen (after whom Virginia was named) is reputed to have inhaled, persuaded by her then favourite Raleigh.

Genoese and Venetian fleets carried tobacco to the Levant and Middle East, and the Spanish and the Portuguese to Africa and Asia. Arguably the greatest impact was on Africa, where the Portuguese had taken control of Arab trading posts, introducing tobacco from Brazil; and by the end of the sixteenth century, Africans had evolved their own practices and myths. When Africans began to be traded across the Atlantic as slaves, the enslaved would in part have been purchased with tobacco and would be familiar with its use.⁸

The seventeenth century witnessed both prohibition and expansion. The century opened in England with James I, who succeeded Elizabeth I, in 1606 blasting it as satanic and introducing taxation and an import duty; yet the Virginia Company was also set up. That same year, Phillip II of Spain introduced a ban on tobacco cultivation, which was lifted in 1614, but a special tax was introduced in addition to duty, depending on place of origin, the highest being on Cuban tobacco. Tobacco in Cuba had been *cosa de indios y negros* (a thing for Indians and blacks), but, as it worked its way up from the lower strata of society, so did whites develop a taste for it, forbidding the Negroes from selling or cultivating tobacco except for their own use. All tobacco had to be imported into Seville, and in 1620 the first Seville tobacco factory was opened producing snuff. In 1636, the Spanish monarchy founded *La Tabacalera*, reputed to be the world's first tobacco company, and introduced state tobacco shops called *estancos*, where its products were sold and further taxed.⁹

⁸ Kiernan (1991) among others, writes of how tobacco spread so quickly round the world by trade, possessing, as French historian Fernand Braudel expressed it, the supreme asset of flexibility in adapting itself to the most diverse climates and soils.

⁹ This is recounted in the classic works on Spanish tobacco history by José Pérez Vidal, *España en la historia del tabaco*, Madrid: Consejo Superior de Investigaciones Científicas, 1959 and *Historia del cultivo del tabaco en España*, Madrid: Servicio Nacional de Cultivo y Fermentación del Tabaco, 1956. See also José M. Rodríguez Gordillo, *Un archivo para la historia del tabaco*, Madrid: Jacaryan, 1984.

Governments became as addicted as their people, and within decades most European countries had established taxes and duties. Much of the continent was caught up in the Thirty Years War (1618-1648), driven by religious and imperial conflict, and smoking was spread by the Dutch, described as a new nation of *tabagophiles*. Protestant allies of the Protestant English, the Dutch set up the West India Company that was later the model for the English and French, attacked the Spanish fleet, traded slaves and carried tobacco as a valuable instrument of exchange, earning it repute as the first globally available luxury commodity in their trading empire.

Prohibitions elsewhere – Russia, Islamic states such as the Ottoman Empire, Japan and China – proved short-lived, as tobacco spread like a seventeenth-century epidemic, dispersed as an article of maritime trade and a staple of the silk route, endemic in the world of smuggling and contraband. It was to counter this, especially the smuggling and contraband of tobacco, that the English passed the 1651 and 1660 Navigation Acts, to limit trade to English ships; and in their new North American colonies, it was tobacco that was at the heart of an infamous system of production (plantation slavery) and an intricate web of commerce (the trans-Atlantic triangular trade of goods and slaves), on the back of which fortunes were made and wars fought.¹⁰

Other major tobacco-producing countries in the Americas also relied on slave labour, notably Portuguese Brazil, destined to become the world's second-largest tobacco exporter after Virginia and largest importer of slaves. Among Spain's colonies, Venezuela and Cuba were Spain's largest and second-largest producers. In Cuba, *vegueros* (settler growers) rose up in arms on three successive occasions during the early eighteenth century against repressive regulation.¹¹ By then, the growing number of Spanish settlers, distanced from Spain, had adopted the habit of smoking cigars and many were involved in smuggling and contraband with those from other trading nations.

Most of the tobacco shipped legally to Spain was to Cadiz, to be rolled into cigars, or to be made into snuff in Seville, where a third new factory in 1758 was described as the largest industrial building of its time in the world.¹² Yet returning Spanish emigrants who had made their fortune 'clung to the expensive and aristocratic vice of smoking Havana cigars, which they had sent to them from Cuba.'¹³ In Spain, it was never common to smoke Havanas!

The Havana cigar comes of age

While Spain held on to Cuba and Spanish America, Britain's American colonies sparked the Seven Years' War (1756-1763). George Washington, a lieutenant colonel son of a Virginia tobacco-farming family, killed Frenchmen building a fort, and war ensued on four continents:

¹⁰ Among other works, see Allan Kulikoff, *Tobacco & Slaves: The Development of Southern Cultures in the Chesapeake, 1680-1800*, Chapel Hill and London: University of North Carolina Press, 1986.

¹¹ See José Rivero Muñiz, *Las tres sediciones de los vegueros en el siglo XVIII*, Havana: Academia de la Historia de Cuba, 1951. Also Charlotte A. Cosner, 'Rich and Poor, Black and White, Slave and Free: A Social History of Cuba's Tobacco Farmer's 1718-1817', PhD thesis, Florida International University, 2010 and 'Vegueros and Tabaqueros: Rebellion, Revolution and "The Devil's Plant": Challenges to State Control in Colonial Cuba', *Cuban Studies Association Occasional Paper* 9 (1998), at <http://scholarlyrepository.miami.edu/csa/9>.

