

## Ysabinda and the Spice Race: Reading the Body and the Indian Ocean World in Dryden's *Amboyna*

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On March 9, 1623, ten Englishmen including Gabriel Towerson, chief factor of the East India Company, along with ten Japanese and one Portuguese were executed in the Molucca Island of Amboyna (Ambon) by the Dutch. The Amboyna Massacre, as this episode came to be known, threw into relief the complex transnational politics in the Indian Ocean region during a period of commercial and cultural exchange that we now label as the “global renaissance” (Singh 4). Once news reached England, the events in the Moluccas fed into the Hollandophobia that dominated much of the English response to the Dutch Republic during the seventeenth century, prompted by trade anxieties in both the Atlantic and Indian Ocean regions. At the heart of this specific dispute between the merchants of the rival East India Company (EIC) and the Vereenigde Oostindische Compagnie (VOC) lay the quest for exotic spices; in this case, cloves. Despite the propaganda surrounding the massacre, however, no immediate steps for retaliation were adopted, owing in part to the complex religious and diplomatic connections between the two nations.

Around fifty years later, this incident would reappear in the English public sphere, becoming the subject of John Dryden's play *Amboyna, or the Cruelties of the Dutch to the English Merchants*. Written during the Third Anglo-Dutch War (1672-1674), Dryden's play attempts to legitimate English claims over Amboyna by resorting to the trope of romance. It thus reinterprets the commercial rivalry between the two European Companies as a contest for the possession of Ysabinda, a native of the island. In this re-staging, Towerson, and by extension the EIC's claim to Amboyna, rests with his love for and marriage to Ysabinda, and the prelude to the massacre is thus a love story that goes tragically wrong. As this essay will show, Dryden's *Amboyna* transposes the violence associated with the European race for the Spice Islands onto the body of a native woman. In the process, the play has to negotiate and even radically alter racialized stereotypes that marked narratives of European discoveries and their subsequent dramatizations on the public and private stages during the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. What lay at stake was England's attempt to categorize the Amboyna Massacre not only as a violation of the Anglo-Dutch treaty but also as a criminal attack on its own legitimate claims upon Ambon.

Although the play was an initial success on stage, it was soon after neglected as one of Dryden's less sophisticated and more propagandist works. After the postcolonial turn in the 1980s, however, *Amboyna* has seen a resurgence in critical attention. For instance, Robert Markley and Elizabeth Maddock Dillon read Dryden's play in conjunction with rising English nationalist sentiments in the eighteenth century, while Siraj Ahmed places it at the crossroads of modernity and changing global economic systems. Ayanna Thompson, by turning to the actors employed in the play's first production, argues for a racialized reading of its performance history. The play's torture scenes and their racialized performances are also the subject of Kristina Bross's study, wherein she compares the incident at Amboyna with massacres in the New World during the same period. The play's colonial implications, especially those refracted through the depiction of Ysabinda are taken up by Shankar Raman and Marjorie Rubright. As Rubright points out "the women in Dryden's *Amboyna* breathe life into the gaps of the historical narrative, expanding the imaginative framework of social relations on the island" (216). It is Ysabinda in particular who brings out the complex nature of the Anglo-Dutch relationship in the Indian Ocean region.

Read through a postcolonial lens, Dryden's play enables us to better recognize the interconnected histories of Europe and the Indian Ocean region. In a post-Restoration period marked by a renewal of Company charters and the continued expansion of its mercantile networks in the east, European and by extension English encounters with the polities of South and South East Asia were used by playwrights for the revived public theatres. For instance, John Fletcher's *The Island Princess* (c.1619-21) based on Iberian expansion into the Molucca Islands of Ternate and Tidore went through several adaptations, and Dryden himself turned to recent Mughal history for his heroic drama *Aureng-Zebe* (1675). Dryden's likely source was François Bernier's *The History of the Late Revolution of the Empire of the Great Mogol* (1671), although as the repeated revivals of the plays by Fletcher and Shakespeare suggest, the dramatic traditions of the Pre-Civil War English stage continued to influence Restoration playwrights. In *Amboyna*, Dryden revisits not only the events but also the discursive representations of the Company and its factors from the early seventeenth century. The play thus sifts cultural memories of dramatic traditions and of England's first forays into the Indian Ocean Region, at a time when the nation was reimagining its identity after the return of the Stuart monarchy.

