A periodisation of globalisation according to the Mauritian integration into the international sugar commodity chain (1825-2005)

Patrick Neveling

University of Berne

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A periodisation of globalisation according to the Mauritian integration into the international sugar commodity chain (1825-2005)[1]

Patrick Neveling

(University of Berne)

This paper shows that the analysis of commodity chains (CC) can be fruitfully employed to respond to recent calls in the field of global/world history for a periodisation of globalisation.[2] The CC approach is ideally suited for advancing global historians' understanding of the way that particular places are positioned within a changing capitalist world system. This is important because it is this capitalist world system that ultimately defines globalisation in a particular place and therefore also the periodisation of globalisation.

The place to be studied in this paper is Mauritius, a small island in the Western Indian Ocean that has a very particular history of colonial and postcolonial integration into the capitalist world system. The entry of Mauritius into the British Empire brought about a particular kind of integration of the island into the capitalist world system. Central to this integration was the production of sugar under the West Indian Sugar Protocol, with this ultimately turning Mauritius from a free port into a plantation economy. This shaped the island's economic and political practice, and brought the formation of a range of institutions that sustained a high degree of inequality among Mauritians by finding ever newer ways of conciliating socio-economic mobility with exploitation.

I discuss Mauritian history through the framework of bilateral and multilateral trading agreements that had significant impact on the sugar industry and kept the island economically dependent on this single crop. This only changed when the postcolonial state succeeded in diversifying the Mauritian economy during the 1970s and 1980s.[3] Nevertheless, it can be argued that Mauritian integration into the sugar commodity chain defined the emergence of new sectors because trading agreements that negotiated market access in the agricultural sector were extended to new industries that focused on the processing and assembly of raw materials and semi-finished goods. The lighthouse role of sugar only changed with the establishment of the World Trade Organisation (WTO) and its differentiation of negotiating trading agreements in the fields of 'Agriculture', 'Non-Agricultural Market Access' and 'Services'. Another central aspect of studying a commodity chain is the respective production regime and the inequality that it brings along. In Mauritius, sugar production was and is highly profitable for the local bourgeoisie. Following British conquest this bourgeoisie constituted itself as an alliance between the remaining French settler families on the one hand and British traders and companies on the other. Later, other trading communities from the

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[1] I would like to thank Jonathan Curry-Machado, Robert Heinze, Tijo Salverda and Jarrett Zigon who have given valuable advice in the process of writing and revising this paper.

[2] See A. McKeown, 'Periodizing Globalization', *History Workshop Journal* 63:1 (2007), pp.218-30.

[3] The most capital intensive and enduring attempt at economic diversification before 1968, when Mauritius was granted independence, was the growing and processing of hemp into bags for packaging of Mauritian sugar. Other attempts included the planting and export of tea. See P. Neveling, 'The (Dis-)Comfort of Global Commodity Chains: Colonial and Postcolonial New Deals for the Mauritian Economy', conference paper, *Re-Appropriating World Market Production: Commodity Chains in the Project of Postcolonial Development (1920-2000)*, Historical Institute, University of Berne, Switzerland, 2009, p.25.

Indian Ocean were incorporated into the bourgeoisie's ranks, particularly Indian merchant communities.[4]

Having discussed the inclusion of Mauritius in the 1825 West Indian Sugar Protocol, I divide the paper chronologically into four broad periods: first, the long nineteenth century of intra-empire trading agreements and economic diplomacy; second, between 1919 and 1937, when the sugar sector acted in Mauritius as a system of income redistribution; third, the period through the Commonwealth Sugar Agreement of 1951 up to the Lomé Convention of 1975; and finally, the contemporary developments, shaped by the extension of the GATT into the World Trade Organisation and a revival of free-trade ideology .

As this paper applies the analysis of commodity chains to periodise globalisation, it is important to identify which strand within the wide-ranging field of commodity-chain analysis is best suited for this endeavour. The following first section will therefore set out a theoretical programme for aligning the analysis of global commodity chains with periodisations of globalisation. This will include a review of recent as well as foundational works on CC analysis and its offspring, the analysis of global commodity chains (GCC) and of global value chains (GVC).

Commodity chains analysis and the periodisation of globalisation

In a critique of Topik, Marichal and Franck's edited volume on commodity chains and the building of the world economy,[5] Arnold Bauer asks whether it is "as useful to tell that people plant or mine certain commodities as it is to explain to whom the earnings in the export stream accrue or why they are distributed the way they are". He argues that the commodity-chain approach (CC), by moving away from national or imperial structures and towards "individual 'commodity chains'" instead, fails to address the role of work and labour systems within such chains and, foremost, the pressing concerns of underdevelopment, dependency and poverty.[6] This is a surprising assertion, because the analysis of commodity chains was a crucial aspect of the study of the capitalist world system developed by Wallerstein and others, who saw that competition within the interstate system could encompass notions of 'wealth' in the seventeenth century as much as notions of 'development' in the twentieth:

> From the point of view of state-machineries, regular, but not continuous, alterations in the relative economic strength of localities, regions, and states can be viewed (and indeed most often are viewed) as a sort of upward or downward 'mobility' of the state as an entity, a movement measured in relation to other states within the framework of the interstate system.[7]

[4] Clarence-Smith gives an excellent account of the early days of cooperation and competition between Europeans, Africans and Asians in the wider region (W. G. Clarence-Smith, 'The Cotton Textile Industry of Sub-Saharan Eastern Africa in the Longue Durée', Conference Paper: *Understanding African Poverty over the Longue Durée*, Hephzibah Christian Centre, Peduase, Ghana; The Weatherhead Center for International Affairs (WCFIA, Harvard University) in Partnership with the International Institute for the Advanced Study of Cultures, Institutions and Economic Enterprise (IIAS), 2010). Here the focus is predominantly on culture as a marker for difference and collaboration while in this paper the focus is also on inequality as such a marker.
[5] S. Topik et al. (eds), *From Silver to Cocaine: Latin American Commodity Chains and the Building of the World Economy, 1500-2000*, Durham: Duke University Press, 2006.
[6] A. Bauer, 'Commodity Chains: Revisiting the History of Latin American Global Exports', *Contra corriente* 4:3 (2007), p.185.
[7] I. M. Wallerstein, *The Modern World - System II: Mercantilism and the Consolidation of the European World-Economy, 1600-1750*, N.Y.: Academic Press, 1980, p.179.

The explicit aim of the world-systems project was then to transcend the "methodological nationalist approaches" to economic change. The study of commodity chains should instead provide an empirical means to do exactly what Bauer laments is lost: to study the emergence and changes of the international division of labour and surplus in a "long-range, macrohistorical perspective".[8] Since the programme for studying commodity chains was first developed, there have been numerous extensions, changes and diversions to it. I now turn to discuss some of these briefly. This is in preparation for a later stage of my argument when the material from Mauritius can be used to show that not all facets of commodity-chain analysis are useful for the historian. Rather, it will become evident that some explicitly ahistorical variants of this research programme provide fatal detours from the project.

The publication of Gereffi and Korzeniewicz's edited volume *Commodity Chains and Global Capitalism* in 1994 took the analysis further, but also diverted the centre of attention from the interstate system as the framework enabling the economic practice of capitalism. Instead, commodity chains were portrayed as linked together in networks. In light of Bauer's recent critique it is important to note that the focus on networks still involved studying:

> the acquisition and/or organization of inputs (e.g., raw materials and semi-finished products), labor power (and provisioning), transportation, distribution (via markets or transfers), and consumption.[9]

But the initial interest in the interstate system was replaced with a rather vague notion of "social relations" that are said to inform the workings of commodity chains:

> The analysis of a commodity chain shows how production, distribution, and consumption are shaped by the social relations (including organizations) that characterise the sequential stages of input acquisition, manufacturing, distribution, marketing, and consumption. The GCCs approach promotes a nuanced analysis of world-economic spatial inequalities in terms of differential access to markets and resources.[10]

Such a shift in focus created opportunities for researchers with more mundane agendas to develop their own understandings of what was to be studied. Bair identifies a movement from a more network-based Global Commodity Chain (GCC) approach towards a Global Value Chain (GVC) approach in the early twenty-first century.[11] The main proponent of the GVC approach, Michael Porter, focuses particularly on how one activity performed within a firm's chain influences the cost or effectiveness of other segments within the same chain.[12] It is against the transfer of this notion of value generated through competitiveness into research agendas of the social sciences that this paper argues in part. While to some extent this is in line with Bair's demand for a stronger focus on market institutions in research,[13] it is necessary to (re-)expand the research agenda further. The problem here lies with one of the