¹² See Pérez Vidal (1956; 1959). Also Santiago de Luxán Meléndez et al. (eds), *El mercado del tabaco en españa durante el siglo XVIII: fiscalidad y consumo*, Las Palmas de Gran Canaria: Universidad de Las Palmas de Gran Canaria, 2000, on state finances, contraband and consumption.

¹³ Ortiz (1995), pp.76-7.

France declared war on Britain, which in turn declared war on Spain. According to another Virginia tobacco farmer, Thomas Jefferson, this was the backdrop to the 1776 declaration of independence of the thirteen British colonies, which were quick to forge alliances with France (1778) and Spain (1779) and negotiate peace with Britain (1782). Tobacco debts were negotiated as part of reparations and trade resumed.

In 1788, the Schlottmann factory was set up in Hamburg to manufacture leaf imported from Cuba, and Hamburg would become a major centre of the tobacco trade. Meantime, in France, the expenses of war and the court occasioned taxes deemed intolerable by a people of smokers who rose up in revolution in 1789, and snuff, the mark of aristocracy, fell firmly out of favour. It remained for Napoleon Bonaparte, having reinstated tobacco taxes to help finance his armies, to redraw the political map of Europe and profoundly change the continent's smoking habits.

Britain held firm, its navy having defeated the combined French and Spanish fleet at Trafalgar, and, while subject to continental blockade, found a weak spot in Spain. There Seville's factory had expanded to include three types of cigar and an early form of cigarette, marking a shift from snuff to smoking, which had become endemic among Spain's largely rural population. The smallest and cheapest smokes were made from *tabaco picado* (shredded tobacco), later dubbed *papelotes* (paper ones, from the paper around them); the largest and most expensive were the *puros* (pure ones), smoked by nobility, including King Fernando VII; and in between were the *papantes*.

Officers of the French army occupying Andalusia took to smoking *puros* and *papantes*; and contraband and smuggling boomed as *bandoleros* (bandits) operated in resistance to the French and were joined by a British expeditionary force in Spain in 1808, which also took to cigars. In England, the Regency period and its Romantic movement, as well as the cavalry, all extolled the cigar; and the Duke of Wellington's triumphal return from Waterloo was a triumph also for the cigar: from 1814 on, as a result of the Peninsular and American wars, the 'Spanish vice' was taking hold. In 1800, England imported 26lbs of cigars; in 1824, 15,000lbs; and by 1830, 250,000lbs, including a first direct shipment from Cuba. The House of Commons had a designated smoking chamber; the smoking jacket and cap made their entrée; and the growth of cigar smoking led to tobacconists specialising in the import of cigars, crowned by the Havana. Queen Victoria came to the throne in 1837 with a court prohibition, but to little avail.

Developments in the Americas combined with those in Europe. In 1803, Napoleon raised financing through the sale of Louisiana, doubling the size of the emergent United States and moving the frontier west. West coast Hispanics smoked cigars, and along the eastern seaboard the 'Spanish' cigar was gaining popularity due to the fast-growing trade with neighbouring Cuba. During the Seven Years War, the British occupied Havana in 1762 and the settlement with Spain traded Havana for Florida. Legend has it that the North American taste for Cuban cigars developed after General Putnam returned from the British occupation of Havana with three donkeys laden with Havana cigars as plunder and sold them in a tavern in Connecticut; shortly after, the Cuban seed was imported to grow cigar leaf and produce cigars there.¹⁴

¹⁴ Ortiz (1995, p.77) recounts this thus: 'It was well on in the second half of the eighteenth century, after the conquest of Havana by the English in 1762, that Havana cigars set out to conquer the world. It was then that Havana cigars traveled to England in the red coats of the British officials and to North America with the Yankee

The eleven-month British occupation of Havana broke the Spanish monopoly hold on Cuban tobacco, and, while reinstated in 1764, it was hard to enforce and finally ended in 1817. By then Spain had lost all its mainland territories in the Americas, leaving only Cuba, along with neighbouring Puerto Rico and Santo Domingo, and the Philippines in the Pacific. Cigar production boomed in Spain, and the women drafted into the factories would be later immortalised in Georges Bizet's opera *Carmen* (1875); but with free trade Cuban cigars gained in preference over those made in Spain, or elsewhere, with either imported Cuban or home-grown leaf.

In 1817, King Ferdinand VII of Spain restored absolute monarchy in Spain but was swayed by Cuban economist Francisco Arango y Parreño to abolish the Spanish monopoly there: 'things had been set in motion, the epic story of the Havana had begun.'¹⁵ Shipping using the port of Havana increased, steam ships shortened crossings and commerce boomed, tobacco growing and cigar manufacturing flourished, and by 1840 the *puro* had become the *habano*.

At the same time, the wheels were in motion for competition for the Havana. The Netherlands was a case in point:

From 1825 onward, while British and French elites, and all the others after them, devoted themselves to Havana, huge workshops were set up in the Netherlands to treat tobacco from their Indonesian possessions, mixed with tobacco from Brazil, Java, and Sumatra for the wrapper and binder leaf and Bahia for the filler. Their experts developed a "special light" taste and matching prices which would make a fortune.¹⁶

Descendants of pipe smokers became cigar smokers, and the Netherlands exported countless more cigars per capita than any other nation except Denmark, overshadowing Spain and Cuba.

Havana factories continued to supply the elite luxury market, but the upheavals of the latter part of the century took their toll. The history of *El Habano* would be marked by in- and out-migration of growers, manufacturers and workers, along with circulation and transfer of seed and know-how. Spain, the United States, the Caribbean and Central America, but also territories across the Atlantic and far further afield, all formed part of an increasingly globalised phenomenon of 'Cuban' tobacco growing and cigar manufacturing and marketing.