As a play, *Amboyna* engages with Pre-Civil War history in complex ways. While Dryden describes Ysabinda as an "Indian lady" and a native of Amboyna, symptomatic of the proliferation of the terms "India" and "Indian" in disparate geographical regions throughout the Old and New Worlds, Towerson's betrothed is an amalgamation of historical fact and fiction. Towerson was not engaged to anyone from Amboyna, but he was married to Mariam Khan, a Christian Armenian whose father Mubarak

Khan was a courtier of the Mughal Emperor Jahangir. After her father's death, Mariam spent some time in the Mughal harem under the protection of Jahangir, and it was the emperor himself who arranged her first marriage with William Hawkins, a factor and one of the earliest ambassadors of the EIC. Mariam traveled to England with her husband, and upon his death, remarried Towerson whom she had met on the voyage. After a short stay in England, the newlyweds made their way back to India. Unlike Dryden's idealized portrait of Towerson as a loyal lover, in real life, the English captain abandoned his wife when he realized that he had overestimated her wealth and connections at the Mughal court. Still eager to make his fortunes in the east however, Towerson took up his post in Amboyna. As Bindu Malieckal argues, "the Indonesian princess Ysabinda is an almost unidentifiable re-creation of a historical figure" (97). While Dryden presumably follows cultural memory in giving Towerson an "Indian" wife, Ysabinda unlike her historical counterpart is not a widow, but is instead a virgin at the beginning of the play.<sup>1</sup> As Malieckal warns us, such departures in portraying Mughal women on the Restoration stage, whether it be Mariam Khan as Ysabinda or Jahangir's wife Nur Jahan as Noor Mahal in Dryden's other play *Aureng-Zebe*, are demonstrative of the inadequate understanding of their political and social roles at court. Instead, the women, especially Ysabinda, become a means for staging European fantasies about the east. Ysabinda's body symbolically conflated with the Indian Ocean island of Amboyna emerges as the site where European mercantile rivalries play out; and while in the actual massacre, no Amboynan was implicated, in Dryden's play, Ysabinda becomes both the catalyst for and collateral damage of the race for clove, nutmeg, and mace.

### Anglo-Dutch Relations in the Indian Ocean Region

In his Prologue to *Amboyna*, Dryden lists the wrongs of the Dutch Republic to explain the unfortunate need to "make a War/With those who of the same Religion are" (Sig.Ar). Although Dryden's immediate context was the Anglo-Dutch War, his grievances against the fellow Protestant nation went further back to the bitter trade rivalries of the early seventeenth century. Ironically, it was in fact religion that drove both English and Dutch merchants to first foray into the Indian Ocean region. When Philip II of Spain also became ruler of Portugal in 1580 upon the death of Sebastian I in the disastrous Battle of Alcazar, he prevented ships from the Protestant nations of England and the Dutch Republic from anchoring in Lisbon, thereby seriously affecting their spice supplies (Markley 30). By the sixteenth century, spices – pepper, nutmeg, clove, cinnamon, and mace – had become an essential part of European life and came to be used for cooking as well as a variety of medicinal purposes. At this time, the spice-producing regions in South and South East Asia,

including Ambon, fell to Portuguese control, an arrangement that had been settled upon almost a century earlier under the Treaty of Tordesillas. The 1494 treaty, backed by several Papal Bulls, “divided the ‘discovered’ world into a Spanish and Portuguese half, rest[ing] upon a notion of longitude” (Raman 7). Following Philip’s embargo, in the closing years of the sixteenth century, English and Dutch merchants had to directly venture into the Indian Ocean region with the intention of securing either trading treaties or outright control of the spice producing regions.

