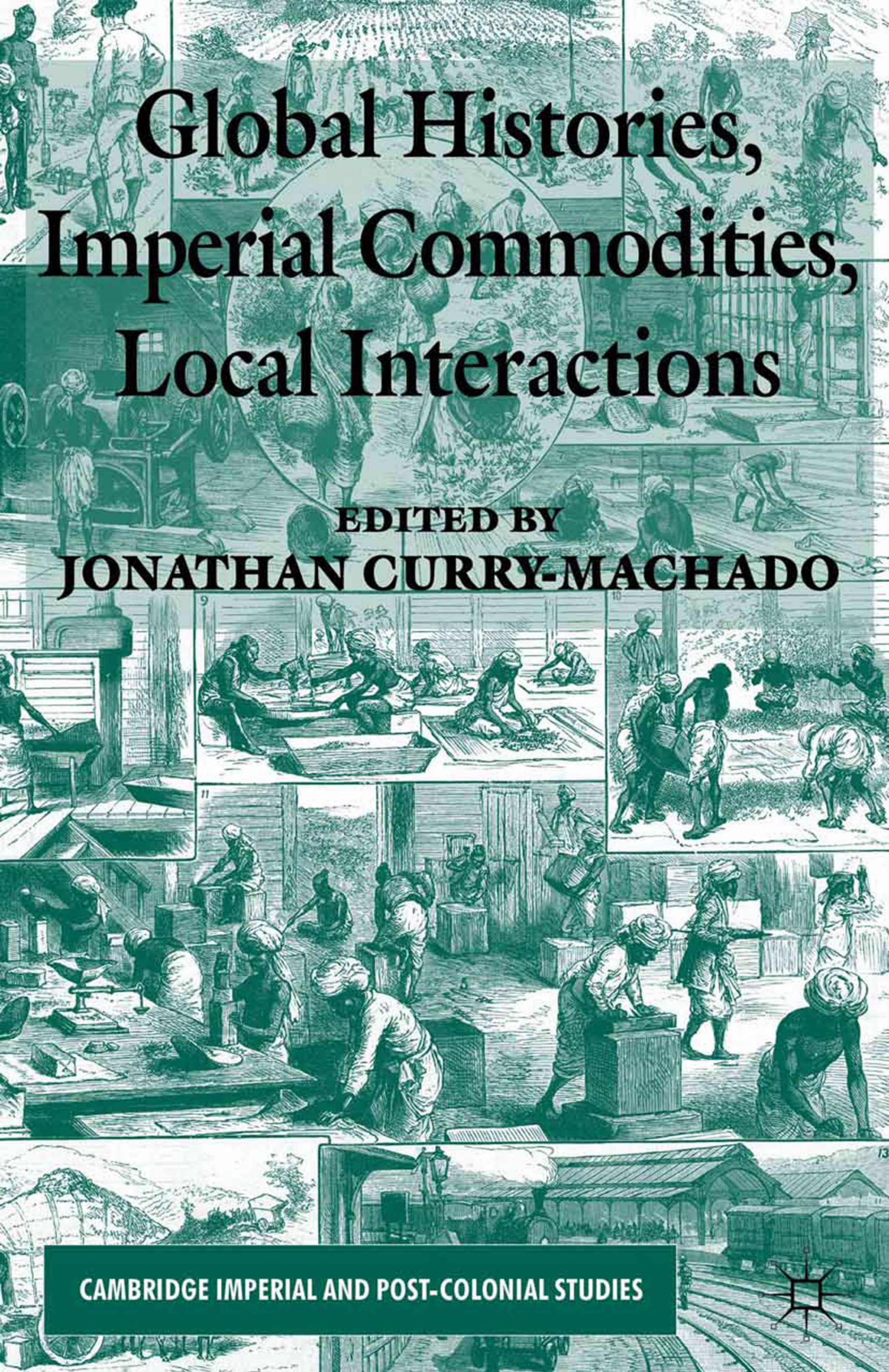

Global Histories, Imperial Commodities, Local Interactions

EDITED BY

JONATHAN CURRY-MACHADO

CAMBRIDGE IMPERIAL AND POST-COLONIAL STUDIES

Global Histories, Imperial Commodities,
Local Interactions

Cambridge Imperial and Post-Colonial Studies Series

Also by Jonathan Curry-Machado

CUBAN SUGAR INDUSTRY: Transnational Networks and Engineering Migrants in Mid-Nineteenth Century Cuba

Global Histories, Imperial Commodities, Local Interactions

Edited by

Jonathan Curry-Machado
Coordinator, Commodities of Empire Project
Associate Fellow, Institute of the Americas, University College London

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Contents

Illustrations

Tables

Figures

Maps

Preface and Acknowledgements

Versions of all the chapters in this collection were originally published in the 'Commodities of Empire Working Papers' series (http://www.open.ac.uk/Arts/ferguson-centre/commodities-of-empire/working-papers/). Several began life as presentations at one of the annual international workshops organised by the Commodities of Empire Project. This volume is a sequel to the 'Commodities, empires, and global history' special edition of the *Journal of Global History* (March 2009), which featured an earlier collection of other papers in the series.

The Commodities of Empire Project was founded in 2007 as a collaboration between the Open University's Ferguson Centre for African and Asian Studies and the Caribbean Studies Centre at London Metropolitan University (2007–09), the University of London's Institute for the Study of the Americas (2009–2012) and Institute of the Americas at University College London (2012–). The partner institutions, with their respective specific regional coverage, bring to the project a global reach, enabling the drawing of historical comparisons linking the Caribbean and Latin America with Africa and Asia. Since 2007, Commodities of Empire has been recognised as a British Academy Research Project.

The mutually reinforcing relationship between 'commodities' and 'empires' has long been recognised, with the quest for profits driving imperial expansion, and 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 and bananas); industrial crops (cotton, rubber, linseed and palm oils); stimulants (sugar, tea, coffee, cocoa, tobacco and opium); and ores (tin, copper, gold and diamonds). Their expanded production and global movements brought vast spatial, social, economic and cultural changes to both metropoles and colonies.

'Commodities of Empire' research explores the networks through which commodities were produced and circulated within, between and beyond empires, in particular during the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. It pursues the interlinking 'systems' (political-military, agricultural labour, commercial, maritime, industrial production, social communication and technological knowledge) that were themselves evolving during the colonial period, and through which these commodity networks functioned and which they themselves influenced. Of particular interest is 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'. Thus the project is especially attentive to local processes (originating in Africa, Asia, the Caribbean and Latin America) that significantly influenced the outcome of the encounter between the world economy and regional societies. Through such study of the historical movement and impact of commodities, processes of globalisation over the past few centuries are examined.

At the heart of 'Commodities of Empire' is a belief in the need to pursue research through collaboration and comparison, thereby enabling a global, transnational, trans-imperial perspective to be developed out of a wealth of locally and regionally embedded studies. The international network of commodity historians that we have developed since the project began in 2007 has thus resulted in the development of a number of innovative collaborative projects. These have been stimulated by our annual workshops, which have played a key role in widening the scope of the project and drawing in new participants. The project is currently collaborating with the Technology and Agrarian Development Group at the University of Wageningen (the Netherlands), on a research programme called Commodities and Anticommodities. Other collaborations are being actively pursued with researchers at the International Institute of Social History, Amsterdam, University of Ghent (commodity frontiers) and Consejo Superior de Investigaciones Científicas, Madrid (global circulation of scientific knowledge). Members of the Project have also participated in other international research networks: Commodity Chains (University of Konstanz); Estudios Atlánticos (Universidad de Las Palmas de Gran Canaria); Intoxicants and Intoxication in Cultural and Historical Perspective (University of Cambridge); the Network in Canadian History and Environment (NiCHE); Trading Consequences (York University, Canada); and the New Cuban Diaspora

project (Queens University, Canada). Commodities of Empire has also secured AHRC funding to develop a digital online space for collaborative research: *Commodity Histories*.

I would like to thank all those who have made possible the development of the Commodities of Empire Project over the years, without whom this present volume could not have been published: in particular the Project's co-directors, Jean Stubbs and Sandip Hazareesingh. This is a project that defines itself as an international network, and its success is due to the enthusiastic participation of numerous scholars the world over – not only those represented in this volume, but all those who have taken part in our workshops, and who are active in pursuing collaborative work with us and engaging in lively debate. Particular gratitude is due to the British Academy, for supporting and recognising the potential of Commodities of Empire from its outset. We also thank our host institutions, and those in them that have assisted us over the years: the Directors of the Ferguson Centre at the Open University; Heather Scott for her hard work in organising the workshops, administering the website and publishing the working papers; at the Institute of the Americas (University College London), Maxine Molyneux for providing us with an institutional home; and also our colleagues from the Caribbean Studies Centre (London Metropolitan University) and the Institute for the Study of the Americas (University of London), where we have previously been based. Finally, thanks to the editors of this series, in particular Richard Drayton, for inviting us to put together this collection.

Notes on Contributors

Vibha Arora is Associate Professor of Sociology, Department of Humanities and Social Sciences, the Indian Institute of Technology Delhi, India. She has published more than 30 journal articles and book chapters on environmental politics, identity and ethnicity, state and development politics. She co-edited *Routeing Democracy in the Himalayas: Experiments and Experiences* (2013) and is currently writing two monographs on identity politics and environmental issues in Sikkim.

William Gervase Clarence-Smith is Professor of the Economic History of Asia and Africa at the School of Oriental and African Studies, University of London, UK. He has researched the history of the Franco-Belgian Société Financière des Caoutchoucs (Socfin) and is working on a global history of rubber in the Second World War. He is the author of *Cocoa and Chocolate, 1765–1914* (2000), co-edited *The Global Coffee Economy in Africa, Asia and Latin America, 1500–1989* (2003, with Steven Topik) and edited *Cocoa Pioneer Fronts since 1800: The Role of Smallholders, Planters and Merchants* (1996). He is also chief editor of the *Journal of Global History*.

Jonathan Curry-Machado is Coordinator of the Commodities of Empire British Academy Research Project and Associate Fellow of the Institute of the Americas (University College London). Until recently he was also a researcher with the Technology and Agrarian Development Group of Wageningen University (the Netherlands) on the NWO-funded project 'Commodities and Anticommodities'. His book *Cuban Sugar Industry: Transnational Networks and Engineering Migrants in Mid-Nineteenth Century Cuba* was published in 2011. His current research focuses on the social, economic and environmental history of the sugarcane frontier, in particular in Cuba, and the impact of this upon rural communities.

Steve Cushion has recently been awarded his PhD from the Institute for the Study of the Americas (University of London), with a thesis entitled 'Organised Labour and the Cuban Revolution, 1952–59'. He has a BA Joint Honours in French and Computing from London Guildhall University and an MA in Area Studies in Latin America from the Institute for the Study of the Americas. Before retiring, he worked at London Metropolitan University, where he taught French Language, French Politics and Society, Computer Programming and Software Development. He is currently Secretary of the London Retired Members branch of the University and Colleges Union (UCU) and a member of the committee of the Society for Caribbean Studies in the UK (SCS).

Teresita A. Levy is Assistant Professor in the Department of Latin American and Puerto Rican Studies at Lehman College, City University of New York, where she teaches courses on Latin American history, Dominican history and Puerto Rican history. She is currently working on a manuscript titled 'Negotiating Empire: Tobacco Cultivation in Puerto Rico, 1898–1940', a detailed socio-economic study of the expansion of the tobacco sector of the island after the American occupation of 1898 and how Puerto Ricans negotiated the new American empire.

Patrick Neveling is currently main researcher for the three-year project 'A Global History of Export Processing Zones, 1947–2007' funded by the Swiss National Science Foundation and located at the Historical Institute of the University of Berne, Switzerland. His works combine social anthropology and global history, and he has regional specialisations for Indonesia/Insular Southeast Asia and Mauritius/Mascarene Islands. In line with his wider concern with the problem of capitalism, his expertise extends to the history of the international trading system, international organisations, international border regimes and other aspects of the capitalist world system. He has edited volumes on tourism, the invention of tradition, development and neoliberalism and published articles on similar topics. His work on Mauritius is based on his PhD thesis submitted at the University of Halle, Germany, entitled 'Manifestations of Globalisation. Capital, State and Labour in Mauritius, 1825–2005'.

Kaori O'Connor is a senior research fellow in the Department of Anthropology at University College London (UCL), where she specialises in materials, material culture and the history and anthropology of food. She won the Sophie Coe Prize for Food History 2009 for her study of the Hawaiian luau. Her books include *Lycra: How a Fiber Shaped America* (2011) and *The English Breakfast: The Cultural Biography of a National Meal* (2013). She is currently working on an anthropological history of feasts and feasting in antiquity.

Alan Pryor was born in 1943 at Chingford when it was still part of rural Essex. He left school at the age of 15 with no educational qualifications. At the age of 20, he chose a job in the Fire Service. For most of his career he worked in the East End of London where he rose to the rank of Station Officer. On retirement he took up the study of history, with a particular interest in London's industrial areas, where he had spent much of his working life. He studied at the University of Essex, where his research included the housing conditions of the East End, the sugar-refining industry of London and finally the brewing trade of London, for which he was awarded a doctorate in history in June 2012.

Jonathan Robins is an assistant professor in world history in the Social Sciences Department at Michigan Technological University, USA. His research uses commodity history to explore transnational phenomena like imperialism, capitalism and globalisation.

Jean Stubbs is co-director of the Commodities of Empire British Academy Research Project, Associate Fellow of University College London's Institute of the Americas and Professor Emerita of Caribbean History at London Metropolitan University. She was elected Académico Correspondiente Extranjero of the Academia de la Historia de Cuba in 2012 and was the recipient in 2009 of the UNESCO Toussaint L'Ouverture award for her work, which spans class, race, gender and tobacco. She is the author of *Tobacco on the Periphery: A Case Study in Cuban Labour History, 1860–1958* (1985).

Miguel Suárez Bosa is Professor of Economic History at the Universidad de Las Palmas de Gran Canaria, Spain. He has directed the research projects 'Ports and the configuration of business infrastructure in the Atlantic cities (19th and 20th centuries)', 'Port-management models and port communities' and 'Water culture and management'. He has published several books and articles concerning maritime and port economic and social activity, especially in the Atlantic space, as well as on businessmen and workers. He has also participated in numerous international congresses and delivered lectures on these themes.

Jelmer Vos is Assistant Professor of History at Old Dominion University, USA. He received his PhD from the School of Oriental and African Studies and was a post-doctoral fellow at Emory University and the Universidade Nova de Lisboa. He is currently preparing a manuscript on the history of the Kongo kingdom, northern Angola, under early colonial rule. Another part of his research concentrates on the eighteenth-century slave trade from Liberia and Côte d'Ivoire.

Global Histories, Imperial Commodities, Local Interactions: An Introduction

Jonathan Curry-Machado

Take a look around you. In our contemporary world, wherever your eyes fall and whatever need you seek to satisfy, it is near impossible to escape from a dependency upon commodities. Not only are we reliant upon goods that are bought, transported and sold for profit – as food, industrial components, even entertainment – but we have become ever more distanced from their geographical origins. We take for granted items that have come from the other side of a world that has become tied firmly into a single global economic system, while our news continues to be filled with the horrors and uncertainties of conflicts that are themselves the result of competition over resources; or an effect of a trading and banking system premised upon the conversion of objects for use into representations of value; or the overexploitation and destruction of our planet's environment.

There is a growing genre of popular historical, geographic and anthropological scholarship in which the story of human civilisation is told through the history of individual commodities. Just as with the biographies of 'great' historical personalities, in which the significant events and sweeping processes of human development become personalised through the overblown valorisation of single subjects, so too is there a tendency for such commodity biographies to lay exaggerated claim to the fundamental role played by their subjects of choice. Tobacco becomes the 'plant that seduced civilization', tea 'the drink that changed the world', while the West was 'rescued' by 'the humble spud'.[1] Such books have played an important part in popularising awareness of just how important the cultivation and trade of many ubiquitous items of consumption were for the forging of our modern world. However, while the individual chapters in this collection focus on individual commodities – and in themselves add further details and subtleties to the growing biographies of the commodities they deal with – by bringing them together in their multiplicity, the intention is to go beyond the specificities of their histories, towards a contribution to the multidimensional writing of our global history.

Put simply, a 'commodity' is the product of human labour combining 'use' and 'exchange value'. An object becomes a commodity when it is no longer produced for immediate consumption, but is part of an economic relationship whereby it is traded for other commodities or an abstract monetary representation of its worth.[2] Human history can be described in terms of the commodity-driven processes that have acted like 'a thread running through all of humanity's past'.[3] Through networks of commodity chains, we can describe and understand global interconnections and social and economic relations, connecting cultivation to consumption by way of manufacture and trade: the 'warp and woof' that binds the world into a single fabric.[4] From being nomadic hunter-gatherers, humans settled and began to farm the land, gradually making agricultural innovations that enabled ever larger quantities of crops to be cultivated, while increasing international trade resulted in their distribution throughout the world. In the process, human societies became bound together on an increasingly global scale, while the production of commodity crops led to profound ecological changes.[5]

Commodities were at the heart of the establishment by European powers of global empires from the sixteenth century onwards, 'within a multinational network and within an international trading system'.[6] Cross-Atlantic exploration, initially premised on the search for alternative routes to obtain Asian goods, resulted in European arrival in the Americas. The Spanish Empire was built upon commodities: first, the extraction of precious metals; then the extensive planting of tropical commodity crops such as sugar, coffee or tobacco. The Spanish were followed by the more mercantilist-minded Dutch, British and French in the seventeenth century, who through joint-stock companies extended their overseas interests and expanded the range of commodities available to their metropolitan consumers and industry. During the nineteenth century, a new imperial power emerged – the United States – which by the twentieth century was not just rivalling, but supplanting the old world empires, not through the formal instruments of imperial control, but through the assertion of economic dominance and through access to and control over the natural resources and commodities demanded by industry and a growing population. As a result, the planet has become ever more integrated into a single 'world system'. The processes of commodity extraction, trade and consumption have resulted in the emergence of a global economy and society where events in one hemisphere directly impact on the other; and the most remote locations are often the setting for the acquisition of raw materials and products demanded by industry and consumers the world over.

Alongside the spread of commodity agriculture and trade came technological innovation: from the eighteenth century, steam-powered machinery, first in the processing of cotton, and by the nineteenth century permeating industry and agriculture. Technological advances spread around the world through processes of transfer in which 'by far the most important vehicle . . . were skilled workers';[7] and migration – both free and forced – also brought the large-scale movement of labour required for the ever larger scale of crop exploitation. As a result, products – now 'no longer directly consumed' by their producers – came to be 'used against the producer to exploit and oppress';[8] and inherent in global commodity production were underlying social tensions resulting in revolutionary explosions, or everyday resistance.[9]

Commodities may have depended upon a mobile, and often captive, workforce for their cultivation and production, but the networks by which they were traded and transported were likewise the result of diasporic merchants, acting as 'cross-cultural brokers' – nodes for the transnational commercial networks through which commodities moved.[10] Meanwhile, as global demand for commodities increased, ever larger quantities had to be transported in less time, and advances in naval engineering were often stimulated by the need to obtain a commercial edge. On land as well, commodity trade promoted advances in transport. By the late eighteenth century, canals enabled long-distance transport of goods; but with the development of steam technology, railways brought the possibility for the rapid transportation of large quantities of goods and people from one city to another; and from field, to factory, to port, from where steamships carried them around the globe.