Early twentieth-century US occupation opened Cuba to mass US investment, and the American Tobacco Company, or Trust as it was known, bought up major leaf and manufacturing concerns. By then more interested in profits deriving from mass-mechanised cigarette production and unable to undermine successful Cuban opposition to standardisation and the introduction of the cigar machine, the Trust ultimately transferred much of its cigar production to the US. Smaller family firms, however, known as 'independents', fought back

officers who had been in charge of the colonial regiments that helped occupy Havana and not long afterwards, in 1776, were to win the independence of their own country. After this momentous episode in Cuba's history the taste for cigars began to spread beyond Spain. In 1788 the first factory manufacturing cigars was set up in Hamburg by H.H. Schlottmann, and by 1793 they were in wide use in all Germany... In the nineteenth century it was the invasion of Spain by Napoleon's armies and Lord Wellington's troops...'

¹⁵ Deschodt & Morane (1998), p.55.

¹⁶ Deschodt & Morane (1998), p.169.

against foreign standardisation and affirmed their agricultural and industrial expertise.¹⁷ They were able to hold out, many of them producing the premium handmade *Habano* right up until the 1959 revolution.

US hostility to Cuba's revolution led to a US trade embargo that – with US pressure – extended to most of the Americas (Canada and Mexico being the only early exceptions). Prior to the embargo, the US Department of Agriculture commissioned a report to document the extent to which the US cigar industry was reliant on Cuban leaf imports and advise on sourcing alternative supplies. The report's recommendation was to seek these in neighbouring Caribbean and Central American territories, whereby agronomists, growers and manufacturers would experiment in the Dominican Republic and Nicaragua in particular. Western markets became a battleground for disputed Havana cigar brands from island/offshore parallel production and marketing systems, while Eastern European socialist bloc and 'Third World' countries emerged as new Havana cigar partners.

Thirty years on, the fall of the Berlin Wall in 1989 signalled the end of Soviet bloc trade and aid that had developed in the vacuum left by US hostility and embargo, and the US response to Cuba's ensuing crisis was to tighten and extra-territorialise the embargo. Yet at the same time, the US anti-anti-smoking cigar revival was in full swing, engineered in no small part by the New York glossy *Cigar Aficionado*, created in 1992. US Cuban tobacco interests were in all-out competition with island Cuba, which courted non-US trade and investment, making cigars part of its crisis structural adjustment strategy and striking landmark credit deals in 1994 between the Cuban state tobacco enterprise and its French and Spanish parastatal tobacco counterparts. The US cigar bubble burst in 1999, but the luxury market for premium handmade cigars held around the world, most notably for the island-produced *Habano* in Europe and newly emerging Asian economies such as China, such that Cuba reported a nine-percent increase in profits in 2011.

Quality, skill and *terroir*

What is it about the Havana that makes it so special? Ask those in the trade and they will speak of the quality and skill of growing and manufacturing in Cuba – what the French, in protecting their champagne, coined as *terroir*. The very special quality of the Cuban cigar is attributed in particular to the leaf grown in the Vuelta Abajo region of western Cuba, today's Pinar del Río province and to a lesser extent in Vuelta Arriba, in central Cuba, and to the handcrafting of the cigar itself.¹⁸

In 1940, José Perdomo, at the time occupying a key role in Cuba's *Comisión Nacional por la Propaganda y Defensa del Tabaco Habano* (founded in 1927), wrote:

The Cuban cigar is a luxury article. As such, it goes to market without the intention of competing with any other cigar. Rather, it is designed for the minority who can afford such luxuries.

¹⁷ The dispute was encapsulated in a volley between Gustavo Bock, *The Truth about Havana Cigars*, New York: Havana Tobacco Company, 1904, and the counter-attack on behalf of the 'independents' by journalist and cigar maker José González Aguirre, *La verdad sobre la industria del tabaco habano*, Havana, 1905.

¹⁸ Interestingly, in 1772, Felipe de Fondesviela, Marques de la Torre, in recognition of the quality of its tobacco, decided the area should be separate from Havana and have a municipal government of its own, at the time called New Philippines. An excellent 'pocket' analysis of *terroir* can be found in Becky Sue Epstein, *Champagne: A Global History*, London: Reaktion Books, 2011.

According to Perdomo, there were certain conditions which a cigar must fulfill to be considered a genuine Havana: it must be made with only leaf grown in Cuba, and leaf of only the highest quality, and it must be manufactured in Cuba, entirely handmade, using long filler, and bearing the official Seal of Warranty of National Origin. In the words of Perdomo:

The entire industrial process of this cigar is carried on in Cuba in a special climatic situation where there is not the slightest suggestion of artificiality. It is only necessary to locate each department of work in the factory in the proper place. The sunshine, average temperature, and humidity of the atmosphere in Cuba are closely linked with the quality of the Havana cigar. These factors, plus the composition of the soil and subsoil, in harmonious combination, are what make it possible for Cuba to produce tobacco with both the agricultural and industrial qualities of the Havana.¹⁹

These claims have been echoed by many others before and since. According to Cuban expert in the trade Enzo Infante Urivazo:

The name habano, used to designate cigars made in Cuba, was not chosen by the Cubans. It emerged somewhat spontaneously in the international tobacco markets when certain features of undisputed quality led consumers to regard as best the products that came from Havana or were exported out of Havana harbor.