As a result of initial exploratory success in South East Asia, both England and the Dutch Republic set up their own trading companies to facilitate the direct importation of spices. The EIC received its charter from Elizabeth I in 1600, while the VOC formally came into existence two years later. The common quest for spices forced the two European Companies to compete with one another. While pepper was available in the Indian subcontinent, the rarer spices, such as clove, were obtained from the Moluccas or Spice Islands of Indonesia. The Spice Islands including Amboyna, Ternate, Tidore, Ceram, and Banda became the centre of the spice race, as Europeans fought over not only clove but also nutmeg and mace. In order to secure these spices, both EIC and the VOC had to adapt to the centuries-old intra-continental trade that exchanged spices for textiles within a complex network that stretched from Mocha in the Red Sea to Japan. Thus, during the seventeenth century, both the EIC and the VOC had to negotiate with a cosmopolitan mix of stake holders, a phenomenon that is reflected by the nationalities implicated in the Amboyna Massacre – Portuguese, Japanese, and English.

It was precisely these transnational factors that came to govern Anglo-Dutch relations in Amboyna. Although it was the English explorer Sir Francis Drake who had reached the island as early as 1579, it fell to the Dutch to wrest control of the Spice Islands from Portugal in 1605 (Stephenson 64). It was only in 1610 that English merchants attempted to set up factories, realizing its importance to the spice trade. In 1619, the English and the Dutch came up with a treaty to share the lucrative spice production. Under the agreement “one third of the Spice of the Moluccas, Banda and Ambon and one half of the pepper trade of Java [went] to the EIC” (Gaastra 52). Working behind the treaty was a dual incentive to regulate the price of spices in European markets while ensuring maximum profitability. In addition, the Dutch Republic apprehensive of renewing war with Spain at the conclusion of the Twelve-year Truce in 1621 was eager to have an ally in the east (Gaastra 52). The result was an unequal sharing of governance, defence, as well as profits. As Joseph F. Stephenson explains: “The Dutch held possession of the island and the Portuguese-built fort thereon; the English, on the other hand, would work with the Dutch in farming operations and in providing naval security in the event of an attack by a third party” (65). This arrangement, however, was disliked by a section of Dutch merchants on the ground in Indonesia, including Jan Pietersz Coen, the Governor-general of Batavia. These

misgivings by local VOC employees would play a large role in determining the final course of the Amboyna Massacre.

The events leading up to the massacre began early in February 1623 with a Japanese mercenary being accused of plotting the overthrow of the Dutch garrison as well as the murder of the Dutch governor Harman van Speult (Keay 48, Bassett 1). Under torture, he implicated the English merchants who were then lured into the fort and arrested. In turn, the English prisoners, including Towerson, were tortured with what we would today identify as water-boarding. Most confessed during the interrogation, although the veracity of any English plot remains debated, especially since the EIC had already begun preparations to move out of the Spice Islands, recognizing their inability to match the Dutch presence (Bassett 4). In the final count, ten Englishmen were executed, although fourteen were initially arrested. Among those who received reprieve were Edward Collins and John Beaumont, both of whom appear as fictionalized characters in Dryden's play.<sup>2</sup> Once news of the torture and massacre reached England, it predictably caused an outrage. Anonymous pamphlets and ballads such as *News out of East India of the cruel and bloody usage of our English merchants and others at Amboyna* (1624) featuring woodcuts of the water torture highlighted the perceived treachery of the Dutch. When it came to public theaters, however, the reluctance of the Crown to wage open war with the Dutch Republic meant that plays dealing directly with the massacre were prevented by the Privy Council from being staged (Stephenson 65). This is not to suggest that the Amboyna Massacre found no mention onstage; deftly evading censorship, marginal references appeared in plays such as Ben Jonson's *The Staple of News* (1626) and William Davenant's *News Out of Plymouth* (1635) (Stephenson 65-66, Raman 199). By the time Dryden began writing his play, however, England had already fought two wars (1652-1654 and 1665-1667) with the Dutch, and was in the middle of a third. Public as well as political opinion was thus against any form of Dutch aggression, and the fifty-year-old Amboyna Massacre which had largely gone unavenged by the English, could now be staged without restrictions.

