The Birth and Development of British Newspapers in the Coffee Houses

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Title: The Birth and Development of British Newspapers in the Coffee Houses.
Abstract
This work provides a tour of the seventeenth-century England and it focuses on the emergence of coffee houses as a driving force of newspapers. It describes the environment, the confrontation that existed between the owners of the properties and the publishers of newspapers, and the opposition and loss of interest on the part of different social spheres. Subsequently, the work connects this first part with the development of slavery as a source of income, describing the trade system used, the support offered by the English crown and the negative impact it had on the slave communities until its abolition.
Keywords: Coffee House, newspaper, meetings, trade, slavery

Título: Nacimiento y Desarrollo de los Periódicos Británicos en las Casas del Café.
Resumen
Este trabajo proporcionará un recorrido por la Inglaterra del siglo XVII, haciendo hincapié en las casas del café como órgano propulsor de los periódicos. Asimismo describirá el ambiente, la confrontación que existió entre los dueños de los locales y los editores de los periódicos, y la oposición y pérdida de interés por parte de diferentes esferas sociales. Posteriormente, se conectará esta primera parte con el desarrollo de la esclavitud como fuente de ingresos, describiendo el sistema de comercio utilizado, el apoyo ofrecido por la corona inglesa y la negativa repercusión que tuvo sobre las comunidades de esclavos hasta su abolición.
Palabras clave: Casa del Café, periódico, reuniones, comercio, esclavitud.

1. INTRODUCTION

The 17th century is characterized by a period of major changes in England. For the first time, the monarchical system disappeared and society tailored to a new mode of life, driven by a strong economic growth. The Eastern influence raised in the streets of London, an establishment called Coffee House. These establishments begin to witness meetings of enthusiasts of literature or reviewers of social events who proceeded from the highest and lowest strata of English society. The coffee consumers decided to collect and record each shared word giving birth to pamphlets and newspapers, one of the first forms of journalism. However, the informational frenzy will indirectly attack a high percentage of population outside Europe. The consumption and increase of the demand for products such as coffee or sugar will launch England in the search and establishment of plantations. Thanks to the discovery of America two centuries earlier, England will find a wide field where to acquire these products and where to send African slaves to work on these plantations. In this essay I will display an open analysis about the proportionately direct relation of slavery and the development of the transatlantic slave trade with the growth of consumption in the coffee houses due to the fervour for the exchange of news and its subsequent printing in newspaper form. In order to do this I will describe the historical context in which it took place, I will develop an examination of the coffee houses as the institution which gave rise to the newspapers in England and finally I will analyse the factors that propitiate the increase of slavery, its development and its final abolition.

2. HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

The seventeenth century started with the succession of James VI, King of Scotland, to the English throne. A fact that would calm the clashes between the two regions and would provide some stability to the island. Furthermore, the king decided to support the Protestants over the Catholics, another conflict which accentuated the gap between Scotland and England. In addition, he decided to govern without Parliament, reason why he maintained an absolutist government until his death in 1625. His successor Charles I attempted to continue the absolutist administration of his father, a decision that

exacerbated the tension in England, since the parliament, formed by the nobility and bourgeoisie, was against it. All this led to the civil war and the subsequent victory of Oliver Cromwell and his parliamentary army entailed that Charles I was charged with high treason and he was executed in 1649. After these disputes it was settled the Republican or Commonwealth regime, when Cromwell was named Lord Protector. In 1660 the monarchy was restored in the hands of Charles II, who tried to re-establish the monarchical order, but the differences with the Parliament impeded a stable government. James II followed King Charles but the Glorious Revolution on the part of Mary II and her husband William of Orange in 1689, restored the political order of England stablishing the system of constitutional monarchy.

This century was a period of major changes in society, but Assa Briggs stresses that the economic progress "was the major determinant of social change" (Briggs 152). The growth of the British Empire, coupled with the impulse of navigation and trade, led to the emergence of expensive luxury items. Undoubtedly, coffee, tea and sugar were three essential oversea inclusions to the society of the time.