Power exerted through trade and empire has clearly been unequally balanced in favour of the European and North American powers. Nevertheless, the chains and networks of commodities were not simply imposed upon the rest of the world by imperial interests: 'However influential Europeans and Americans may have been in the making of this modern world they did not make it themselves.'[11] Much of the impetus for the development of a world interconnected through the production, movement and consumption of commodities has come from the initiatives of people in those lands that, in spite of being colonised and dominated, continue to shape the resources that the globalised economy requires.

It is from this perspective that the Commodities of Empire Project approaches the study of commodity history; and the twelve chapters presented here not only demonstrate the global reach and significance of the products out of which our modern world has been built, but also just how rooted in local societies, often far distant from the centres of metropolitan power, their histories are. At the same time, they collectively illustrate four key areas of concern in the contemporary study of the history of commodities: the transcendence of borders; the role of local agents; power and resistance; and frontiers.

The 'new global history' describes how this globalised present came about from developments running through the past – variously seen as emerging in the nineteenth century (when global commodity-driven empires and the communications revolution forged the modern industrial capitalist world), in the sixteenth century (with the establishment of European global empires) or extending all the way back to the first nomadic hunter-gatherer societies (their movement and exploitation of the materials they encountered forming the bedrock upon which all subsequent human societies have been built).[12] Such an approach, which has emerged over recent years building on the world-systems theory first developed by Immanuel Wallerstein, seeks to obviate the borders and boundaries imposed by nation states, and even transnational empires – seeing the world as a single interconnected entity. Such approaches can result in studies of both connections and comparisons, enabling quite distinct places and times to be understood through the differences as well as the interactions between them.[13] Global history looks across 'regional and national boundaries as well as continents, oceans, and separable cultures'.[14] Far from leading to an exclusive concentration on macrohistorical processes and developments at a planetary level, this is an approach that sees 'all local, national, or regional histories [being] in important ways . . . global histories'.[15] Thus this volume combines studies of global interconnections following the paths of commodities, with in-depth studies of the local interactions out of which these came.

Nevertheless, this world continues to be strongly subdivided by politically imposed lines drawn across the map, defining regions, nations, supranational entities and imperial blocs. If the history of the past few centuries, in particular if seen in terms of commodity chains, was one of progressive economic integration, it has also been one of rivalry and conflict between geographically defined powers, in particular, European overseas empires. It is the tension between these two tendencies that has shaped our modern world, and neither can be viewed in isolation from the other.

However, all the chapters in this collection demonstrate how porous such geopolitical boundaries were when it came to the production and trade of global commodities, and this came about through various forms of negotiating and overcoming borders. While such a process led to the forging of supranational empires, the networks through which commodities have found their way around the world also saw the transgression of imperial as well as national boundaries. By going beyond 'the nation-state as the focus of history',[16] the chapters in this volume demonstrate how through trading routes, migration and even as a survival strategy by the common people, the production, circulation and ultimately consumption of commodities took place in a more fluid manner, linking the local to the global. At the same time, culture provided a vehicle by which national and local identities spread and commingled at the global level. It is for this reason that several of the chapters in this volume appear to move between discussing imperial trade relations and other forms of international, regional and local trade relations that lay outside formal empire. While recognising the necessary part played by imperialism in the development of global capitalism,[17] the intention is to move beyond the historiographical debate over what should or should not be considered as 'imperial'.[18] Rather than a world dominated by conflicting empires, there emerges a planet that has become gradually interconnected through multiple transnational networks of trade, migration and technological transfer. Commodities were at the heart of these, and the study of their interacting chains and networks, as well as the frontiers into which their cultivation was pushed, helps us reach towards a complex understanding of the processes out which our contemporary world has been made.

The commodity-powered drive towards globalisation would seem to have been of greatest benefit to the industrially advanced core metropolitan countries, which historically – whether through empire or capital investment – dominated the path of economic development and imposed their will on the colonised areas of the world. But while the latter may have appeared to be peripheral to the global economy, subjugated to metropolitan interests, in many cases local studies reveal just how important local actors were for the establishment of global commodity chains. An important feature of the approach taken by the contributors to this collection, and by the 'Commodities of Empire' project in general, is the emphasis upon the relative autonomy of local actors. Much research on commodities, and their impact on local societies, has tended to accentuate the role of imperialism, and the domination of metropolitan powers and their agents. Local producers are all too often seen as either victims or mere instruments in the agenda of Europeans. But there is a need to switch the focus away from that which might be termed an Empire- or Euro-centric viewpoint, to one that views local communities as assertive, defining and sometimes even controlling the destines of particular commodities.

By focusing upon the direct experiences of those involved in the production and trade of commodities in those countries from which these have been extracted, it becomes possible to perceive and understand how our global history has not simply been imposed from above, but has been built up from the very real lives of those whose story and agency might otherwise be ignored. At times, it was local initiative that began the process of global engagement, and some commodities could only extend globally because of their local acceptance. However, this frequently emerged through a partnership with representatives of global trade who were quick to exploit the opportunities that they encountered. Of course, there were many cases in which the imperial metropolitan powers did impose their needs upon the farming and trading practices of local societies. This often brought with it conflict, as local communities felt themselves disempowered by the imposition of a foreign commodity crop, or the distortion of the local economy and trade by absorption into global commercial networks.

The cultivation, production, trade and consumption of commodities, and their movement around the planet, were integral to the development of the global capitalist system. As such, they cannot be considered as impersonal objects, whose history can be accounted for purely through the statistical records of export and import. Throughout history, the extraction of, and control over, commodities was at the heart of political systems, the material basis for power, and generated the cause of popular resistance. The chapters in this collection illustrate this in a number of ways. The search for commodities and their trade were central to the establishment of empires and were the underlying reason for Europeans establishing their dominion over large tracts of the planet – as well as providing the means by which certain local groups could establish social, economic and political ascendency. The exploitation of tropical commodity crops in the Americas required the mobilisation of vast quantities of manual labour. This provided the impetus for the Atlantic slave trade from the sixteenth to the nineteenth centuries. Not only were commodities the reason behind this, they also made the slave trade a practical possibility. Commodities also determined the process of transition from slavery. Although the reality of most commodity chains was one of elite domination and subaltern oppression, this in itself generated the conditions for resistance and alternatives to present themselves. Thus commodities are not just economic products moving around an impersonal trading system. Intrinsic to them are multiple and interweaving human stories of power and control on one side, and subservience and resistance on the other.

As global demand for commodities has increased, as land has become exhausted through overexploitation and as geopolitical and economic realities change, there has been a continual need to move into new areas. Human history can perhaps be viewed in terms of this resource-seeking activity that has led to ever shifting frontiers tying the entire planet into a single economic system, and providing the drive for migrations along with transfers of crops, knowledge and technology.[19] Many examples of frontier can be found in this collection: some resulted from commodities becoming exploited to the point of exhaustion, forcing the continual search for new lands; in other cases, trading frontiers can be seen participating in the opening up of ever wider areas of the planet to global commerce; while other commodities demonstrate that frontiers were not only horizontal (i.e. geographical) in nature, but also vertical – seeking out new sources to exploit, or markets to sell to.

The chapters in this collection present a wide range of cases, from Asia, Africa and the Americas, and broadly cover the last two centuries, in which commodities have led the consolidation of a globalised economy and society – forging this out of distinctive local experiences of cultivation and production, and regional circuits of trade. The chapters also cover a range of commodities: sugar, tobacco, rubber, cotton, tea, cassava, beer and coal.

Vibha Arora takes us to the periphery of British empire, to the Himalayan passes between Sikkim and Tibet, control over which was seen as key for the expansion of British imperial trade and its penetration of the Chinese commercial networks in the nineteenth century. Sikkim, although itself highly peripheral in terms of commodity extraction, became an important point of convergence between rival trading systems – with commodities being used to facilitate global political expansion. In the process, the British asserted ever greater political control and distortion of the local economy and practice in order to secure the area for their trade in tea and other commodities.

Alan Pryor looks at another aspect of the British imperial presence in the Indian subcontinent, and the impact that this had on consumer tastes both in India and back in Britain. His chapter explores the early history of Indian Pale Ale, as a distinctive product born out of empire, but itself becoming an early example of globalised consumption. He describes how the British thirst for beer resulted in the adaptation of this very British beverage to the Indian climate. But the process was a two-way one, with returning colonial officers and agents bringing back to their homeland a taste for Indian Pale Ale. More than that, this became a product sought after throughout the colonial tropics.

International trade in many goods depended upon the existence of effective transport networks – which, to this day, continue to be largely dependent upon maritime routes. From the time of the early European New World explorations, the mid-Atlantic Macaronesian islands (in particular, the Canary Islands and Cape Verde) had been important way-points for transatlantic movement and commerce. As trade intensified in the second half of the nineteenth century, the ports on these islands developed the services they offered to transcontinental shipping – both as refuelling stations and as commercial entrepôts: lynchpins for the globalisation of trade. This development, and its importance for the transatlantic trade, is explored by **Miguel Suárez**.

Shipping routes facilitated the opening up of more distant commodity frontiers, and **Jelmer Vos** describes the early-twentieth-century trade in wild rubber from West Central Africa. Focusing his story on the British merchant, John Holt, and drawing on the correspondence sent by field agents, his chapter shows how global trade in this region was combined with the traditional local barter practices. British and Dutch traders were instrumental in the opening up of Portuguese Congo (now Angola) to the international rubber trade, acting as the agents through which local and regional traditional trading networks were tied into the global. This gave considerable power to the local intermediaries and was probably more successful than had there been an attempt to impose trade upon the region.

While this was an example of tapping into existing cultivation possibilities and trading networks, **Jonathan Robins** explores how British imperial demands for cheap cotton prompted an attempt to impose cotton cultivation in the African colonies. But far from simply succumbing to metropolitan demands, African farmers demonstrated that successful exploitation of a commodity requires that the needs and knowledge of local producers must be taken into account; and that failure to do so is unlikely to lead to good results. Attempts to impose the crop on Africans resulted in many examples of the employment of 'weapons of the weak': smallholders circumvented British imperial interests and demands, crossing the borders into German and Portuguese colonies where they might achieve some trading advantage by so doing; workers might just walk away from cotton plantations, returning to farm food on their own plots of land, absconding with sacks of fibre to sell directly; and growers might add dirt and rocks to cotton, or moisten it, to increase its sale weight.

Patrick Neveling's chapter follows the sugar commodity chain and covers nearly two centuries of Mauritian integration through the lens of the international agreements that marked the process of sugar globalisation. From French colony, to British colony and the West Indian Sugar Protocol, to the Commonwealth Sugar Agreement of 1951 and Lomé Convention of 1975, he brings the story up to the present-day developments around the Global Agreement on Tariffs and Trade (GATT) and the World Trade Organisation (WTO). In this story, not only did sugar shape the development of Mauritian society, but it defined the way in which the island became drawn into the world system. National boundaries were transgressed by Mauritian planters, negotiating their participation in the bilateral and multilateral trading agreements that came to form the institutional architecture of the globalised economy. Thus for Patrick Neveling, the commodity-chain approach enables an historical understanding of how particular localities and nations become positioned within a changing capitalist world system.

From the nineteenth century into the early twentieth century, while the sugarcane frontier became globalised, one country in particular came to dominate the world market. By the mid-nineteenth century, Cuba was the world's principal exporter, and the island's economy and agriculture was becoming dominated by this single crop. **Jonathan Curry-Machado** compares two of Cuba's sugar frontier regions, San Juan de los Remedios and Guantánamo. However, here was a case of sugarcane plantations expanding rural settlement, but at the same time increasingly dominating the rural economy such that the island became ever less self-sufficient in food, and eventually leading to the displacement from the land of smallholding farmers. This resulted in rural resistance, although this was something of a rearguard action.

By the 1950s, the once globally dominant Cuban sugar industry was under threat from falling world prices, frontier exhaustion and reduction in their quota of sales to the United States, upon which it had become dependent. In an attempt to encourage stabilisation of the situation, Cuba became a signatory to the London Sugar Agreement in 1953. However, this resulted in a cut in exports, accompanied by an assault on workers' conditions. **Steve Cushion** shows how this resulted in a rise in industrial militancy, which ultimately fed into the growing revolutionary movement on the island.

Teresita Levy shows how smallholder tobacco producers in Puerto Rico organised themselves in the first decades of the twentieth century and were able to resist US domination – despite the island falling under US control. She shows how the tobacco farmers 'were neither victims nor passive observers'. Here the encroachment of the global economy upon a nation (through the vehicle of imperial domination) itself provided a route by which the apparently subservient found access to the mechanisms that enabled them to break beyond the imposition of borders. She shows how tobacco farmers organised themselves in cooperatives, and in this way countered both US domination and that of the sugar industry. At the same time, the nature of the tobacco crop (unlike sugar) gave them the ability to combine this with food crops for local and home consumption.

The final three chapters take a global approach to the history of three very different commodities. **William Clarence-Smith** describes the battle for rubber that took place during the Second World War – at time not only of heightened military–industrial demand for this commodity, but also of considerable disruption in established supply routes. He looks at the exploitative social relations, not only under communist and fascist regimes but also in the colonies of the so-called liberal democracies. At the same time, new sources needed to be found – seeing a revival in the collection of wild rubber and the cultivation of temperate rubber plants.

Kaori O'Connor provides a global overview of the history of a food commodity that, while one of the most important staples for many parts of the world, has tended to remain 'hidden' under various guises: tapioca, cassava or manioc. Focusing on consumption rather than cultivation and trade, the chapter nevertheless shows how this root, which began its historical life in South America, came to extend its reach around the world, feeding communities in the Americas, Africa and Asia – as well as becoming an integral, though little recognised, part of developed-world diets. The Portuguese encountered cassava as a local staple in Brazil that saved them from starvation. The transatlantic slave trade carried it into Africa, not only to be used to feed slaves in transit, but then entering into local diets in many places to such an extent that its overseas origins became forgotten. Later, its potential use for cheap mass consumption resulted in it becoming a plantation export crop in its own right, in Asia – in particular in Java, alongside sugar. In the form of tapioca, it has since spread through a 'consumption frontier', insinuating itself into all manner of items of global food.

Finally, **Jean Stubbs** takes us on the journey of the Havana cigar, from American indigenous origins, through its adoption by Europeans following conquest, to its emergence as a luxury commodity, the very local branding and origins of which have defined its global reach. She shows how this great symbol of Cuban identity came to be enjoyed the world over: a truly global luxury, still defining itself through its origins. The chapter is a very fitting one on which to end. Not only does it evocatively demonstrate how interconnected the local and the global are, it also illustrates the extent to which our contemporary world continues to be shaped through the cultivation, manufacture, transport, marketing and consumption of commodities.

The Commodities of Empire project, out of which this collection has come, continues to work towards deepening our understanding of how central to the making of the modern world were those spaces and communities too often dismissed as peripheral to the global system. In their varying ways, all the chapters in this book show how the history and culture of Africa, Asia, the Caribbean and Latin America contributed to this, through the growing of crops and production and trade of commodities that have become seen as a necessary part of people's lives throughout the world.

Notes

1. Gately, *Tobacco*; Martin, *Tea*; Zuckerman, *The Potato*.
2. Marx, *Contribution to the Critique of Political Economy*.
3. Mazlish, *New Global History*, p. 7.
4. Hopkins and Wallerstein, 'Patterns of Development'; 'Commodity Chains'.
5. Barbier, *Scarcity and Frontiers*.
6. Liss, *Atlantic Empires*, p. 239.
7. Jeremy, *Artisans, Entrepreneurs, and Machines*, p. 19.
8. Engels, *Origin of Family, Private Property and State*.
9. Scott, *Weapons of the Weak*.
10. Curtin, *Cross-cultural Trade*.
11. Marks, *Origins of the Modern World*, p. 199.
12. Wallerstein, *Modern World System*; Mazlish, *New Global History*; O'Rourke and Williamson, *Globalization and History*; Hopkins, *Globalization in World History*; Gills and Thompson, *Globalization and Global History*.
13. Mazlish, *New Global History*; O'Brien, 'Historiographical Traditions'.
14. O'Brien, 'Historiographical Traditions', pp. 4–5.
15. Bayly, *Birth of the Modern World*, p. 2.
16. Mazlish, 'Introduction to Global History', p. 4.
17. Hobson, *Imperialism*; Hilferding, *Finance Capital*; Luxemburg, *Accumulation of Capital*; Lenin, *Imperialism*.

18. Gallagher and Robinson, 'Imperialism of Free Trade'; Platt, 'Imperialism of Free Trade'.
19. Barbier, *Scarcity and Frontiers*.

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1

Routeing the Commodities of the Empire through Sikkim (1817–1906)

Vibha Arora

> They sometimes believe, justly perhaps, that commerce follows the flag, and sometimes the flag follows the commerce; therefore they [Tibetans] think that politics has something to do with trade.[1]

I begin this chapter by juxtaposing Richard Temple's comment made in the late 1880s with a question–reply emerging from Tibet:

> Why do the British insist on establishing trade-marts? Their goods are coming in from India right up to Lhasa. Whether they have their marts or not things come all the same. The British were merely bent on over-reaching us.[2]

This reply, given to the Maharaja of Sikkim during discussions over the Younghusband mission of 1904, was by none other than the Thirteenth Dalai Lama himself, and he was not being alarmist. McKay's comment that the term 'Trade Agent' was a convenient fiction owing to the difficult political circumstances encapsulates this candidly.[3] Trading in commodities rooted and routed the British Empire, and commercial control over production and exchange of commodities facilitated political expansion globally. In the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, trade and politics were not inseparable and trading privileges between nations were negotiated by both subtle political diplomacy and aggressive military campaigns.

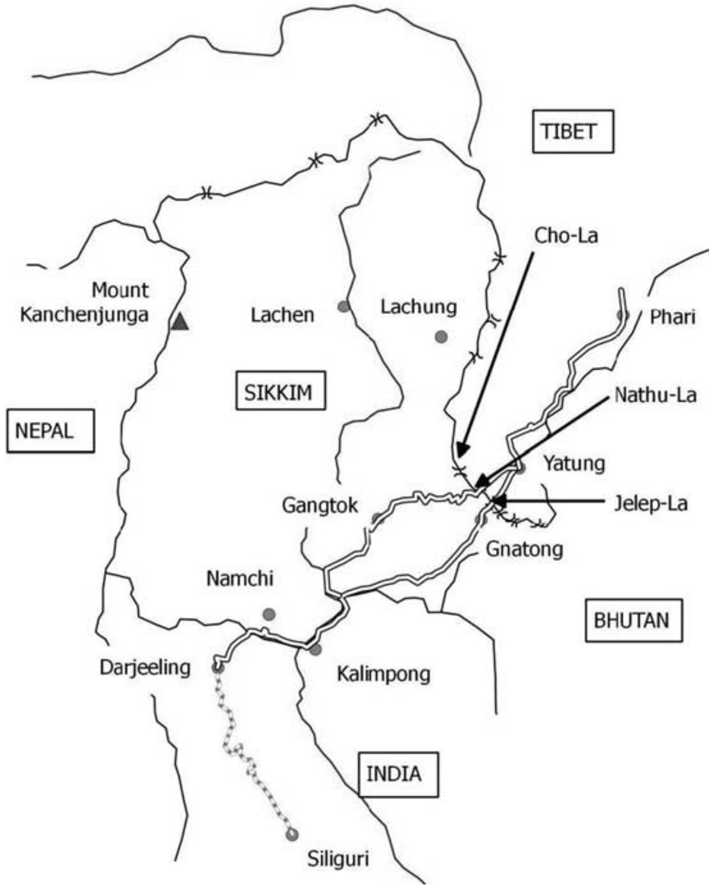
Marx and Engels wrote in 1848:

> [T]he need of a constantly expanding market for its product chases the bourgeoisie over the whole surface of the globe. It must nestle everywhere, settle everywhere, establish [connections] everywhere.[4]

While admitting that the new forces of industrial capitalism required a constantly expanded market, Marx was unable to resolve the problem of capitalist accumulation. Critiquing Marx, at the turn of the twentieth century John A. Hobson and Rudolf Hilferding argued that capitalist accumulation required the expansion of capitalism into non-capitalist areas through imperialism. Such an analysis was then forcibly taken up first by Rosa Luxemburg and then Vladimir Lenin. Their inflection that it is the invasion of pre-capitalist economies that keeps capitalism alive explains the East India Company's and later the British Raj's interest in developing Darjeeling and politically controlling Sikkim. Capitalism increased its profits not merely by acquiring new markets for commodities by various means, trading in the commodities of the new territories and investing its surplus in development of new territories but also by the acquisition of its human and natural resources through imperialism.[5] Political control of Sikkim facilitated capital accumulation and expansion of capitalism and also funnelled the British imperial engine into the Highlands of Asia.