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[8] J. Bair and M. Werner, 'Commodity Chains and the Uneven Geographies of Global Capitalism: A Disarticulations Perspective', *Environment and Planning A,* 43/5 (2011), p.988.
[9] G. Gereffi, M. Korzeniewicz, and R. P. Korzeniewicz, 'Introduction: Commodity Chains and Global Capitalism', in G. Gereffi and M. Korzeniewicz (eds.), *Commodity Chains and Global Capitalism*, Westport, London: Praeger, 1994, p.2.
[10] Gereffi, Korzeniewicz & Korzeniewicz (1994), p.2.
[11] J. Bair, 'Global Capitalism and Commodity Chains: Looking Back, Going Forward', *Competition & Change* 9:2 (2005), pp.153-80.
[12] Gereffi, Korzeniewicz & Korzeniewicz (1994), p.6.
[13] Bair (2005), p.171.

central ideological distinctions that the capitalist world system has produced itself and that has found its way into the social sciences:

> The conventional view in the social sciences, in political discourse, and in the mass media is that capitalism and the market economy are more or less the same thing, and that state power is antithetical to both. Braudel, in contrast, sees capitalism as being absolutely dependent for its emergence and expansion on state power and as constituting the antithesis of the market economy.[14]

It is evidenced then that the shift in focus from the interstate system to social relations and further to intra-firm networks that came along with a relabeling of the research programme from CC to GCC to GVC does no longer allow us to undisclose the ideological distinction between capitalism, market and state. Instead, GVC analysis has shifted the focus to one side of the coin: the market. When Bauer urges us to return to a focus on national or imperial structures, he wants to look at the other side of the same coin. As the following sections will show, CC analysis instead has the potential to look at both sides of the coin as well as the edges, and thus realise that the structures represented on both sides are complementary rather than distinct.

The Mauritian position within the capitalist world economy prior to 1825

Mauritius is a small island nation-state in the south-western Indian Ocean that has a very particular history of colonial and postcolonial integration into the capitalist world system. One of the few European colonies that were uninhabited at the time of colonisation, it has since then been ruled by the Netherlands (1635- c.1700), the French (1735-1810), the British (1810-1968), and a locally based postcolonial bourgeoisie alliance with certain Fabianist/democratic elements (1968-present). Hence integration into the capitalist world economy was quite a peculiar process. Contrary to parts of the world where European powers faced the problem of being buyers rather than sellers of commodities,[15] prior to 1800 Mauritius was a prototype example of the establishment of European infrastructure in the Indian Ocean.[16]

Dutch settlement never exceeded three hundred individuals. Colonisers were heavily outnumbered by the population explosion of rats and left the island rather unaffected apart from the extinction of the endemic dodo birds and cutting down of substantial parts of the forest to supply timber for the Dutch fleet. The challenge they faced was to sustain life and profitability on a remote colony that lacked exploitable labour and potential collaborators who could have provided knowledge of the local setting. Faced by this, the Dutch struggled to maintain Mauritius as a port of call on the route to the Asian spice trade and abandoned the island in the early eighteenth century.[17]

The Dutch departure was followed by the opening up of the island to capitalist exploitation in the eighteenth century, with the arrival of the first French colonialists from the neighbouring island La Reunion, who named it Ile de France. These pursued an ideology of Physiocratic economics, and ventured into forms of pre-industrial capitalist agriculture. Thus, Mauritian

[14] G. Arrighi, *The Long Twentieth Century: Money, Power, and the Origins of Our Times*, London, New York: Verso, 2002 [1994], p.10.
[15] See I. Wallerstein, 'The Great Expansion: The Incorporation of Vast Zones into the Capitalist World Economy (ca. 1750-1850)', *Studies in History* 4:1/2 (1988), p.94.
[16] K. Pomeranz, *The Great Divergence: China, Europe, and the Making of the Modern World Economy*, Princeton & Oxford: Princeton University Press, 2000.
[17] P. J. Moree, *A Concise History of Dutch Mauritius, 1598-1710: A Fruitful and Healthy Land*, London: Kegan Paul International, 1998.

integration in the first two centuries of settlement was comparatively independent of pre-colonial economic practices and markets. Competition was not a matter of how to integrate a local or regional structure into the emerging Europe-centred world economy, but how to establish a regional structure that could generate profit on the fringes of world trade. The French established a free port on the island, with this emphasis on 'free trade' based on privateering. The island's economic booms during the French period therefore coincided with the Seven Years' War of the mid-eighteenth century and the Napoleonic Wars around the turn of the nineteenth century. Because of its strategic location on the maritime trading routes between Asia and Europe, Mauritius became known as "the star and the key of the Indian Ocean" – since most European trade with Asia had to remain sea-bound, via the Cape of Good Hope, due to the Eurasian overland trade routes being controlled by the Ottoman, Indian and Chinese empires.[18]

Because of this favourable strategic location, for most of the eighteenth century licenses to hijack Anglo-Indian ships and trade the stolen goods were sold in the Port Louis free port.[19] The British conquered the island in 1810 and Mauritius formally became part of the Empire in the Vienna treaty of 1814. Britain granted the French-Mauritian ruling class rights to pursue their cultural practices and keep reminiscences of the former legal-political structure. From then on this structure worked below the superstructure of British colonial administration.[20] The hierarchy that positioned the French colonisers as the subjects of British rule was to determine the patterns of struggles within the local society and economy for the decades to come. Through the implementation of a node in the sugar commodity chain, the British Empire was equipped with sufficient powers to enforce the new codes of conduct as a process for embedding the Mauritian economy and society into the Empire's economic structures.[21]

Due to the shift to a plantation economy, the demand for labour increased and the slave population expanded rapidly as ever more slaves were imported despite the British ban on slave trading in 1814. Within the sugar-cane commodity chain, slaves were positioned at the extreme edge of the production side. Their position as well as their resistance must therefore be interpreted from the perspective of the economic calculus within the early years of Mauritian sugar-cane production: slaves were labourers and fixed capital assets framed by a labour regime with an inherent technology of surveillance, enforcement and a legal code. These assets had maintenance costs and were subject to speculation, as they could be bought and sold with profit on the market. All changes following Mauritian integration into the Empire's preferential commodity chain in 1825, particularly the abolition of slavery, must therefore be understood as the 'real' incorporation of Mauritius into the capitalist world system by the then dominant power: the British Empire.[22]

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[18] Pomeranz (2000).

[19] Allen (*Slaves, Freedmen, and Indentured Laborers in Colonial Mauritius*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1999, pp.19-21) provides an insightful comparison of the commodities produced on Mauritius, and the much higher monetary revenues in trade in privateered goods.

[20] C. Boudet, 'La Construction Politique d'une Identité Franco-Mauricienne (1810-1968): Le Discours Identitaire comme Gestion de la Contradiction', *Kabaro/Revue Internationale des Sciences de l'Homme et des Sociétés* 3:3-4 (2005), pp.3-44.

[21] K. Polanyi, 'Die Wirtschaft als eingerichteter Prozeß', in K. Polanyi, *Ökonomie und Gesellschaft*, Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 1979, pp.219-44.

[22] See G. Arrighi, 'Spatial and Other "Fixes" of Historical Capitalism', *Journal of World System Research* 10:2 (2004), pp.527-39.