3. COFFEE HOUSES

The first coffeehouse dates from the year 1652. Its chief Pasqua Rosée stablished it in St. Michael's Alley, Cornhill, London. Nevertheless, Rosée set up in 1651 his first coffee shop in Oxford, England.

However, Pasqua wasn't a pioneer in opening a coffee house, as Lord Bacon pointed out in *Sylva Sylvarum* in Turkey, there were already coffee houses: "They have in Turkey a drink called Coffee . . . and they take it, and sit at it in their Coffee Houses, which are like our Taverns" (Ward 141).

From this, numerous of this establishments were emerging, some of them were the Temple Bar, established by James Farr in 1656, Jonathan's Coffee-House opened in 1698 and St. James Coffee-house opened in 1705. By 1739 there were 551 coffeehouses in London and "each attracted a particular type of crowd divided by occupation or attitude". (Dasgupta 78)

During this time, public meetings were not common, neither newspapers, so the coffee houses were the driving force for the pooling of society issues. Coffee houses allowed the entry of men of any social rank who "went daily . . . to learn the news and to discuss it." (Macaulay 80). As a result, the coffee houses became one of the most "public sphere institutions in London (Calhoun 1)". In addition, they became an eye-catching and distinctive of London city. It is important to note that coffee houses were different from the public houses, as unlike these, coffee houses did not allow women to enter or alcohol was sold.

Hence, the entrance to a coffee house implied the access to "meeting places, discussion forums, news centers, institutions of literary criticism, auction houses . . . stock markets, insurance company offices and post boxes" (Calhoun 3). That is why it is not surprising that these exchanges of information and judgements began to shape the public opinion. The narrator of The Censor supported this statement by stating that "in order to see how the World runs, and gather Observations on the Humours of Mankind" someone should "constantly appear once a Day at the Coffee-houses." (Lewis 210).

3.1. The Rise of Newspapers

The writing of all this multitude of opinions, news or events, led to the creation of newspapers and pamphlets. Successively, Joseph Addison and Richard Steele brought The Tatler (1709-1711) and The Spectator (1711-1712) to life in St. James Coffee-house. Gradually, newspapers started to gain distinction, to the point that Samuel Johnson included the following definition of a Coffee House in his Dictionary: "a house of entertainment where coffee is sold, and the guests are supplied with newspapers" (Ellis).

However, it can be considered that although not all the newspapers arose in a coffee house, this favoured their existence thanks to being distributors of the same. Then, I will present some of the most significant models. *The London Gazette* was the very first British newspaper and it was first published as *The Oxford Gazette* on 7 November 1665 and one year later as *The London Gazette*. The origins of this newspaper date back to the Great Plague of London, which ended with 15% of the population. Fearful, King Charles II escaped due to the contagion alert. It was the newspaper of the royalty, and "the first official journal of record" so it was considered a "reliable source of news" ("A History of the Gazette | The Gazette"). In addition, it "served the purposes of both the Crown and the Executive well" ("A History of the Gazette | The Gazette"). Similarly, Elizabeth Mallet published the first daily newspaper in 1702, *The Daily Courant*. It was "printed on

one side" and consisted of "one page of two columns" (Ainsworth 247). Additionally, it contained "paragraphs translated from the Harlem Courant, the Paris Gazette and the Amsterdam Courant" (Ainsworth 247). Her author emphasized its objectivity by saying :"Nor will he take it upon himself to give any Comments or Conjectures of his own, but will relate only matter-of-facts; supposing other People to have Sense enough to make reflections for themselves." (Ainsworth 247)

Jonathan Swift edited *The Examiner* from 1710 to 1714. The content of the newspaper was political in nature but it was treated from the point of view of a Tory. *In 1752,* Henry Fielding and Henry Woodfall published *The public advertiser*, "a daily newspaper" which advertised "the Universal register office and the activities in Bow Street" and it run "daily announcements beneath the masthead that solicited information on thefts and stolen goods" (Lee 152).

The positive reception of the British nation was reflected in the rise of the production. The arrival of the printing press was one of the most notorious events in British history, and it allowed the massive production of books, pamphlets and newspapers, whose prices were affordable for the lower classes. Despite not being so numerous print runs as in present day, James Raven points out that: "The printed output of the 120 years after 1695 was the crowning achievement of the manual press" (Raven 1).