Trade in tea accounted for the largest share of the Company's profits in this period after it gradually became a national drink in England. However, the East India Company and later the British Raj faced great difficulties in finding commodities that the Chinese would accept in exchange. The only commodities that the Chinese traders were interested in or were willing to accept in exchange were opium and raw cotton from India. Hence, much of the tea trade required payments to be made in gold bullion – Tibet was seen as a major source of gold.[6]

Landlocked Sikkim (see Map 1.1) was never a producer and a great consumer of commodities, but it occupies a strategic geopolitical position on the Indo-Tibetan frontier. It is located directly on the inland trade route between British India and Tibet and China. Diaries of naturalists such as Hooker, travelogues and expeditions to Sikkim



Map 1.1 Sikkim

and Tibet, the writings of numerous British officers and trade agents posted in the region, and mountaineering expeditions to Mount Everest and other Himalayan mountains including Kanchenjunga were the main sources of information since geographical surveys were conducted after 1861.[7]

A socio-historical analysis of international treaties and internal and external trade for the period 1817–1906, and the administration of trade routes, reveals the imperial concern for circulating the commodities of the Empire through the Jelep and the Nathu passes.[8] But some key questions are raised: What historic role did the Nathu-la, the annexation of the Darjeeling Hills and the domination of the Sikkim Himalayas play in the expansion and consolidation of the British Empire during the nineteenth and twentieth centuries? What were the main commodities exchanged on this trading route? What was the volume of trade in comparison to Nepal? How did the commodities of the empire provide an impetus and pretext for imperial control of the Eastern Himalayas? This chapter seeks to provide answers to these questions. The first section analyses the importance of Sikkim for furthering Anglo-Tibetan trade and imperial expansion into Tibet in the eighteenth century. The second section traces the historical roots of imperial expansion and control of Sikkim's internal and external affairs after the Treaty of Titalia (1817) and discusses the formal establishment of the Empire with the annexation of Darjeeling from Sikkim in 1835. The appointment of J. C. White was a turning point as he effectively reduced the king, Thutob Namgyal, into a puppet. The various missions and conventions from 1885 onwards until the Younghusband Mission of 1904 are critically analysed in the third section. I also discuss how these conventions subverted Sikkim's independence, facilitated trans-border trade and legitimised British Indian claims over Sikkim. The final section highlights the changes in Sikkim's polity and its incorporation into the British Indian Empire in 1906.

Locating Sikkim in the imperial expansionist policy

British imperial interests in the Himalayan region and particularly in the Eastern Himalayas were motivated by mercantile interests, with the numerous Himalayan passes of Western Tibet (Ladakh), Nepal, Sikkim and Bhutan presenting possibilities for using Tibet as the backdoor to China. Trade across the Himalayas and trade between China and Tibet were an expression of both politics and economics, and the Tibetan monasteries were actively involved in this. Trade along these passes was both a commercial activity for numerous Indo-Tibetan groups – such as the Sherpa, Thakali and the Tromwo – and a livelihood necessity, with Tibet being the chief source of salt in the region. Tibet, famed as a land of abundant wealth, presented itself as an exporter of gold dust, borax, musk, wool, salt and sheep (meat) to

India and represented a potential market for importing British manufactured textiles, Indian tea, tobacco, grain and mechanistic tools. The gold mines of Tibet were perceived to be the richest in the world, which prompted the British to aggressively promote trade.[9]

In the 1770s, after the Gorkha conquest of Kathmandu, trade between British India, Tibet and China nearly ceased, and the need for finding an alternate route became urgent. Policymakers realised that improvements in terms of trade would enable the Company to sell British-manufactured goods in China and Tibet, which would reduce the quantity of bullion required to finance tea imports into Britain.[10] Risley lucidly commented:

> Tibet offers a great market for certain articles of English manufacture ... and [it was believed that Tibet can] contribute to the currency problem by flooding the world with supplies of gold.[11]

Both Tibet and China actively resisted British efforts to foster Indo-Tibetan trade. Early attempts to open a trade route to Tibet can be traced back to Governor-General Warren Hasting's decision to send George Bogle (the young secretary to the Board of Revenue) to Tibet in 1774 to study the markets and resources of Tibet.[12] On his return from Tashilhunpo in 1775, Bogle recommended that by befriending the Tashi Lama:

> the Company would derive much more than the profits of a flourishing trade across the Himalayas. Tibet was the back door to China and might well prove to be the way round the obstructions imposed upon British trade and diplomacy at Canton.[13]

In 1783, Warren Hastings sent Captain Samuel Turner on a mission to Tibet, but he failed to secure any trade concessions. To initiate trans-Himalayan trade with Tibet from Bengal through Bhutan, Bogle concluded a treaty with the king of Bhutan in 1775.[14] Nonetheless, imperial commercial interests were repeatedly thwarted until they succeeded in controlling Sikkim.

Apart from the famed Nathu-la (Gnatui) and the Jelep-la passes, there exist more than twelve other passes (such as Cho-la, Lachen and Lachung) that connect Sikkim with Tibet, and through whom small-scale trade was regularly conducted. The religious affiliation between the monasteries and the kinship links between the nobility of Sikkim and Tibet presented a perfect corridor for facilitating trade between Bengal and Tibet.

Routeing the empire through Sikkim and the importance of Darjeeling

P. J. Marshall distinguishes between colonial expansion – including migration, commerce and diffusion of British culture – from 'empire' – defined as imperial rule and extension of political authority over territory and people. He admits that many would dispute this distinction, and in many cases expansion preceded the empire.[15] In Sikkim, expansion and empire were interdependent processes and mutually reinforcing. The East India Company functioned not merely as a commercial body but as a potential political power in India. Mercantilism and the desire to maximise revenue through trade via Sikkim surface prominently in all the international treaties and conventions signed between representatives of the British East India Company and later the British Raj, and the Namgyal dynasty that (formally) ruled Sikkim. The British entered the region as peacemakers between Sikkim and Nepal and negotiated the Treaty of Titalia (1817), demarcating Sikkim's border with Nepal. However, these trade interests were transformed gradually into imperial dominion over independent Sikkim, the annexation of the Darjeeling Hills and the curtailment of Sikkim's international relations and restrictions on its commercial and political relations with Tibet. Ostensibly to promote Anglo-Tibetan trade and commercial relations, the military campaign under Colonel Younghusband in 1904 proved to be the turning point, with Sikkim playing a key role in it.

Under the terms of the Treaty of Titalia, Sikkim 'placed its foreign relations under a measure of company rule' in return for protection from the Gorkhas. Henceforth, the company acquired the right to trade on the Tibetan frontier using the inland route through Sikkim. The British were able to exploit these trade concessions only after 1861 since the Nepal route was an established one. Article 8 of this Treaty explicitly instructs the Sikkim king:

> that he will afford protection to the merchants and trader's from the Company's province's and he engages and that no duties shall

> be levied on the transit of merchandise beyond the established custom at the several golas or marts.[16]

Politically this treaty transformed Sikkim into becoming a node for channelling Anglo-Chinese diplomacy.[17]

By the mid-nineteenth century the Indian rupee became an acceptable currency in the Himalayas and emerged as the favoured medium for large commercial transactions. The Darjeeling Hills played a critical role in furthering British interests in this part of the Himalayas. The Lepcha rebellion, following the murder of the Lepcha Prime Minister Bholod in 1826, led to civil unrest in Sikkim. Continual raids by disgruntled Lepchas based in neighbouring districts of Nepal provided the British with the perfect pretext to interfere in the internal matters of Sikkim in 1828 and force the king into acquiescence.[18] The hill tract of Darjeeling was discovered in 1827–28 by Captain Lloyd and J. W. Grant during their visit to settle a boundary dispute between Sikkim and Nepal. They advised Lord William Bentick to acquire it as a military outpost and as a sanatorium, while recognising its position as a military outpost and trading node. Control over this region enabled the British to drastically alter the demographic profile of the Eastern Himalayas.

The so-called grant of Darjeeling by the king of Sikkim to the British has been disputed and hotly debated in political and academic arenas. It is popularly believed that the grant dated 1 February 1835 was purportedly signed between the king of Sikkim (Tsugphud Namgyal) and Campbell, who in 1839 became the Superintendent of Darjeeling and in-charge of international relations with Sikkim for nearly 22 years. Dating the Darjeeling grant to 1 February is difficult since the actual deed did not carry any date. Furthermore, Captain Lloyd did not meet the Sikkimese king until 23 February 1835. The history of Sikkim written by the king and queen contradicts and casts doubt on whether Darjeeling was given willingly in lieu of a fixed rent. This is confirmed by an analysis of the original grant signed by Captain Lloyd, which is written in the Lepcha language. Recent writings propose that the Darjeeling Hills were not gifted or rented out but annexed by the British in 1835 and included in the Calcutta Presidency.[19]

British Darjeeling rapidly developed into a critical commercial node of British imperialism by offering immense opportunities for commodity exchange and free trade to merchants. Originally inhabited by a hundred Lepchas in 1835, Darjeeling was inhabited by nearly 10,000 people in 1849. Under Dr Campbell's administration this quiet and relatively unknown hill tract became the hub of commercial activity and a frontier town:

> In 1839 the first Darjeeling hotel was built; three years later the settlement was linked to the plains by a military road. In 1848, a Convalescent Depot for British troops was established there. In 1850 the town became a municipality.[20]

At about this date the cultivation of tea also began. All these immediately alarmed the king, who realised that a sovereign state had developed in his territory. The British policy of encouraging the settlement of immigrant labourers from neighbouring Nepal pushed the indigenous Lepchas numbering over a hundred into hilly pockets, thereby transforming Darjeeling into what has today become a Gorkhaland. Both Tibet and Bhutan reprimanded and accused Sikkim of selling the tract of Darjeeling to the Company. Tibet restricted Sikkim's access to its traditional grazing rights on the Tibetan frontier. Tsugphud Namgyal (the Sikkimese king) forbade his subjects from visiting the trade marts and made it difficult for others to use the Sikkim route.[21]

Relations between the king of Sikkim and Dr Campbell deteriorated in the late 1840s after the British subjects faced numerous obstructions in trading through Sikkim and Tibetan merchants faced difficulties in visiting Darjeeling. In 1848, botanist Joseph Hooker (President of the Royal Society) arrived in Darjeeling and after initial refusal was allowed to visit Sikkim on the insistence of Dr Campbell. This expedition was immortalised in Hooker's travelogue *The Himalayan Journals* (1891), which documents not merely the flora and fauna of the region but a detailed narrative of his tour and the difficulties his team faced, and provides vital topographical information about the region.

It was Dr Campbell and Dr Hooker's trespassing into Tibet from the Cho-la pass that precipitated their arrest on the frontier in 1849 by T. Namguey, the intelligent pro-Tibetan Sikkimese Prime Minister. A military expedition was despatched, the British ceased the king's allowance and annexed the Morung tract of Sikkim, which restricted Sikkim's access to the Indian plains only through

Darjeeling.[22] However, the critical political and commercial breakthrough came with the signing of the 1861 Treaty at Tumlong between Sir Ashley and Sidekyong Namgyal, Tsugphud Namgyal's successor. This treaty not only imposed an indemnity of Rs 7,000 for instigating the British into invading Sikkim but also permitted the British to intervene in the internal affairs of Sikkim. Under Article 8, the government of Sikkim was enjoined to abolish all restrictions on travellers and monopolies in trade between the British territories and Sikkim. Article 13 gave the British the right to construct a road through Sikkim. No duties would be imposed on British goods imported into Sikkim or exported by Sikkim into British territories, although the government of Sikkim was entitled to levy a customs tax (not exceeding 5 per cent of their value) on goods passing through Sikkim into Nepal, Tibet and Bhutan. Henceforth, it was lawful for any British subject to enter Sikkim for trade, travel, topographical or geological surveys, and any other purpose. The treaty unequivocally stated that the king of Sikkim would not object but extend his full cooperation to any road-making activity for encouraging trade through Sikkim.

The British never contemplated annexing Sikkim at this juncture, as they did not wish to be embroiled in any long-drawn expensive wars in the region. Tibet was not actively interfering in the internal affairs of Sikkim nor was Sikkim formally acknowledging Tibetan suzerainty. Europeans travelling to Sikkim were cordially received and freer intercourse with Darjeeling brought about the extinction of slavery in Sikkim, and many British subjects acquired landed property there.[23] Indo-Tibetan trade continued to preoccupy the British, who wanted to sell Darjeeling tea and other manufactured goods to Tibet. In 1869, after his return from Tibet, T. T. Cooper (who described himself as a pioneer of commerce) read a memorandum to the Calcutta Chamber of Commerce wherein he publicised:

> Tibet consumes annually 6,000,000 lb of Chinese brick-tea mainly produced in Szechuan province. Could this be replaced by tea of India, and here there would be a market of great value? This idea, that Indian tea could find a ready sale beyond the Himalayas, was an attractive one.[24]

The difficulties in finding that niche were not anticipated. The British envisioned that importing Indian tea to Tibet could prove beneficial and supply them with gold. Many constituencies, including Edgar, Waddell and White, impressed on the Company that the Sikkim route via Chumbi Valley was the shortest and the most direct road between British territory and Tibet.

The Sikkim route was doubly beneficial since it connected the tea-growing districts of Darjeeling and the Bhutan Duars to the profitable markets of Lhasa and Tibet. This prompted the British in 1873 to depute J. W. Edgar, the Deputy Commissioner at Darjeeling, to explore the possibility and desirability of making a road or roads through Sikkim and the best routes to be taken. His account documents the subsistence trade and describes the geography of the region in great detail, along with the persistent refusal of the Tibetans in letting him cross the Sikkim border. At Jelep-la, Edgar noted that 'while the majority of our subjects are not allowed to enter Tibet for the purpose of trade, crowds of Thibetans [*sic*] are constantly pouring into our bazaars'.[25]

In his report, he acknowledged that he had not been able to collect any reliable statistics regarding the trade of Tibet with China, but noted that it was much lower than expected due to the difficulties of road transport and the political insecurity constantly faced by the merchants. He observed that there was a great demand for broadcloth in Tibet. The chief articles imported into Tibet from Bhutan and Darjeeling were rice, sugar, dried fruits, tobacco, stic-lac, indigo, sandalwood, ivory, peacock feathers, rhinoceros-horns and different varieties of cloth. In return, Tibet exported tea, salt, blankets, silk-piece goods, pies, mules, yak-tails, musk, turquoise, coral and gold. Chinese brick-tea, despite being inferior in quality to the Darjeeling variety, was being consumed by the natives of Darjeeling. He opined that the construction of a road would encourage export of wool, ghee (clarified butter) and sheep meat into India.[26]

Edgar surveyed many passes during this visit, including the Gnatui pass (now known as Nathu-la), where he found Tibetan traders using it to visit Darjeeling. Alerted about the advantages of establishing a mart at Guntuck (Gangtok), and the construction of the royal residence there, he assessed its suitability along with the possibility of using the Gnatui pass. However, he recommended the establishment of a trade mart at Gnatong near the Jelep-la and the construction of a road linking the region with bridges over the river Teesta.[27]

Kalimpong was the largest entrepot of the Indo-Tibetan trade. It was annexed from Bhutan in 1865 and included in Darjeeling. While plans were being formulated to further commercial opportunities afforded by the Sikkim route, concurrently the British undermined Sikkim internally on the administrative, social and political fronts:

> [The] mass settlement of Nepalese and the deprivation of the traditional lands held by the Lepchas, Bhutias, and the Tsongs (Limbu) proved to be the most effective method of destabilizing the king's authority.[28]

In 1875, a major dispute occurred between Sikkim's state and nobility. These nobles had settled Nepali persons and leased rights to collect revenue to a Newar in Namchi, South Sikkim. Other Sikkimese nobles were furious and in 1876 they referred this dispute to Sir Eden Ashley who intervened sympathetically on their behalf. For his part, the seventh *Chos-rgyal* of Sikkim, Tsugphud Namgyal instructed his successors that 'not a single person belonging to either state of Nepal and Bhutan will be allowed to settle down in Sikkim'. A circular prohibiting the settlement of any Nepali person in Sikkim was issued in 1871.[29] In the introduction to the *Gazetteer of Sikkim*, Risley openly admitted the objective of the imperial policy:

> [O]ur position will surely be strengthened by the change which is insensibly but steadily taking place in the composition of the population of Sikkim . . . The influx of these hereditary enemies [Nepali] of Tibet is our surest guarantee against a revival of Tibetan influence . . . in Sikkim, as in India, Hinduism will surely cast out Buddhism, and the praying wheel will give place to the sacrificial implements of the Brahman.[30]

In 1889, the unpopular appointment of Jean Claude White as the first Political Officer epitomised Sikkim's transformation into a British protectorate during the reign of the Sikkimese King Thutob Namgyal. White functioned as the de facto ruler of Sikkim. During his tenure (1889–1908) he followed a conscious policy of settling Nepali immigrants into Sikkim in order to increase revenue and economically develop this region. These immigrant Nepalis were perceived to be the most loyal supporters of British interests in the region, who would counter the pro-Tibetan leanings of the Lepcha and the Bhutia groups in Sikkim.

Infrastructural development and capital works were integral components of capitalist expansion into the colonies in order to maximise resource extraction and accumulation by the investment of the surplus generated from the colony itself. It is not surprising that White channelled a major proportion of Sikkim's revenue earnings into road building, construction of bridges and other infrastructure necessary for transforming it into profitable trade route between Bengal and Tibet. By 1879, a cart road to the Jelep-la and thereupon to the Chumbi valley was completed, bringing Darjeeling close to the Tibetan border. By 1881, Darjeeling was connected by a narrow gauge rail with Siliguri. It took less than a week to reach the Tibetan border from Calcutta. Improvements in roads and transportation were critical for reducing costs.[31]

An analysis of trade reports reveals the imperative underlying the imperial political missions to Tibet, including the Younghusband Mission of 1904. The opening paragraph of the *Report on the External Trade of Bengal with Nepal, Sikkim and Bhutan for the year 1880–81* optimistically opined that henceforth 'frontier trade would be recorded separately and not as part of the internal trade of Bengal'. The second paragraph summarised that the registered imports from Nepal, Bhutan and Sikkim exceeded exports by Rs 4,836,509 in 1880–81, and the bulk of this import was through Nepal. During this period, trade between Bengal and Sikkim and Tibet was registered at Pheydong and Runjeet in the Darjeeling district, with imports standing at Rs 167,960 and exports being Rs 80,898. The principal items being imported from Sikkim were horses, cattle, food grains, vegetables, salt and other manufactured articles such as planks, while piece-goods (European) and tobacco were the main items that were exported by Bengal into Sikkim. The Deputy Commissioner, in one of his monthly reports, commented in April 1881 that 'trade with Tibet continues to be at a standstill. I have been informed that many traders have returned from Phari in despair', while monthly reports for later months state that there was no improvement and 'the Tibet trade, such as it is, is still confined to Chumbi Valley inhabitants'.[32] These obstructions paved the way for sending the Macaulay Mission in 1885.

