Shaping Southeast Asian Taste: Curry as Historical Evidences of Muslim Trade Networks in the Indian Ocean

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Abstract

Though most spices originated from and were mostly consumed nowadays in areas in the Indian Ocean, discussion about the history of spices always started with European exploration in the 15th and 16th centuries. For these spice-producing-and-consumming areas, such a Eurocentric view undermined their role in the spice route and gave them nothing but uneasy memory when remembering spice, because the majority of people there knew it only as a fortune looted by the Europeans. In these spice-producing areas, dishes similar to what modern society now identify as curry were found since the early modern period. By using historical methods and utilization of secondary sources like studies about the early modern economy and regional food history of Asia, this paper attempts to know more about the relationship between spices and people in the Indian Ocean, for I am sure that millennia aged contact between them must result from far more complex relation than just a relation between commodity and the people who cultivate and sell it. Scrutinizing curry resulted in a conclusion that spice masters of the Indian Ocean were neither spoiled cultivators nor lazy hosts. Curry was a happy memory of an era of economic boom, where people all over the Indian Ocean competitively took part in the expanding network of Muslim trade and profited greatly from the lucrative maritime spice trade.

Keywords: Spice, Curry; Spice Trade; Indian Ocean; Muslim Trade Network.
Introduction

Growing up in Indonesia, my first encounter with the word ‘spices’ occurred as early as elementary school, but not in the market or my mother's kitchen. It was when my teacher told her student that spice was the cause of Western colonization. What my teacher said, I suppose, speaks for a wider reality. Though spices mostly came from “the East”, the historical discussion of spices started when it was encountered by the Europeans. In Indonesian historiography, the spice was told as a treasure looted by the Europeans. It was nevertheless briefly discussed in the period before the coming of the Europeans, but merely as a charm to attract foreigners to come from far away. This way, the position of Indonesians in the spice trade was extremely simplified to a supplier who saw spices as no more than a commodity that brought them a fortune.

On the contrary, we know how spice was perceived more than just as a commodity in Europe. From the work of namely Jack Turner (2004) and Paul Fredman (2008), we know that in the West, spices used to be fashionable food items, a divine myth, and believed to be the cure for everything. They have succeeded in explaining the uncanny fascination among the Europeans towards spices in antiquity, as well as the social and intellectual transformation behind the reason for their abandonment of spicy food culture in later periods. Seeing that this is also the story provided by studies about the history of spices which were available in English, the Indonesian experience, that discussion about spices only start after it was found by the Europeans, echoed in other spice-producing countries. During my explorations, studies about spices in those countries that I found mostly came from the medical or economic side which aimed to examine their value for modern societies. Little is known about the development that sustained spices to stay existing from those ancient times to our present days. We know more about spices in the Roman Empire than in the Malabar Coast where most of the pepper came from, Ceylon where the cinnamon was, Banda the source of nutmeg, and Ternate for clove.
Fig. 1 Per Capita Total Spice Consumption by Region 1961-2007


The fact that countries in “the East”, or what now is most representatively identified as countries in the Indian Ocean, dominated the list of highest spice per capita consumption and how little we know about what spices meant for those societies from time to time is an irony. As in my own experience, I do know from a very young age that my mother massively uses chili, pepper, galangal, turmeric, lemongrass, bay leaf, and ginger for cooking, but in my hometown, we call it bumbu dapur or “essential seasonings” rather than rempah-rempah or spices. It wasn't until I was much older that I realize that they were the same thing. I think these also illustrate how Indonesians, and most likely people in the other spice-producing countries in the Indian Ocean, did not see or took for granted the connection between the glorious spice from their past and the very same thing that they consume every day.

The heritage of the spice route that Indonesians celebrate mostly was by-products that came from the encounter ignited by spices but involved no spices in it. For
example, we have heard a lot about how Lasem’s batik, fortresses in Maluku, or Chinese Temples in Pantura echoed Indonesia’s glorious past when its spices invited people from all over the world to come and trade. It is very unlikely that the mighty spices which once brought power to countries in the Indian Ocean, especially in the early modern period, and has been sustained to be one important thing that they consume for various purposes until nowadays by nothing. It was impossible that the millennia-old relation between spices and people in the place where it came from formed nothing besides a relationship between the commodity and the men who plant and sell it.