Once the Havana was acknowledged the best, some said it was because of the leaf, others the cigar makers' skill, yet others the growers' skill, but, Infante Urivazo declared: 'The factors that have contributed to the prestige of Cuba tobacco are found first and foremost in the soils.' After that, the Havana cigar 'is both an art and a science.'²⁰

According to Cuban geographer Antonio Nuñez Jiménez:

Havana tobacco is the favoured child of Cuban agriculture, thanks to the combination of extraordinary geographical factors and the expert, painstaking efforts of our agricultural and industrial workers, which have favoured our unparalleled leaf.²¹

Cuban cigar maker-historian-educator Gaspar Jorge García Galló placed more emphasis on the skills involved in the cigar's making, and wrote extensively on the psychology of the cigar maker as well as writing a biography of the cigar itself. Towards the end of the latter, he declared: 'The intention of this book has been to celebrate creative work.'²²

Seeds, people, skills and know-how can all be transferred, but *terroir* cannot. Hence the power of the concept, which means, as expressed by Vahé Gérard: 'Cuba is still the promised land for the cigar lover.'²³ However *terroir* has to be defended, not least by seals of approval and branding. Ortiz himself wrote that Havana tobacco:

can display crowns, sceptres, the emblems of royalty, and even an emperor's title. Tobacco proudly wears until the moment of its death the band of its brand; only in

¹⁹ José E. Perdomo, *Léxico tabacalero cubano*, Miami: Ediciones Universal, 1998 [1940], p.193.

²⁰ Infante Urivazo (1997), p.11 & 13.

²¹ Nuñez Jiménez (1996), p.57.

²² García Galló (1961), p.271.

²³ Père et Fils Gerard, *Cigars: The Art of Cigars, The World's Finest Cigars*, 2 vols., Paris: Flammarion, 2002, p.8.

the sacrificial fire does it burn its individuality and convert its ashes as it ascends to glory.²⁴

Curiously, nonetheless, in accounting for the rise of *El Habano*, relatively little explanatory attention has been given to royal favour, stamps of warranty and sumptuous labelling. This is somewhat intriguing when manufacturers such as Bernardo Rencurrel and Hija De Cabañas y Carvajal early carried royal dispensation (in 1810) for being purveyers to the Spanish crown, and the latter (making cigars since 1797) is attributed with having introduced the first Havana ‘segár’ on the London market, before Spain lifted its monopoly on Cuban tobacco in 1817 and predating the Office of Patents and Brand Names of Havana set up that same year.

By the 1830s there were voices calling for protective measures to guarantee the quality and prestige of the Havana cigar, and in 1839 the *Real Sociedad Económica de Amigos del País* founded a school for apprentices in tobacco. In 1842, the Spanish Captain General issued a decree forbidding the use of all brands other than those approved by the Civil Government and warning engravers not to print seals for manufacturers without approval. In 1843, two German brothers, Herman and August Upmann, travelled from Bremen to Cuba looking for a business opportunity, and in 1844 opened a cigar store in Havana. Said to be the first foreigners to be authorised, they went on to become merchants in cigars and banking, solidly established in both by the 1860s.

In 1847 the *Real Sociedad Económica de Amigos del País* sponsored Havana’s First Public Exhibit of Products of the Industry, awarding medals to local manufacturers for their products. At the time, in the words of Narciso Menocal in his book on the glory days of Cuban cigar labels, the Cuban cigar ‘was enjoying a moment of supreme international predominance’.²⁵ Cabañas took the Gold Medal at the 1851 Queen Victoria’s Great Exhibition in London, and in 1867 Partagás took gold at the Paris World Fair.

Cigar brands had to be registered under Municipal Ordinances, but there was such concern over brand profusion that in 1889 the Union of Cigar Manufacturers of Havana was authorised to vet members placing a seal on boxes as a guarantee of origin. The seal bore the royal crown and the coats of arms of Spain and City of Havana on the left and on the right Columbus. In the centre it read:

The Union of Cigar Manufacturers guarantees the origin and legitimacy of the cigars bearing this seal and will, pursuant to the law, prosecute anyone attempting to falsify or amend it.²⁶

Significantly, the age of the cigar was also the age of the lithographic industry. Invented in the late eighteenth century in Germany, lithography was developed in the early nineteenth century in France as chromolithography, which, from 1840 on, became the ‘art form of the middle class’ and was also adopted for advertising. Cuban scholar Zoila Lapique Becali documents how lithography was available in Cuba three years before it was in the US and four before Spain. In 1822, a first French shop was opened in Havana for printing music sheets, known as La Litografía de Música or La Litografía de La Habana. In 1840 two lithographic shops were set up, almost in unison, one French and the other Spanish, initially to

²⁴ Ortiz (1995), p.43.

²⁵ Narciso Menocal, *Cuban Cigar Labels: The Tobacco Industry in Cuba and Florida: Its Golden Age in Lithography and Architecture*, Miami: Cuban National Heritage, 1995, p.25.

²⁶ Menocal (1995), p.37.

reproduce engravings of Cuba but soon used by manufacturers to print labels. Demand was such that within five years new lithographic shops were opened involving Cubans and Europeans.²⁷

The iconography on Cuban cigar labels for export assured an international clientele that they were buying a Cuban product, and not an imitation: 'Like all exceptional quality and expensive products, cigars are counterfeited. Havana cigars are the most affected, including boxes, packaging and certification labels.'²⁸ They were also, however, incredibly richly embossed gold and coloured labels, designed to denote a quality product that stood out. They were, in the words of Cuban expert Adriano Martínez Rius:

...expressions of luxury and power... of the brands with magnificent lithography that further empowered and consolidated the universal grandeur of the Habano. From that moment on, the Habano had a presentation in accordance with its lineage.