Embedding Mauritius: the 1825 integration into the West Indian Sugar Protocol

Crucial for Mauritius and its incorporation into the capitalist world system was a substantial shift and revolution in the till then small agricultural sector. This happened in 1825.[23] The privateering-based Mauritian free-port economy was modulated into a mono-crop economy based on sugar plantations due to its integration into the preferential West Indian sugar-tariff system at work in the British Empire. From then on, if the island's Franco-Mauritian economic elite "wanted to make money under British rule... they had to produce commodities".[24] The establishment of large-scale capitalist agriculture on the island meant a significant move towards Mauritian integration into the British-dominated global system. But this was not only based on the production of sugar cane; with it came a bundle of legal structures, morals of trade and codes of conduct that had to be implemented along the commodity chain of sugar. Crucial to the enforcement of these new rules was the way in which the chain and its nodes were controlled:

> There are two primary loci where one can create large nodes of decision-making bodies. One can group primary production in large units – what we might call the 'plantation' solution. Or one can create large nodes at a stage after the initial production zones in the commodity chain. For example, some large 'merchants' (what in French are called *négociants* as opposed to *traitants* or *commerçants*) can station themselves at bottlenecks of flows. It is not enough, however, to create a quasi-monopoly or oligopoly of merchandising. It is also crucial for this (let us call him) large scale merchant (or merchant-banker) to establish a dependency upon him on the part of a mass of small producers.[25]

In other words, a periodisation of globalisation for Mauritius along the lines of a commodity-chain analysis begins with sugar. This commodity substituted the bottlenecks of flows created by French piracy before 1810, which basically relied on the island's strategic positioning in the Europe-Asia trade; and the failure of the French East India Company to establish commercial agriculture in Mauritius.[26]

When French Isle de France fell to the British Empire in 1810 the island not only received a new name (Mauritius); it suddenly became part of the Empire's market that was significantly bigger and more profitable than that of the declining French Empire. What this meant in terms of future economic options took the Franco-Mauritian upper class little time to realise. With demand for sugar on the British home market significantly higher than in France,[27] sugar production quickly increased after 1815, when the earlier 36-shilling duty for exports to the British market was replaced by a 10-shilling duty for the new crown colony. Production was ten times higher in the early 1820s than in 1810.[28] A driving force behind the transformation of the domestic economy was the first British governor, Robert Farquhar (1810-1817, 1820-1823). Accounts differ as to whether he realised himself that sugar cane was better suited for

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[23] See Allen (1999), p.12.
[24] W. K. Storey, *Science and Power in Colonial Mauritius*, Rochester: University of Rochester Press, 1997, p.26.
[25] Wallerstein (1988), pp.113-4.
[26] M. Vaughan, *Creating the Creole Island: Slavery in Eighteenth-Century Mauritius*, Durham & London: Duke University Press, 2005, p.61.
[27] S. W. Mintz, *Sweetness and Power the Place of Sugar in Modern History*, London: Penguin Books, 1986, pp.188-90.
[28] V. Teelock, *Bitter Sugar: Sugar and Slavery in 19th Century Mauritius*, Moka: Mahatma Ghandi Institute, 1998, pp.42-3.

the rough Mauritian climate than coffee, indigo, cloves or nutmegs;[29] or whether he was pushed to negotiate duties equal to Caribbean sugar by the Mauritian planters.[30] However, as there was no private banking system in Mauritius before the 1830s,[31] planters depended heavily on the colonial government's financial support, and thereby the British established their crucial position as the island's merchant bankers.

Another way through which economic policy on the island was determined and embedded via London was connected to long lasting disputes between the Colonial Office and the British East India Company over the terms of free trade or import/export duties.[32] Mauritian planters had already been sending memorials to London, demanding that the extra 10-shilling duty paid on East Indian sugar that was supposed to give the West Indies a competitive edge be waived. When Farquhar left for good to London in 1823 he started campaigning for the Mauritian planters' rights to equal market access, and was supported in this by the new governor Cole.[33] But Mauritian efforts to establish large-scale sugar-cane plantations faced a powerful enemy. Caribbean plantations in those days were mostly run by businessmen who not only lived in Britain, but had substantial influence in the House of Commons, or were even members of the House themselves. The following quote from an article in the *London Times*, published on the day of the third reading of the Bill granting Mauritian sugar equal import conditions as West Indian sugar, indicates why campaigning had been successful:

> Indeed, if nothing more could be adduced in favour of Mauritius than the promise made at the conquest of the island, that all the benefits should follow the possession which were enjoyed by the other British colonies, it is difficult to conceive how the pledge could be forfeited without a blot on the national honour.[34]

Thus, the amendment of the bill in 1825 sheds light on the way the British public constructed its relationship to the French colonists in Mauritius: as they were as white and racist as the new British rulers were, they had the same rights to the Empire's market – a concession rarely granted to non-European populations.

My analysis here differs from other works on Mauritius that have interpreted the shift to a sugar mono-crop economy as placing the Franco-Mauritian plantocracy in a nutshell to sail the high tides of the world market. Allen states: "Two principal factors governed domestic capital formation in Mauritius after 1810: the world market price for sugar and the industry's profitability".[35] This notion identifies a pattern of trade that Gereffi et al. have called a

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[29] A. Macmillan (ed.), *Mauritius Illustrated: Historical and Descriptive, Commercial and Industrial Facts, Figures, & Resources*, New Delhi: Asian Educational Services, 2000 [1914], p.44.
[30] Teelock (1998), p.43.
[31] After British take-over, the Colonial Bank of Mauritius, Bourbon (Reunion) and Dependencies had been established in 1812 but operation ceased in 1813 (L. Berthelot, *Histoire de la Chambre de Commerce et d'Industrie De Maurice*, Port Louis: Chambre de Commerce et d'Industrie de Maurice, 1991, p.45). In 1825, the influential Franco-Mauritian plantation owner and politician, Adrien D'Epinay, founded the *Banque de Maurice*, which was a substantial disaster in terms of performance. More successful was the foundation of the Mauritius Commercial Bank, a joint venture of Mauritian and British merchants under the leadership of James Blyth (S. Selvon, *A Comprehensive History of Mauritius*, Port Louis: M.D.S., 2001, pp.201-8) – a bank, that remains the most influential on Mauritius.
[32] Storey (1997), p.26.
[33] Teelock (1998), pp.43-4.
[34] *The Times*, 6 June 1825.
[35] Allen (1999), p.27.

"buyer-driven commodity chain".[36] Mauritian planters, according to Allen, had no control over the prices their product fetched on the London market, for traders determined these.[37] But the problem with this perspective is that Allen focuses on estate management throughout his study to an extent that one wonders if this had been the sole variable through which profit could be generated. In a similar way to the firm-centred approach of GVC analysis, Allen puts capitalism and the market on one side and the state on the other side of the coin. The amendment of the 1825 Bill highlights two other factors that were significantly more decisive for the profitability of the Mauritian sugar industry than estate management. These factors underline that Mauritian sugar constituted the antithesis of the concept of the market economy that features so strongly in Allen's explanation of the tragedy of the Mauritian plantocracy: first, the role of bilateral and multilateral trading agreements substantially influenced market prices via regimes of market access and export/import duties; and second, the international sphere of front and back room diplomacy of lobbying organisations opened the doors to certain markets, determined the entrance fee and closed the doors to others.

Global (intra-empire) trading agreements and economic diplomacy from 1825 to 1919

Mauritian entry into large-scale sugar production coincided with the end of sugar's era as "England's single most important import." But whereas West Indian sugar exports came crashing down in the following decades, Mauritian production and export expanded rapidly. Even after the Corn Laws were repealed in 1832, production continued to increase until 1845, when Britain completely abolished preferences on its market in the Sugar Equalisation Act and sugar prices fell rapidly.[38] Disagreement on the rules and morals of the trade nevertheless arose when Mauritian planters realised that slavery would be abolished. Clashes between their ranks and the British intensified the closer the date for the final abolition of slavery in 1835 approached.