In starting the endeavor to dig more into the development of people’s perception of spices in the Indian Ocean using the historical approach, I set curry as my object. Curry surprisingly is a kind of dish that could be found in most of the spice-producing areas and the early modern hot spots of the spice trade. (Chaudhuri, 1990: 173-174) Curry is a dish that employs massive use of spices namely pepper, turmeric, ginger, cinnamon, cumin, cardamom, chili, nutmeg, clove, and onion. This study departs from a hypothesis that curry was formed by great changes that occurred once in the spice route. Despite its global popularity, the study of curry is still scarce (Collingham, 2006; Trang, 2006; Sen, 2009; Rahman, 2016), and none has sufficiently analyzed its connection to the spice trade and spice route.

By using a historical approach, I aimed to trace both the history of the curry and spice trade and reconstruct them as one from the point of view where things were entangled between them. The sources used are mostly secondary and consisted of established studies about the early modern economy of the Indian Ocean, as well as regional food histories. The latter is particularly used to find early modern recipes of curry, a source very essential to food history. The findings were organized into three sub-chapters which talk about 1) how the spice trade gave birth to curry, 2) the variation of curry dispersed in the world to set the boundaries of the “curry-sphere”, and 3) the explanation of processes that happens within the curry-sphere and what does it mean for Indian Ocean people as the master of spices.
With such methods, this paper argues that starting the discussion about spices with the coming of the European or merely taking it as a nice odor of “the East” that attracted them is of a severe simplification. The formation of curry culture explains the active agency of people in the Indian Ocean in handling spices because curry was not a byproduct of the spice trade. Curry was a culture they formed out of excitement and strategic vision to help the trade grow. That way, curry gives a room where people in the spice-producing area, or especially whose case is the most familiar to me: in Indonesia, commemorate spice in a more pleasant way than just a fortune looted by the Europeans.

**Discussion**

**From Spice to Currysphere**

The story of spices is the story of every civilization but the producers and the first-hand traders. We know spices were a highly desired commodity in great civilizations like Egypt, Rome, and China. (Ptak, 1992: 31; Czara, 2009: 31) We know spices from many points of view of the consumer, but little is known about how it was perceived by the first hand who handled the commodity. This was not surprising given these few reasons. First, sources were rather difficult for scrutinizing the view of people in the Indian Ocean, especially Southeast Asia, who was known for their “oral traditions”. (Reid, 1992: 270) As a consequence, the story from the other players, who were better in documentation, came truer to the eye of modern researchers. Second, travel accounts like when Pigafetta said that the people in Maluku was not knowing the use of spices in the 15th century were called many times (Reid, 1999: 9), often enough to make it sounds like it speaks for the whole period of the spice trade. By those premises, we were delightfully walked to the conclusion that spice was always loved by its faraway consumers but not by the people in its place of origin.

Given the scarcity of sources, it was valid enough to say that Pigafetta’s account speaks for a wide range of society at that time, only not for later periods. Curry dishes that involved massive use of spices such as *Kaeng Massaman* in Southern Thailand and
Rendang in Sumatra were said to be mentioned in sources from as early as the 16th century. (Wongcha-Um, 2010; Hanifah, 2017) Marsden (1811: 62) said that in the 18th century, food in the strait of Malaka was mostly cooked in a curry way as in India. Rafless (1817: 63) in his extensive description of early 19th century Java, mentioned that in Java existed a kind of soupy dish (jangan) named Gulai Melayu, after a place where it first developed (Melayu or Malay). A colonial cookbook Koki Bitja from the 19th century also mentioned Kari as one of the most commonly cooked dishes in the Dutch East Indies (Rahman, 2016: 104-131). The descriptions of those foods mentioned that each recipe required many kinds of spices.