Martínez Rius continued:

From a purely informative phase it moved into what in the present-day we would call **MARKETING**, aimed at attracting potential consumers and promoting the various manufacturers' trade marks.²⁹

Taste and 'Cubanicity'

Ask smokers today what makes a Havana cigar so special, and they'll celebrate its taste, feel and aroma, and the experience of the smoke. Again in the words of Martínez Rius:

In the contemporary world, the cigar is known as a genuine symbol of pleasure, and if it's a Havana, it's the **NON PLUS ULTRA** of its kind, the preference of those who know how to enjoy an excellent smoke.³⁰

Ortiz opened Cuban Counterpoint with the statement: 'Tobacco is born, sugar is made. Tobacco is born pure, is processed pure and smoked pure.' He continued:

In the same box there are no two cigars alike; each one has a different taste... the merit of tobacco lies in... the exquisite aroma of the pure Havana cigar, which is intoxicating... tobacco affords satisfaction to the touch and sight... What smoker has not passed his hand caressingly over the rich brevas or regalias of a freshly opened box of Havanas? ...catharsis for nervous tension to the smoker who handles them and holds them delicately between lips and fingers? (...) Poets who have been smokers have sung of the rapt ecstasy that comes over them as they

²⁷ Zoila Lapique Becali, *La memoria en las piedras*, Havana: Editorial Boloña, 2003 and 'Los sucesos de la historia de España y Cuba en las etiquetas de los cigarrillos y habanos cubanos', in Consuelo Naranjo Orovio and Carlos Serrano (eds), *Imágenes e Imaginarios Nacionales en el Ultramar Español*, Madrid: Consejo Superior de Investigaciones Científicas, 1999; also 'La litografía en el siglo XIX', *Catauro* (2005). Frédéric Mialhe and Edouard Laplante were particularly famous for their engravings of Cuba at the time (Emilio Cueto, *Frédéric Mialhe, Mialhe's Colonial Cuba: The Prints that Shaped the World's View of Cuba*, Miami: Historical Association of Southern Florida, 1994).

²⁸ Gerard (2002), p.68.

²⁹ Martínez Rius (1999), pp.24 & 69.

³⁰ Martínez Rius (1999), p.28.

follow with eyes and imagination the bluish smoke rising upward... Whereas sugar appeals to only one of the senses, that of taste, tobacco appeals not only to the palate, but to the smell, touch, and sight.³¹

Ortiz singled out the Havana cigar as an article of pleasure and vice, a luxury article like champagne, something unique that cannot be surpassed or substituted.³² Tobacco's enduring appeal, he argued, derived from natural and social factors whose effects can be reduced to two: hedonism and utilitarianism. First feared and regarded with suspicion, contempt, repulsion, 'a thing for the savages', it then spread among the lower ranks of new settlers before those of higher social standing. In Cuba, in the cleansing rituals of Afro-Cuban religions, cigar smoke was to ward off evil; in England, Chaucer upbraided cigar smokers of London as 'English Moors', having fallen into the 'Negro's introduced fashion'. It was not long, however, before the partisans of tobacco divided into two groups, hedonists and panaceists, the former were the real victors while the latter provided the rationale:

Pleasure sought tobacco, the dislike of new things and austerity opposed it; but medicine justified it for reasons of its own, and sensuality was able to hide behind the cloak of curative science.³³

Smoking a Havana became not only a symbol of position and wealth but an exotic luxury consumed and reduced to ashes, a high cost for wasteful and fleeting pleasure, making this a luxury of rare distinction: 'People smoked ostentatiously, the same way they displayed a little Negro slave, a cage of talking parrots, a mahogany coach, or a tortoise-shell cane.'³⁴ The 'Ortizian' approach would be echoed in two contemporary studies, one by Jarrett Rudy in his 2005 book on smoking in nineteenth-century Montreal and the other by Matthew Hilton in 2000 on smoking in nineteenth-century Britain. Each, however, took the analysis a stage further.

Rudy rehearsed some of the same arguments:

The cultural categories of tobacco connoisseurship were most clearly exemplified in the cigar. It was a symbol of wealth and power, and its smokers were criticized for their extravagance. The most expensive and most prized cigar was the Cuban.

The St James Club, one of Montreal's elite men's clubs, imported Cuban cigars specifically for its members. 'They pointed to the skilled labour of the cigar maker and the terroir of the tobacco as the cultural categories that accounted for the value of the cigar.'³⁵ Connoisseurs were 'men of taste', theirs was the acquired taste of 'men of culture', and the cigar was made by skilled labour in a male-dominated cigar rolling process, learned through long apprenticeship and control of entry into trade:

As with grapes used to make champagne and French wine, it was the experience of the cultivator and his relationship to the soil and climate that determined the quality of the tobacco leaf.³⁶

³¹ Ortiz (1995), pp.8-9.

³² Ortiz (1995), p.71.

³³ Ortiz (1995), p.201.

³⁴ Ortiz (1995), p.213.

³⁵ Jarrett Rudy, *The Freedom to Smoke: Tobacco Consumption and Identity*, Montreal and Kingston, London, Ithaca: McGill-Queens University Press, 2005, p.47.

³⁶ Rudy (2005), p.60.