As early as the eighteenth century, an imagination of the island's development prospects along the lines of labour shortage had been established. While slavery had been transformed into an ever more inhumane regime after the introduction of the *Code Noir* in Mauritius, a second layer of perception as to how the working population was divided into race clusters had become inscribed into Franco-Mauritian minds.[39] The end of legal slave trading in 1814 triggered illicit trade in the following decades;[40] and at approximately the same time, contract workers from the vast British possessions in India were gradually imported to substitute the slaves on the plantations.[41] The latter business led to numerous intra-empire quarrels, because

[36] Gereffi et al. (1994), pp.10-1. See also P. Dicken, *Global Shift: Reshaping the Global Economic Map in the 21st Century*, London: Sage, 2003, p.19.
[37] Allen (1999), p.27.
[38] V. A. Mahler, 'Britain, the European Community, and the Developing Commonwealth: Dependence, Interdependence, and the Political Economy of Sugar', *International Organization* 35:3 (1981), p.473.
[39] Vaughan (2005).
[40] R. B. Allen, 'Licentious and Unbridled Proceedings: The Illegal Slave Trade to Mauritius and the Seychelles during the Early Nineteenth Century', *Journal of African History* 42:1 (2001), pp.91-116.
[41] Opinions differ on when exactly contract workers were first introduced. It seems plausible that this process of pooling new labour reserves was opened up by endeavours of the colonial administration that had Indian contract workers build the first road crossing the Mauritian central plateau and connecting the two main ports in 1818 (Teelock 1998, p.68). It should also be kept in mind that the slave markets in the Indian Ocean were by no means limited to certain regions, but that besides Africans, substantial numbers of Indian and Indonesian slaves were sold to Mauritius. The linear narrative of Mauritian population composed of French settlers, African slaves and Indian contract workers who came to the island in successive phases should rather be understood as the present regime's idea of identity politics than as analytically grounded. While Benedict (*Mauritius: Problems of a Plural Society*, London: Institute of Race Relations, 1965), but especially Eriksen (*Common Denominators: Ethnicity,*

British governors in Mauritius sought to support 'their' plantation owners with cheap labour whereas governors in India tried to protect 'their' colonial subjects from the slavery-like working conditions in Mauritius and to improve the contracted workers' travel and living conditions instead. These two succeeding regimes of coerced labour determined the labour process on Mauritian plantations throughout the nineteenth and into the twentieth century.[42] Of particular interest for Mauritian integration into the sugar commodity chain is the transition from one system to the other.

The abolition of slavery brought fresh capital to Mauritius in the form of a £2 million compensation. This capital was invested mainly in the acquisition of new milling technologies. On top of this, after a furious showdown with the colonial administration, an attempt on government by planters from the south-eastern district of the island, and a general strike against the installation of a new protector of slaves,[43] Mauritian slave owners managed to further negotiate the right to association, print a newspaper and open a banking house on the island. It needs to be explained how, after the abolition of sugar duties and slavery, Mauritius quickly – much to the surprise of most British experts – became the main sugar exporter in the imperial market.[44] Two developments seem central for this quick acquisition of market share.

One advantage, although at first sight anything but obvious, was the short duration of Mauritian sugar planters' businesses. Whereas the Caribbean estates had amassed substantial debts and therefore a substantial amount of the compensation paid in 1832/33 went into liquidation,[45] no such process can be found in sources on Mauritius:

> Thus we can say that, in the 1830s, the West Indies were sold up, largely for the benefit of the factors; and even this repatriation of capital could not have been done without twenty million pounds of the British taxpayers' money.

The money received by Mauritian slave owners seems to have gone exactly where the money in the Caribbean did not go: into "investment in social overhead capital and agricultural improvement".[46]

A second factor was the planters' ability to adjust to the new rules of the market. How strong the contrast to the old modes of production was deserves additional emphasis here: Mauritius had shifted from a free-port economy to a plantation economy, turned from slavery to contract labour, and moved its bottleneck strategy from privateering in the Indian Ocean's waters to lobbying in the London offices of the colonial administration. All these developments had taken place within only thirty years. Although even during field research in 2003 and 2004 I

Nation-Building and Compromise in Mauritius, Oxford: Berg, 1998) and most recently Boswell (*Le Malaise Créole: Ethnic Identity in Mauritius*, New York: Berghahn Books, 2006) walk into this trap of Mauritian nation-building narratives, Christopher ('Ethnicity, Community and the Census in Mauritius, 1830-1990', *Geographical Journal* 158:1 (1992), pp.57-64) perfectly demonstrates the shortcomings of long-term British ethnicisation policies in colonial and postcolonial times.

[42] Tinker tries to link the two regimes even closer, calling contract labour *A New System of Slavery* (London: Oxford University Press, 1974).

[43] C. Boudet, 'Les Abolitions de l'Esclavage à Maurice et la Construction d'une Identité Franco-Mauricienne', in E. Maestri (ed.), *Esclavage et Abolition dans L'Océan Indien 1723-1860*, Saint-Denis de La Réunion & Paris: Université de La Réunion & L'Harmattan, 2002, pp.255-66; and Boudet (2005).

[44] D. Bräutigam, 'Strategic Engagement: Markets, Transnational Networks, and Globalization in Mauritius', *Yale Journal of International Affairs* 1:1 (2005), p.67.

[45] R. B. Sheridan, 'The West India Sugar Crisis and British Slave Emancipation, 1830-1833', *Journal of Economic History* 21:4 (1961), pp.548-9.

[46] Pares (1960), cited in Sheridan (1961), p.549.

was surprised how many Franco-Mauritians still held strong racist ideas and seemed tragically stuck in a past they would never get back,[47] ever since the abolition of slavery they have managed quite well to lure the outside world into believing that they were adherents of the free market and victims of the marginal position of Mauritius within the geography of world trade.

Mauritian entrepreneurs responded to the beet-sugar induced difficulties on the world market with the establishment of an institution to better represent their interests in 1827. In 1850, they called again to London for a green light to establish a Chamber of Commerce in Mauritius. Whereas, given its charter, the first Chamber had mainly been intended to provide an infrastructure for facilitating prosperity and development, its re-establishment envisaged the following objectives outlined in its charter:

> to receive and collect all information concerning subjects of commercial interest, with the aim to remove all the disadvantages from these and to right the wrongs; to consult authorities and individuals on these issues;
>
> to establish a code of ethics aiming to simplify and facilitate commercial transactions for those who are involved therein;
>
> to arbitrate disputes among parties who desire to avoid lawsuits and who desire to submit themselves to the judgements of the chamber and accept these.[48]

This demonstrates that it was set up only for those Mauritian traders who were already running established businesses. The envisioned introduction of a code of ethics points to a strategy of strengthening internal cohesion and implementing a local court-like system disclosed to British authorities. Whereas these two intentions in the charter must be read as references to the Chamber's internal functions, references to the gathering and spread of information target outward-bound activities of crucial importance: Mauritius was on the periphery of the global system of sugar trade in the 1820s, but had become ever more central in terms of production capacity and technology by 1850. What was scarce, though, were technologies and measures of authority to gain political influence on the decision makers in London's political and diplomatic circles.

A crucial role in the enterprise to change Mauritian positioning was given to the leading Mauritian nineteenth-century shipping and marketing company, Blyth Brothers & Co.[49] The former director of this company, James Blyth, had already been central to the first successful establishment of a banking house in Mauritius (1830), and subsequently the company set up shipping activities. In 1850 Mauritius, it was anything but easy to gather information on European market developments. As the island was not connected to the emerging system of steamship lines linking Europe and the Indian Ocean,[50] travel times were long. This caused problems even in the simplest forms of communication such as the transmission of letters by ship between London and Mauritius. As early as 1854 the then president of the Mauritian Chamber of Commerce (MCC), Mr Wiehe, complained in furious letters about the lack of

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[47] For a similar observation, see Boudet (2002).
[48] Berthelot (1991), p.15.
[49] The following section is based on a company history of Blyth Brothers & Co. Ltd. (M. Lagesse, *Blyth Brothers and Company Limited, 1830-1980*, Cassis, Port Louis: Blyth Brothers and Company Limited, 1980).
[50] In 1851, the legislative council of Mauritius granted £12,000 annually to the General Screw Steam Company (represented by H.D. & J. Blyth & Greene Co.) for a regular service line to Aden, where passengers disembarked and continued via land to a Mediterranean port and from there to Marseille. The service ceased after only two years of existence (Lagesse 1980, p.111).

steamships connecting Port Louis to the outer world.[51] Blyth Brothers were active not only establishing regular shipping lines to serve Mauritian commercial needs, but also held various consulates (e.g. Italy, Netherlands, United States of America, Belgium, Austria/Hungary) in Port Louis, and in 1870 represented 32 international banks (e.g. Deutsche Bank, Dresdner Bank, The Bank of New York) plus various international insurance companies.[52] Close co-operation between the company and the MCC manifested itself further when Blyth Brothers director H. J. Jourdain was elected Chamber president in 1864. In the following decades all Blyth Brothers successive directors came to hold both posts.[53] Furthermore, the company's offices in London functioned as a non-permanent representation of the MCC, and from there dinners with British members of parliament were arranged while Blyth Brothers became involved in buying and selling land and plantations in Mauritius.[54]