Missions and conventions of British India, Sikkim and Tibet (1890–1904)

In 1884, Colman Macaulay, the Financial Secretary of Bengal, convinced and obtained support from Lord Randolph Churchill, the Secretary of State, to undertake a mission to Tibet. Macaulay was briefed to explore and discuss with the king of Sikkim the possibility of opening the trade route to Tsang in Tibet via the Lachen valley in North Sikkim. The British believed that Indian tea and British textiles would find a ready market in Tibet, which could supply them with gold dust, musk and wool. Macaulay assured the Sikkimese king that all expenses for road and bridge construction would be borne by the British while Sikkim would only need to supply labour. The Tibetan authorities perceived the 1885 Macaulay Mission (which included Sarat Chandra Das) to be a first step towards a British invasion of Tibet and thwarted all their efforts. The persistence of the British made the Tibetans suspicious and in 1886 provoked Tibet into reclaiming Jelep-la from Sikkim in order to assert their overlordship over Sikkim. The Tibetans imperiously wrote to the Sikkimese king commanding him to defend his own territory and stop his officials from acting as guides for the British and coolies in opening roads from Sikkim into Tibet. Furious at the Sikkimese king in allowing the British to make roads and bridges up to Jelep-la, they decided to occupy Rhenock and Jelep-la, asserting that it constituted the Sikkim–Tibet boundary.[33] The British countered Tibet with a military campaign and advanced up to Lingtu on the Tibetan frontier.

This alarmed the Chinese, who wanted peace restored. On 17 March 1890, a convention was signed at Darjeeling between the British (represented by Lord Landsowne) and Chinese (represented by *Amban*, Sheng Tai),[34] relating to Sikkim and Tibet. This treaty settled Sikkim's status as a British protectorate while Tibet was projected as part of the Chinese Empire. Article 1 of this document defined the boundaries of the Sikkim–Tibetan frontier as the watershed between the Teesta river system in Sikkim and the Tibetan Mochu and the rivers flowing northwards into Tibet. Article 2 of the 1890 Convention stated:

> It is admitted that the British government, whose protectorate over the Sikkim state is hereby recognised, has direct and exclusive control over the internal administration and foreign relations of

> that state, and except through and with the permission of the British government, neither the ruler of the state nor any of its officers shall have official relations of any kind, formal or informal, with any other country.[35]

In 1886–87 trade was registered at 27 stations for Nepal, and 3 each for Sikkim and Bhutan. Increase in trade was registered for Nepal, which continued to dominate the external trade of Bengal. The report documents the diversion of trade from Kalimpong to Gangtok, and from 1885 a blockade on the Tibetan frontier (at Lingtu). The blockade did not obstruct any of the traders belonging to the great Lhasa monasteries from going to Calcutta while their trade was not being registered. On the Sikkim trade registered at Pheydong, Runjit, Rhenok and Kalimpong, the Deputy Commissioner notes that 'a good deal of this goes to Tibet by other passes than the Jeylep [*sic*], but cannot be distinguished in the returns of the local Sikkim trade'. The main imports registered (Rs 265,832) included silver, yak-tails, musk, raw wool and manufactured wool, while the cotton-piece goods of European and Indian manufacture comprised the bulk of the exports to Sikkim and Tibet (Rs 336,097). The withdrawal of the blockade in Tibet led to an increased registration of trade in 1890–91. The maximum revenue earners continued to be English cloth (cotton and wool), with indigo appearing in the list of exports to Sikkim and Tibet.[36]

After three years of discussions, in December 1893, the Regulations concerning Trade, Communications and Pasturage were appended to the 1890 Sikkim–Tibet Convention, which concluded that a trade mart would be established at Yatung in Tibet where British subjects would be allowed to travel freely to trade and maintain accommodation and storage of goods. The Chinese did not agree to Phari being a trade mart. A list of goods was agreed while trade in arms, ammunition, military stores, salt, liquors and intoxicating drugs was prohibited. Tibet was permitted to import Indian tea at the same rate as Chinese tea, although not for a period of five years after the enactment of this treaty. The Tibetans were not a party to either of these treaties and did not sign them.[37] Since no steps were undertaken to involve them in any of the negotiations, the treaty became a liability and merely a paper convention. The Tibet question can be traced to this blunder of the imperial policy since the Sikkim–Tibet Convention and the Trade Regulations gave

> recognition to Chinese authority over a people whom the Chinese had not the power to control, and bound the British in any future crises along this frontier to deal with a government which was disliked and weak in Lhasa.[38]

Yatung was found to be an unsuitable location after a cess of 10 per cent duty was levied at Phari in Tibet. Trading was curtailed with even the Tibetan traders being denied free access to Yatung. The Tromwo/Chumbiapa held a transport monopoly over carrying goods southwards from Yatung and controlled all trade between Kalimpong and Phari: '[t]hrough Chumbi valley as through the neck of a bottle, is poured half of the entire trade between India and Tibet'.[39] White, who visited Yatung in 1894, gave a very unfavourable report and preferred the opening of the Lachen route. The Tibetans refused to accept the demarcated Sikkim–Tibetan frontier, destroyed the erected boundary pillars and 'encroached' into Giaogong in Sikkim.[40] The trade through Yatung continued to remain a small portion of India's foreign trade due to Tibetan obstructiveness.

Personal enterprise and the conventions explain the increase in the volume of trade into British India by nearly 20 per cent in 1897, as compared to 1894–95. The number of stations on which trade was being registered increased to 41 in 1897, with the bulk of these posts being for Nepal (34), with 4 for Sikkim, and 3 for Bhutan. The value of imports from Nepal registered at Rs 14,449,393, from Sikkim and Tibet at Rs 1,345,087 and from Bhutan at Rs 119,713; while the exports from British India indicate a rise to Rs 12,174,517 for Nepal, Rs 729,096 for Sikkim and Rs 144,471 for Bhutan. Paragraph 25 of this 1897 report recommended that trade with Tibet should be registered at Guntok and Yatung. Timber, spices, fresh fruits and vegetables, gram and pulses, cattle, sheep and goats, hides of cattle, horses, ponies and mules, rice and some cloth comprised the bulk of the imports from Sikkim; while husked rice, cotton-piece goods, salt, provisions, cattle, tobacco, indigo, mineral oil, cotton yarn, sugar and iron were the main goods exported to Sikkim. British India continued to import wool, musk, yak-tails, mules and horses from Tibet and exported silver, indigo, cotton-piece goods of Indian and European manufacture, tobacco, wool, iron, brass, provisions, sugar and husked rice to Tibet.[41]

The Commissioner of Rajashahi division was instructed to collect statistics at Yatung from 1 January 1898 and to establish a registration post at Guntok. The total number of stations rose to 43 in 1898, with 34 posts for Nepal, 2 for Tibet, 4 for Sikkim and 3 for Bhutan; the increased trade volume was attributed to accurate registration at the new stations. Raw wool was cited as constituting nearly 63.6 per cent of the total imports, with English cotton-piece goods forming the bulk of the exports.[42]

The objective of the 1904 Younghusband mission was overtly to resolve the boundary question and discuss with the Tibetan authorities their non-observance of treaties and consequent injury to the trade between India and Tibet. The Russian involvement in Tibet and their free access to trade marts raised British suspicions and Lord Curzon, the then Viceroy of India, deputed Francis Younghusband to go to Tibet with White and Captain O'Connor. Curzon believed that British authority had to be ostensibly asserted on the frontier after King Thutob Namgyal's diplomatic interventions on their behalf to negotiate with Tibet failed. Colonel Younghusband was permitted to proceed as far as Kampa Dzong across the Sikkim–Tibet border. On 17 November 1903, *The Times* carried the report of the Younghusband Mission under the title 'Thibet [*sic*] to be invaded'. When the Tibetans refused to negotiate, the mission took an overtly aggressive stance towards Gyantse and transformed into a military expedition, ending in the British occupation of Lhasa. Despite fighting valiantly, Tibet lost heavily in the battle, culminating in the flight of the Thirteenth Dalai Lama to Urga in Mongolia. The ostensible purpose was to negotiate an Anglo-Tibetan treaty, but the deep-seated motivation was to squarely check the growing Russian influence on the Tibetan government. This Convention, comprising nine articles, was signed on 7 September 1904 at Lhasa by Colonel Younghusband acting as the British representative, Lo-Sang Gyaltsen, the Gaden Ti-Rinpoche (Dalai Lama's regent) and representatives of the three monasteries Sera, Drepung and Gaden, and of the Ecclesiastical and lay officials on behalf of the Tibetan government. The war indemnity of Rs 7,500,000 payable in yearly instalments was much lower than the cost incurred by the British.[43]

In brief, the Convention ratified and recognised the Sikkim–Tibetan frontier as demarcated in the 1890 treaty and negotiated the further opening of two trade marts. The Tibetan monasteries controlled a large volume of the tea trade and had vested interests in controlling and restricting Anglo-Tibetan trans-Himalayan trade. By including the representatives of the three powerful Tibetan monasteries, the British sought to overtly overrule any monastic opposition to the treaty. The British had wanted Phari, which served as the main Indo-Tibetan trading centre, although they were not able to negotiate this successfully. These marts were sited at Gyantse south-west of Lhasa, at Yatung in the Chumbi Valley across from Sikkim and Gartok in western Tibet, and a British representative was allowed to reside there.

The Younghusband Mission achieved the distinction of transforming Tibet into a piece on the imperial chessboard. Articles VI, IX and the separate article authorising the Gyantse trade agent to visit Lhasa caused considerable controversy in India, England, China and Russia such that the details of the convention were reported by *The Times* in September 1904. The British occupation of Chumbi Valley was perceived as tantamount to an annexation. The war indemnity was reduced to Rs Twenty-five lakhs (2,500,000) payable in three instalments; the separate article about allowing the trade agent at Gyantse to visit Lhasa to settle commercial matters was renounced by Lord Ampthill (acting as Viceroy in Lord Curzon's absence) despite strong protests voiced by Younghusband himself. It was argued that Article IX ignored Chinese claims and constituted British designs to make Tibet its protectorate as had happened in the case of Sikkim. In the absence of Curzon, who was then on leave, the 1904 Treaty was regarded as a violation of Younghusband's original brief. The 'hero' Younghusband was downsized since the British wanted to maintain Tibet as a buffer-zone, and left on the backseat. Younghusband himself tried to offset the negative publicity by writing an autobiographical account of this 1904 mission, and on Central Asia and the Himalayas.[44]

Sikkim an Indian state

In 1906, a convention was signed between Great Britain and China wherein it was mutually agreed to continue the agreement concluded in the 1890 Convention and the Regulations of 1893, and the trade concessions extended to Great Britain in the 1904 Convention would be denied to any state other than China. The most controversial element was embedded in the framework of Article 1:

> The Government of Great Britain engages not to annex Tibetan territory or to interfere in the administration of Tibet. The Government of China also undertakes not to permit any other foreign State to interfere with the territory or internal administration of Tibet.[45]

The Chinese did not lay claims to Sikkim at any point and recognised it to be part of British India. On 1 April 1906, political control over Sikkim was formally transferred to the Government of India by the Bengal government in recognition of the fact that the main trade route to Tibet passed through Sikkim. The Political Officer of Sikkim was entrusted with the administrative control over Sikkim, Bhutan, Chumbi and the trade agency at Gyantse. Captain O'Connor was appointed as the Trade Agent at Gyantse. To show appreciation of his role, the king and queen of Sikkim were invited to the Calcutta Durbar in 1905 on the occasion of the visit of the Prince and Princess of Wales. Here Thutob Namgyal asked of His Majesty that he be given greater control over Sikkim's internal administration and permission to visit Chumbi Valley, but both his requests were turned down by the Government of India.[46] Despite opposition from Thutob Namgyal, White insisted on installing Sidekyong Namgyal, a recognised reincarnate monk, as his successor.

In 1908, Sir Charles succeeded White as the second Political Officer of Sikkim. In 1906, Sidekyong Namgyal, the heir apparent after gaining permission from the British, enrolled at Pembroke College at Oxford University. On his return from England, Sidekyong Tulku tried to modernise the feudal land revenue system but faced stiff opposition from the nobility. In 1914, he succeeded Thutob Namgyal as the *Chos-rgyal*, but Sidekyong Tulku Namgyal reigned for barely eight months and was succeeded by his younger brother, Sir Tashi Namgyal, who ruled Sikkim until 1963. As a Political Officer of Sikkim between 1908–1921 and 1919–1921, Sir Charles did not try to superimpose himself on the Sikkimese king. He made sincere efforts to offset the tensions caused by Nepali immigration to Sikkim and check

Marwari influence and local indebtedness towards them by restricting them to the bazaar areas. Charles Bell authored several influential books on Tibet, religion and the people of Tibet, and established a friendly relationship with the Dalai Lama and even visited Lhasa.[47] After Bell and under Tashi Namgyal's able administration, Sikkim acquired greater autonomy in conducting its internal affairs. During his reign Sikkim joined the Indian Council of States in 1935, and Tashi Namgyal was enjoined to represent as the ruler of this Princely state. As an Indian state, Sikkim had no right to separate external relations whatsoever and the Political Officer was permitted to conduct Sikkim's political relations, a practice that continued until 1975 when Sikkim was incorporated into independent India.

Conclusion

Capitalist expansion and its incessant search for newer markets and goods for trading were the driving force behind the spread of the British Empire in the Indo-Tibetan borderlands such as Sikkim. Improvements in roads, transportation and communication networks in both Sikkim and Darjeeling served both commercial and military interests and provided the necessary infrastructure for empire. I began this chapter by juxtaposing two comments about trade and imperialism, and this chapter has demonstrated the relationship between these and the politics of expansion and empire. The various treaties concluded between Sikkim, East India Company/British Raj, Tibet, Nepal and China established the contours of this imperial outreach and overturning of local political economy and demography in the Eastern Himalayas. The provisions of the 1904 Treaty, concluded after the Younghusband Mission, explicate the intermingling of capitalism, imperialism and globalisation in this region – a relationship that may have ongoing relevance. Trading posts have functioned as listening posts in Asian geopolitics in the past and may perform similar facilitative functions in the present.

Notes

1. Temple, *Travels in Nepal and Sikkim*, p. 117.
2. Cited in McKay, p. 20; and Singh, *Himalayan Triangle*, p. 249.
3. McKay, *Tibet and the British Raj*, pp. 30–1.
4. Marx and Engels, *Communist Manifesto*, p. 29.

5. Marx and Engels, *Communist Manifesto*; Marx, *Capital*; Hobson, *Imperialism*; Hilferding, *Finance Capital*; Luxemburg, *Accumulation of Capital*, p. 370; Lenin, *Imperialism*.
6. Smith, 'Complications of the Commonplace'; Chung, 'Britain-China-India Trade Triangle'; Greenberg, *British Trade and Opening of China*. The search for an alternative to procurement of Chinese tea also gave the principal impetus to much experimentation, the subsequent plantation of tea and garden estates for cultivating premium tea in the Darjeeling Hills and other parts of the Indian Himalayas, such as Assam.
7. Hooker, *Himalayan Journals*; Temple, *Travels in Nepal and Sikkim*; Easton, *An Unfrequented Highway*; Buchannan, 'A Recent Trip'; Freshfield, 'Roads to Tibet'; Markham, 'Travels in Great Tibet'; Ryder, 'Exploration and Survey'; Walker, 'Four Years' Journeying'; O'Connor, 'Pari Jong to Gyantse'; Macdonald, *Touring in Sikkim and Tibet*; Waddell, *Among the Himalayas*; White, *Sikkim and Bhutan*; Smythe, *Kanchenjunga Adventures*.
8. Lamb, *British India and Tibet*. *La* is a Tibetan word meaning a mountain pass. Jelep-la, meaning 'the lovely low pass' in the Tibetan language, is an all-season Himalayan pass, unlike the Nathu-la (or the Gnatui), which means the 'pass of the listening ear'.
9. Lamb, *British India and Tibet*, p. 3; *Tibetan Border Worlds*, pp. 137–38, 144; Von Furer-Haimendorf, *Sherpas of Nepal*; Buchannan, 'A Recent Trip'; Freshfield, 'Roads to Tibet'; Waddell, *Among the Himalayas*, p. vi. The Ladakh route was favoured since both the King of Kashmir and the Tibet government did not levy any duty on the Leh–Lhasa route (Gill, 'India's Trade', p. 79).
10. Lamb, *British India and Tibet*, pp. 3–6, 10.
11. Risley, *Gazetteer of Sikhim*, p. xii.
12. Lamb, *British India and Tibet*, p. 7; Markham, 'Travels in Great Tibet', p. 332.
13. Lamb, *British India and Tibet*, p. 9.
14. Deb, 'George Bogle's Treaty', pp. 5–9. In contrast to the British, the Gorkhas invaded Tibet in 1855 and secured important trade concessions, including the right to establish an agency at Lhasa, free trade and extra-territorial rights.
15. Marshall, *Making and Unmaking*, pp. 4, 13.
16. Sharma and Sharma, *Documents*, p. 2.
17. Singh, *Himalayan Triangle*, pp. 175–6.
18. Rhodes, 'Development of Currency', p. 263; Sprigg, '1826'.
19. Wangyal, *Sikkim and Darjeeling,* pp. 59–60, 86; Dolma and Namgyal, *History of Sikkim*, p. 56; Sprigg, 'The Lepcha text', pp. 4–10.
20. Lamb, *British India and Tibet*, p. 71.
21. Pinn, *Road to Destiny*, p. 2; Arora, 'Being Nepali in Sikkim'; Singh, *Himalayan Triangle*, pp. 180–4.
22. Singh, *Himalayan Triangle*, pp. 187–8.
23. Risley, *Gazetteer of Sikhim*, p. v.
24. Lamb, *British India and Tibet*, p. 97.
25. Edgar, *Report on a Visit to Sikhim*, pp. 13, 18.

26. Edgar, *Report on a Visit to Sikhim*, pp. 45, 48–9.
27. Edgar, *Report on a Visit to Sikhim*, pp. 31–3, 78–9.
28. Singh, *Himalayan Triangle*, p. 224.
29. Dolma and Namgyal, *History of Sikkim*, pp. 65–6.
30. Risley, *Gazetteer of Sikhim*, p. xxi.
31. Luxemburg, *Accumulation of Capital*, p. 352; White, *Sikhim and Bhutan*, pp. 28–9; Lamb, *British India and Tibet*, p. 121; Singh, *Himalayan Triangle*, p. 203.
32. India Institute Library Archives, Bodelian Library (Oxford), *Report on the External Trade of Bengal with Nepal, Sikkim and Bhutan* (ETB), 1881, pp. 1, 11. The list of items is much longer for trade between Bengal and Nepal.
33. Dolma and Namgyal, *History of Sikkim*, p. 80.
34. *Amban* is a Manchu honorific title for a minister or high official representing the Chinese emperior.
35. Cited in Sharma and Sharma, *Documents*, p. 56.
36. *ETB*, 1891, pp. 9–11, 13. Kalimpong was included to avoid a double record of trade at the stations of Kalimpong and Rhenok.
37. Singh, *Himalayan Triangle*, p. 223; Bell, *Tibet*, p. 61.
38. Lamb, *British India and Tibet*, p. 164.
39. Bell, *Tibet*, p. 78.
40. Lamb, *British India and Tibet*, pp. 168–70.
41. *ETB*, 1897, pp. 1, 13. Pedang, Ranjit, Laba and Singla in the Darjeeling district, which were kept open throughout the year. Guntok (Gangtok) became Sikkim's capital in 1894.
42. *ETB*, 1888, 1899, pp. 1, 7.
43. Bell, *Tibet*, p. 66; Singh, *Himalayan Triangle*, pp. 24–7.
44. Lamb, *British India and Tibet*, pp. 244–7, 255; Younghusband, *India and Tibet*; and *Our Position in Tibet*.
45. Younghusband, *India and Tibet,* p. 444.
46. Singh, *Himalayan Triangle*, p. 250.
47. Bell, *Tibet*; *People of Tibet*; and *Religion of Tibet*.