3.2. The Confrontation between Owners and Publishers

An important chapter in the history of coffee houses was that of the dispute between the owners of the establishments and the publishers of the newspapers. The owners of the coffeehouses were aware of their customers' interest in newspapers, so they subscribed to numerous newspapers to maintain the clientele. A curious fact is that these newspapers dealt with both local and foreign issues. In addition, coffee houses were money saving "he that comes often saves two pence a week in Gazets, and has his News and his Coffee for the same charge" (Calhoun 17). However, this would lead to a confrontation between the owners of the property and the publishers, "revealed by pamphlets they published on the matter" (Calhoun 17). The former feared the loss of profits due to the cost of the subscription, "a Paper once received into a Coffee-House is not easily dismiss'd" (Calhoun 17), since they had to continue receiving newspapers that did not have a high follow-up.

"The coffee house owners wanted news for their customers to read, but claimed that up to 50% of material in the papers was advertising." (Barrès-Baker 21) Therefore they made the decision to publish "their own papers, for 'the Coffee-Houses being the Grand Magazines of Intelligence, the Coffee-Men...will be better able to furnish the Town with News-Papers, than any other Persons whatever'." (Calhoun 17), and they released two papers a day. They were aware of the puff of news and information that was transmitted each day in their establishments, so they receive news from anonymous source and later they put it in writing.

3.3. The Fall of Coffee Houses

The fall in popularity and visits to coffee houses can be explained by many factors, one of the most important being the fact that coffee gained a series of refractories. In the first place, it was the Christian community that stood against it, since coffee came from the Islamic world. In fact it tells a popular history that Pope Clement VIII decided to try coffee himself and he declared: "This devil's drink is so delicious. We should cheat the devil by baptizing it" (Crofton), so the coffee started to take reception in the religious circles. Secondly, many merchants feared that the high demand for coffee would lead to a decline in English profits and the decline in demand for ale. Third, in 1674 it was published the pamphlet *Women's Petition against Coffee* in which women claimed the presence of their husbands at home.

Another fact that led to the fall of coffee houses was the industrial revolution. Although this meant important and numerous advances for industry, it also opened the gap between the different social classes, increasing the wealth of the upper class. That is why coffee houses were taken in the form of elite clubs. This is borne out by Edward Gibbons' who in 1762 showed the change that had taken place in relation to the concept of coffee house previously presented: "affords a sight truly English; twenty or perhaps thirty of the first men in the kingdom in point of fashion and fortune, supping at little tables covered with a napkin in the middle of a coffee room upon a bit of cold meat on a sandwich and drinking a glass of punch" (Wade). Thus, "the growing working class" Began to frequent pubs and public houses and to opt for "beer and gin" (Suter 109).

Not only the clientele was moving away from the coffee houses, similarly, the postal system "began delivering direct to homes" (Suter 109) and the newspapers began to be produced in factories, which allowed to make numerous print runs.

The last factor that caused the fall of coffee houses and more specifically of coffee was the increase of the nation's interest in tea. One of the advantages of tea was that it could be consumed at any hour of the day, since the exciting effects of tea were inferior to those of coffee, it did not need a machine to produce it and it could be consumed at home. Consequently, "the distinctive coffee house culture as a popular English culture icon had gone" (Suter 110), in fact, it was adapted to the new fashion, since in the year 1717 Twinings inaugurated the first store of tea.

4. SLAVERY

The relationship between the increase of slavery and the origin and development of newspapers in the coffee houses, is established through the products that were served there, whose origin came from slave plantations. A "commercial revolution" (Cowan 261) took place in England due to the growth of exports and imports and "the rise of coffee and coffeehouses had an important role to play in Britain's prolonged burgeois revolution" (Cowan 261). Thus the increasing demand required more workforce. In these last point I will focus on slavery derived from coffee and sugar plantations.