The MCC itself started lobbying for a telegraphic cable connection to Britain in the 1850s (though they were not successful until 1869) and succeeded in lifting import duties on machines used in sugar factories in 1853.[55] When in 1854 London sugar tariffs fell, a system of differential import rights based on polarisation was introduced. The MCC in co-operation with the Chamber of Agriculture (MCA) for the first time sent one from their ranks to London to lobby for a better import regime for Mauritian sugar with high polarisation.[56] Although they did not succeed, this first mission has been interpreted as the advent of Franco-Mauritian private sector diplomacy in London.[57] As the efforts had not brought the intended harvest, the MCC went on to council Mauritian planters on how to best grain their sugar after the British trading company M. M. Travers & Sons had been consulted, and gave advice on how to best advertise test packages of Mauritian sugar without walking into the trap of advertising sugar of too high quality and then paying indemnity for the difference in quality of the bulk cargo delivered.[58]

Nevertheless, the 1860s decline in prices for Caribbean sugar on the London market was a factor no lobbying at the Colonial Office could have turned into a benefit for Mauritius. Therefore, the island turned to the British colonies India and Australia, and managed to establish a substantial market in both. Sugar production had risen to 150,480 tons in 1862,[59] and already in 1863 Bombay was buying 10,000 tons of Mauritian sugar while at the same time substantial quantities of rice, flour, lentils and grains moved in the other direction.[60] The tightened commercial link between the two colonies was followed up by the introduction of the Indian rupee as Mauritian currency.[61] Up to the First World War, India was to remain a major market for Mauritian sugar. In 1899, first the Indian colonial government and, in a later vote, also the House of Commons supported the imposition of countervailing duties on

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[51] Berthelot (1991), pp.29-33.
[52] Lagesse (1980), pp.112-4.
[53] Berthelot (1991), pp.153-7.
[54] Lagesse (1980), p.120.
[55] Berthelot (1991), pp.44, 56, 72.
[56] This system of distinction via polarisation stands in contrast to most assumptions of an entirely duty- and quota-free British imperial market as presented by most authors (e.g. Mahler 1981: 475). Osterhammel and Petersson (*Geschichte der Globalisierung: Dimensionen, Prozesse, Epochen*, München: Beck, 2007, pp.60-3), for example, equate the era of free trade, which they date from 1846 to 1880, with the emergence of a global economy.
[57] Bräutigam (2005).
[58] Berthelot (1991), p.87.
[59] Lagesse (1980), p.118.
[60] Berthelot (1991), p.60.
[61] Lagesse (1980), p.118.

bounty-fed sugar imported to India in the interest of Mauritius.[62] Only when the European demand for sugar rose, with the beginning of the war in 1914, did the British government pool the colony's production. As sugar was to be refined at 99.5 per cent for the British market, as opposed to 96 per cent for the Indian market, and Mauritian factories had to adjust to the new percentage, from 1914 onwards the island's sugar was again part of the European market.[63] Besides the necessity for the British government to substitute German and Austrian beet-sugar imports with Mauritian sugar, a vivid example of the importance of Mauritian sugar was the German import/export embargo enforced by the warships Koenigsberg and Emden during the first months of 1914.[64]

To sum up, the period between Mauritian integration into the British Empire's sugar commodity chain and the First World War was characterised by two connected developments. The first of these was the introduction of the sugar regime itself. This meant a change of economic strategies. With the new regime of trade and its morals, an adjustment of labour regimes on the production side of the commodity chain was enforced and Mauritian plantations had to shift from slave to indentured labour. But indentured labour was anything but the system of free citizens selling their labour force on the market as preconditioned by Marx for capitalist economies. Ideally, contract labourers were free to work anywhere they wanted when the contracts ended after five years. During the difficult years following 1860, the Franco-Mauritian plantocracy reacted by outsourcing parts of their business. In the early 1870s, a large-scale process of *morcellements* (division) began, and substantial plots of cane land were parcelled and sold, turning former contract workers into smallholders. While this process in Mauritian nation-building narratives often is described as emancipation, it coincided with the centralisation of the mill system that brought the number of sugar factories down by nearly 90 per cent from 1860 to 1937, from 303 to 38. While the average annual extraction capacity of mills multiplied in the same period from 450 to 8,210 metric tons of sugar, the *morcellement* hardly brought prosperity to the smallholders.[65] Allen has focused his detailed analysis of the *morcellement* on the years before 1914. But a large acreage changed hands from 1914 to 1921 when sugar prices were at an all time high. Many smallholders had bought their plots at peak prices in the wake of the abolition of indenture. This meant that huge profits went to landowners and to a new professional group: estate agents. Land was often bought, parcelled and sold by joint venture companies of Franco-Mauritians and traders of Indian descent. While the estate-agency business helped several families to acquire massive wealth and turn this into corporations that would be important players in Mauritius for the coming decades, the vast majority of smallholders remained dependent labourers, as their plots were far too small to sustain households. Thus the free wage labourers emerging after the end of indenture in 1923 were often highly indebted smallholders who were desperate to find seasonal employment with millers and owners of large plantations.[66] The *morcellement*,

[62] C. S. Griffin, 'The Sugar Industry and Legislation in Europe', *Quarterly Journal of Economics* 17:1 (1902), pp.41-2. This provides a good example of the academic support given to the policy change from liberalism and no duties on sugar to a protectionist policy introduced in 1900: "The new [Indian] sugar duty ... renders the problem of protecting the Indian planters an easy one. A simple remission of the duty on sugar from the English colonies would serve the same purpose as a countervailing duty on European sugar, and in all probability would be much easier to pass" (Griffin 1902, p.42).
[63] Anonymous, 'Trade Movements and the War', *Geographical Review* 1:3 (1916), pp.209-10.
[64] Berthelot (1991), pp.118-9.
[65] Allen (1999), pp.72-4; North-Coombes, M. D., *Studies in the Political Economy of Mauritius* [Moka, Mauritius]: Mahatma Gandhi Institute, 2000, p.141.
[66] This issue is rarely raised in Mauritian historiography and if it is then it is local historians who do so. See for example V. Teelock, *Mauritian History: From Its Beginnings to Modern Times*, Moka, Mauritius: Mahatma Gandhi Institute, 2001, pp.323-50.

in my interpretation, should be understood as a huge campaign to generate fresh capital and outsource market risks by sticking to a centralised system of mills on which the former indentured labourers were now dependent to sell their produce. Nevertheless, the repercussions of the global crisis led to a relative diversification of the intra-Mauritian nodes in the global sugar chain. But an intra-island market in which planters and millers negotiated prices for cane never emerged, as transport facilities were extremely limited. What emerged instead was a system of scientific breeding of cane that generated new ideas as to how profit might be generated in the industry.[67] While quarrels over the distribution of risk and power within this market soon emerged in the global recession of the late 1920s and 1930s, the development of a new bottleneck institution and significant changes in British colonial policy as well as in the capitalist world system were to provide the solution for these internal quarrels, and further consolidate the control of the chain in the hands of the plantocracy and their lobbying institutions.

The Mauritian sugar sector as a system of income redistribution (1919-1937)

The second development was the emergence of a new organisation for marketing and financing the Mauritian sugar industry. While at first former British governors like Farquhar supported the planters' interests within the imperial system of trade preferences, after the establishment of the MCC Mauritian planters and merchants took lobbying into their own hands. The London offices of the British-Mauritian company Blyth Brothers & Co. played an important role in this process of emancipation of Mauritian private-sector economic diplomacy until 1919. That year marked major changes in the British Empire's sugar commodity chain and triggered the foundation of a new and powerful umbrella organisation of Mauritian sugar producers.

Great Britain, after having already established a system of tariffs to reduce commercial in favour of military transport during the war,[68] introduced a system of imperial preferences in 1919. While free trade had never been fully implemented either in the Empire or in its relation to global markets, this system marked the end of the free trade propaganda/ideology for the coming decades. In Mauritius, planters reacted to the strong bargaining position Asian traders had assumed during the war years with the foundation of the Mauritius Sugar Syndicate (MSS). The British economist James Edward Meade, writing on the prospects of the Mauritian economy in 1961, lists the following boards and associations for the Mauritian sugar industry:

- The MCA as the umbrella organisation of planters, millers and others connected to the industry.
- The Mauritius Sugar Syndicate is exclusively a marketing organisation. It handles the whole crop of the colony and, jointly with the Chamber, is responsible for the discharge of obligations under the Commonwealth and International Sugar Agreements.
- The Central Arbitration and Control Board as a semi-official body that determines conditions and terms for the sale of cane to mills.