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2

Indian Pale Ale: An Icon of Empire

Alan Pryor

Indian colonies, once established, had to be supplied with the necessities of life that were 'appropriate'; in other words, European. In the crucible of a tropical climate new products such as mulligatawny soup and curry, which became established in the sub-culture of British India before being introduced to the palate of mainland Britain, emerged. In 2008, Elizabeth Buettner spoke of the incorporation of chicken tikka masala into the British culture by the end of the twentieth century, where the original dish, chicken tikka, had been hybridised by the addition of masala sauce to satisfy British tastes. In a time of racial tension in Britain, this was seen as an example of food being seen as a non-threatening sphere of cultural diversity.[1] In the early nineteenth century, a similar invasion took place with the introduction of Indian pale ale to the British drinker. Like the chicken tikka masala, it brought connotations of India but with a different message for a different time, where the exotic element of India had been tamed by its commodification into 'non-threatening' food items, such as curry, mulligatawny soup and Indian pale ale.

The story of the development of Indian pale ale is one of cultural invention. This was a new product that was neither British nor Indian, occupying the space in between those two cultures in British India. In the late eighteenth century, George Hodgson developed a new beer for India in an obscure brewery on the eastern periphery of London. Hodgson's Pale Ale was a light beer with a refreshing bitter taste, which was to become a signifier of Anglo-Indian identity in numerous accounts of life in India. Eighteenth-century beer was a relatively low-value product and its export to India was only made possible by the Byzantine economics of the East India Company. The growing demand for pale ale in India brought competition from other brewers, particularly from Burton-on-Trent. This study argues that the difficult trading conditions of India were instrumental in the development of new marketing techniques, which were subsequently employed to introduce a new genre of beer into Britain: Indian pale ale.

This chapter examines the interaction between metropolitan manufacture and colonial demand by investigating the development of a new beer in the eighteenth century, which forms part of a wider study of the London brewing industry. It is argued that there was an unofficial agenda to commodify the British Empire, particularly India, which is epitomised with the development of Indian pale ale. Heroic accounts of colonial adventures were often peppered with references to its restorative qualities. The sub-text was that India was Britain's challenge, particularly the climate, but the superiority of Britain's manufacturing ability was able to produce a beer that was able to meet it. This fitted with an idealised version of empire, where the metropole imported the raw materials for its manufacture, rewarding the colony with manufactured goods, education, governance and progress. By following the marketing and development of this product it becomes possible to gain greater understanding of the emerging debate over protectionism and free trade as it affected Britain's relationship with its empire.

The Bow Brewery

The Bow Brewery stood on the banks of the River Lea on the eastern periphery of London at Bow Bridge. This was an ideal location to supply beer to the East India Company's fleet, which lay at their Thames anchorage at Blackwall, two miles down the River Lea. George Hodgson had acquired the Bow Brewery in 1752, where he brewed porter for the surrounding district. Porter was a dark bitter beer that was the favourite drink of London labourers in the eighteenth century. In 1787, he produced 16,384 barrels of porter, which was a modest amount compared with 150,280 barrels from Samuel Whitbread, the leading brewer of porter in London.[2] About this time, George Hodgson's son, Mark, decided to brew a specific type of beer for export to India, using a pale malt and plenty of hops. The preservative qualities of pale malt were well known and described by Michael Combrune, the period's leading writer on brewing: 'liquors brewed from very pale malts, preserve themselves for a long time'.[3] Combrune had also stated that pale malt-produced beers 'are better to allay thirst'.[4] The preservative qualities of hops were equally well known, but Hodgson's innovation was to put additional dry hops in the barrel of finished beer to improve the beer's chances of surviving the long voyage to India.[5] This was intended to stabilise the beer against the constant rocking motion in the ship's hold. Thus, a combination of pale malt with an exceptionally high proportion of hops produced a distinctive bitter taste, which proved to be a thirst-quenching drink, ideally suited for the Indian tropical climate.

Circumstantial evidence points to the possibility of family influence in the promotion of Hodgson's beer in the East India Company's fleet. Thomas Hodgson had worked his way through the ranks of the East India Company to become the captain of the Earl Cornwallis in 1785. His first three voyages were to China, but on his fourth voyage in 1793, he sailed for Bengal for the first time. This coincided with the first advertisement for Hodgson's beer, which appeared in the *Calcutta Gazette* in September 1793 as part of the private trade from the East Indiaman, Britannia, and again in November when Captain Browne of the Hillsborough advertised 'Pale ale and porter in hogsheads from Hodgson'. Thus, in 1793, the Britannia had sailed in April, the Hillsborough in May and the Earl Cornwallis in July.[6] Captain Hodgson was probably a member of Mark Hodgson's family and his change in destination from China to Calcutta was the signal for a campaign to persuade his fellow captains to carry Hodgson's beer to Calcutta. Although not alone in the export of beer to India, Hodgson's Pale Ale was singular in being identified by name. As the fleet of East Indiamen arrived each autumn, similar advertisements continued to appear. Some preferred to sell the beer personally, such as Captain Lambe of the Melville Castle, who advertised in the *Calcutta Gazette* in 1801: 'just landed and now exposed for sale, for ready money only, beer from Hodgson'.[7] However, it is important to remember that this product was not for consumption by the indigenous population but by the British population of colonial India.

The key to understanding the economics that allowed the export of relatively low-value products such as beer to India, at an affordable price, lies with the complex financial system of the East India Company. The East India Company's principal trade was the importation of silk, cotton and tea from India and China. Ships' officers were allowed to export 56 tons of goods free of freight charges. Although this was described as their 'private trade', it played a vital role in the economic system by finding sufficient exports to fill the ship on the outward journey.[8] This trade was known as the officers' 'investment', which usually consisted of various domestic commodities, including food and drink. These generous allowances were often not fully used as the capacity of these ships could easily accommodate sufficient supplies for the British communities in India. These provisions had to be culturally 'appropriate' for the colonial population. The East India Company issued a list of suitable goods, which included perfumery, hats, stationery, pickles, port wine, ale, beer and porter in hogsheads or bottles.[9]

In the early nineteenth century the predominant return cargo was indigo. This crop was notoriously unreliable and the East India Company delegated the trade to agency houses who were licensed to manage the indigo production of Bengal. These agency houses in India had 'sister' agencies in London. By the 1820s, there were over twenty approved agencies, which had formed a powerful interest group within the main structure of the East India Company.[10] They had developed in the late eighteenth century and gradually gained influence by the purchase of sufficient shares to sit at the Court of Directors of the East India Company. In 1813, they voted for the ending of its monopoly of trade with India, believing that their profits would be greater if the tight controls of the East India Company's regime were abolished.

Free trade and monopoly

The ending of the East India Company's monopoly in India was influential in changing relationships in the commodity chain for the supply of beer to India. Local merchants in Bengal were thereby empowered to break Hodgson's monopoly to supply pale ale, by seeking new sources from brewers in Burton-on-Trent. Samuel Allsopp and Michael Bass led the way in gaining a tenuous foothold in the Indian market, with the development of new methods of marketing and distribution, which proved conclusive in their eventual success.

In the early nineteenth century, the East India Company had come under much criticism from Manchester manufacturers and Liverpool shipping interests for their poor record in exporting British goods. As a result the East India Company had its charter renewed in 1813, but lost the monopoly for Indian trade, which created great changes in the commodity chain. New shipping companies joined the trade and freight charges dropped dramatically, but there were many financial casualties. Where the monopoly had restricted the balance between supply and demand there was now a free-for-all. The Indian economy remained stubbornly resistant to European encroachment. By the 1820s, the only export from Britain that could be guaranteed to sell was beer, but there were constant complaints of the irregularity of supply, which caused wild fluctuations in the price. Some of these shortages were due to natural causes – brewing is a manufacture that is unavoidably linked to the vagaries of the agricultural cycle – but there were also signs of market manipulation.

Throughout this time, the Bow Brewery had remained the largest exporter of pale ale to India. However, it was now under the new management of Frederick Hodgson who was thought by the agency houses to be deliberately restricting the supply to achieve high prices. Having been excluded from the management of the brewery until the age of majority, Frederick had set about developing his own career. He soon demonstrated leanings towards financial and commercial ventures, setting up as a stockbroker in Throgmorton Street as early as 1817. On taking control at the Bow Brewery in 1819, Hodgson installed Thomas Drane, a brewer from Limehouse, as the managing partner of Hodgson & Co., while he pursued his political career as the MP for Barnstaple, Devon.

Frederick Hodgson had a virtual monopoly in the Indian market, where his pale ale had no rival. His dominance in the provision of beer to the East India Company can be demonstrated by examining their system of communication with flags from ship to shore for the acquisition of stores. In 1818, the Company adopted the 'improved system of telegraphic communication', which designated codes for ordering stores including beer. There were codes for ordering generic types of beer, small beer, strong beer or ale, but additionally there was a specific code reserved for ordering 'Hodgson's Pale Ale' by name, demonstrating the importance of this product to the East India Company.[11] Other brewers had tried to break into the market, with little success. John Walsby of the Imperial brewery in Battersea specialised in the supply of beers that 'when brewed for exportation will stand the test of any climate, and are well known in the East and West Indies'.[12] However, Walsby had ceased brewing ale for the Indian market by 1817, reverting to the production of porter for private families.[13] A more immediate threat to Hodgson's dominant position emanated from the Imperial brewery of Bromley-by-Bow, less than a mile away from the Bow Brewery on the River Lea. The proprietor, William Brown, ran a series of advertisements in *The Times* from 1817 to 1818, offering 'liberal terms for Pale Ale to merchants and captains for the East India and West India climate'. However, Brown could not compete successfully with Hodgson, and by 1820 he was declared bankrupt.[14]

Clearly Hodgson was now in a strong position and he continued to dominate the trade until 1821. By 1820, imports of beer were down to a quarter of those in 1816, and he was accused of operating a monopoly, as the imports of his beer increased in price. In 1821, Hodgson responded to calls from the Calcutta agency houses for increased supplies of beer. He enlarged the brewery and imports rose by 50 per cent. However, this was little more than a third of the production of 1816 and still not enough to satisfy the agency houses, who decided to seek additional supplies of beer.[15]

Burton brewers had been exploiting a similar niche in the market as Hodgson by exporting their beer from Hull to Russia as a return cargo for goods from the Baltic. When the Tsar banned that trade, they were forced to look for alternative markets. Allsopp led the field in attempts to copy Hodgson's Pale Ale and the first shipments were sent in 1822. Hodgson responded by increasing supplies to lower the price and drive out this new competition. He doubled his exports in 1822 to 6,181 hogsheads and again in 1823 to 11,481 hogsheads, which flooded the market.[16] He also took advantage of reduced freight charges to charter ships for the direct transport of beer and withdrew the customary credit of 18 months for the East Indian private trade.

The Burton brewers faced a difficult task of reproducing the taste of Hodgson's Pale Ale and progress was slow, but from the beginning they entered into a dialogue with agency houses. Allsopp's first consignment in 1822 had disappointing results. The agency house of Mathew Gisborne wrote in July 1823 asking for permission to bottle the beer on its arrival, to improve its appearance. In 1824 another Calcutta merchant, J. Bailton, advised that the beer should be bitterer, saying 'it wanted hop and required less malt'. The use of additional hops had been the basis of the success of Hodgson's Pale Ale since the 1780s and with careful empirical changes Allsopp was reproducing the taste in his own beer. By 1826, Allsopp's beer was quoted in the *Calcutta Weekly* at the same price as that of Hodgson's. Other brewers now entered the market, including Bass & Ratcliff of Burton, Ind & Smith of Romford and Charringtons of Mile End.[17]

The interaction between the Burton brewers and their agents in Calcutta is an early indication of a change in brewers' attitudes towards marketing. Hitherto, brewers in Britain restrained competition within their locality by the process of 'tying' a public house to the brewery. This could mean outright ownership of the public house, but more often it entailed holding the lease as security against loans or bad debts. It was only in large towns, especially London, where a mass market allowed breweries to develop to a sufficient size to allow competition. However, in practice the brewers acted as a monopoly by fixing prices and restricting competition within the localities of individual breweries.[18]

In India the situation was different. There was a growing market that offered opportunities to new entrants to the export trade, but they had to overcome prejudice against newcomers because the name of Hodgson's beer had a 40-year start. The solution was in careful attention to detail in the brewing process, but equally important was the need to publicise their product at every opportunity.

Competition and free trade

Free-trade measures in the 1820s caused the East India Company's financial system to deteriorate. The financial chaos that followed was instrumental in the creation of new marketing methods by the Burton brewers. Hodgson's reputation ensured that he could sell his production, whereas the Burton brewers' survival depended on finding new agents for their beer. Samuel Allsopp reacted first by sending his son Henry to India. He had previously worked at Gladstone & Co. in Liverpool and was able to use his contacts to create new agencies for their beer. The other brewers followed suit in organising agencies in the new economic climate of India. The export of pale ale for the Indian market was becoming increasingly divorced from the East India Company and its surrogate agencies, and Liverpool became the port of choice for the Burton brewers. Hodgson & Co., despite their proximity to the London Docks, established an agency in 1825 to export bottled beer from Liverpool.[19]

The Burton brewers' gradual erosion of Hodgson's lead gave them the incentive to seek constant improvement in brewing techniques. By 1832 the annual export of pale ale to Bengal was estimated to be 12,000 barrels, with Bass producing 5,200, Hodgson 3,600 and Allsopp 1,400. The Burton brewers had found that their water supply contained natural sulphates and calcium, which was far better for brewing pale ale than the soft water available to Hodgson. This gave a sharper bitter taste and displayed a sparkling clarity in the bottle. However, the development of more active strains of yeast in the Burton 'union' system of fermentation was equally important in producing a fully attenuated strong beer with little residual sugar, giving a dryness of taste that was compatible with a bitter beer.[20]

Marketing in India

The Burton brewers now had a beer that was as good as Hodgson's, if not better. Their greater challenge was to overcome the selling power of Hodgson's name, which after 50 years of production had virtually become the world's first branded beer. The Calcutta agency house Tulloch & Co. claimed that they could not sell other beers even if good quality, because of the 'high repute of Hodgson's name for beer'.[21]

At this time, the market for alcoholic drinks was almost entirely European, as most Indians did not drink alcohol. The principal market for pale ale was the officer corps of the army stationed in India, not the private soldiers, who preferred porter and spirits. The British army consisted of 20,000 men, which was augmented by the East India Company, who recruited their own European army of 15,000 men. The daily allowance for British soldiers was three quarts of porter, a third of which could be taken as spirits if they chose. They could also buy a limited amount of extra drink from the regimental canteen if they could afford it. However, if they were prepared to disobey orders, they could buy unlimited supplies of spirits, such as rum or arrack from primitive stills in the Indian villages.[22]

For many soldiers, drink was the escape route from a life of unbearable tedium. Life in the barracks was often one of boredom punctuated with periods of heavy drinking, where the monthly pay-day was described as ‘a scene of riot and confusion, where the drinking continued as long as the money lasted’.[23] Such accounts of drunkenness and immorality did not usually reach the general public unless they had a subtext of moral reform, such as that of the prodigious novelist G. P. R. James in *The Commissioner* in 1843, where the hero was seen to renounce a vacuous existence by saying, ‘for three years I had nothing but dancing girls, curry and Hodson's pale ale, I got sick of it sir. I sent home for some Hobbes, Voltaire and Descartes’.[24]

In these vernacular accounts of Indian life, Hodgson's Pale Ale was often shortened to ‘Hodsons’. To pronounce the ‘g’ would be a social gaffe and clear indication of recent arrival to the colonies. The name itself became associated with Anglo-Indian life, which was one of respectability, punctuated with danger, incorporated into stories for the young adventurer. A favourite theme was that of narrow escapes from death while hunting man-eating tigers. In these stories, the reader was initiated into the Anglo-Indian vocabulary as in *Rambles along the Styx* by Lieutenant-Colonel Leach, who described his lifestyle in India as

> living in *bungalows* ventilated by *punkahs*, drinking therein, sundry bottles of Hodson's pale ale; riding on elephants, shooting from their *howdahs* at everything from tigers, boa-constrictors to buffalo.[25]

Although India was the main destination for the Hodgson's beer, the name began to materialise along the shipping routes of the growing British Empire. In 1820, it appeared in St Helena when the exiled Napoleon complained of undrinkable beer. The Governor of the island directed that some casks be obtained of ‘what is called Hodson's pale ale’.[26] In 1824, advertisements in the *South African Commercial Advertiser* described ‘a shipment of fifty hogsheads of pale ale received direct from Messrs. Hodgson & Co. which will be sold by single cask’.[27]

As the overland route to India was developed in the 1830s, Hodgson's Pale Ale began to appear in countries outside of the British Empire. The renowned magazine *Punch* reported that pale ale was to be found universally throughout Turkey, Syria, Greece and Egypt where 'a foaming bottle of the exhilarating Hodgson could be enjoyed'.[28] William Thackeray, on his epic journey from Cornhill to Cairo, reported his joy at the arrival in Jerusalem of 'a camel-load of Hodson's pale ale from Beyroot [*sic*]'.[29]

Thus the name Hodgson became associated with travel to distant lands. This was exemplified in a popular genre of books that featured imperialistic accounts of British adventurers in the Middle East. A military writer, Captain Mignan, in his book *A Winter Journey through Russia, the Caucasian Alps, and Georgia*, relates how the intrepid explorers arrived in the town of Benaub in Persia. Although the area produced fine wines for the king of Persia, they were told 'that it was well known that the Shah's harem consumed more Hodgson's Pale Ale than a regimental mess in India'.[30]

Further afield, a more prosaic description from Canada spoke of 'pigeon pie washed down with Hodgson's Pale Ale'.[31] Similar accounts from Siam, Burma, Australia, New Zealand and South Africa were a constant reminder to the British public of this product. A correspondent from Argentina spoke of 'his one luxury being a consignment of Hodgson's Pale Ale',[32] while in Batavia 'Sherry and Madeira were rejected for copious draughts of Hodgson's Pale Ale during dinner'.[33]

The principal market for Hodgson's Pale Ale continued to be Europeans in India. The few Indians that drank alcohol were said to prefer porter, when it was said:

> it is only at the tiffins of the Europeans that Hodgson's beer is most run upon, and that the dusky natives do more affect the generous liquor that comes nearer to their own complexion.[34]

However, this was contradicted by other accounts of Indian consumers, where Hodgson was reputed to have refused a private contract for £1,000 worth of ale because 'his hands were full quenching the thirst of sundried Indians'.[35] Perhaps it was just a matter of price, as porter was certainly cheaper than Hodgson's beer. In the crosscurrents of colonial migration, Indian contract labourers bound for South Africa were advised in *The Madras Journal of Literature and Science* that 'Cape beers are pleasant enough and much cheaper than Hodgsons, but Hindoos often sigh for the old malt'.[36]

This steady stream of anecdotal publicity promoted the reputation of Hodgson's beer. He seems to have relied on this rather than the adoption of an active marketing policy, as it followed the trade routes to become a cultural icon of the growing British Empire. Conversely, the Burton brewers had an uphill task to compete with Hodgson in India, but they decided that they could challenge his reputation in the untried British market for pale ale.