Fadly Rahman (2016: 39-40) argues that the non-preference for black pepper in some areas of the archipelago was valid to accuse the people of despising the flavor of spices. This argument when combined with Pigafetta’s account of how people in Maluku did not know the use of spices, could illustrate a situation where the development of curry was impossible. Simply put, if the people where many kinds of spices originated did not know and did not enjoy it, they cannot grow fondness towards a dish as spicy and as heavily flavored as curry. However, such a conclusion is misleading. Even if the pungent flavor of black pepper was not preferred, there were still a bunch of spices that were used. Rahman (2016: 39-40) used sources from the 17th and 18th centuries, the period when curry already existed in the archipelago according to the sources used in the previous paragraph. About Hikayat Banjar and Hikayat Pocut Muhammad he cited, I am more inclined to an alternative interpretation from Reid (1999:347-348) that the aversion among the people in Banjarmasin (Hikayat Banjar) and Aceh (Hikayat Pocut Muhammad) towards pepper was caused by Dutch monopoly which destroyed their pepper trade. Nevertheless, spicy was already a basic flavor known in Southeast Asian cooking since the first millennia (Rahman, 2016: 30). Reid (1992: 35-36) said, behind the absence of explanation about spicy food in foreign travel accounts from the 15th and 16th century about Southeast Asia, there is a great chance that it was not because Southeast Asian food was not spicy, but because spices were so popular to be consumed in Asia so most of the food, be it Arabs, Indians,
Southeast Asian, or Chinese, were spicy. That way, spiciness did not become something “exotic” enough to note.

Little enthusiasm towards spices from the people where spices originated might prove that it was indeed at the beginning for them a commodity demanded in foreign places. Spices from Ternate and Banda have reached Egypt since BC. It was a period too early for any records about foodways in Maluku to exist. From the oldest that I managed to find, from around the 10th century, though it involved spicy as a basic flavor, food in Southeast Asia was simply cooked and seasoned. Proteins were fish fried or roasted, not meat stews; and strong flavor came from pungent relishes which used only long pepper, ginger, and turmeric, not a dozen kinds of spices at once as in curry. However, since the 16th century spices have been massively used in dishes like Kaeng Massaman and Rendang which possessed distinctive characteristics so close to what we now know as curry. Those dishes were thick stews that often use meat as the main ingredients but could also vegetables, employing at least a dozen kinds of spices which were sautéed first in oil before simmered down in broth and thickening substances such as ghee, milk, chickpea powder, or coconut milk. The definition was proposed by K. N. Chaudhuri (1990: 173-174). This kind of dish, according to him, was prevalent in many places in the Muslim-dominated Indian Ocean from the 10th to 18th century.

Some elements of curry described by Chaudhuri were very similar to Arabian sour meat stew (ḥawāmiḍ). Arabian sour stew usually was meat simmered down in milk and flavored with sugar and sour substances. (Lewicka, 2011: 191) One of the examples was Prophet Mohammad’s favorite, Tharid (Fredman, 2007: 136). Though the method of cooking resembled that of curry, these Arabian meat stews were mostly lightly flavored. They used spices but in a very insignificant amount and the dominant flavor was sweet and sour. (Fredman, 2007: 139) The creation of Curry, according to Elizabeth Collingham (2006: 27) was incubated in India. It was during the early times of the Mughal Empire in the 11th century, when its royalty which was of Persian-Mongolian blood, brought their fondness towards meat and "Arab stew" downward to the
subcontinent. In the subcontinent, it was mixed with the food culture of the predominantly Hindu population who despised meat and loved spices. Curry was born, Collingham said, within the inclusive Mughal court kitchen and then dispersed to the rest of the populations who slowly embraced Islam.

Since curry could be found in areas wider than Indian subcontinents, Collingham’s “Mughal Explanation” is not sufficient. Rather than only because of the wisdom of the Mughal inclusive court, I think the formation of curry represents the busy spice trade and the growing prosperity it caused in the littoral Indian Ocean during the early modern period. A version of Tharid which was lightly spiced came from before the 7th century, before the economic boom of the Abbasids in the 9th century. After more Muslim traders became richer, they could afford spices that used to be too fancy to consume. Arabian sour stews that used to be spiced only with a pinch of cinnamon, started to incorporate more spices in this later version of the recipe (Fredman, 2007: 139, 149).

Growing prosperity was also felt in the Eastern part of the Indian Ocean. In Southeast Asia, red meat, which primarily was used for curry in the western part of the Indian Ocean or when it was still the Arabian sour stew, was rare. According to Reid (1992: 37), the tropical rainforest landscape which dominated Southeast Asia was impossible for cattle breeding. Their main source of protein, therefore, came from fish and a small amount of domesticated poultry. Red meat which could only be obtained by hunting was only served on special occasions since it was of great value (Reid, 1992: 38). The use of meat in Sumatran curries illustrated a growing prosperous community in the cities which were also a market for cattle. It likely stimulated the cattle breeding business to grow. Southeast Asian regarded spices as cheap but meat as expensive, and the Arabs were on the contrary. Both now consumed meat and spices in the form of curry because they were more connected and richer than ever.

