



Last February there occurred a strange event in Italy, triggering a wave of fury and indignation across social media : the plantation of a grove of palm trees in Milan’s main town square, la Piazza Risorgimento.

These 42 trees, which have been placed in the front of the historic 14th-century cathedral, will soon be joined by 50 banana plants. The plantation, installed to renew the vegetal square on the Piazza, was organised by the city council and financed by a deal with the colossal coffee chain, Starbucks.

The transnational corporation (TNC) will soon invest into the Italian market, envisioning the creation of 300 new stores in the country. The participation of Starbucks in financing the new vegetal square was integral to the company’s contract with the city, in exchange with being given the possibility to implant a coffee store on the famous place. The 3-year plan to rearrange the style of the green spaces in the front of the equestrian monument of Emanuel II, as it had been done in the 19th century, had already been set in place by the city of Milan before the participation of Starbucks.

Yet this banal exotic garden was considered an invasion, with people expressing their fury across social media outlets. The contestation movement, led by the far right wing, is fueled by contrasting values related to coffee culture. The American-style consumption of the on-the-go large cup of coffee is the opposite of the Italian coffee drinking culture, which usually involves a quick small cup of espresso standing at the bar. By comparison, the “bad quality American coffee” is seen as bland. But beyond this matter of taste, the dispute crystallised on the Piazza Risorgimento trees plantation. These trees were not “traditional”

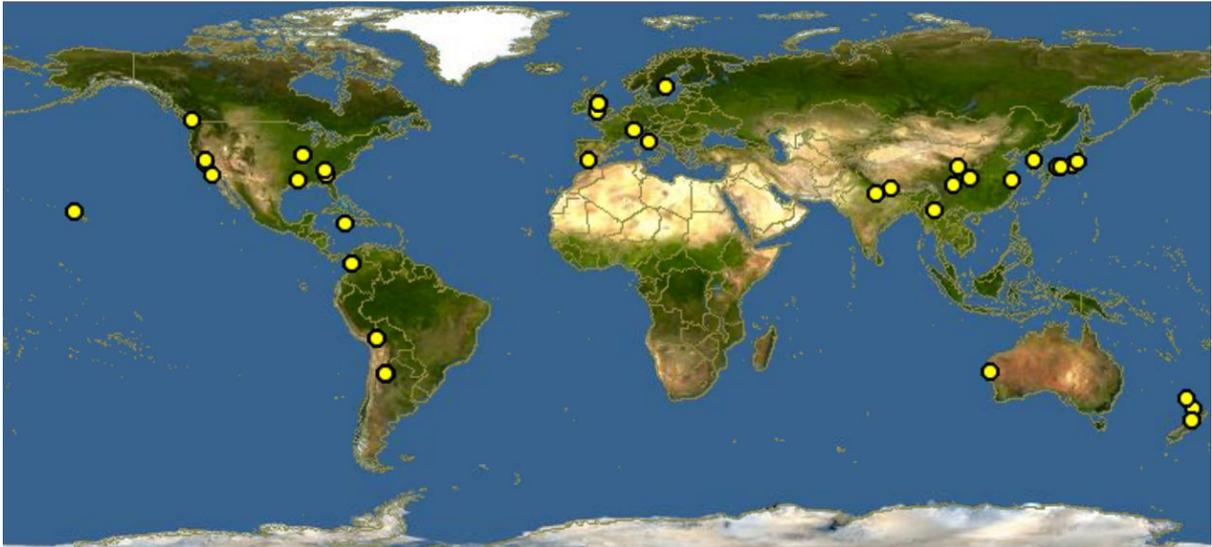
italian palms. For the North League, these foreign trees were a real problem, triggering their denouncement of the “africanisation” of the place, contrasting with the 14th-century Gothic architecture.



Somehow, the importation of this new “exotic” ecosystem — thus meaning the transnational brand being visible through the shape of these trees — was directly competing with the Italian ecology in its extended conception. This was a great source of tension. On February 19th 2017, manifestors entered the new garden with the intention of destroying it, trying to set fire to the controversial trees.