Marketing and distribution in Britain

Any attempt to find a market for pale ale in Britain would have to begin in London, the only centre with a significant population of Anglo-Indians. The Oriental Club of Hanover Square had been set up in 1824 as an exclusive haven for returning servants of the East India Company.[37] The editor of *The Court Journal* described it as the 'Mulligatawney Club', with a membership of 600, restricted to those who had resided in India or the Cape of Good Hope. He went on to question:

> If to the generality of idle men, the Club is a refuge, how much more must it be to the returned Indian, who has been wearing out the best years of his life in the east, often in solitude, if a civilian . . . where he could order mulligatawney soup and Pillau for dinner washed down with Hodgson's Pale Ale and a bottle of claret.[38]

Thus a small but influential Anglo-Indian elite became established in London society, bringing acquired tastes from the east. Some complained about the authenticity of attempts to reproduce a curry in England as 'a hash flavoured with turmeric and cayenne'. They also drew unfavourable comparisons with the drinks that were manufactured for the Indian market, criticising pale ale in particular, saying 'great are the lamentations over Hodson's pale ale, with which the home-brewed may not compare'.[39]

This adverse comment reflected the fact that Hodgson had begun to produce pale ale for the home market that was probably inferior to the export brand. Beer in India was not taxed, so there was a need to reduce costs to keep the price down in Britain by reducing the hop content. His first advertisement appeared in *The Morning Chronicle* in July 1833:

> Hodgson and Co.'s Bottled Pale Ale the nobility and gentry and others (especially families from India) are respectfully informed that they may be supplied with Hodgson & Co.'s bottled pale ale in quantities of two dozen quarts.[40]

Formal advertisements in newspapers or magazines for alcoholic products were virtually unknown at this time. The few that did appear tended to be event-orientated, whereby the public were informed that a shipment of port, madeira or brandy had arrived and was available for sale. Hence Hodgson was a pioneer in such marketing, and he ran similar advertisements for Portsmouth and Southampton, aimed at the 'officers of the Navy, Army and Gentlemen, for exportation or home consumption'.[41]

In the early 1830s, the Burton brewers had also begun to produce a distinctive form of their pale ale for British consumption, which was marketed through a network of agencies. This did not threaten Hodgson's dominance of the London market at this time. Bass had opened his London store at Great Tower Street in 1830 and Allsopp had a similar facility at Upper Thames Street. Both were near the waterfront, which reflected their continuing need for water transport via the Grand Union canal, which was slow and insecure.[42] When the Burton brewers acted collectively in 1839 to petition the Parliament for the Manchester and Birmingham Extension Railway Bill to be passed, they stated

> that the petitioners have a large and growing trade with London, Manchester and Liverpool, in an article which is exposed to incessant plunder and adulteration by canal conveyance.[43]

It was said that every lockkeeper between Burton and London felt entitled to tap into the barrel for his beer and replace it with water. The bill was passed, Burton-on-Trent was connected to the rail network and the situation was transformed.

Within two years Allsopp and Bass had expanded their agency network and began an advertising 'war' with Hodgson in the classified advertisement pages of the British and Indian press. The Burton brewers went further than Hodgson to address the public concern over adulteration of beer by seeking medical endorsement of their products. Allsopp began his advertising campaign with explicit new medical claims that several eminent doctors were strongly recommending his East India Pale Ale to their patients. Bass followed suit with a similar advertisement in the *Indian Mail*, where he claimed that 'Dr. Prout, in his work on diseases of the stomach, especially recommends India Pale Ale for weakly persons'.[44] Other innovations included placing advertisements in new media such as *The Medical Times* and *The Lancet.* At a time of widespread concern about food adulteration this was a creative way of reassuring the public about their product.

Both Bass and Allsopp had now adopted Hodgson's terminology of 'India pale ale', which now became the generic term for all brewers' beers that had originated for the Indian market. A new marketing strategy was to appeal to drinkers in Britain by demonstrating the success of their product in India, as in the following advertisement:

> The high esteem in which the pale ale of Bass & Co. is held in India will be seen in the comparative quantity shipped to Calcutta in 1839:- Shipped by Bass 4,936 hogsheads: by Hodgson 1,483 hogsheads.[45]

Allsopp responded with alternative figures for the quantities of beer exported to India in 1841 to 1842, given as 'Allsopp 9,499, Bass 4,796, Hodgson 2,001'.[46]

Two points emerge from this exchange. First, is the importance that they placed on their performance in the Indian market as part of their marketing strategy in Britain. Second, that Hodgson was no longer a threat and was scarcely deemed worthy of mention.

One of Hodgson's major distribution problems arose from unscrupulous retailers who refilled returned bottles with an inferior product. He first attempted to prevent this in 1836 by changing the advertisements for Hodgson's Pale Ale in *The Hampshire Telegraph and Sussex Chronicle* to state that this beer was only available through a sole agency and that 'all others professing to sell the same are deceiving the public. As a caution the casks are branded and bottles sealed.'[47]

The branding of alcoholic drinks was in its infancy when he changed the advertisements yet again, where it was said that 'none are genuine unless labelled Hodgson East India Pale Ale and the corks branded'.[48] The Burton brewers, who also labelled their beer, protected against the practice of refilling bottles by maintaining strict control over the agents who retailed their beer. Bass said that his agents 'were his eyes and ears who kept him informed of complaints in quality, competition from other brewers'.[49] Bass and Allsopp had a network of agents in every major city, with at least 40 in London alone.[50]

The Burton brewers aggressively targeted the London market with a relatively expensive product like Indian pale ale, because they were aiming at the aspirations of the emerging lower middle-class shopkeepers and clerks.[51] Their success lay in the development of the trade in bottled beer that claimed protection from the adulterations that were widely practised in nineteenth-century public houses. The two archrivals, Allsopp and Bass, had ignored the 'tied-house' system of the London brewers and set up a network of agents, initially in India and subsequently in Britain. Michael Bass, when accused in Parliament of being a monopolist, stated with pride 'that he sent 100,000 barrels of beer annually to London and did not own a single public-house'.[52]

Advertising had been an important step forward for Hodgson, but he did not have the Burton brewers' flair for turning publicity to good advantage. He also failed to establish a network of agencies, having only four agents in the whole country, in Liverpool, Hull, Southampton and London. A fellow brewer said that 'it was well known that the orders Mr. Hodgson received were fully as many as he could execute',[53] indicating that the brewery was working to capacity and probably needed investment. Hodgson's response seems to have lacked vigour, but perhaps by this time, in his late 40s and with no son to hand over to, he had lost interest in the business. In 1843, he sold out to another brewer, Edwin Abbott, who described himself as the 'sole surviving partner of this long celebrated establishment'.[54] Hodgson's name was kept for the beer, the value of the brand being apparent. Abbott began a new advertising campaign in India and in 1845 it was reported in the 'Commercial Intelligence from Bombay' of *The Times* that although Allsopp and Bass still dominated the market, 'Hodgson appears determined to recover his position'.[55] However, this seems to have had little success and production of Hodgson's Pale Ale continued to decline through the 1850s, until in 1859 a single line advertisement read 'Abbott's Bow Brewery: expressly for private families'.[56] In 1862, Abbot was declared bankrupt and the Bow Brewery closed. Bass and Allsopp continued to increase production, trebling their output every decade. By 1870, Allsopp was second only to Bass, whose brewery was the largest in the world, producing 48 million gallons of beer annually.[57]

Conclusion

Hodgson's Pale Ale, which had been a fixture of the British Empire, had lost its dominance of the Indian market to Bass and Allsopp, and then failed in the British market. The Burton brewers seemed to have more appetite for the competition. The arrival of the railway connection undoubtedly helped the Burton brewers, but that did not remove the inherent advantage that Bow brewery enjoyed in its proximity to the docks. Both Allsopp and Bass had the expense of maintaining large London storage depots, complete with rail access. The Burton brewers had one advantage, which was the breweries' water supply, but it was their careful scientific approach to improvements in brewing techniques that capitalised on this fact. Their beer had a dry bitter taste and contrasted with the sweet taste of mild ale and the thick, dark texture of porter, usually drawn from the barrel into a pewter tankard. Thus they were able to deliver a bottle of clean-tasting beer that looked good in a clear glass and that was attractive to the aspirant middle classes. It was a beer for its time.

The constant stream of East India Company servants returning to nineteenth-century Britain brought back tastes for exotic foods, including mulligatawny soup, curry and pale ale. Both Hodgson and the Burton brewers sought to exploit this potential market in Britain by advertising their beer as 'Indian pale ale'. The Burton brewers were more successful, using the methods developed in India. They coupled a vigorous marketing campaign with a national distribution network of agencies for the supply of bottled beer. This revolutionised the brewing trade by circumventing the traditional system of public houses, creating Britain's first 'brewing town'.

The role of the Indian community in these developments, while elusive, can be found in their rejection of Western cultural values. Their reluctance to buy British-manufactured goods resulted in the loss of the Indian monopoly by the East India Company, which was then reduced to governing the country as a surrogate arm of the state. The well-paid army officers and civil servants stationed in India were the principal customers for Indian pale ale. This massive bureaucracy, which was funded by taxes from Indian peasants, was superimposed on the country and never part of Indian culture. Instead, it was the British who adapted to the Indian way of life, creating an Anglo-Indian sub-culture where India pale ale developed into an iconic feature that spread throughout the British Empire. The final irony came when this product, designed for the Anglo-Indian market, was reintroduced to its birthplace in London, from where it proceeded to transform the British brewing industry.

Thus, Indian pale ale followed the trade routes of the growing British Empire, a reassuring symbol of the mother country in remote areas of foreign lands, gaining a brand identity that would be envied even today. The use of the Anglo-Saxon 'ale' united the ancient tradition of Britain with the unfamiliarity of India, encapsulating the concept of metropole and colony in a single phrase. The development of brand names allowed devotees of a particular product to attach iconic status to their particular preference, whether it be from Hodgson, Allsopp or Bass. In Britain, the idea of empire could now be 'packaged' into products where the strange and exotic had been tamed, where India could be experienced with the consumption of a curry, pilau rice and a bottle of Indian pale ale. This is a small but important example of the industrial, commercial and cultural enrichment of Britain through the interaction with its empire.

Notes

1. Buettner, 'Going for an Indian', pp. 865–6.
2. Parliamentary Papers, 1773 (House of Commons 34), p. 103; *The Times*, 17 November 1787.
3. Combrune, *Essay on Brewing*, p. 190.
4. Combrune, *Theory and Practice of Brewing*, p. 280.
5. In 1835, the crew of the *Stirling Castle* was shipwrecked off the north coast of Australia. Cast ashore and without fresh water, they shared one eighteen-gallon barrel of Hodgson's Pale Ale between them until it ran out, when they 'shared out the hops and grounds at the bottom of the barrel, which they chewed in order to create moisture' (Eaton, *Shipwreck*, p. 30).
6. Farrington, *Biographical Index*, p. 383; Hardy, *Register of Ships*, pp. 143, 153, 157, 159, 169; *Calcutta Gazette*, 22 September and 14 November 1793.
7. Seton-Carr, *Selections From Calcutta Gazettes*, p. 550.
8. Sir Evan Cotton, *East Indiamen, the East India Company's Maritime Service*, London: The Batchworth Press, 1949, p. 33.
9. Cotton, *East Indiamen*, p. 33; Hardy, *Register of Ships*, p. 144.
10. Webster, *Gentlemen Capitalists*, p. 68; Hardy, *Register of Ships*, p. 137.

11. Lynn, *Improved System of Telegraphic Communication*.
12. 'Bell's Monthly Compendium', p. 26.
13. Parliamentary Papers, 1819, 'Minutes taken (in session 1818) before the Committee To whom the Petition of several Inhabitants of *London* and its vicinity, complaining of the very high price of and inferior quality of BEER, was referred to examine the matter thereof, and report the same, with their Observations to the House', p. 45.
14. *The Times*, 25 August 1817, 18 November 1817, 13 May 1818, 14 February 1820.
15. Mathias, *Brewing Industry*, p. 190; Tizard, *Theory and Practice of Brewing*, pp. 522–3; Molyneux, *Burton-on-Trent*, pp. 230–1; Wilson, *Review of External Commerce*, pp. 14–15.
16. Mathias, *Brewing Industry*, pp. 191–2; Wilson, *Review of External Commerce*, pp. 14–15.
17. Bushnan, *Burton and Its Bitter Beer*, pp. 104–5, 108; Tizard, *Theory and Practice of Brewing*, p. 524.
18. Harrison, *Drink and the Victorians*, p. 65.
19. Bushnan, *Burton and Its Bitter Beer*, p. 109; *Liverpool Mercury*, 4 March 1825.
20. Mathias, *Brewing Industry*, p. 192; Protz, *Ale Trail*, p. 66; Spiller, *Victorian Public Houses*, p. 25.
21. Bushnan, *Burton and Its Bitter Beer*, pp. 102–3.
22. Dickens, 'Something to be Done in India', p. 106; Postans, *Western India*, p. 167.
23. Marshal, 'British Society in India', pp. 93–4.
24. James, *The Commissioner*, p. 79.
25. Leach, *Rambles along the Styx*, p. 22.
26. Forsyth, *History of the Captivity of Napoleon*, p. 237.
27. *South African Commercial Advertiser*, 30 March 1824.
28. 'Punch in the East', *Punch, or the London Charivari*, 8 (1845), p. 31.
29. Espinasse, *Literary Recollections and Sketches*, p. 151.
30. Mignan, *Winter Journey through Russia*, p. 197.
31. Tolfrey, *Sportsman in Canada*, p. 76.
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3

The Control of Port Services by International Companies in the Macaronesian Islands (1850–1914)

Miguel Suárez Bosa

The focus of this chapter is on the role of the Atlantic Macaronesian islands (in particular the Canary Islands and Cape Verde) in the supply of services to international maritime vessels during the period that has been labelled the 'first globalisation', which lasted from the middle of the nineteenth century until the first third of the twentieth. A connecting thread in this was the supply of coal to steamships – an activity that was undertaken primarily by foreign firms and, in particular, the English.

Port services are essential for maritime transport. It is widely accepted that transport (as 'social overhead capital') was a basic component of economic growth from the Industrial Revolution onwards, and maritime transport in particular has played a fundamental part in the development of trade. Technological advances in steam navigation, such as high-pressure boilers, propellers and turbines, greatly increased the potential speed and range of ships; but this required a powerful source of energy, which was enabled through the generalised use of coal. At the same time, there was a need for appropriate construction techniques and materials, thereby allowing for the construction of bigger and more complex vessels.[1]

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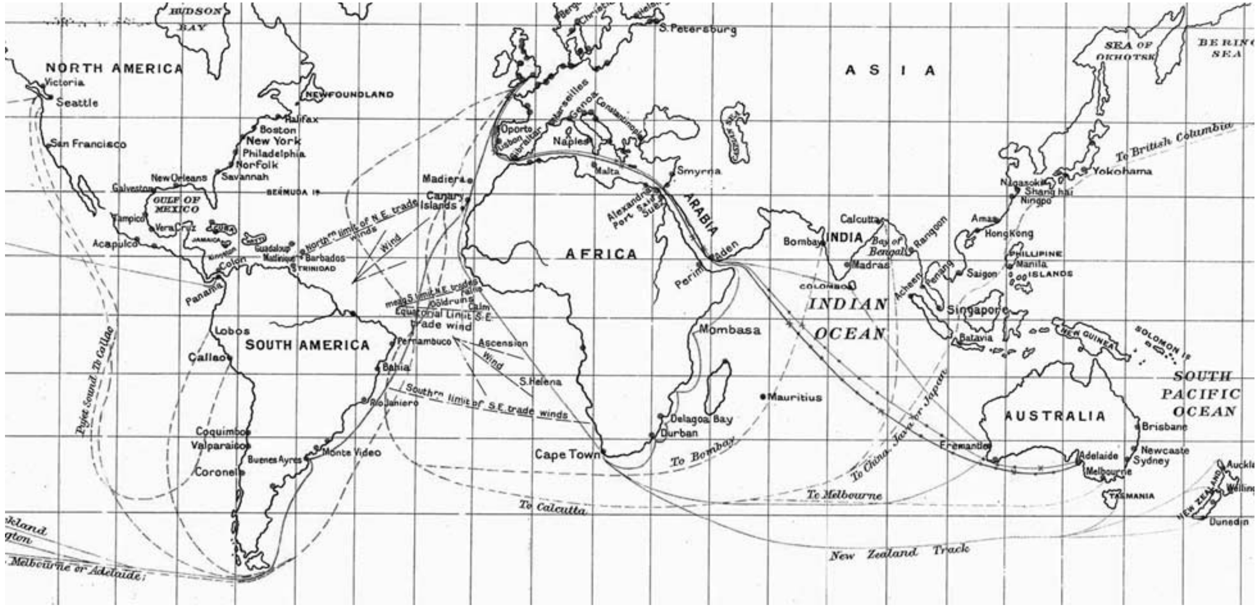
Given the limited sailing range of early steamships, conveniently located supply stations along the length of trading routes were essential in that they allowed ships' holds to be occupied by merchandise rather than by large amounts of fuel (see Map 3.1). The strategic position of the Iberian Atlantic islands in the southern North Atlantic (Madeira, the Canary Islands and Cape Verde, and to a lesser degree the Azores) during the steamship age – situated as they were around the mid-point of the Atlantic trading routes – made them highly attractive as way-stations, not only for resupplying coal, but also for resupplying fresh goods and water for the ships plying the routes between Europe and the rest of the world. These proved to be ideal servicing stations, where institutional circumstances and changes enabled lower transaction costs, thereby improving trade profits.

All this should be placed in the socio-economic context of the nineteenth century. In the 1800s, European economic expansion occurred alongside the processes that had their origins in the Industrial Revolution and in the momentum created by the capitalist economy. Transportation infrastructure (e.g. ports, railways and the telegraph) had become essential elements for strong commercial development and, consequently, were sectors that experienced rapid growth through abundant and available capital investments. These investments also arrived in the African Atlantic islands, in particular directed to agriculture, infrastructure (such as water and gas) and the service sector (hotels and restaurants).

It is in this context that this chapter is placed, while exploring Atlantic history in the context of the world system.[2] The first section analyses how income arising from the situation primarily favoured Cape Verde until the middle of the nineteenth century. However, as is seen in the second, an improved institutional framework resulted in being beneficial to the Canary Islands, despite their disadvantageous strategic situation along ocean trade routes. The third section analyses the international companies that held monopolies in services, and which rationally took advantage of the free port status to the point where the Canary Islands became a supporting link in the expansion of European capitalist imperialism. Finally, the chapter finishes with a number of brief conclusions.



Map 3.1 Track chart of the world, showing some of the chief steamships and sailing ship routes and principal coaling stations
Note: Each day's run is marked with a dot, each week's run with a cross. Points indicate coaling stations. Continuous lines indicate steamship tracks; broken lines indicate sailing ship tracks.
Source: Adapted from Kirkaldy, *British Shipping*.