Only, curry is a problematic term. Curry itself was a term coined firstly by the British to call the most prevalent kind in Indian cooking (Sen, 2009: 10-11). From time to time, curry has gained a lot of resentment coming mostly from the Indians
themselves. Curry was accused to be culturally inappropriate abstractions made by a foreign party towards a culture whose richness was beyond their knowledge. (Anand, 2015; Khan, 2019) The British even invented the instant powder of curry. (Sen, 2009: 11) This curry powder, in the 19th and 20th centuries, was responsible for the spread of British-invented curry to an even wider space, mostly through the agencies of forced workers mobilized under the incredibly vast British empire (Sen, 2009: 12).

I decided to use the term curry not to refer to the 19th and 20th-century curry whose development was supported by the discovery of curry powder. The curry from the earlier period I talk about uses no curry powder. Even if they employed the use of powdered spice, the recipes would still vary from one place to another. My usage of the term instead was derived from the same motive of Chaudhuri and Collingham. Besides, even though very likely curry got its worldwide popularity because of the convenient use of curry powder, the taste and appearance of curry in the early modern period and our modern version now still agree. Therefore calling it curry throughout this paper will be easier for the reader without undermining the meaning instead of if I use more politically and chronologically correct terms such as “spicy milky early modern meat stew of the Indian Ocean”.

The Curry of the Indian Ocean

Curry appeared in the Muslim trading community of the Indian Ocean between the 10th to 18th centuries, but where exactly? This part will define the area of curry dispersion or curry-sphere. In this part too, will be explained the limit of the dispersion or the reason why it did not spread further to China or in other Muslim societies such as Egypt and Turkey. From there we could solidify our argument that the Muslim trading community of the Indian Ocean served as the incubator for curry was distinctive in particular time and space. The spice route stretched much longer than that, Muslim civilization too covered an area much wider, but one region must have been included within both categories to be able to have its curry.
If we departed from the definition we have formulated in the first part, *Doro Wat* in Ethiopia, *Tharid* in the Middle East, *Korma* and *Biryani* in India, *Rogan Josh* in Kashmir, *Mas Riha* in Maldives, *Laksa* in Singapore and Malaysia, *Gulai* and *Rendang* in Indonesia, *Kaeng Massaman* in Southern Thailand, and *Piyanggang Manok* in Southern Philippine are curry. Their places of origin undeniably were settlements of trading communities in the Indian Ocean.

Trading communities in the Indian Ocean were indeed part of the spice route but not instantly all area falls under the stretch of spice route has curry. The most prominent case was China. Even though China was where one of the earliest and steadiest demands of spice came — knowledge about pepper was found in the record of the Han dynasty from the 2nd century BC (Czara, 2009: 33) —, their cuisine did not use spices in curry way. The Muslim community in China, such as the Uyghurs, belonged to a different trail of Islamization than that of the booming economy of the Indian Ocean. Their Islamization happened earlier in the 10th century through the Central Asian network, and further on in the 13th century, through the institutionalizations of the Chinese Muslim community under the Yuan Dynasty (Hammond, 2019). Therefore, their cuisine resembles Mongolian. Their cuisine heavily used meat but only a little amount of spices. Though those arid regions also had a lot of dairy products, meat was rather eaten dry as kebab than stewed in milk. The soup they had was more clear and light than thick. In greater China, clear soup was also preferred over thick stew.

In the 9th century, there were already Muslims from Arabs conducting maritime trade with China (Lombard, 2005:22), but their cultural influence was not detectable in the vast region of China. In China, traders were usually treated as an outsider. They were given posts, quite free to conduct their business, but had no access to infiltrate the community. This happens for around 5 centuries. (Hammond, 2019) The same pattern also happened in Thailand. Therefore, a variant of curry in Thailand appears in the 16th century Pattani where a Muslim community was secluded for merely economic objectives by the predominantly Buddhist Siam. The name of the curry is Massaman Curry. The word *massaman* was believed to come from *Musulman* or “the Muslims” in
Thai. (Wongcha-Um, 2010) This curry, just like its fellow coastal Indian Ocean curry, was a spicy orange-colored thick meat stew.