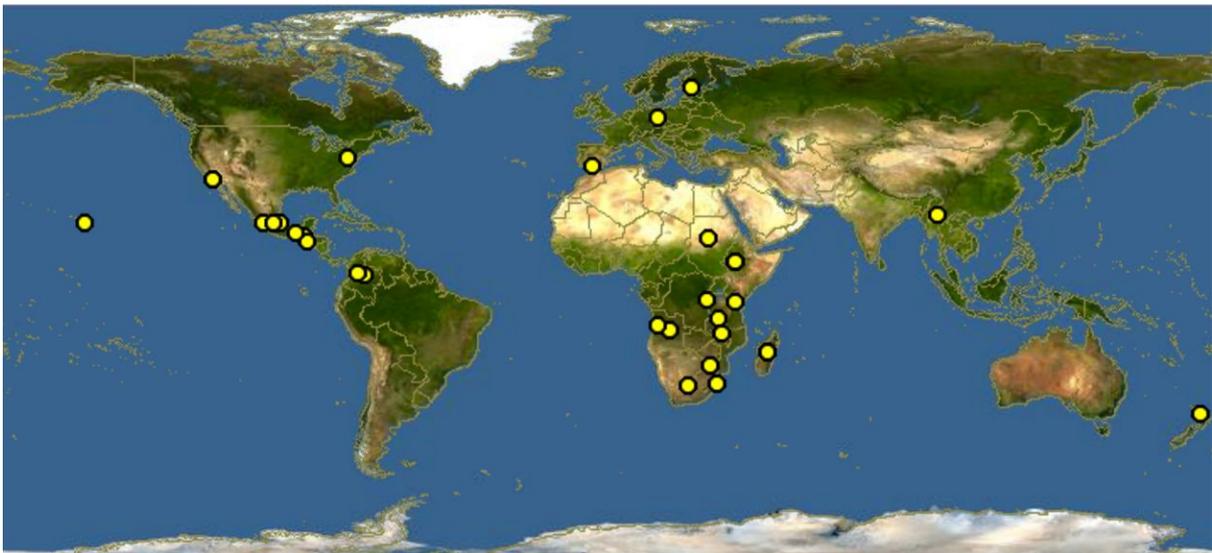
The question at this point is, is there a gateway to sorting out this remarkably intertwined story in a way of conceiving territories? We have begun a small inquiry to define the different actors and find as maps and representations as possible. The following documents may be a starting point for a little exercise on how to read maps for a larger reflexion on the way to represent such a space in the next posts.

First, we began looking at the trees themselves. In the west square, we find a palm with the botanical name *Trachycarpus Fortunei*. This palm, not even African, is native to central China and southern Japan, south-northern Burma and northern India. It was chosen for its great resistance to colder climates and its ability to grow at a much higher altitude than other species. In fact, the only native European species of palm trees, called *Chamaerops*, is a dwarf species, usually used for decorative arrangements. It is mainly found in southwestern Europe, over the Mediterranean coastlines of Malta, Sicily, Spain and Portugal, Italy, as well as in North Africa, Morocco, Algeria, Tunisia.



Spread of the *Trachycarpus Fortunei*

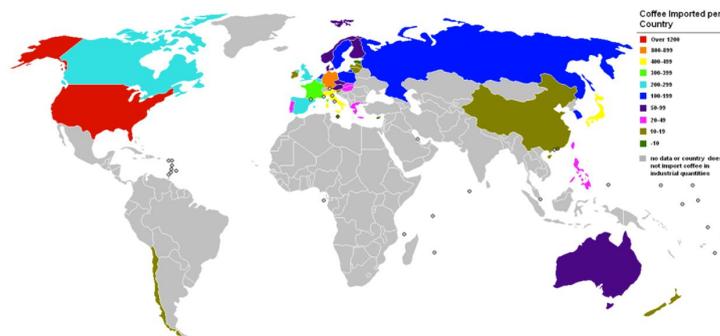
As for the banana plants, the selected species for the project is the *Ensete Ventricosum*, commonly known as the “Ethiopian Banana” or the “False Banana”, which can be used as a cereal or an ornamental plant. It is native mainly to the eastern edge of the great African continent, extending northward through Mozambique, Zimbabwe, Malawi, Kenya, Uganda, Tanzania, Ethiopia and the West Congo.



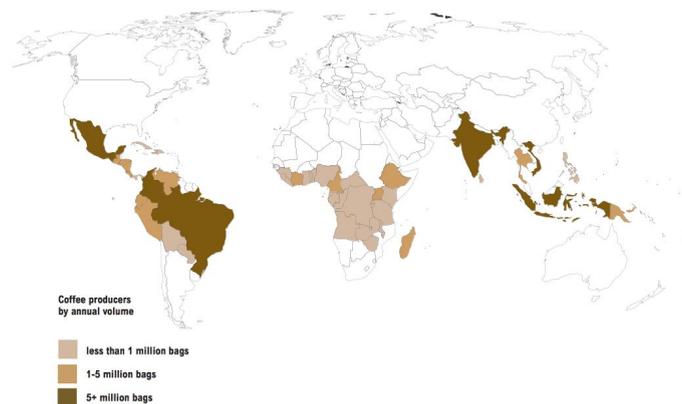
Spread of the *Ensete Ventricosum*

Attempts of mapping

To clarify the situation and to try to understand the “extent” of the problem that is the irruption of an exotic garden on the parvis of a Gothic cathedral, we have collected a few maps concerning the third plant involved: coffee, or coffee plants. The aforementioned is a notoriously well known transnational agent that represents a great asymmetry between northern and southern countries. We will embark upon a brief analysis of these different representations.