The initial advantage of Cape Verde in the coal trade

The Cape Verde archipelago, after a deep economic crisis at the beginning of the nineteenth century, suddenly found itself in the 1830s with an important comparative advantage. Given the technology available at the time, steamships were readily able to reach the islands, making them the best location for a coaling station in the Atlantic routes between Europe and South America and, to a lesser extent, the route around the Cape of Good Hope.[3]

During the nineteenth century, the Cape Verde island of San Vincent (and Mindelo Bay) went from being a marginal and sparsely populated area to becoming a dynamic centre of demographic and economic growth around which a large part of Cape Verde life revolved.[4] The cause of this sudden growth originated in the flow of merchandise and passengers from both sides of the Atlantic, and the ships that used the island as a stopover. At the same time, San Vincent became a communications centre for postal services and, after 1874, long-distance telegraph services between the European metropolitan countries and their colonies in Africa and South America.

What is considered the first phase of the contemporary development of port services took place from the 1850s onwards. The port areas followed the British model of concentrating dedicated spaces for merchandise and coal, as well as the creation of esplanades and service piers. Initially, Portuguese colonial ports in Cape Verde benefited from the income that came from supplying 86.6 per cent of coal between 1856 and 1880, compared with 13.4 per cent in the Canary Islands. The need to obtain a profit from merchandise and passenger transport, along with reducing fuel costs, led the shipping companies to only purchase the coal needed to reach Cape Verde, where the price was lower than in South American ports. Also favouring Cape Verde were the natural conditions of Mindelo Bay; internal company tactics that assisted shipping enterprises in overcoming obstacles such as higher tax rates, greater customs and sanitary restrictions; limited access to internal markets; and lack of potable water or public investment (see Figure 3.1).

Despite the importance of shipping to Cape Verde, a three per cent state tariff was imposed on the import and export of merchandise (including combustible minerals), which was added to local fees – as in the 100 réis-per-tonne coal tax established in 1854 by the municipality of Mindelo and raised to 300 réis (1.2 shillings) in

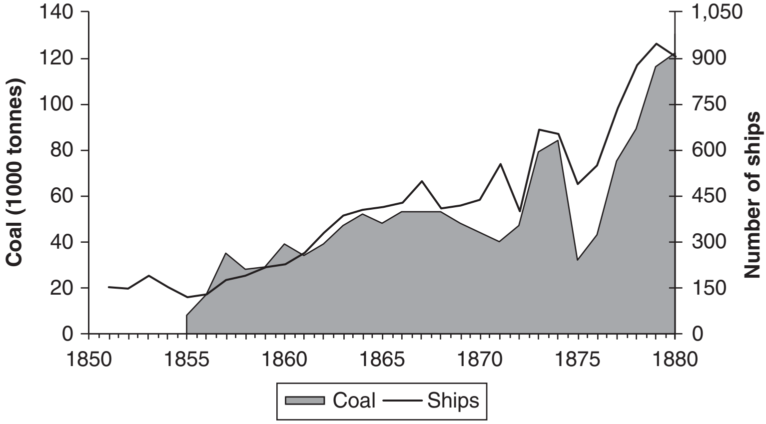


Figure 3.1 Long distance maritime traffic and coal imports into San Vicente (Cape Verde)
Source: Almeida, *O Porto Grande de S. Vicente*.

1880. Although public intervention undoubtedly contributed to the economic development of the province, especially commercial and agricultural activities, nevertheless specific fiscal and administrative obstacles could not be eliminated.

Investments and salary costs also had an important role, given the labour-intense nature of port activity. In this regard, three aspects stand out when examining the port of Mindelo: first, port infrastructure was built almost entirely through private initiative; second, comparatively lower salary costs (relative to those in the Canary Islands) contributed to the rise in profits despite lower consumption; and finally, companies adopted measures to concentrate and/or distribute services offered among firms so as to avoid internal competition while, at the same time, increasing international competitiveness and maximising profits.

In Mindelo, foreign companies quickly took control of maritime services. John Rendall & Co. and Royal Mail Steam Packets obtained the concession granted by the Portuguese government in 1850 for the installation of coal depots. Shortly afterwards, Patent Fuel (1851), Thomas & Miller (1851) and Visger & Miller obtained the properties and representations of the Royal Mail Steam. This business structure, however, did not persevere. After successfully buying out the assets of rival firms, the business became part of Patent Fuel and

Visger & Miller in 1857. These two firms, in turn, merged a year later with the formation of Millers & Nephew.[5] From this point (until the establishment of the Cory Brothers & Company Limited) the new company would become the main intermediary and coal supplier in the mid-Atlantic region. This concentration accelerated much-needed private investment in infrastructure, such as wharves and, above all, modern maritime vessels – for example, larger wooden and iron barges and tugboats. This enabled a reduction in the transaction costs relating to the time need for layovers, which was a determining factor in regular navigation.

By the same token, the Canary Island ports began to supply coal in 1838, following the Royal Decree of 11 November of that year in which the Port of Santa Cruz was officially given the status of coal-supplying port, enjoying practically no customs tariffs, since coal-supply operations were subjected to a single storage charge of just 2 per cent. However, even after the declaration of Free Ports in 1852 – and more significantly the construction of large port infrastructures in Gran Canaria and Tenerife – only 62 steamships (50 from the United Kingdom and 12 from France) visited these ports, generating an overall coal supply of just 4,837 tonnes. It was not until the construction of the major ports in Las Palmas de Gran Canaria and Santa Cruz de Tenerife in the last third of the nineteenth century that large quantities of coal for shipping began to be stored in the Canary Islands (Figure 3.2).

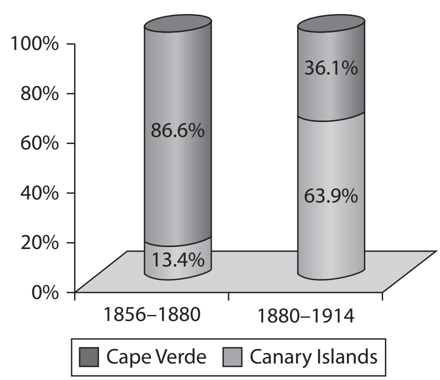


Figure 3.2 Percentage of coal provided in Cape Verde and the Canary Islands in two periods
Source: Suárez Bosa and Cabrera Armas, 'Competencia en los servicios portuarios'.

In the Canary Island ports, the strategy that was pursued by port-service businesses during this phase was similar to that described by San Vicente, although there was one difference. While in Mindelo, the services offered to ships was dominated by British investors and monopolised by one firm, in the Canary Islands, Spanish, local or 'old' foreign firms with several years of residence in the islands predominated. During this stage, the port of Santa Cruz received the majority of vessels undertaking transatlantic and long-distance voyages, both under steam and sail. Their agents, in order to reduce costs and limit competition, wove alliances and arranged for coal to be supplied by individual suppliers, consortia or partnerships, such as Bruce Hamilton & Co., or Le Brum & Davidson.[6] Operations were characterised by the lack of resources, to the extent that the loading and unloading of coal was done using small rowboats that embarked from a small government pier, the beach or a small wharf that was constructed in 1857 by Ghirlanda & Cumella. The supply of coal was somewhat precarious and did not exceed the 200 tonnes supplied annually until the 1860s, when demand from steamships belonging to the fishing company Marré des deux Mondes and, shortly afterwards, the Trasatlántica Española laid the groundwork for later expansion.

The 'benefits' of a free-trade framework during the first globalisation

The second phase in the development of port services in the Atlantic archipelago began at the end of the 1870s with the transport and communication revolution. The overall effect was that the movement of merchandise, passengers and capital intensified as prices dropped in transportation, manufactured goods and raw materials. The consequence was an international division of work, which had to adapt to the conditions of individual countries and companies. In the maritime transportation sector, the response of the shipping lines was the creation of maritime conferences where companies divided market share and set prices. In the ports, agents who provided support to shipping traffic also formed agreements that, in the majority of cases, increased the average size of the company, reduced competition and regulated prices.

In San Vicente, as in the Canary Islands, the new phase began with the end-of-century crisis and the establishment of Cory – an

English company with mining interests. This situation intensified in the middle of the 1880s with the arrival of the Anglo-Brazilian enterprise Wilson Sons, which was founded in San Salvador de Bahia in 1837 and, despite moving to London in 1887, maintained a strong presence in South American ports. This phase finally culminated with the arrival of the English company Hull Blyth & Co., which held a large network of coal depots around the world. However, the arrival of Cory set off an initial rise in competition in Cape Verde that resulted in the revitalisation of traffic and supplies, but, with the merger of both companies and the creation of Miller Cory & Co., the business remained (until 1875) in the hands of a single company. This again changed when the Anglo-Brazilian company Wilson began its activity in the port after buying up a concession and building a floating depot. Likewise, a concession granted to the German company Brewer & Co. altered, yet again, business strategy. As a result, Cory requested that British officials discuss the matter with their Portuguese counterparts, which resulted in the concession's annulment in 1887. Two years later, both companies merged into Miller & Cory Vert Islands Ltd.[7]

In this manner, the coal supply in the Cape Verde port remained in the hands of a duopoly in which each company maintained ownership of its installations and vessels, but in which the depot storage was a de facto cartel. That said, in contrast to the previous period, the port did not maintain its previous hegemonic position. At the beginning of the 1890s, both traffic and supplies fell. Nevertheless, companies were reluctant to change their pricing policy given that they could count upon assured traffic from the European–South American–European route, thereby guaranteeing high profits.

The rapid social and economic decline within Cape Verde that caused a reduction in traffic raised alarms and led for calls for government intervention. Some measures were taken, such as reducing institutional obstacles to maritime traffic, and tonnage taxes on coal were reduced. In 1879, taxes had risen from 250 réis per tonne (one shilling) from the previous rate of just 30 réis. Time restrictions on sanitary and customs visits were restricted, non-commercial vessels were exempt from fees and attempts were made to reduce collusive practices to give incentives for new bidders.[8]

The success of these measures was relative. In 1895, the inauguration of a new coal-storage depot belonging to the Companhia de Sâo Vicente de Cabo Verde (which was nominally Portugese but held by Hull) led to a fall in average coal prices from 34 to 19 shillings per tonne, a price matching that of the Canary Islands. That said, this 'competition' among coal suppliers was short-lived, with the authorities declaring that 'the deposits are already united'. However, competition meant that the market would be divided again over a price agreement, as had happened previously.[9] However, the negative effects (such as a decline in traffic and supplies as well as a rise in unemployment) were delayed because of the international conjunction of wars in Cuba and South Africa, as well as the commercial and migratory flows in the Atlantic. At the turn of the century and the end of the conflicts, maritime activity declined, regulating the San Vicente stopover to ships headed to South America and Portuguese colonies in Africa and Asia. The port of Dakar even became a competitor and went, in a short period, from supplying 50,000 tonnes of coal in 1900 to 100,000 tonnes in 1904, 212,000 in 1910 and 577,000 tonnes on the eve of the Great War.

Institutional factors now became a key element in this process, and the share of shipping leaned in favour of the Canary Islands (Figures 3.2 and 3.3). Portuguese administrators, despite the measures

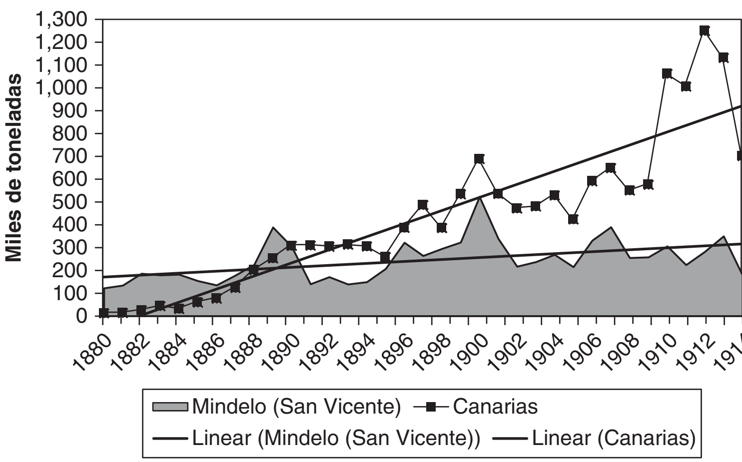


Figure 3.3 Coal supplies to steamships in Cape Verde and Canaries
Note: Supplies in Mindelo (San Vicente) and for Canary Islands, in Las Palmas de Gran Canaria y Santa Cruz de Tenerife.
Source: Suárez Bosa and Cabrera Armas, 'Competencia en los servicios portuarios'.

mentioned above, maintained elevated tariffs on the coal as they considered that the cost advantage could not be undermined. Moreover, as the Portuguese lived off the passive income from taxes, making the port profitable was left in the hands of foreign firms, as we have seen. These companies chose to maintain the prices for services, a policy which was built upon the notion of the unalterable advantages of Cape Verde's geographical position. Also, the international scope of these businesses, as direct or indirect owners of many coal depots around the world, meant that forming trade cartels would assure greater benefits.

In addition to this, the Canary Islands' free-port status gave the region a considerable advantage with respect to competing Atlantic way-stations.[10] Operating costs in the Canary Islands were comparatively lower, both in comparison with Cape Verde and Madeira. In 1894, for example, ships arriving in the Canary Islands to restock coal avoided tax charges if they entered the port for 'coal, water or victualling', paying just 3s.4d. to enter and leave the port, 28s.2d. for pilotage and a 4s.2d. consular fee. In 1896, ships were paying just 25s. per tonne of coal supplied.[11] Nevertheless, each port had to share this hegemony with the other island ports, which led to greater inter-island competition, as is reflected in the advertising material from this era. The Consul of Tenerife, for example, denied that the increase in traffic in the Canary Islands was to the detriment of traffic in Madeira. To prove his point, he provided the following sets of figures about shipping activity in Funchal Port: in 1886, 618 vessels with an overall registered tonnage of 8,887,497 tonnes visited the port and were supplied with 76,495 tonnes of coal; four years later, 645 vessels with an overall registered tonnage of 1,002,770 tonnes loaded 67,574 tonnes of coal. However, these amounts were smaller than those supplied by the Canary Islands ports: some 333,919 tonnes in the year 1890.[12]

At times the rivalry between the ports intensified or diminished for several reasons, but competitiveness definitely existed, as can be demonstrated by a number of facts. For example, an increase in customs tariffs in Madeira in 1880 led to an increase in prices on the part of the supply company – in this case the Blandy Brothers – to the advantage of the Canary Island coaling companies. The port management resorted to a wide range of tactics, including inventing false reports about the economic situation and bribing the ships' captains or chief engineers. At the same time, coaling companies had a number of ways of attracting customers, such as price reductions or preferential treatment towards ship captains. In any case, such competitiveness as existed was relative since most of the time the Atlantic ports were governed by cartels that emerged from an agreement known as the Atlantic Islands Depot Arrangement (AIDA), which survived into the 1930s.[13]

The complete consolidation of Canary Island ports as a logistical platform took place from 1880 onwards. Alongside institutional aspects, other factors should be added: technological advances made steam engines more efficient, giving ships a wider navigational range and placed the Canary Islands in a favourable position; the intensification of public investment in navigational infrastructure (in contrast to that carried out by the Portuguese in Cape Verde); individual business strategies augmented commerce as a wider and more competitive range of services was offered in which the price and stopover time became determining factors; the shipping lines' preference for the Canary Islands, especially by Elder and the Germans as a way-station in the Europe–Africa–Europe routes; and finally, the possibilities that the business could offer, above all, after a fiduciary system was introduced in 1883. Also favouring the shipping lines (as well as their transport agents and the consignment of these services) was the larger size of the Canary Island market and the potential of new agricultural crops (such as tomato and bananas) in meeting consumer demands as well as providing European farmers with potato seeds.

Similarly, the outcome was different in the Canary Islands, despite the oligopoly in port activity. Competition from San Vicente and Madeira meant that business strategies were accompanied by other key elements in attracting traffic in this zone: coal, water and food supplies were offered at an inferior price along with technical support and improving a general set of services; the layover time in Canary Island ports was considerably reduced in the last third of the nineteenth century; and, equally important, the Canaries offered lodging for crew and passengers wanting shore leave. Central to this was the entry of new companies of British origin in supplying coal and freshwater supplies – a tendency that shifted to German firms in the twentieth century.[14]

At the same time, the state incrementally intervened and modernised infrastructure with new and modern warehouses and depots, esplanades, stone wharves and tugboats to bring to the coast large barges and water tankers fitted with pumps. In 1897, the coal companies themselves expressed that coal stations built in island ports through enormous sacrifices would have to make a pledge to stay competitive.[15]

Finally, in Cape Verde, fuel importation continued to be subject to tax payment, while in the Canary Islands only half the unloading fee was required as payment to advisors at Las Palmas de Gran Canaria and Santa Cruz de Tenerife Port Board of Works in the twentieth century. This situation made it possible for coal and other services to be offered at a lower price than Cape Verde.[16]

The company as a key factor in port services and in Canary Island hegemony

In the port of Santa Cruz de Tenerife, the main port services were in the hands of three companies: Hamilton & Co., Juan Cumella and Ghirlanda Hermanos. These three firms were involved in consignment, agency, banking and insurance while supplies, freshwater, ship repairs and salvage ships were arranged. This situation would last until the late 1880s. However, in the early 1890s the landscape changed with the arrival of a new player in the port: British businessman Alfred L Jones, who took control of the powerful shipping company Elder Dempster & Co.[17] In 1893, new coal depots were built, and in the following years, the company diversified into other areas such as shipyards, workshops, freshwater supplies and laundry services. These activities were channelled through Elder Dempster & Co. subsidiaries, the Teneriffe Coaling Co. and the Teneriffe Steam Laundry Co. respectively, and positively contributed to the creation of a dynamic port area in Tenerife.

The two groups mentioned formed a de facto duopoly as they were the only two companies offering major services. Although they did not become a coal supply cartel, they did, however, find this arrangement suitable for the water supply and formed, in London, the Teneriffe Water Co. Elder Dempster & Co. also invested in passenger transport, through participating in Camacho's Union (a society created in 1905) and in a rescue-boat venture from 1906 onwards. Maritime traffic continued its upward climb, taking advantage of the slowly declining price of coal, the better and faster services provided and, at the turn of the twentieth century, increased demand as a result of the Boer War.

This period for the neighbouring and competing port of Las Palmas was even better. In effect, the declaration by the Spanish state that it was a port of refuge (an administrative category that opened the way for important investments), funds earmarked for seawall construction, the increase of maritime shipping that was derived from imperialist expansion and competition between companies (mining or otherwise) for access to coal depots led to the creation of companies (the majority of which were foreign) that engaged in provision and supply – although these also extended their businesses into production, commerce and finance.

In this sense, the main port services, starting with the consignment of supplies, were in the hands of foreign businesses, with the exception of the Anglo-Hispanic Miller & Co. (which had been present in the island since 1854), Salvador Cuyás & Prat and other minor Spanish and French shipping consignees such as Miguel Curbelo or Juan Ladeveze. Among these firms, Elder Dempster, Blandy Brothers & Co. stands out, having established a shipping agency in Madeira in 1862 and later in the Canary Islands as Swanston & Co. These entities were at the forefront of the first investment boom and the assault on the hegemony of Mindelo and Santa Cruz de Tenerife.[18]

Nevertheless, a series of developments reorganised the business landscape and created a trend towards cooperation. This was a period when commerce was apportioned, both in Las Palmas and in Mindelo, where supply companies shared the coal business of the shipping lines they represented and fixed the supply price. This, however, could not prevent the entry of new foreign companies into island ports. The rise of competition and, with it, lower profit margins in coal-supply contracts made with shipping lines led to a new business pact in 1903 with the creation of the Atlantic Islands Depot Arrangement that affected every coal-depot company in the archipelago.