[67] W. K. Storey, 'Small-Scale Sugar Cane Farmers and Biotechnology in Mauritius: The "Uba" Riots of 1937', *Agricultural History* 69 (1995), pp.163-76.
[68] Mahler (1981), p.475.

- The Mauritius Sugar Producers Association as an employers' union representing the millers' interests towards the planters.[69]

The marketing dimension of the MSS highlighted by Meade dates back to the interwar period. It is particularly interesting that the colonial government sanctioned the handling of the whole crop by the MSS following the first substantial and widespread riot of small planters. In 1937, due to a transmission of reduced world-market prices from the millers further along the chain to the small planters,[70] a large group of the latter attacked one of the mills that had declared it would buy up their sugar cane at reduced prices only. Four planters died in the ensuing shootout and a commission of enquiry was set up. Following the recommendations of this commission, the MSS was officially turned into the bottleneck that from now on mediated between the Mauritian nodes in the sugar commodity chain and the outside world. Already before 1937 the MSS had been in charge of selling all Mauritian sugar on the world market. But this had been by way of a series of agreements among local businesses. While a substantial part was exported at a guaranteed price under the system of imperial preferences, the remainder was sold according to shifting world-market prices. The overall income was then pooled and evenly distributed among the millers and owners of large plantations according to the amount of tons that had been delivered to the MSS at the end of the crop season. Smallholders might be described as an appendix to this system as they sold their canes via brokers to millers and received sugar in return. This sugar could then be passed on to the MSS in another transaction involving brokers. The crop season was pre-financed by MSS payments to millers who usually had themselves granted loans to small planters. In years of low world-market prices the MSS stored a substantial amount of sugar to be marketed in hope of higher prices in the future. Thus, there was already a redistributive system in existence by which the millers and owners of large plantations not only pooled and collectively sold their sugar, but also shared the market risk for the small amount of sugar sold on the world market at the same time. However this redistributive system did not extend to the small planters who had to sell their cane to neighbouring mills. These mills fixed prices and kept a substantial margin as their share. They could do so, because the smallholders suffered from adverse transport conditions that hindered the emergence of a (anyway limited) competition among millers for canes. After the 1937 riots, this bottleneck in the chain between smallholders and millers was given up in favour of a system of general redistribution of market gains and risks.[71]

One important aspect enabling the institutionalisation of this system was that there was a matching institutionalisation on the international sphere. In 1937, Britain ratified the International Sugar Agreement (ISA). The ISA provisioned Mauritius as well as other colonies and Commonwealth countries with a range of fixed annual quota for exports to the London market. This put an end to a series of policy changes in the 1920s and 1930s. Before 1937, Britain had switched rather erratically between protecting its home markets by reducing or abolishing preferences for producers in the colonies on the one hand, and on the other hand extending preferences to subsidise ailing Mauritian and other colonial producers. Furthermore, Britain and other contracting parties of the ISA mutually acknowledged existing

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[69] J. .E. Meade, *The Economic and Social Structure of Mauritius (Report to the Governor of Mauritius)*, London: Methuen, 1961, pp.79-80.
[70] Small planters in 1960 owned and worked 40% of the Mauritian land under cane (Meade 1961).
[71] C. A. Hooper, *Report of the Commission of Enquiry into Unrest on Sugar Estates in Mauritius, 1937*, Port Louis, Mauritius: Government Printer, 1938; Meade (1961); LSE archives, Meade Files/Meade_5.

quota systems to the degree that these were written into the agreement (albeit some of them amended following negotiations).[72]

From imperial preferences to the Commonwealth Sugar Agreement (1951) and the Lomé Convention (1975)

When the British Empire began to decompose after the Second World War, the United Kingdom in concert with other European colonial powers had already come up with a safeguard system. In the late war years preparations were made to set up a number of agreements and institutions that would regulate international trade in the decades to come (Bretton Woods, United Nations, World Bank, International Monetary Fund, etcetera). The Global Agreement on Tariffs and Trade (GATT), ratified in 1947, established a system of trade regimes and codes of conduct for the colonial powers,[73] as well as their colonies, which was to be transferred one to one in cases of transition from a colonial to a postcolonial state.[74] Mauritius as a British colony became a member of the GATT in 1947; and after independence in 1968, a simple one page letter dated 4 April 1968 sent by the British government to the GATT director was sufficient to assure Mauritian accession to GATT according to provisions reserved for newly independent countries in 1967.[75] Under GATT, trade in all goods with special provisions for former colonies, other bilateral or multi-lateral trade agreements signed by one or more member states had to be presented to and accepted by all other members. When the British government implemented the Commonwealth Sugar Agreement (CSA) in 1951, granting an annual purchase of 1.8 million metric tons of cane sugar from Commonwealth sugar producers at a guaranteed price, this agreement had to be passed within GATT. Later, the CSA had to be integrated into the emerging European Economic Community. The Common Agricultural Policy, protecting and subsidising EU producers heavily against world-market competition, strongly resembles the principles of the CSA in its seclusion of world-market mechanisms. Whereas other imports of sugar were levelled by high import duties to European prices after subsidies, seventy-nine former European colonies in Africa, the Caribbean and the Pacific were granted intra-EU prices for their agricultural products under the Lomé Convention ratified in 1975.[76] As sugar represented about 90 per cent of the country's export income at the time of Mauritian independence in 1968 (with only minor changes over the following fifteen years), the guaranteed price was a substantial contribution to the policy of export-led development started with the opening of an Export Processing Zone (EPZ) in 1970.[77] A boom in textile and garment production in the Mauritian EPZ was heavily financed by capital from the local sugar industry, turning the country not

[72] See C. L. Gilbert, 'International Commodity Agreements: An Obituary Notice', *World Development* 24:1 (1996), pp.1-19.
[73] B. M. Hoekman & M. M. Kostecki, *The Political Economy of the World Trading System: The WTO and Beyond*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001, p.38. It is important to note that agreements such as the CSA and the Lomé Convention also needed to be matched with provisions of the ISA, which was amended in 1954 and 1974 (Gilbert 1996).
[74] GATT, *The Territorial Application of the GATT Agreement: A Provisional List of Territories to Which the Agreement Is Applied*, Stanford, USA, Stanford University Library, GATT Digital Archives GATT/CP/108, 16/04/1951, http://gatt.stanford.edu/bin/detail?fileID=1836506882, 16/04/1951 accessed 11 May 2012.
[75] GATT, *Status of Mauritius,* Stanford, USA, Stanford University Library, De Facto Application of the GATT L/3003, 10/04/1968, http://gatt.stanford.edu/bin/detail?fileID=1167170839, 10/04/1968 accessed 11 May 2012.
[76] Mahler (1981), pp.476-80.
[77] P. Neveling, 'Spirits of Capitalism and the De-Alienation of Workers: A Historical Perspective on the Mauritian Garment Industry', *Working paper GZAA*, MLU Halle-Wittenberg, 2006; P. Neveling, 'Flexible Capitalism and Transactional Orders in Colonial and Postcolonial Mauritius: A Post-Occidentalist View', in J. Kjaerulf and J. K. Jensen (eds), *Flexible Capitalism: Exchange and Ambiguity at Work*, Oxford: Berghahn, under review.

only into what some have called an economic miracle in the Indian Ocean,[78] but also into the EPZ with the highest rate of local capital worldwide.[79]

After independence, Mauritian economic diplomacy continued as a joint endeavour of the postcolonial state and the private sector. Until the early 1990s, Mauritian governments seriously lacked funding to send delegates to Brussels or London for the sake of tariff negotiations. These instead were pursued with the support of the MSS, MCC and MCA representatives in European countries, and helped to negotiate the highest of all sugar quotas among ACP countries in 1975.[80]