### Incorporating the Native Body in Dryden's *Amboyna*

That the local Dutch government in Amboyna acted with remarkable haste, arresting and executing in a matter of days the accused Englishmen along with their alleged Portuguese and Japanese accomplices, was well established in the immediate reports of the incident. Dryden replicates this swift transition by relegating the torture and executions to the final act of the play. The rest of the play, however, is devoted to Towerson's love for Ysabinda, tracing his return from England, the couple's continuing loyalty to one another even after the lapse of three years, and their much-awaited marriage. Disrupting their lives is Harman Junior's unwanted advances

towards Ysabinda. What makes the actions of the Dutch governor's son all the more treacherous is that Towerson rescued him from pirates. Upon first sighting the beautiful and wealthy Ysabinda, Harman Junior immediately begins to desire her, and with the Dutch Fiscal's encouragement rapes her on her wedding night. Seeking to avenge his bride, Towerson kills Harman Junior in a duel. The Fiscal eager to hide his own crimes fabricates the story of the Japanese mercenary inquiring about the fort's defenses as evidence of a larger plot hatched by the English to overthrow the Dutch in Amboyna. Harman Junior's death is seen as both proof and collateral damage of the English plot. In Dryden's play, therefore, the actual accusations leading up to the massacre, indeed the massacre itself, is seen as an epilogue to Towerson's love for Ysabinda and her brutal rape.

We must ask ourselves why a play seeking to commemorate the Amboyna Massacre invests much of its plot in establishing Towerson and Ysabinda's relationship, and why the complex political negotiations of the Indian Ocean region get recast in the form of a more familiar love triangle. Some scholars including Ahmed have interpreted the Towerson-Ysabinda-Harman casting in terms of a conflict between an older feudal and a newer mercantile order. Within this reading "Ysabinda stands for an increasingly obsolete feudal order" that is brought to a brutal end by Harman Junior who symbolizes "a new political economy" (Ahmed). I would like to argue, however, that Ysabinda's body comes to symbolize precisely this emergent globalized economic order. Contrary to Dryden's other plays situated in exoticized spaces such as *The Indian Queen* (1664), *The Indian Emperor* (1665) and *Aureng-Zebe*, the plot of *Amboyna* does not unfold within a monarchic context. Although Ysabinda shares similarities with racialized princesses on the early modern stage, she is, strictly speaking, not a member of Amboynan royalty. She is instead described simply as an "Indian Lady," and is later praised by the Dutch Governor Harman Senior for being "beauteous, rich, and young" (5). Harman Senior's estimation of her value comes right after an animated discussion with the Dutch Merchant Van Herring and the Fiscal regarding the profitability of the spice trade:

*Harm.* I wonder much my Letters then, gave me so short accounts; they only said,  
The *Orange* Party was grown strong again, since *Barnevelt* had suffer'd.

*Van Her.* Mine inform me farther, the price of Pepper and of other Spices was rais'd  
of late in Europe.

*Harm.* I wish that news may hold; but much suspect it, while the English maintain  
their Factories among us in Amboyna, or in the neighboring Plantations of Seran. (2)

Concerns over internal Dutch politics, the power tussle between the supporters of the Prince of Orange and the Republican forces gets superseded by news of rising prices of spices in Europe. As Harman

Senior is quick to point out, continued profitability depended on Dutch monopoly of the spice trade, which was impeded by the English presence in Amboyna. Ysabinda's appraisal, as an individual as well as Towerson's "Mistress" is thus situated within this larger financial/trade context; her use value is determined within a globalized market economy driven by the spice trade that moved capital and manpower across continents. Unfettered by any kind of royalty, Ysabinda's desirability is linked to her riches, a wealth that presumably also comes from the island's spice production. Metonymically identified with the profitable spice trade, Ysabinda herself can no longer remain the desired object of any one person, or one nation. Harman Junior's lust for Ysabinda thus becomes symbolic of a pan-European hunger for spices.