However, Rudy makes an acute observation: ‘While the quality of Cuban tobacco probably fluctuated, the suggestion of tobacco being Cuban was more important than the actual quality of the tobacco.’ The appearance of being Cuban was a priority for cigar manufacturers and ‘Through advertising, they evoked a sense of “Cubanicity” that could be attached to any cigar to raise its value.’³⁷ What was important was not its origins but its perceived origins.

Thus, from 1900 to 1940 the Montreal firm Granda Hermanos y Cía made ‘authentic’ Cuban cigars in Canada. The Granda brothers learnt cigar making in Cuba and acquired the special skills of ‘Spanish’ as opposed to ‘German’ hand work, using long filler instead of the short filler of cheaper cigars and sorting into many more shades than the German three or four. Granda’s advertising was extensive compared with other cigar advertising and their Spanish name captured the cachet of Cubanicity.

Hilton subsequently argued that the mass phenomenon of smoking that has remained central to individual and group identity is rooted in the bourgeois liberal context of smoking, involving that specific liberal notion of the self, especially promoted by gentlemen smokers of pipe and cigar in the mid to late nineteenth century:

It is bourgeois because the culture of smoking was promoted by a specific cohort of the male population which had sufficient economic and cultural capital to buy expensive pipes, cigars and tobacco mixtures... The context is liberal because the understanding of smoking... stressed the central tenets of this national political, economic and cultural creed: individuality and independence.³⁸

Hilton pursues this idea further to argue for an understanding of how a particular section of the male population legitimated their activity in the perceived feminine world of consumption by first emphasising the rational, pointing to the intellectual, the skilful and the purposeful aspects of smoking. They then used this as a solid base from which to explore the more irrational or ephemeral, demonstrating aspects of their individuality through knowledge of figures such as Columbus, Nicot and Raleigh, as well as the more masculine domains of production and manufacture, including descriptions of Cuba’s growing regions and Havana factories. Theirs was ‘a freemasonry of smokers’ and a camaraderie based on a shared command of the tobacco experience.

Where if not in the cigar establishment would that knowledge and that ‘freemasonry of smokers’ and camaraderie be forged, and Iain Scarlet’s *A Puff of Smoke* paints a very clear picture of one such London cigar establishment that has endured to this day as James J. Fox & Rupert Lewis on St. James’s, Picadilly. Scarlet opens: ‘London is arguably the cigar capital of the world and Robert Lewis is certainly the longest established cigar merchant in London and probably the United Kingdom.’ His book marked the bicentenary of the firm in the part of central London, close to the royal palace, which to this day ‘has a worldwide reputation not only for pomp, pageantry and gentlemen’s clubs’ but also exclusive shops (hatters, tailors, gunmakers, and the like).³⁹

When the troops returned home after fighting with Wellington in the Peninsular wars, Scarlet recounts:

³⁷ Rudy (2005), pp.62-3.

³⁸ Matthew Hilton, *Smoking in British Popular Culture 1800-2000*, Manchester and New York: Manchester University Press, 2000, p.3.

³⁹ Iain Scarlet *A Puff of Smoke*, London: Robert Lewis, n.d., pp.1, 3.

the craze for cigars swept London with much the same enthusiasm as the hula-hoop 150 years later... The shop in Great Newport Street began to resemble a club. Gentlemen came not only to buy their cigars and tobacco, but to relax and (seated on nothing much more comfortable than a tobacco tub) enjoy a chat and a smoke and, perhaps, a glass of sherry.

In 1834-5, the lease was taken on St James's Street and 'It was a wise move. The street which had once been famous for its coffee and chocolate houses was now the centre of gentlemen's clubland and a fashionable shopping district.'⁴⁰

The owners travelled to hotels all over the country by rail with sample cases, including Havana cigars, laying them out in private rooms of the best hotels, inviting tobacconists, hoteliers and innkeepers to view and place their orders, and at the end of the day wining and dining on a grand scale. Mr Churchill opened his account at the shop in 1900, after being introduced to the Havana cigar while serving as a soldier in Cuba in the 1890s. He purchased fifty Bock Giraldías and would repeat his order for many years to come. Later, during World War II, Havana cigar manufacturers combined together to send him 5,000 cigars, and the gift was repeated annually until after the war.

The ultimate smoke

Sander Gilman and Zhou Xun in their 'Introduction' to *Smoke: A Global History of Smoking* wrote of Europeans' encounter with smoke on arriving in the New World:

Smoke, ineffable yet perceivable; real yet illusionary; present yet transient; breathable yet intoxicating. It was smoke that captured the world's imagination. It was an experience for which they had initially no vocabulary and to which they sought (and continue to seek) to give meaning. Smoke was a cure, but it soon became a passion.⁴¹

They continued:

The cigar is a prime example of how tobacco continued to re-invent itself, enchanting the world once more – and at its roots was one of the original ways of consumption. The cigar became fashionable first in Spain, then in Britain and other parts of Europe. It was first conceived of in Cuba and was launched into full swing in the Philippines. A not-too-distant cousin of the way that the Cubans had smoked when they met Columbus's sailors, it was pure smoke.⁴²

While the eighteenth century was the century of snuff, the early nineteenth century appeal was that of Lord Byron in 1823: 'Thy naked beauty -Give me a cigar!' Cigars became the mark of status for aristocrats, the privileged, wealthy and social elites. With the twentieth-century rise of the cigarette, the tobacco industry created a product that could be virtually all things to all people. In the words of Gilman and Xun, 'Its promotional strategies demonstrated 'a sophisticated notion of culture and its operative mechanisms' representing 'innovative

⁴⁰ Scarlet (n.d.), p.13.

⁴¹ Gilman & Xun (2004), p.9.