The trade regime established after the Second World War cannot be understood and interpreted without a short reference to its dominant ideologies. While questions of how to achieve economic development had been a major concern during the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, the scope of these debates was limited to the respective spheres controlled by a single imperial power. With the emergence of institutions of global significance, such as the GATT, the idea of development was given a new twist. The world was from now on divided into three regions that were positioned along a hierarchy determined by economic variables such as GDP.[81] Although in terms of its sugar industry Mauritius was an industrialised country, its GDP and other variables positioned the island on the underdeveloped side of the hierarchy: the Third World. Along with this division of the world came the ideologies of development and modernisation that set up fixed patterns of action to be followed in order to improve a country's position. Thus, one can speak of a neo-evolutionary concept that positioned nations and their economies in time according to their stages of development.[82] Inherent in the promise of development and prosperity was a system of aims and norms inscribed into GATT which are circumscribed in its 'Preamble':

> Recognizing that their relations in the field of trade and economic endeavour should be conducted with a view to raising standards of living, ensuring full employment and a large and steadily growing volume of real income and effective demand, developing the full use of the resources of the world and expanding the production and exchange of goods,
>
> Being desirous of contributing to these objectives by *entering into reciprocal and mutually advantageous arrangements* directed to the substantial reduction of tariffs and other barriers to trade and to the elimination of discriminatory treatment in international commerce.[83]

It was exactly this concept of reciprocal and mutually advantageous arrangements that was transformed in the heydays of development policies in 1965. This served to legitimise preferential trading agreements between the EEC and former European colonies, although

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[78] I. Aladin, *Economic Miracle in the Indian Ocean: Can Mauritius Show the Way?* Stanley: Editions de l'Océan Indien, 1993; A. Subramanian and D. Roy, 'Who Can Explain the Mauritian Miracle: Meade, Romer, Sachs or Rodrik?' *IMF Working Paper* WP/01/116 (2001).
[79] Neveling (2006).
[80] Bräutigam (2005).
[81] See A. Escobar, 'Power and Visibility: Development and the Invention and Management of the Third World', *Cultural Anthropology* 3:4 (1988), pp.428-43.
[82] J. Ferguson, 'Decomposing Modernity: History and Hierarchy after Development', in A. Loomba et al. (eds), *Postcolonial Studies and Beyond*, Durham: Duke University Press, 2005.
[83] GATT, *The General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade*: Rule 1 July 1986, http://www.wto.org/english/docs_e/legal_e/gatt47_e.pdf, date accessed 11 May 2012, pp.105, emphasis added.

they were non-reciprocal.[84] On paper, the industrial countries volunteered to forego the norm of reciprocity in order to give trade benefits to underdeveloped countries and hence allow them to develop. But the EEC, for example, not only chose which country to grant such benefits to and which not to according to a postcolonial nation's political performance; it also gained control over substantial shares of goods traded on the world market under the system of trade preferences. As outlined above, and similar to economic diplomacy in the nineteenth century, the Mauritian private sector was very active lobbying in Brussels; only this time, it was not the British governors supporting them but the government of independent Mauritius.

From Lomé and GATT to WTO (1995)

The Uruguay Round, initiated in 1986, laid the grounds for the foundation of the WTO in 1995. Once again, and for the second time after the rise of free trade ideology in mid-nineteenth century Britain, the capitalist world economy went into a phase of trade liberalisation claiming to end all other bilateral and multi-lateral trade agreements. What this meant for Mauritius is best illustrated by the events around the ministerial conference of the WTO in Cancun in 2003. Since the foundation of the WTO, the way in which global trade liberalisation was to be achieved has been a highly controversial issue. Every second year, ministers of member states, WTO delegates, lobbyists representing transnational companies and delegations from large international NGOs meet to either follow up or open up a new round of negotiations.[85] These rounds are split according to sectors: trade in agricultural goods, trade in non-agricultural goods and the newly emerging global trade in services framed in the Global Agreement on Trade in Services.

In 2003, Mauritius was a member of several pressure groups, each consisting of nation states grouped together along the lines of shared interests in trade of one of the sectors outlined above. An example of such a type of formation is the group of ACP states that in preparation for the 2003 summit met in Fiji in May to agree on common grounds for trade in sugar cane.[86] The Mauritian Minister of Industry and Commerce, Jayen Cuttaree, led this group of nation states as spokesperson. Another group was the Organisation of African Union (OAU), which tried to bring together the commercial interests of African nations as the least developed of all continents. Given that Mauritius was one of the few African countries that could afford to employ a decent number of representatives in the WTO headquarters in Geneva, it was no surprise that Jayen Cuttaree acted as spokesman for the OAU as well. This is a coincidence of representations of obviously very different interests: whereas the OAU objected to the US and EU insistence on agricultural preferences as it harmed the export prospects of most African countries, the ACP states supported the EU/US initiative as all countries profited from preferential access to the European market. Thus, the Mauritian position in Cancun was somewhat schizophrenic as it went along with the ACP in trade in agricultural goods, joined the OAU in their demand for extended protectionism and financial support in trade in non-agricultural goods based on the notion that underdevelopment had resulted from colonisation and therefore a gesture of reciprocity was needed from the former colonisers, and took sides with the EU/US position on opening up trade in services as most Mauritian companies hoped to profit from expansion to the East African states. Thus Mauritius in 2003 was by no means a

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[84] See A. Ziai, 'From Development Discourse to the Discourse of Globalisation', *Sociologus* 60:1 (2010), pp.41-70.

[85] Hoekman & Kostecki (2001).

[86] The following description is based on research during two periods of field research in Mauritius in 2003 and 2004, and builds on various articles published in the Mauritian daily *L'Express* in 2003, among other sources of information.

coherent national economy represented by its government in the Cancun negotiation round. The national policy was, in terms of global trading agreements, divided according to its main economic sectors: sugar cane, textiles and garments, tourism and services. Along the commodity chains of these sectors, the Mauritian government took up a Janus-headed stance: one time promoting liberalisation, another time protectionism. Thus, what had started as a seemingly small-scale endeavour in economic diplomacy in the years before 1825 had turned into a full-scale foreign policy operation. The dimensions of this operation became even more evident when Mauritian minister Jayen Cuttaree ran for the post of the Director General of the WTO (and lost to the EU Commissioner for Agriculture, Pascal Lamy).

Conclusion

My analysis of the history of Mauritian sugar production and its integration into global capitalism has shown the shortcomings of the GCC or GVC approaches. The principal mechanisms of this industry and its commodity chain's long history cannot be identified if the analytical focus is on companies buying or selling sugar and therefore creating value. This is not to say that companies and their networks do not play an important role in the Mauritian sugar sector. But this sector was embedded into the capitalist world system in such a way that one of the central analytical distinctions of the GCC approach – for example, that of buyer- or producer-driven chains – is rather insignificant here. Instead, for a period of nearly two hundred years, what was central was always economic diplomacy: how to best negotiate a guaranteed amount of Mauritian sugar to be purchased by the British Empire, the Commonwealth or the European Union (and its forerunner organisations). This, in other words, meant how to best insure market access in terms of export quota and price guarantees. One might object that the politico-economic entities involved in these negotiations and deals (e.g. the Mauritian Sugar Syndicate or the Colonial Office) represented a seller-buyer relation. But their actual dealings with one another can hardly be understood if notions of competitiveness and value creation are applied. This would involve taking the capitalist world system for something that it is explicitly not: a system based on rational economic calculus and action.

One of the many cases in point that have emphasised the importance of other factors than economic calculus for my analysis is the political and economic turmoil around the abolition of slavery in Mauritius. In a paper on what he calls the great expansion of the capitalist world system from 1750 to 1850, Wallerstein argues that besides having been integrated into commodity chains as producers, slaves also had been turned into objects of capital investment and that the slave markets were subject to price fluctuations and thus speculation.[87] When the Mauritian planters were granted compensation for the release of their slaves, it was exactly the second, speculative dimension that was, accompanied by the notion of racial superiority, a heated subject in the negotiations and sometimes violent uprisings in Mauritius. But what was negotiated in a larger framework was Mauritius' future position in the British Empire, the dominant power in the capitalist world economy in those days:

> We have tried to establish that incorporation involved the integration of the production sphere into the commodity chains of the capitalist world-economy and that this integration tended to require, in the period of incorporation, both the establishment of larger units of economic decision-making (including often, but not always, plantations) and the increased coercion of the labour force.[88]

[87] Wallerstein (1988), p.129.
[88] Wallerstein (1988), p.130.