It is the subplot that better allows us to read the political and economic stakes of desiring and physically possessing Ysabinda. A possible answer to this complex love triangle lies in an address by Julia, wife of the Spanish Captain Perez. Julia who takes on the Dutch Fiscal and the English merchant Beaumont as her lovers, contemplates her adultery in the context of the European race for the Spice Islands:

If my English Lover *Beaumont*, my Dutch Love the *Fiscall* [sic], and my Spanish husband were Painted in a piece with me amongst 'em, they wou'd make a Pretty Emblem of the two Nations, that Cuckold his Catholick Majesty in his Indi's. (17)

Julia conflates her sexualized body with the (East) Indies, assigning her rightful ownership to her husband, and by extension to the Spanish monarchy. The cuckolding of Perez by Fiscal and Beaumont becomes emblematic of the growing power of the two Protestant nations in the East. Their secret lovemaking becomes synonymous with Catholic Spain's loss of control over the material goods and the geographical spaces of the Spice Islands. For this metaphor to work however, Dryden transforms the sole Portuguese victim of the massacre, Augustine Perez, into a Spaniard. While Portugal had come under the Spanish Crown between 1580 and 1640, Dryden's substitution erases the rich history of Portuguese presence in the region, including the fact that Perez was born in Bengal (Kerr 549). Julia is also simplified by Dryden; according to contemporary sources, Perez who was in charge of slaves had taken as wife a woman who was herself enslaved (Dearing 282). Dryden's play, however, gives us no hint about the possibility of Julia being a native, neither are we told her fate, including her presumed repossession by the Dutch after Perez's execution.

What is remarkable about Dryden's dramatization of Perez's cuckolding is the way that Julia's body gets commodified and comes to stand for the East Indies. Later, the Fiscal explicitly compares her to the highly profitable nutmeg tree, and the sexual favors she bestows upon him and Beaumont to the two varied spices that it produces: "Oh Sir, in these Commodities, here's enough for both, here's Mace for you, and Nutmeg for me in the fame Fruit; and yet the owner has to spare for other friends too" (19). The Perez-Julia subplot might, of course, be read as a parody of

the Towerson-Ysabinda story, with the Spanish Captain's wife willingly cuckolding her husband as opposed to Ysabinda's brutal rape. While Julia's body, as a much desired object, briefly stands in for the East Indies, it is ultimately Ysabinda who is identified with Amboyna and its riches. It is upon her body, that the bitter struggle for control over the Spice Islands gets waged. As Raman observes, "[t]he struggle between Towerson and Harman for Ysabinda aims, first, to make explicit the qualitative difference between their respective desires, and second, to establish the ethical superiority of the English position" (212). Together, the two women of the play, Ysabinda and the racially indeterminate Julia, through the parallel love triangles that they (un)willingly invite, appear to dramatize two related phases of European activities in the Moluccas. If the subplot with Julia speaks of the displacement of Iberian control over the Spice Islands by the two Protestant nations, then Ysabinda enacts the more immediate open rivalry between EIC and VOC in acquiring the rarer spices. The play, in other words, functions as a microcosm for the complex and often violent political negotiations of the Indian Ocean World.

In conflating Ysabinda's body with the land, Dryden was, of course, following a well-established precedent set by travel narratives as well as pre-Civil War plays of reading exotic geographical spaces in eroticized terms. For instance, Sir Walter Raleigh after his expedition to South America in 1594 famously described Guiana as a virgin ripe for colonization:

To conclude, Guiana is a country that hath yet her maidenhead, never sacked, turned, nor wrought; the face of the earth hath not been torn, nor the virtue and salt of the soil spent by manurance. The graves have not been opened for gold, the mines not broken with sledges, nor their images pulled down out of their temples. It hath never been entered by any army of strength, and never conquered or possessed by any Christian prince. (109)

Raleigh understands the land's maidenhead in terms of the (non)exploitation of economic resources – the mines, temples, and graves that have not yet been plundered by any European (Christian) nation. The unmolested state of Guiana by Spanish forces makes her particularly appealing to English designs, and Raleigh, of course, advocates greater exploration and eventual colonization. The English adventurer was not alone in conflating economic and sexualized language while describing newly discovered geography. Commenting on the French clergyman Jean de Léry's account of Brazil, Michel de Certeau observes that in European travel writing the "eroticizing of the other's body [...] goes hand in hand with the formation of an ethics of production" (227). The eroticization itself, as de Certeau observes, was inextricably tied to the pursuit of profit in exotic lands.