⁴² Gilman & Xun (2004), p.17.

notions of social and cultural ‘engineering’.⁴³ Where cultural norms and expectations proved an obstacle, the answer was to change the culture.

By the twentieth century, across the globe, humankind had a tobacco habit. In the four centuries since Rodrigo de Jerez and Luis de Torres smoked a Cuban cigar, tobacco production, trade and consumption had soared. World Wars I and II, and the intervening and initial post-war years, were a smoker’s paradise, as the cigarette rode supreme – in reality and on screen. The cigarette, however, with its monopolies, global corporations and immense profits, was also to be tobacco’s downfall. Its addictive dangers ushered in health prohibitions throughout the western world, though fostering new booms in the non-western world where there were no such prohibitions.

It was counter to this that the cigar made a 1990s comeback. The new rich were to be seen frequenting newly created cigar divans of London and New York. In the words of Iain Gately, they were:

...dedicated to the pleasures of owning and smoking the most expensive and flamboyant of smoking devices... The cigar revival is explained in part by the spirit of conspicuous consumption which permeated the age... Cigars were a field in which discrimination and purchasing power could be exercised with equal freedom, and smoking a cigar was a perfect demonstration of both.⁴⁴

Aaron Sigmond, founding director of *Smoke* magazine, wrote in 1997, at the height of the 1990s cigar boom:

Each cigar is a new and sensual experience which instantly distinguishes a smoker from those around him. When two cigar enthusiasts meet, a bond is created that words can do little to convey. Cigars embody a certain sense of fraternity which spans generations, diminishes political differences, and somehow makes all quarrelling suddenly seem petty.⁴⁵

Yet the new answer to ‘why smoke?’ was really power-smoking, in the same fashion as power-dressing; and the most sought-after ‘power smoke’ of them all was Fidel Castro’s erstwhile specially hand-rolled Cohiba, which takes us to a different kind of *terroir*, one which has political and cultural caché.

When Cuban writer Reynaldo González published *El Bello Habano* (The Fine Havana) in 2004, it read as a modern-day ode to the Havana cigar, with evocative chapter headings: ‘Una caja de recuerdos magicos’ (A Box of Magical Memories), ‘El Diablo es buen negocio’ (The Devil is Good Business), ‘Caballo medieval, montura renacentista’ (Medieval Horse, Renaissance Trappings), ‘Los piratas tambien fuman’ (Pirates Smoke Too), ‘Don Habano, caballero ilustrado’ (Don Habano, Educated Gent), and ‘Incendios libertarios: humo de tabaco’ (Libertarian Fire: Cigar Smoke). He covered traditional ground:

⁴³ Gilman & Xun (2004), p.343.

⁴⁴ Gately (2002), p.342.

⁴⁵ Aaron Sigmond in Mark Stücklin, *The Cigar Handbook: A Buyer’s Guide to the World’s Finest Cigar Brands*, New York: Barnes and Noble Books, 1997.

The secret of the exquisite legitimate Havana lies in the privileged land where it is grown, the virtuosity of the plant and the care that goes into it, and it's exclusively handmade by women and men jealously guarding their craft.⁴⁶

In the more heady years of the late 1960s, however, a young Swiss by the name of Zino Davidoff wrote in a more personal vein: 'When I was twenty, I fell in love with the great tobacco plantations in Cuba. This passion of my youth has never been spent.' His father encouraged him to travel to the Americas to learn about the tobacco trade: "I am not able to give you much money," he said, "only some letters of introduction to tobacco merchants. But if you use them correctly, these letters are worth gold. In our business, friendship is not a vain word." He went to Buenos Aires and then Bahia, where one day an old planter said, 'Son, you love tobacco. Go to Cuba – to the land of the red clay soil. There you will discover the puro, the pure cigar. Then, nothing else will exist for you.' He left for Cuba 'in the state of anticipation a young archaeologist might for Greece or a seminarian for Rome'. For two years he stayed there wrapped in 'a veritable state of excitement which affected all the senses.' He worked on a farm, was curious about everything, and in his words:

I learned very quickly that just as there are no two great wines which are the same, no two cigars are identical... Eventually I knew which were the best cigars in the world - and why.⁴⁷

Davidoff was captivated by Cuba's cigars and they would dominate his life for the next 30 years:

When I returned to Europe, I decided to dedicate my talents to the tobacco business. The puro of Cuba is not a cigar like any other... It is the king of tobacco products and should be treated according to its rank... Irreplaceable virtues of this magic island: its geology, wind, water, its miraculous soil... For Cubans, and for me, the puro can be nothing other than Cuba, nothing other than a Havana.

He wrote at the time (1969):

Neither war nor politics has altered the cigar. Great cigars still come from the same precious land. Surviving every vicissitude, a good Havana with a gold or purple band, in its wooden box with cedar shavings, encased in its baroque splendour, is still the master of the cigar world. It cannot be cut off from its glorious past or its obscure origins. Of noble lineage, it will never be a simple manufactured object... It is something that commands respect... A good cigar contains the promise of a totally pleasurable experience... If there is a secret to the cigar, it is to be found in the slow movements, the dignified measured smoking. The movements are more than mannerisms; they are ceremonial acts... The conversation of cigar smoking ought to be slow and majestic...⁴⁸

He continued:

A cigar cannot be truly enjoyed without contemplation, without thinking. You cannot smoke anything at any time, in any place. A cigar should fit your mood,

⁴⁶ González (2004), p.125.

⁴⁷ Zino Davidoff, *The Connoisseur's Book of the Cigar*, New York: McGraw Hill, 1969, p.3.