Being Muslim is also not the only requirement to have curry. The Turks, the Egyptians, and the Muslims of Central Asians were among those Muslims who don’t have curry. Muslim Arabs community was the origin of ḥawāmid or sour meat stew, the ancestor of curry. When their living standard increased during the economic boom in the 9th century, they started to incorporate more spices into their stew. This phenomenon happened mostly in the Arabian Peninsula and Indian subcontinent, where the Muslim traders of the Indian Ocean mostly came from. The Turks, the Egyptians, and the Muslim people in Central Asia did not have curry because first, they were more a part of an older network of silk routes or caravan trade than spice routes or maritime trade. In these regions, spice use was rather limited because spices were transported in a much smaller amount and slower. Secondly, in those areas further away from the origin of spices which mostly incorporated in curry such as nutmeg, cloves, turmeric, ginger, and pepper, the Arabian sour stew was less spicy and more sour. Despite their wealth, spices were still more expensive in the area further from their origin. Therefore, it stayed Arabian sour stew in the West but transformed into Curry in the East.

In the whole chain of coastal Muslim towns of the Indian Ocean, these few patterns of curry could be found. They firstly fulfilled these primary requirements which were to use a dozen or more kind of spices, have a main ingredients which mostly were meat but could also be other things, have a thickening substance, and cooked by first fry the spices in little oil, simmer it down with thickening substance, and then boil the main ingredients in that mix. Every region had its adaptation of this spicy Arabian stew. In Africa, the thickening substance used was mostly chickpea powder. Some also use ghee and milk in the northern part of India, but in southern India, Ceylon, Bengals, and Southeast Asia, it was mostly coconut milk. In Africa, the Middle East, and Northern India, they used primarily mutton, but sometimes also beef and chicken. In Ceylon and in Java, where Islamization came later and the society was still dominated by Hindus
until later time than the other region, the use of Jackfruit and fish as a replacement for meat is common. In Southeast Asia, people loved to add their twist like tamarind, galangal, and fish sauce. In the Indonesian archipelago and Thailand, it could be seen that the curry that was similar to any other region in the Indian Ocean littoral was found around the Strait of Malacca, such as *Rendang* and *Kaeng Massaman*. In Bangkok and Central Java, the main ingredients were replaced or mixed with all kinds of vegetables, the soup is more heavily sweetened, and local flavors such as lime leaves, galangals, tamarind, and shrimp paste were added. In Maluku, the source of fine spices essential for curry, cloves, and nutmeg, food was lightly spiced compared to in Sumatera and other Indian Ocean coastal Muslim communities. The Muslim tradition in Maluku according to Schrieke (1955) radiated from its source of Islamization, which was Java, not directly from Muslim traders who came from the western part of the Indian Ocean.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Region</th>
<th>Curry</th>
<th>Main Ingredients</th>
<th>Thickening Substance</th>
<th>Spices</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Ethiopia</td>
<td>Doro wat</td>
<td>Chicken/egg</td>
<td>Ghee Injera (sponge bread)</td>
<td>Cumin, cardamom, coriander, black pepper, chilli, clove, nutmeg, ginger, poppyseed,</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Arabian desert</td>
<td>Tharid</td>
<td>mutton/goat</td>
<td>Ghee Injera (sponge bread)</td>
<td>Used to be plain, but the later version also incorporated spices such as clove, chilli, cumin, black pepper, cardamom</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kashmir</td>
<td>Rogan Josh</td>
<td>mutton/goat</td>
<td>yogurt</td>
<td>Clove, bay leaf, cardamom, cinnamon, ginger, garlic, lal mirch (Kashmiri dried chilli)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Country</td>
<td>Dish</td>
<td>Meat/Produce</td>
<td>Spice/Herb</td>
<td>Milk/Condiment</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>----------------</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>India</td>
<td>Korma</td>
<td>mutton/chicken</td>
<td>Almond, yogurt</td>
<td>Cinnamon, cardamom, clove, bay leaf, coriander, cumin, ginger, onion, garlic</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>India</td>
<td>Biryani</td>
<td>Beef/mutton</td>
<td>milk</td>
<td>Cardamom, coriander, cumin, cinnamon, clove, ginger, onion, garlic, chili</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>India</td>
<td>Aloo gobi</td>
<td>cauliflower, potato</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>Coriander, cumin, ginger, curry leaf, turmeric, onion kalonji, garlic</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Maldives</td>
<td>Mas Riha</td>
<td>tuna/jackfruit</td>
<td>Coconut milk</td>
<td>Cardamom, ginger, curry leaf, cumin, fennel, turmeric, black pepper,</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Malaysia, Singapore</td>
<td>Laksa</td>
<td></td>
<td>coconut milk</td>
<td>Turmeric, lime leaf, onion, garlic, belacan (shrimp paste), lemon grass, galangal</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sumatera</td>
<td>Rendang/Kalio</td>
<td>beef/ buffalo beef</td>
<td>coconut milk</td>
<td>Coriander, ginger, tamarind, nutmeg, clove, turmeric, cinnamon, chili, onion, garlic, galangal, lime leaf, bay leaf, lemongrass</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sumatera, Java, Malaysia</td>
<td>Gulai</td>
<td>beef/ chicken/ goat/ jackfruit</td>
<td></td>
<td>Coriander, pepper, fennel, nutmeg, cinnamon, cumin, turmeric, ginger, chili, onion, garlic, galangal, lemongrass (Javanese variant)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Southern Thailand | Kaeng Massaman | beef/chicken/duck, potato | coconut milk | cardamom, cinnamon, clove, cumin, nutmeg, chili, white pepper, coriander, bay leaf, galangal, lemon grass, kapi (shrimp paste), fish sauce, tamarind, palm sugar