Such sexualized associations of the land were not restricted to the New World. Building upon similar discourses of female virginity and



male possession, Elizabethan and Jacobean playwrights often paired European merchants or adventurers with native women of the Old Worlds of Asia and Africa. Implicit in these portrayals was the transference of property and territory after the willing submission of the exotic princess. For instance, in John Fletcher's *The Island Princess* (1621), the Christian conversion of Quisara, sister of the King of Tidore (yet another member of the Spice Islands) and her marriage to the Portuguese Armusia becomes a way for portraying the Iberian conquest of the Moluccas.<sup>3</sup> Commenting on the "recurrence of this scenario of marriage and romance" while depicting wealthier regions of the east, Ania Loomba argues that: "In English writings, the desire of the non-European for Europeans becomes a way of suggesting the supposed reciprocity, mutuality, and equality of international and colonial trade, and, in many instances, a way of disguising its violence and asymmetry" (72). The presumed love and willing submission of the native women thus became a way of mystifying European needs for trade and conquest. Moreover, these romances were inevitably gendered in stereotypical ways with the white Christian male successfully winning and converting the indigenous princess or high-born lady. The trope of marriage and conversion was thus often relied upon while staging geographical spaces upon which England, or other European nations had no direct claim. In Philip Massinger's *The Renegado* (1624), it is the Turkish princess Donussa who falls in love with the Venetian Vitelli and embraces Christianity, while Vitelli's sister Paulina (her name symbolic of Pauline teachings) successfully resists the lure of both Islam and the Ottoman Viceroy Asambeg. If Paulina's steadfastness in the face of material and political temptation becomes symbolic of Christian Europe's resistance to the Ottoman Empire, then Donussa's conversion forwards the fantasy of an East that is willing to submit to Europe.

Dryden's *Ysabinda*, much like the oriental princesses on the early modern stage, converts to Christianity after falling in love with a European.<sup>4</sup> As *Ysabinda* clarifies: "I shall love your God because I see that he takes care of Lovers" (10). In the course of the play, this proves to be an ironic statement since the lovers are at the end brutally separated. Given the EIC's tenuous presence on the island, it is *Ysabinda*'s love for Towerson that legitimizes its claim over Amboyna. Rather than recognizing the English as latecomers to the Spice Islands, it is the Dutch who come across as interlopers. This becomes especially evident after *Ysabinda*'s marriage and rape. The play, moreover, complements this Pre-Civil War imbrication of romance and colonial territorial possession with the introduction of a rhetoric of new economic exchange, suggestive of a globalized market system. *Ysabinda*, as we have seen, from the very outset of the play is marked out on the basis of the commodified indicators of her beauty and wealth, especially by the Dutch Governor Harman. When Harman Junior later attempts to use her as a token of exchange, he promises Towerson better trading conditions for the EIC if he surrenders *Ysabinda* to him:

*Harman Junior.* [...] your Factories shall be no more opprest but thrive in all advantages with ours; your gain shall be beyond what you could hope for from the Treaty: in all the Traffick of these Eastern parts, ye shall -

*Towerson.* Hold, you mistake me Harman, I never gave you just occasion to think I wou'd make Merchandise of Love; Ysabinda you know is mine, contracted to me e're I went for England, and must be so till death. (13)

Although Towerson vehemently opposes making a “Merchandise of Love,” Ysabinda is still a possession, “contracted” to him until death. As Malieckal points out, this exchange between the two suitors actually highlights “the play’s recurrent motif of colonial ‘Trade’” (115). Given the way that the play metonymically links Ysabinda to the island and its spice production, it is perhaps hardly surprising that Harman Junior sees her as negotiable commodity, and attempts to form a private contract with Towerson, one that would counter the Englishman’s marriage contract with the native Amboynan. The play in fact gives us a series of contracts – between the Dutch and the English, between Towerson and Ysabinda – that Harman Junior and his accomplices desecrate. Perhaps the most important of these is Ysabinda’s marriage contract with Towerson.