Decisive in the case of early Mauritian production were the willingness of various governors to give out loans for the industry, the planters' success in negotiating financial compensation for the abolition of slavery and the various economic institutions they founded in Mauritius. But the larger economic unit referred to in the quote above was located in London, and although various institutions and social practices – such as Parliament, the Colonial Office, lobbying and competition with other sugar-producing colonies – were involved, the larger unit can only be defined as the relative positioning of Mauritius within the overall system of liberal and protectionist trade policy and ideology. From the perspective of Mauritian sugar, the oscillation between liberalism and protectionism within this system has remained the same until today – despite changes in the powers that determine the politics within larger units of decision making. It was the West Indian sugar preferences that were later re-established in the imperial preference system, it was the Commonwealth Sugar Agreement that paved the way into the preferential system of the EU market; and it is the preferential EU system that is at stake, when trade in agricultural goods is negotiated in the WTO ministerial rounds.

To relate these developments to a Mauritian periodisation of globalisation along the lines of the liberal-protectionist sugar commodity chain, I want to shortly sum up efforts to split up globalisation into different phases by another author.

Arrighi divides the expansion of the capitalist world economy along the lines of dominant powers. According to him, first Genoa, then the Netherlands, the British Empire and finally the US dictated the terms of world trade. Each of the successive powers relied on a specific form of financial backing through which it exerted its dominance. The period from 1800 to 2000 in his perspective saw the shift of the centre from the British Empire to the US. Prominent events that triggered the shift were what he calls a global depression from 1873 until 1896 and the thirty-year crisis from 1914 to 1945. The demise of the US system of capital accumulation in his view was manifested in the 1970s oil crisis.[89] Major developments that determine this periodisation of globalisation are tied to both the emergence and the transformations within the system of nation states and the worldwide capitalist system. Crisis is the rule in this system and leads to the reconstitution on new and enlarged foundations, whereas long periods of stability and expansion are exceptional. Systemic cycles of accumulation are central to Arrighi's periods of globalisation and follow the succession of core powers (Genoa, Netherlands, Great Britain, US). Each cycle is longer than one century, and thus differs from periodisations based on price-logistics cycles (such as the Kondratieff or secular cycles) that look at the "long-term fluctuation in commodity prices".[90]

The history of Mauritian sugar production and distribution supports Arrighi's *longue durée*-based analysis and shows that what he criticises as only seemingly novel (shifts from Fordism to flexible accumulation/specialisation)[91] are indeed familiar structures.[92] The year 1937 might be perceived as the establishment of a Mauritian version of Fordism, as it marked the end of an internal market for the sale of cane to the mills. But this was a Fordism of very limited scope: the introduction of the redistributive system under the auspices of the MSS by no means changed the system of production or the labour regime. Control of the nodes stayed in the hands of the Mauritian plantocracy as the internal large-scale merchant and in the hands of the British colonial administration as the external large-scale merchant.

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[89] Arrighi (2002), p.ix.
[90] Arrighi (2002), pp.6-7.
[91] D. Harvey, *The Condition of Postmodernity an Enquiry into the Origins of Cultural Change*, Oxford: Blackwell, 1990.
[92] Arrighi (2002), p.3.

Therefore, a Mauritian periodisation of globalisation according to the island's integration into the global commodity chain of sugar first and foremost is related to the fact that sugar is produced on the island in large scale. This production still shapes much of social life on the island, has a decisive impact on the appearance of the landscape with 40 percent of acreage under cane cultivation, and is strongly influencing Mauritian future economic prospects. These observations point towards an important difference in the notions of historicity of globalisation in the GCC and the world-systems approaches. Bair has described these as follows:

> However, the GCC camp departs from the world-systems perspective insofar as global commodity chains are viewed as an emergent organizational form associated with a more recent and qualitatively novel process of economic integration: 'One of the central contentions of the GCC approach is that the internationalization of production is becoming increasingly integrated in globalized coordination systems that can be characterized as producer-driven and buyer-driven commodity chains' (Gereffi 1996: 429). A key difference then between the world-systems and GCC camps of commodity chain research is rooted in this debate regarding whether globalization is better understood as a contemporary phenomenon enabled by increasingly integrated production systems, or as a process beginning with the emergence of capitalism in the long sixteenth century.[93]

Rather than integrated production systems or the emergence of capitalism in the long sixteenth century, it is the interstate system and its regulatory context of trade policies that determines a periodisation from the perspective of Mauritian sugar.[94] If only inter- or intra-firm networks are analysed – as in the GCC or GVC approaches – a distinction of the state and the market is assumed that leads to a conflation of roles in the economy and supports the fiction of a social division between politics and the economic sector.

When instead this angle is twisted back to the co-operation of governments and the private sector (in the extreme case of the Caribbean planters these roles overlapped), another possible periodisation can be questioned. Once such early nineteenth century public-private partnerships become the focus of analysis, we might need to reconsider suggestions to locate the emergence of globalisation in the nineteenth century era of free trade. Indeed, the whole idea that there was an era of free trade in the nineteenth century seems doubtful from the perspective of Mauritius. An example supporting such doubts is the system of distinguishing and taxing sugar imports into the British Empire via polarisation introduced in 1854. This policy stands in contrast to assumptions of an entirely duty- and quota-free British Empire as presented by several authors.[95] While Osterhammel and Petersson, for example, equate the era of free trade, which they date from 1846 to 1880,[96] with the emergence of a global economy and the emergence of a global consciousness, one might add another example that contradicts this periodisation. Campaigning for the abolition of slavery was the first global movement that showed such a consciousness: not so much in terms of the often invoked consumption patterns but in terms of a conscious critique of the labour regime established along commodity chains across the globe. Therefore, it is important to look at the economic calculus and the morals that guide the establishment of global trading regimes as well as their contestations. Given that sugar brought Mauritius into the sphere of global capitalist

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[93] Bair (2005), p.157.
[94] Bair (2005), p.168.
[95] E.g. Mahler (1981), p.475.
[96] Osterhammel & Petersson (2007), pp.60-3.

production, there are minor factors, such as the world-market prices and overall global economic developments that only in moments of fundamental crisis, such as in 1937, led to internal, but never to external, regulatory procedures within the Mauritian nodes of the chain. What therefore in the long run determines the perspective on globalisation from a Mauritian's perspective is maybe best portrayed in the following quote from a Mauritian weekly on the island's economic prospects in times of crisis:

> Mauritius promotes itself as a hub for Indian Ocean trade. Ships from around the world deliver their cargo in Port Louis and load up for onward trips to Asia, Europe, Africa and America. American and French companies send agents to Mauritius, anticipating big profits from trading with the region. Mauritius develops a Freeport to encourage international trade and to position the island as a regional warehousing and processing centre.
>
> These descriptions sound as if they were lifted from a modern day report analyzing the Mauritian economy. But in fact this actually describes the Mauritian economy as it was 200 years ago, when the island was a thriving Freeport colony, known as a key stop for international ships along the lucrative trading routes to India and China.[97]

[97] 'Looking Back, Looking Forward: The Future of Mauritius' Economy May Lie in Its Past', *Le Week End,* 25 November 2001.

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

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The following key research questions inform the work of project:

1) The networks through which commodities were produced and circulated within, between and beyond empires;
2) The interlinking 'systems' (political-military, agricultural labour, commercial, maritime, industrial production, social communication, technological knowledge) that were themselves evolving during the colonial period, and through which these commodity networks functioned;
3) The impact of agents in the periphery on the establishment and development of commodity networks: as instigators and promoters; through their social, cultural and technological resistance; or through the production of anti-commodities;
4) The impact of commodity circulation both on the periphery, and on the economic, social and cultural life of the metropoles;
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Project Directors: Dr Sandip Hazareesingh (OU) and Prof. Jean Stubbs (ISA)

The Open University

The Ferguson Centre for African and Asian Studies,
The Open University,
Walton Hall,
Milton Keynes MK7 6AA

Institute for the Study of the Americas
School of Advanced Study
University of London
Senate House, Malet Street
London WC1E 7HU

INSTITUTE FOR THE STUDY OF THE AMERICAS
UNIVERSITY OF LONDON · SCHOOL OF ADVANCED STUDY