Southern Philippines | Piyanggang Manok | beef/goat | charred coconut meat | Pepper, ginger, turmeric, garlic, onion, galangal, lemongrass

Fig. 2 The variation of curry in the Indian Ocean. The spices in red are local variations.


In the 16th century, the involvement of the Iberian and the Colombian exchange also brought a twist to curry. In modern times, we could hardly see curry without chili. Chili was not around when cooks in Baghdad or the Mughal court started to incorporate more spices into the sour Arabian stew. It was one of the new things from the new world brought by the Iberians with their joining the Indian Ocean trade in the 16th century. The secret of why chili is so popular, why it was later used in Ethiopian's *Doro Wat* to Javanese *Gulai*, was its easiness to grow and its strong taste when compared to indigenous sources of spiciness such as ginger, pepper, or turmeric. Some experts even believe the spread of chili in some way got help from bird migration that accidentally carries the seeds (Andrews, 2002: 282).
The Forces Behind the Formation of Curry

From the previous chapter, we have solidified the area of dispersion of curry or the curry-sphere. In other words, we have successfully identified our main argument. We have also learned that the dispersion relied heavily on the success of Muslim traders in forming and managing trading networks in the early modern Indian Ocean. That is why the form of curry existed at a place depending on how Muslim power was accepted there. However, the thing we have learned is the end product. This last part, therefore, will analyze the process Curry and societies in the Indian Ocean had to go through before reached that end.

Curry got easily dispersed because the agent was traders. Giovanni Rebora (2001: xvi) who studied early modern food culture in Italy proposed that food responds to several things like major political happenings, great discoveries, and the commercial agreements of international traders, but the latest speak the loudest for this particular period. Many movements of people which gave the infrastructure needed for exchanges in food culture were driven by the reason to trade. Even in the case of the Spanish and Portuguese, where religious and patriotic motives also contributed, all were set into a purpose that revolves around creating an international trading network at the end.