At the very start of the play, we are told that Ysabinda is betrothed to Towerson, suggestive of Dryden’s interest in showing the legal status between the two rather than a story of their new love. When in his confrontation with Harman Junior, Towerson reminds him of his “contract” with Ysabinda, what he refers to as his “spousals *de futuro*.” Although Towerson claims that this contract of future marriage cannot be broken, this was in fact not the case. The late seventeenth-century *Treatise of Spousals* (1686) by Henry Swinburne for instance differentiates between the spousals *de futuro* and *de praesenti*, declaring that while the former can be dissolved by either or both parties, the latter cannot (12-13). That Harman Junior attempts to break this initial marriage contract by alternately approaching both parties is then hardly surprising. If he attempts to bargain with Towerson by offering the EIC better trading privileges, beyond those guaranteed by the official Anglo-Dutch treaty, then his appeal to Ysabinda is also rooted in economic privilege. Deriding Towerson as “an *Englishman*, part Captain, and part Merchant; his Nation of declining interest here,” Harman Junior weighs him to his disadvantage strategically and financially against “not me, but any, the least and meanest *Dutchman* in this *Isle*” (11). Unfortunately for the young Dutchman both his new business propositions fail, with the initial symbolically loaded contract between Towerson and Ysabinda still holding.

When Harman Junior’s offers get dismissed, he proposes a duel. It is only after his defeat that he thinks of rape with the Fiscal’s encouragement. Although they consider the option of Ysabinda eventually becoming Harman’s mistress sometime after marriage, it is the young

Dutchman who refuses to wait. “I cannot bear he shou'd enjoy her first,” he states, thus setting the stage for her rape (15). Ysabinda’s violation, however, leaves her marriage and its legal status uncertain. As the well-known Puritan preacher William Perkins sums up in *Christian Economy* (1609): “Marriage hath two distinct parts, the first is the beginning; the second, the accomplishment or consumption thereof. The beginning is the contract or espousals; the end or accomplishment is the solemn manifestation of the contract by that which properly we call marriage” (18). In this fairly common seventeenth-century understanding of the marriage process it is the “accomplishment” or sexual union that ratifies the spousal contract; without which the marriage remains incomplete. Perkins’ treatise on the management of Christian family life, also reminds us of the root of the term “economy” in “οἶκος” or the household. The domestic sphere in early modern Christian philosophy was thus intricately bound with questions of contracts and fiscal arrangements. Not surprisingly, therefore Dryden’s play about the vagaries of global markets and trade disputes gets reworked not just as a political tragedy but also as a domestic one. Harman Junior in raping Ysabinda on her wedding night prevents the consummation of her marriage contract, an act that Dryden wants his readers to recognize as a basic violation of her and Towerson’s personal as well as legal rights. Read allegorically, it marks a failure on the part of the EIC to hold on to its longstanding claims over the Spice Islands, despite the support of a pliant native population.

Ysabinda, however, remains fiercely loyal to Towerson through Harman Junior’s persistent wooing and his violation of her. When Towerson finds her still tied to the tree, she blames her fate on European politics that now intrude upon the Indian Ocean Island: “fly this detested Isle, where horrid ills so black and fatal dwell, as Indians cou'd not guess, till Europe taught” (40). The island, of course, would see more evil with the torture and execution of Towerson and his men. The brutality of the act of rape becomes a precursor to the torture that the Company factors would endure in the Dutch fort. It is in depicting Ysabinda’s rape that Dryden departs from conventional portrayals of inter-racial marriage on the Renaissance stage. As Loomba explains, in this earlier drama “[t]he East is figured as a wealthy, occasionally gracious and beautiful, but needy woman, and the European merchant-colonist is her knight-errant who will be suitably rewarded for his bravery, but who needs to woo rather than simply ravish her” (72). In *Amboyna*, however, Ysabinda’s ravishment or rape by the Dutch becomes key to understanding the loss and death brought on by the actual massacre. The violation is not only of Ysabinda, but by extension of the EIC’s rights over Amboyna.

Although Dryden’s play radically reverses the well-established romance trope of Pre-Civil War drama, this need to show the rape in fact arises from what we have seen is the play’s adherence to a well-established discourse that feminized and sexualized foreign spaces. However, while *The Renegado* or *The Island Princess* enacts the fantasy

of possessing the East, Dryden's *Amboyna* is a representation of English failure and defeat. Harman Junior's brutal rape of Ysabinda on her wedding night grotesquely dramatizes the EIC's loss of territory and material possessions.