⁴⁸ Davidoff (1969), pp.7-8.

habits, personality, surroundings... There is an occasion for each cigar and a cigar for each occasion.⁴⁹

Davidoff acknowledged that in the early years of revolution, when cigar manufacturing was nationalised, 'the great names, the best Havanas – vestiges of decadent capitalism and the power of money – were condemned without appeal.'⁵⁰ Sales plummeted, some dispossessed owners sued in The Hague, others established themselves in Virginia, Florida, Philippines, the Canary Islands and the Middle East. In the 1970s and 1980s, he saw himself as part of reviving the quality and brands in Cuba, and for many in Europe Davidoff would become synonymous almost with Cuban cigars. That was until his falling out with Cuba, thirty years later, and his move to the Dominican Republic, where his cigars are produced to this day.

By the late 1990s, Cuban cigars were again on the ascendancy, so much as to occasion claims such as that by Nancy Stout in *Habanos*:

Throughout the history of the cigar, the habano has been unequivocally considered the pinnacle of smoking pleasure. The unparalleled quality of the Havana cigar has bound the idea of Cuba with its most coveted export, and has held the imagination of aficionados around the world for 500 years.⁵¹

She continued:

Throughout the world and throughout the history of the existence of cigars there has been one, and one only, that has been recognised by the true connoisseur as the ultimate cigar, the legendary and peerless one, the non plus ultra, and that is the habano. Habanos are cigars produced only in Cuba, shipped only from the port of Havana, made entirely of special varieties of Cuban-grown tobacco, and marketed only by the designated name habano... They are smoked by the most famous people, and sold for the highest prices, They are imitated and counterfeited. And, always, as the true sign of a rare luxury item, supply sometimes cannot meet demand.⁵²

Nevertheless, the imitations and the counterfeits are not always what they seem, as they might be made with Cuban leaf by Cubans and in very similar climes. At the height of the boom, all kinds of new arrangements surfaced, one of which was the Graycliff story in the Bahamas. As recounted by Jean Edmond in a 1996 Graycliff brochure, there Avelino Lara, 'King of Torcedores (cigar rollers)' was 'like a fine XO cognac' deploying 'forty years of wisdom to create a new masterpiece cigar that will surpass even his greatest accomplishments.' His tobacco blends remained 'as secretive as a CIA operation' and 'with Avelino's background, the Graycliff line will be nothing short of sensational':

Flamboyant entrepreneur and proprietor of Graycliff, Enrico Garzaroli, is in ecstasy for he knows the demand will far surpass what can be produced and at a price tag only for the very affluent. Graycliff also has the largest selection and collection of authentic Cuban cigars than any other restaurant in the world.

Lara had been head of Cuba's El Laguito factory that makes Cohiba, and, in Lara's words: 'the Cohiba is to Cuba as Dom Perignon is to France. It represents something very special to

⁴⁹ Davidoff (1969), pp.29-30.

⁵⁰ Davidoff, *Connoisseur's Book of the Cigar*, p.44.

⁵¹ Stout (1997), inside cover.

⁵² Stout (1997), p.9.

the country.’ Having Lara there, Garzaroli said: ‘it’s almost like having Picasso come to your home and create five years of art which you make available to the public.’ Edmond himself wrote while staying at Graycliff: ‘As I sat in the parlor with a snifter of Delamain Reserve De Famille Rare, a cognac as superb as the cigar I was about to light, I felt like the Czar of Russia in the days of extreme elegance.’⁵³

If ever a story could encapsulate the many contemporary twists and turns to the luxury *Habano*’s history, this must surely be one!

⁵³ Jean M. Emond, ‘Avelino Lara King of the Torcedores’, in *Smoke Affair: Where Every Day’s a Holiday*, Brochure for Graycliff Hotel, Restaurant, and Cigar Establishment, Nassau, Bahamas, n.d., c.1996.

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The mutually reinforcing relationship between 'commodities' and 'empires' has long been recognised. Over the last six centuries the quest for profits has driven imperial expansion, with the global trade in commodities fuelling the ongoing industrial revolution. These 'commodities of empire', which became transnationally mobilised in ever larger quantities, included foodstuffs (wheat, rice, bananas); industrial crops (cotton, rubber, linseed and palm oils); stimulants (sugar, tea, coffee, cocoa, tobacco and opium); and ores (tin, copper, gold, diamonds). Their expanded production and global movements brought vast spatial, social, economic and cultural changes to both metropolises and colonies.

In the Commodities of Empire project we explore the networks through which such commodities circulated within, and in the spaces between, empires. We are particularly attentive to local processes – originating in Africa, Asia, the Caribbean and Latin America – which significantly influenced the outcome of the encounter between the world economy and regional societies, doing so through a comparative approach that explores the experiences of peoples subjected to different imperial hegemonies.

The following key research questions inform the work of project:

- 1) The networks through which commodities were produced and circulated within, between and beyond empires;
- 2) The interlinking 'systems' (political-military, agricultural labour, commercial, maritime, industrial production, social communication, technological knowledge) that were themselves evolving during the colonial period, and through which these commodity networks functioned;
- 3) The impact of agents in the periphery on the establishment and development of commodity networks: as instigators and promoters; through their social, cultural and technological resistance; or through the production of anti-commodities;
- 4) The impact of commodity circulation both on the periphery, and on the economic, social and cultural life of the metropolises;
- 5) The interrogation of the concept of 'globalisation' through the study of the historical movement and impact of commodities.

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