Trade during the early modern period was about early direct globalization. The Indian Ocean was a sphere where traders from Europe—which also brought influences from America—, Africa, India, Southeast Asia, East Asia, and the Pacific were involved in close contact with one another. Previously, the caravan trade did not allow people to travel far, and fast, and bring a great load of things at once. The pieces of stuff they carried were of a far smaller quantity. At that time, spices that arrived in Europe had to move slowly across deserts and flat grasslands in the middle part of Eurasia through probably hundreds of hands of caravan traders. If according to Chaudhuri (1985: 222) excessive distance of maritime trade of the early modern period has rationalized the price of things which were irrational by modern standards, the irrationality was manifold during the caravan trade. This is why the demand for spice
was heavily driven by myth (Turner, 2004; Fredman, 2008; Czara, 2009). Maritime trade, on the contrary, allowed the Europeans to encounter the people behind the spice cultivation that they used to imagine as mythical creatures. This way, the exchange of cultures between various nations of the globe could happen at once, and the trader was its most important agent. During the caravan trade, information was much more limited and distorted as it has to move across great distances slowly. Because of that, the knowledge a society possessed about a thing could not be directly transferred to another society. In Europe during the medieval time, the Church and nobility have the right and honor to make sense of a foreign object for their people.

Fig. 3 Cinnamon was harvested by mythical creatures, a European depiction from the 16th century.
In the early modern period, economic motives moved people more than religious dogma. Because of this, Christian Europeans saw missionaries who initiated contact with people in Asia as a disturbance to their business. Missionaries looked downward to strangers and aimed to change them accordingly to their values, while traders tried to respect them and treat them as an equal trading partners, if not superior partners with whom they must lower their heads to. (Risso, 1995: 5) Islam was a unique case because the teaching supported trade almost in total contrast way to Christianity. Among the Muslims, traders were usually cum missionaries. Successful coastal trading hubs in Africa and Asia had been converted to Islam by "immersing" Muslim traders cum preachers (Risso, 1995: 6).

The prominence of traders behind an exchange in food culture, or even bigger, the creation of a brand new food culture occurred in the case of curry. The early modern period in the Indian Ocean was when the traders experienced an era of privilege. Being called by Ho (2006: 100) an Islamic New World, the Indian Ocean was a transcultural space where many strong Islamic polities were in good communication with each other, so the Muslims in general traveled and lived within it easily, safely, and profitably. This great power ignited the establishment of port cities and Islamic polities across the Indian Ocean from the thirteenth century on. In Southeast Asia, it happened especially in the fourteenth century, after the shifting of the trade route from the Persian Gulf to the Red Sea made the strait of Melaka into the meeting point for the traders from the South China Sea and Indian Ocean. These are the area where curry grows.

The second explanation of why curry got dispersed easily is because one of the prominent reasons behind the dissemination of food culture is excitement about foreign superior culture. Felipe Fernandez-Ernesto (2002: 138) called it cultural magnetism. People in Java and Sulawesi saw sayyids from Hadramaut, and their conversion to Islam as a ticket to be the eligible member of the lucrative Indian Ocean Muslim trade network. They started to look at them with excitement, adoration, and respect. Then they started to imitate their way of life. Just like how people came from
the pilgrimage to Mecca wearing white robes like a Muslim scholar in Arab, people in the Southeast Asian archipelago who joins the network later in the 14th century also tried to copy the food of their seniors in the Muslim merchants world.

Nonetheless, according to Felipe (2002: 132), food always revolves between two extremes. It was easily influenced by outsiders, but a person's definition of tasty must corresponds to the history of one's palate. No matter how adaptive a food culture was in encountering new influences, they would never leave some of their comfort spots. This is why, besides of course an adaptive behavior to the limitation of natural resources, the main ingredients, thickening substances, and the choice of spices were varied across the curry sphere. In Southeast Asia, the use of galangal, lemon grass, lime leaves, shrimp paste, and tamarind was prevalent. These additional stuff were so essential to Southeast Asian cooking and simply could not be found in curry in another place.

When Muslim polities lost economic and political function to British or Dutch imperialism from the 17th and 18th centuries, they mostly still have their cultural function which became the preservation incubator of these curry recipes. It could be by a surviving symbolic local court residing side by side with the truly controlling Dutch or Indian officers. Besides, the egalitarian characteristics of Islamization made Curry transcends social boundaries. It was both consumed in the palace and in the wider community. Rendang though was also courtly cuisine in West Sumatera, first appearing as the food of the traveling traders and pilgrims. Its dry form came from an endeavor to preserve the curry longer for a journey. Therefore, if curry wasn’t commemorated as palace cuisine, it was still growing among ordinary people in the persisting Muslim community. Besides, northwestern European imperialism which dominated Asia at least since the 18th century care less about religion than their predecessors, therefore Islam maintained itself to be the religion of the majority. The rather fancy characteristic, because, remember, it was the food of the economic boom, survived through hard times by adapting itself to be festive food consumed on Muslim big days. This explains
why in Indonesia and Malaysia, we have all kinds of curry such as *gulai, kare, rendang, and opor* served as the essential dish of Eid.