Towerson's discovery of Ysabinda prevents Harman Junior from returning to murder her upon the Fiscal's instigation. As a result, despite the Fiscal's best efforts, Ysabinda cannot be silenced. Instead, she remains a vocal witness to all Dutch wrongs. Later, when she wants to commit suicide to hide her shame, Towerson reminds her of her Christian conversion which prohibits such an act. Unlike the EIC men, Ysabinda in fact survives the brutal Anglo-Dutch confrontation on Amboyna. Refusing to be locked up or to be silenced, Ysabinda promises to remain a very public witness to the English tragedy:

[O]'re the green Turf where my Love's laid, there will I mourning sit and draw no air but from the damps that rise out of that hallow'd Earth; and for my Diet, I mean my Eyes alone shall feed my Mouth. Thus will I live, till he in pity rise, and the pale shroud take me in his cold Arms, and lay me kindly by him in his Grave. (64)

Her resolution to wait for her death by her husband's grave have led some critics such as Vinton A. Dearing to read her as a heroic character, comparable to protagonists in Dryden's heroic tragedies (274). Ysabinda's body, however, must become a spectacle as she daily performs her protest against the Dutch governor. It is through her ritualistic mourning - drawing air from the grave-site and feeding on her own tears - that she enacts both her resistance to the VOC and her continuing loyalty to Towerson and the EIC. Ysabinda's survival at the end of the play thus continues the English fantasy of long-lasting moral and ethical claims over the Spice Islands.

## Conclusion

During the Third Anglo-Dutch War, the Amboyna Massacre came to acquire renewed significance as an act of unwarranted aggression. Dryden's play, as his dedication to Thomas Clifford, the pro-war British politician, along with his epilogue likening Netherlands to Carthage, make obvious, was meant to incite public opinion against the Dutch. To the Restoration audience, it was Ysabinda's body that staged English innocence and Dutch culpability. Her love for Towerson enables Dryden to claim EIC's rights over Amboyna in a way that a reference to the Anglo-Dutch treaty or even the Massacre itself would not. Ysabinda's love and violation thus becomes a metaphor for the rivalry between the EIC and VOC in the Indian Ocean region, helping Dryden stage a grotesque mystification of trade and colonialism in the Spice Islands.

What Dryden's *Amboyna* helps us recognize is the importance of the Spice Islands in shaping nationalistic discourse in post-Restoration

England and beyond. The Indian Ocean region played a crucial role in shaping the economic and social lives in Europe, especially of the states whose new-age trading companies participated directly in the Spice Race. The emergent modernity of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries played out not only in the fields and cities of Europe, but more crucially through European interactions with a larger global world. Though sometimes overlooked in favor of the developments in the New World, it was the Indian Ocean World and its material commodities, especially spices, that helped broker the rise of capitalism and its accompanying social and technological changes. The Amboyna Massacre, and Dryden's retelling of it, enable us to access the complex political rivalries, the rise of multinational corporations, and unfiltered colonial mechanisms in the Indian Ocean region that transformed global economic systems.

As we turn our attention to the Indian Ocean region, moving away from an emphasis on landlocked spaces or the mainland in literary criticism, Dryden's play becomes all the more important as a document that engages with early colonial propaganda and stratagem. The play also alerts us against the impetus to read colonial histories as originating in the nineteenth century, reminding us instead of the *longue durée* of European colonialism in the maritime worlds of Asia. Moreover, the play challenges the usual postcolonial models of resistance versus complicity, or even colonial paradigms of savage/premodern versus European modern. Dryden's *Amboyna* remains an important text, one richly deserving its renewed critical attention, precisely because it situates itself at the crossroads of mercantile expansion, European colonial rivalry, and the political vagaries of the Indian Ocean World during the early modern period.

## Notes

1. Dearing notes that the name 'Ysabinda' might possibly be derived from 'Tsabinda,' a Japanese soldier mentioned in Dryden's source *True Relations of the Unjust, Cruell, and Barbarous Proceedings Against the English at Amboyna* (1623, reprinted 1651) (283).

2. In the play Collins is executed, whereas his historical counterpart survived.

3. For more on Portuguese and later Spanish exploits in the Moluccas, see: Nocentelli, pp. 573-77.

4. Although Ysabinda is not identified as a princess in the play, some scholars have interpreted her as such. See for example Malieckal.

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