Although its origin is unknown, many scholars point to Ethiopia as the cradle of coffee consumption and also as a country that began with Yemen, its marketing. The sugar we consume today was introduced on the continent following the discovery of America. Since, it should be mentioned, in ancient times, honey was the product chosen to sweeten other foods. From the 16th century, the countries that owned colonies in tropical America, were possessors of an important sugar production of the sugar cane.

The system of commerce that was carried out was known as transatlantic triangular system, being "recognised as the potential engine to drive economic development" (Ennals 78) and maintained from the 16th to the 19th century. The ship sailed from England with a series of manufactured goods, which "included guns, shackles and muzzles manufactured in Birmingham, and textiles from Lancashire" (Ennals 102). These were later profitably traded on the African coast for slaves "which were transported to the Americas on 'the middle passage'" (Ennals 102). Upon arrival in America, they were exchanged for products such as tobacco, cotton, coffee or sugar, which were once again headed for the metropolis.

England, along with Portugal, was one of the countries that potentiated most the slave trade, "accounting for about 70% of all Africans transported to the Americas", "between 1640 and 1807 when the British slave trade was abolished" (Britain and the Slave Trade 1). Numerous studies have revealed that about 3.1 million Africans were transferred from their continent to the New World in this triangular trade.

Given the immense benefit of the trade, which "provided the foundations for the banks established by Alexander and David Barclay, and by Francis Baring, who earned £7,000,000 from slave trading" (Ennals 95) it is not surprising that the English government became involved in this exchange of human beings, through "charters . . . acts to improve trade" financial assistance and eventually "[they took] over the settlements" (Britain and the Slave Trade 3). Besides African companies, the government propelled the creation of companies that were under its protection. For instance, one of these companies was the East India Company founded by royal charter in 1600 which "collected slaves from the West Coast of Africa for its settlements in South and East Africa and in India and Asia". (Britain and the Slave Trade 3).

The other side of this trade was characterized by the absence of protection and humanitarian aid to slaves. In fact, they used to receive a completely opposite treatment. Slaves were "routinely tortured (e.g. whipped, branded, beaten, chained, etc.); separated from other family members; and even deprived of their own names" (Kaye 2). In fact, many of them could not reach the new continent because either torture could lead to death or captivity was so unhealthy that they lost their lives on the ship, in fact, the figures sustain that between the "10 and 20 per cent of slaves died in transit" (Kaye 2). If we go on talking about numbers, the number of slaves being transported to the plantations amounts to 80,000. When they stepped ashore, their life situation did not change. Their working day consisted of "14 hours [harvests] of back breaking labour, six days a week in extreme heat" (Kaye 2). Hard work, new diseases to which they were exposed, discrimination by the employers, and feeding were some of the factors why "approximately one in every three Africans died within three years of arriving" (Kaye 2) in the plantation. On the other hand plantation owners preferred to ignore the situation since the economic benefit was greater than the loss of human lives.

However, the echo of the shouts of the slaves was sensitizing the masses of Europeans, who organized themselves in committees for the abolition of this slave trade. The Society for the Abolition of the Slave Trade and the Anti-Slavery Society possessed "its own network of local and regional auxiliaries" and they "endorsed mass petitioning" (Oldfield). "The Abolition of the Slave Trade Act, along with subsequent Acts [gave Britain the role] to patrol the coast of West Africa and

the Caribbean looking out for illegal slavers" (Kaye 4). Thus, the country that paradoxically strengthened the slave trade, would end up fighting for its destruction in the 19th century.

5. CONCLUSION

In short, the 17th century opened the gap not only between different social classes, but between those who would begin to be called the First and the Third World. While in England, coffee houses were an incentive for public cohesion and the expansion of knowledge, the needs of Europeans were covered by indigenous communities who struggled to survive. This essay has tried to highlight the importance of coffee houses in the English society from its formation to its decline, marking as a fundamental fact the emergence of the newspaper and in turn, to establish a link with the development of slavery and its economic benefits, exhibiting the loss of human lives and concluding with its abolition centuries later. Further research is needed to prove the connection between the coffee houses and slavery. For this purpose, it would be interesting to investigate the figures of coffee and sugar imported into England in this period of time, the possible testimonies of merchants and to have access to the first editions of newspapers that emerged in these establishments.

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