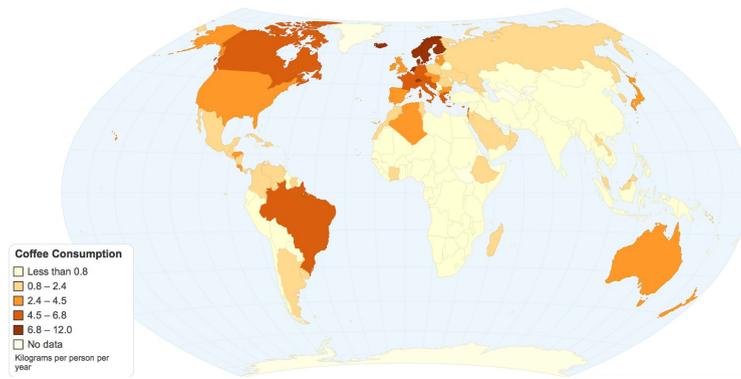


On this first map, we can determine the amount of coffee that is imported into each country per thousand metric tons. Note that some countries reexport a great part of it. This map shows only how much coffee is imported into these countries, not how much of it is consumed therein.

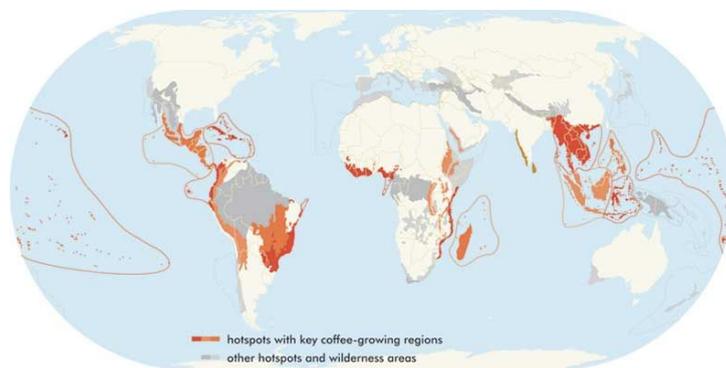


7

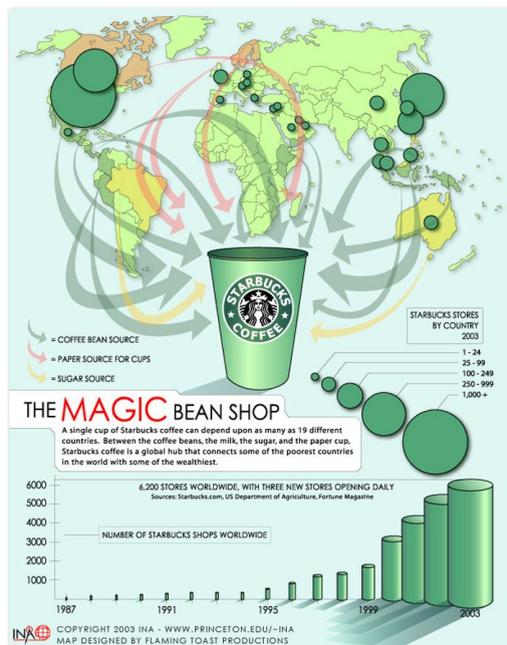
This second map shows the production of bean bags within certain countries. By comparing the figured maps, we can come to the conclusion that there is a great difference between the countries that are exporting and the countries that are consuming coffee. Production is based in the equatorial countries.



Map number three shows us the number of kilograms of coffee consumed by individuals per year. By comparing it to the importation map, it shows that there is no link between the quantity of coffee produced and the cultural use of it. Brazil is an exception as a producer/consumer country whereas the U.S. imports a great deal but does not consume as much. This signifies that they re-export a high quantity of the product.



The next map shows not simply the coffee-producing regions, but more precisely the concentration of hotspots within these key coffee-growing areas. Some regions, which appeared densely active in the previous map, seem relatively empty here with their production clearly concentrated and organised into internal invisible networks.



Finally, this 2003 militant compilation of data illustrates the rapid explosion and spread of the company around the world in the early 2000's.

Territories as a movement

This intertwined scenario of Japanese palm trees in front of a 14th-century Italian Gothic cathedral financed by a giant TNC, links too many hybrids. The aim of this brief exercise, which serves equally as an introduction for the next thoughts on TNCs territories, is somehow an obvious demonstration by contradiction. The over-layered maps that the space notion of traditional geography gives, does not allow any chance of really understanding the fluidity of the processes of TNCs activities and territories. The representation system used by classical cartography, in the way it is built over centuries, is pretty obsolete. This, for some good reasons, is a subject that we will develop in the next posts. It has stayed stuck to the ground and become a normative way of conceiving territories, when the TNCs have always tried to adapt and subvert it. They have developed avoidance strategies, always renewing and reshaping the notions of spaces, times, borders, cultures, finances etc. They have adopted a moving attitude facing static assemblies. TNCs' territories are not fixed, they are more closed to a kind of movement, and that is why it is so difficult to interpret and represent it.

So, to continue this thought, we must think like a physicist, and try to understand a system which misses invisible dimensions to understand its properties. We need other tools to inverse this geometry and implement the notion of TNCs' territories. In our research we were particularly interested in the way that strategies used by armies reshape the urban environment, relying on really complex, multilayered and multi-formed properties. Militaries are also using a thought of postmodern consideration of the urban fabric, to invent new

practical ways to shift space and moving. We will try, in subsequent posts, to develop different considerations of TNC territories.