**Conclusion**

Gambling in the narrative of Indonesian history has two different faces. Gambling activity, on the one hand, can be used as an economic resource, but on the other hand, it is transformed into a social disease in society. It is on this bad side that movements to eradicate gambling emerge. The process of eradicating gambling in the movement container does not appear overnight. In the beginning, from the 1950s to the 1960s, this movement had yet to show itself. Efforts to eradicate gambling are realized with resolutions from social organizations to related parties at the regional level, one of which is the DPRD. It seems that this cannot produce satisfactory results. It is proven that gambling is increasingly difficult to eradicate, even in society, various new types of gambling emerge. In the next period, in the late 1960s, the government used gambling as an alternative economic source by imposing a tax on gambling. The government, society, and religious leaders faced a difficult situation then. Gambling is prohibited in religion, but ensuring the stability of the financial balance requires the government to gain alternative economic resources as quickly as possible. The struggle to eradicate gambling gained momentum in the 1990s when Muslims politically became the main consideration for the authorities at that time. Movements that were previously only resolutions and proposals erupted into socio-religious movements by equating the mission of eradicating gambling with Islamic principles. The result of the movement was able to force the government to stop gambling nationally in 1991. It is undeniable that the spices and spice route was understood among Indonesians, who propose it to be a world heritage to UNESCO, as well as among other prominent spice-producing and consuming countries in the Indian Ocean, as not much more than 1) a fortune that made traders from all kinds of backgrounds came and pin them on the global trade network, and 2) a fortune that was looted by the Europeans in the 16th – 17th century. At first, it seems like nothing went wrong with these two views. The
History taught in school was mostly built upon these premises too. However, as we take a look closer, things were not that good. The narration that positioned spices as the fortune that causes Indonesia’s fame and prime position in the international trading network regarded the people of the Indonesian Archipelago as passive actors. We were just sitting, waiting for traders to buy our spices and being rich, no matter how powerful we became out of the fortune. The second narration, that telling spices as a looted possession was a sad story, which left us with a trauma if not a vengeful feeling towards the antagonist and the period.

Historical sources and archeological findings have proven that spices from the east have reached Egypt and Rome since before Christ. That means people have utilized spices and laid the foundation for the spice route for more than two thousand years. That tells us that what we knew now is nothing close to a sufficient image of the actual spice route. Even more, by starting the discussion only with the coming of the Europeans, we have left thousands of years unexplored. The first thing we could start is by asking what the spice routes made us rather than a spoiled cultivator or a defeated host.

Curry is a strategic way to know more about the relationship between people in the Indian Ocean and spices before the coming of the Europeans. Curry is proven to be found in most of the Muslim coastal communities in the Indian Ocean. The genesis of curry could happen because of the rising power of Muslim traders. It was a meld of the food culture of the earliest civilizations conquered by Muslim power and then spread to the sphere of the Indian Ocean because their economic prominence mesmerized and invited more people venturing into the ocean to join their community.

Exploration of curry told us that people of the spice-producing area were on the opposite of the unpleasant features. With the genesis of curry in harbor towns of the archipelago, they were actively involved in the flourishing Muslim trading network. They did not just wait but registered themselves in the community, and by that, they invited more customers to come, raised the price, stabilized the economy, and brought prosperity to their people. The enthusiasm of people in the archipelago in creating their
version of curry was both a sign of outstanding creativity and full consciousness of what was happening. At the same time, they wanted to embrace being a part of a global network and had this exquisite taste so rather than just swallow foreign influence wholly, they adapt it to the most suitable version to them. This way, as I promised in the introduction, spices give us way more pleasant memories than just a given characteristic that make us passively lazy or something that was robbed from us.

However, the relationship between spices and people in the spice-producing area in the Indian Ocean was still a huge terra incognita. This curry mission is a start and only humbly aimed to motivate similar endeavors. Chances for more identifications, interpretations, arguments, and theories are still wide open. The closest possibility would be applying the same method of this paper to Jamu or spice-based medications.

Bibliography