Pursuant to this convention, as was adopted by shipping companies in other maritime conferences, a reference price was set for carbon sales as well as quotas for companies and ports.[19] In the case that a company exceeded the set limits, they were required to pay a financial compensation, which would be divided among those firms that had not reached the quota. On the other hand, the association

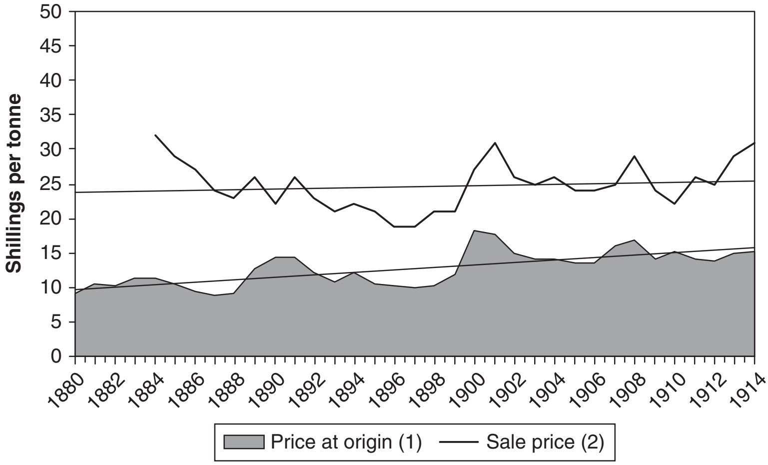


Figure 3.4 Average price of coal supplies to steamships in the Canary Islands
Notes: (1) Price f.o.b. in Nadal Farreras, *Comercio exterior*; (2) Price c.i.f. supplied to ships in Santa Cruz de Tenerife, in Cabrera Armas y Días de la Paz, 'El tráfico marítimo'.
Source: Suárez Bosa y Cabrera Armas, 'Competencia en los servicios portuarios'.

was not limited to coal and extended into other business such as freshwater supplies, and placed another obstacle in the path of rival companies trying to enter the market.

While the agreement affected the profit margins of coal companies (see Figure 3.4), it was beneficial for the Canary Islands as a larger number of supply and consignment companies were in operation, with six in Las Palmas (the main beneficiary), four in Funchal, several in Santa Cruz and three in San Vincent. The concentration, however, could neither prevent new competitors from entering the Island's market nor stop attempts to break the duopoly in Santa Cruz. Similarly, this agreement was not able to stop the competition that would supposedly come from new depots that opened in Funchal in 1908 and Dakar in 1909. Dakar, the more competitive of the two, experienced a growing business, especially with Italian companies engaged in trade with South America, who chose this port over the Canary Islands or Cape Verde for provisioning. However, from 1904 the Canary Islands counted on a new company, the Sociedad Insulana de Transportes Marítimos Ltd., which was a subsidiary of De la Deutsches Kohlen Depot Gesellschaft.

In the Canary Island ports, changes were associated with German expansion, the intensification of Hull's presence and the separation of Hamilton and Cory in Santa Cruz de Tenerife. All said, the changes in ownership of established companies culminated in 1907 with the merger of Wilson Sons with the Ocean Group of Collieries and the founding of Ocean Coal & Wilson's Limited.[20] These variations began in 1906 with the concession granted to Woermann Linie in Las Palmas despite British and French pressure on Spain to revoke it. The entry of the German company was an indication of the nation's growing prominence in international maritime transport and, in the context of the Canary Islands, a sign of the shipping lines' growing interest in the archipelagos' marketplace, which shadowed a rising German demand for agricultural products and the range of manufactured goods being offered in the islands.

As had happened previously with Wilson, Woermann began to compete intensely with established British firms by selling coal at below market prices. To their detriment, the British companies relented, so as to avoid greater loses, and agreed to cede to the Germans a predetermined percentage of business, resulting in Woermann supplying approximately 15 per cent of coal sent to the ships in Las Palmas between 1906 and 1914. Moreover, the admission of the German company into AIDA benefited the economy of the Canary Islands, given the large increase of German ships and the increment of coal supplies.

In 1909 – when Miller modernised the installations with a suspended electric train that reduced costs for the coal company – the coal company Hull opened an office for the Canary Islands, the Compañía Carbonera de Las Palmas, S.L., with the objective of directly running the supply service in Las Palmas that, until that point, it had held through a partnership with Miller, through the Las Palmas Coaling Co. This would lead to the end of the agreement and provoke the exit of Miller from AIDA and the so-called 'coal war' that placed Miller on one side and the other companies on the other. Interestingly, this confrontation (along with other factors such as sector strikes in Tenerife and Cape Verde or the cholera epidemic that broke out in Madeira) stressed the importance of this port when the evolution of the coal supply in Macaronesian ports is taken into consideration.[21]

The end of the conflict came in late 1912 with the return of Miller to AIDA. Normality returned to the three archipelagos, although the establishment of a new German company in Santa Cruz de Tenerife could not be prevented. While this firm did not begin operating until 1913, by 1914 it was supplying 15 per cent of the coal in Santa Cruz. Formed in Santa Cruz in 1912, it was the subsidiary of the German company Deutsche Kohlen Depotin, which was owned by a consortium of 24 German shipping companies, a number of Norwegian, Swedish and Dutch lines and a group of the most important coal mines, including the Coal Union of Rhineland-Westphalia.

Finally, it should not be forgotten that the early introduction of liquid fuel, such as oil and gasoline, to the islands (particularly Las Palmas, for both shipping and re-export to the African continent) was a process that only consolidated after the First World War and that prompted the intensification of commercial traffic between the United States and West Africa. In this sense, it should be highlighted that both the supply and re-exportation were originally carried out by the main companies in the port as well as companies specialising in the new fuel, such as the Vacuum Oil Company that soon arrived. In San Vincent, according to the dates of the concessions, this new business began in 1919 with the inauguration of the above-mentioned facilities of Millers & Cory and Shell's Portuguese subsidiary, The Lisbon Fuel Company Coal & Oil, Limited.

Conclusions

The importance of the ports in the Macaronesian islands as stopovers for provisions and maritime services was confirmed by the mid-nineteenth century. In the age of steamships, the strategic position of the islands in the Atlantic Ocean made them undeniably appealing as way-stations for coal, food goods and freshwater supplies for the ships that plied the routes between Europe, Central and South America, Africa and Oceania.

From the above analysis, a conclusion can be drawn that there were two periods in port services, regardless of competition and/or complementary services between ports. One period is between 1850 and 1880, where the initiative corresponds to the port of Cape Verde, which was aided by income from the situation. The period from 1880 to 1914, however, was dominated by the Canary Islands as a result of a favourable institutional framework that was better adapted to the needs of the expanding capitalist economy. There are also features common to both archipelagos: the adoption by agents of collusive strategies to the point of creating cartels for services offered as a means of overcoming problems related to their business' size; reduction of administrative costs and establishment of unified administrative controls; reduction in market competition; and (despite the existence of nuances in 'captive' traffic that was gained from technical factors that favoured one route over another) increasing competitiveness in international traffic.

Notes

1. North, 'Ocean Freight'; Ville, *Transport and Development*; Lilley, 'El progreso tecnológico'; Jackson, 'The Ports'.
2. Wallerstein, *Análisis de sistemas-mundo*.
3. Kirkaldy, *British Shipping*; Zimmermann, *Ocean Shipping*.
4. Bonaparte Figueira, *Subsidios*; Carreira, *Demografia Caboverdiana*.
5. Bentley Duncan, *Atlantic Islands*, p. 162; Correia e Silva, *Nos Tempos do Porto Grande do Mindelo*, pp. 101, 109–10.
6. Guimerá Ravina, *La Casa Hamilton*.
7. Almeida, *O Porto Grande de S. Vicente*; Fundo de Desenvolvimiento Nacional, *Linhas gerais da história*.
8. Fundo de Desenvolvimiento Nacional, *Linhas gerais da história*, p. 55.
9. Fundo de Desenvolvimiento Nacional, *Linhas gerais da história*, pp. 54–5; Correia e Silva, *Nos Tempos do Porto Grande do Mindelo*, p. 183. The Companhia de Sâo Vicente de Cabo Verde – also known as the Saint Vincent (Cape Verde Islands) Coaling Company Limited – was founded in 1891, and obtained the permit to install warehouses, pier and ground (Fundo de Desenvolvimiento Nacional, *Linhas gerais da história*, pp. 54–5; Correia e Silva, *Nos Tempos do Porto Grande do Mindelo*, pp. 178–88).
10. Bourgon Tinao, *Puertos Francos*.
11. Quintana Navarro, *Informes Consulares*, pp. 293, 307–476.
12. Foreign Office, 'Report on Social and Economic Conditions', p. 11.
13. Foreign Office, 'Report on Social and Economic Conditions', pp. 588, 600, 793; Trant, *Economic Conditions*, p. 33–5; Guimerá Ravina, *La Casa Hamilton*, pp. 171–3, 217, 235.
14. Suárez Bosa, 'Role of the Canary Islands'.
15. Memorias de la Compañía de Servicios del Puerto, S. A, cited by Cabrera Armas and Díaz de la Paz, 'Tráfico marítimo'.
16. Suárez Bosa, 'Role of the Canary Islands'.
17. Davies, *Trade Makers*; Carnero Lorenzo et al., 'Las redes empresariales extranjeras'.

18. Miller, *Canary Saga*; Rodríguez and Díaz de Quintana, *Miller y compañía*; Carnero Lorenzo and Nuez Yánez, ‘La empresa Blandy Brothers’; Blandy, *Blandy Family of Companies*.
19. Marx, *International Shipping Cartels*; Scott Morton, ‘Entry and Predation’; Valdaliso Gago, *Navegación regular de cabotaje*.
20. Suárez Bosa y Cabrera Armas, ‘Competencia en los servicios portuarios’.
21. Martín Hernández, *Tenerife*, pp. 205–6; Quintana Navarro, *Informes Consulares*, p. 793.

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4

Of Stocks and Barter: John Holt and the Kongo Rubber Trade, 1906–1910

Jelmer Vos

Not long after the Atlantic slave trade was phased out in the Kongo region south of the river Zaire in the 1860s, rubber came to dominate the regional export economy.[1] Vegetable oils, which had defined the economic transition from capturing slaves to producing commodities in many West African regions earlier in the century, were also exported from Kongo, as was cultivated coffee, but none of these commodities characterised the new economic era as much as extracted wild rubber. During the West-Central African rubber boom, which lasted from 1879 to 1913, Kongo formed the core of British commercial interests in this part of Africa, especially since Portuguese protectionist measures kept foreign traders out of the Angolan ports of Luanda and Benguela to the south. Of several British companies operating in Kongo since the mid-nineteenth century, however, only two firms from Liverpool managed to endure the competitive environment of the trade in commodities. One was the house of Hatton & Cookson, pioneers of 'legitimate' commerce in the wider Congo region. The other was a company managed by John Holt, who had built his fortune in the produce trade of the Bight of Biafra but had relatively little experience in West-Central Africa. Historians

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have neglected Holt's presence on the coast of West-Central Africa, although the Holt company archives are unique in the detail they provide on the rubber trade in this region. Using the records of Holt & Co., housed at the Liverpool Record Office, in combination with other primary sources, this chapter aims to reconstruct the history of the rubber trade in Kongo. It thus identifies and explains its distinctive reliance on barter, in contrast to the cash basis of the produce trade elsewhere in West Africa.

The chapter builds in particular on a collection of 'Coast Letter Extracts' dating from 1906 to 1911. Consisting of incoming correspondence from factory agents in Ambrizete, the small rubber port at the mouth of the Mbrije River, the letter extracts provide an inside view on the organisation of the trade between the Kongo interior and the coast of northern Angola. The primary task of the writers of these letters was to transmit information on local developments to the home firm in Liverpool, in order to keep the home manager up-to-date on commercial affairs and the state of the firm's investments in northern Angola. Most often they reflect on the complex commercial relations between African brokers and European merchants on the coast, but occasionally they also convey information received from Holt's agent located hundreds of miles inland in the Damba district. The authors expressed a particularly strong fascination with the African system of barter that characterised the trade in rubber at Ambrizete still at the start of the twentieth century. No European currencies were transacted. It will be argued here that barter was indeed a defining feature of the rubber trade, which set it apart from the cash-dominated trade in coffee and vegetable oils. In the conclusion, my findings from northern Angola will be discussed in relation to the standard view on the transition theme as laid out by A. G. Hopkins in his 1973 classic *An Economic History of West Africa*.[2]

Rubber in Northern Angola

The region that is currently Angola occupies an ambiguous position in African economic history. Since the era of the Atlantic slave trade, Angola has consistently stood at the fore of Africa's economic engagements with the wider commercial world. The online Transatlantic Slave Trade Database makes clear that more slaves were exported from Luanda than through any other port in the history of the Atlantic slave trade; Angola itself, meanwhile, was the largest regional supplier of slaves to the Americas. During the subsequent periods of legitimate commerce in the nineteenth century and of colonialism in the twentieth, furthermore, Angola was among the continent's leading producers of rubber and coffee. And yet, the economic history of Angola – and of West-Central Africa in general – is still very much underrepresented in the historiography of the continent. Although the publication of Joseph Miller's *Way of Death* in 1988 has laid a foundation for new research into the history of the Angolan slave trade, the produce trade that defined Angola's interaction with the world economy for much of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries remains largely ignored, especially in the English-language literature. True, in the larger West-Central African context, the history of rubber has received quite a bit of attention, but these studies have been almost entirely concentrated on the atrocious plundering of human and natural resources in the Congo Free State since the 1890s. It is often overlooked, however, that the West-Central African rubber boom started in Angola and predated the foundation of the Congo Free State in 1885, from which rubber exports overtook those from Angola only in 1900 (Figure 4.1), a year after Angolan output had

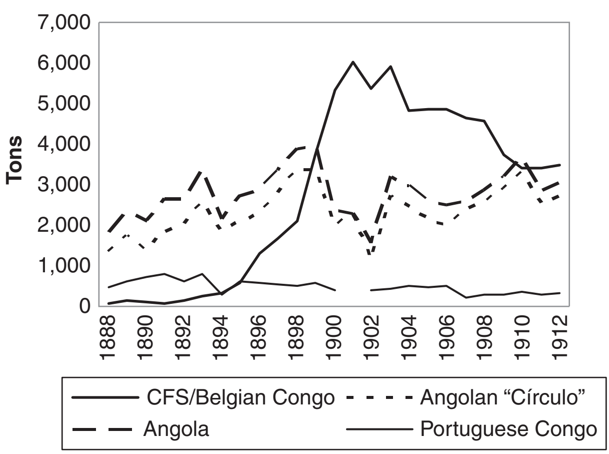
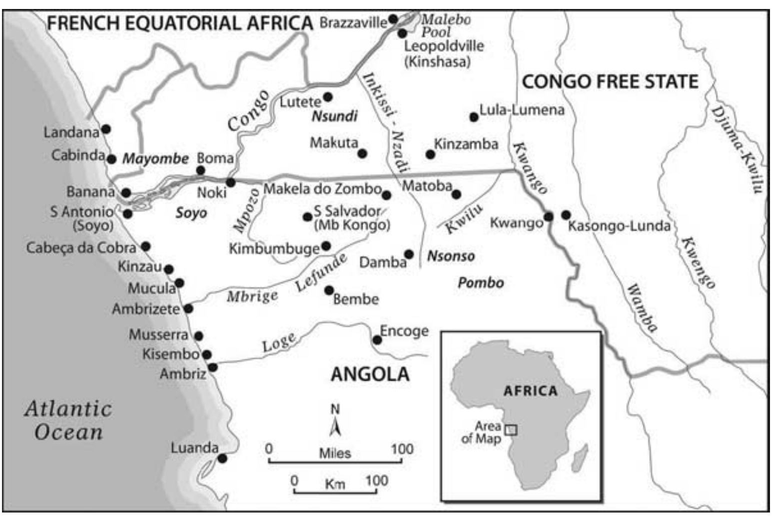


Figure 4.1 West-Central African rubber exports, 1888–1912
Note: Angola's 'Círculo' included the ports of Luanda, Novo Redondo, Benguela, Mossamedes and Ambriz.
Sources: Cardoso, *No Congo Português*; Mesquita, *Dados estatísticos*; Pereira, 'Um anno no Congo'; Waltz, *Das Konzessionswesen im Belgischen Kongo.*

reached its peak and was second globally after Brazil. A crucial difference between the two economies, moreover, was that from around 1900 part of the rubber from the Congo Free State was exploited (as in neighbouring French Congo) through a concessionary system based on forced labour, while the Angolan rubber trade was driven by free African entrepreneurship.[3]

Rubber was first exported through the ports north of Ambriz in 1867 (see Map 4.1). Ambriz was a coastal town that Portugal had occupied in 1855 and that remained Portugal's most northerly possession in West-Central Africa until the Berlin Conference of 1885.[4] These earliest exports coincided with the invention, in 1868, of rubber belts for bicycle wheels. Traders in the Portuguese possessions south of Ambriz responded swiftly to the opening of this new market, as rubber exports from Luanda and Benguela rose from just 759 kilograms in 1870 to more than 360 tons in 1872; the boom came in 1879, however, when Luanda's exports jumped from 275 to



Map 4.1 Lower Congo

Source: The map was originally created by Don Pirius and published in Benjamin N. Lawrance and Richard L. Roberts (eds), *Trafficking in Slavery's Wake: Law and the Experiences of Women and Children in Africa*, Athens: Ohio University Press, 2012 (Copyright © Benjamin N. Lawrance and Richard L. Roberts). This material is used by permission of Ohio University Press, www.ohioswallow.com.

1,416 tons. Seventeen years later, in 1896, rubber replaced coffee as Angola's most valuable export commodity. It would keep this position until the price crash of 1913, which was caused by the arrival on the world market of cheap, high-quality plantation rubber from Southeast Asia and which signified the end of the boom in wild rubber in Africa generally. Whereas in 1910 wild rubber, such as that produced in Brazil and Africa, still accounted for nearly 90 per cent of the global rubber production, in 1923 this percentage had dropped to less than ten.[5]

Luanda and Benguela were the main outlets for the Angolan rubber trade, and the Kongo ports accounted for only a quarter to a third of total output until 1893, when rubber exports from northern Angola reached a high of nearly 800 tons. After that, Kongo's share of Angolan rubber exports declined because of regional stagnation, which resulted, in part at least, from the economic policies pursued by the neighbouring Congo Free State. In particular the construction of the Matadi railway in the 1890s from the tidal lower Congo River to Malebo Pool and Léopoldville, the head of navigation on the vast interior basis of the river, diverted part of the rubber trade that had been carried out through ports in northern Angola.

In contrast to vegetable oils, rubber had a high value per unit of weight and could hence be transported profitably from regions relatively far inland, even by caravans of bearers carrying 30-kilo loads on their heads.[6] In northern Angola, tapping of the latex-bearing sap of woodland creepers seems to have started in the hinterland of Ambriz. Then a frontier of rubber tapping moved gradually inland as the tappers killed the sap-bearing creepers closer to the coast, reaching Mbanza Kongo, the heart of the old Kongo kingdom, around 1877. In the early 1880s, most of the rubber exported through the ports of northern Angola came from the savanna regions near the Kwango River, some 250 miles inland, which in the colonial period constituted a natural border between the Portuguese Congo district and the Congo Free State (and later, Belgian Congo). The most common rubber plants west of this frontier were the *Landolphia Owariensis* and the *Landolphia Florida*, both climbers. The lower-value *Landolphia Thollonii*, also known as *Landolphia Lunda* or *caoutchouc des herbes* (root rubber), was typical of regions east of the Kwango.

Towards the end of the nineteenth century, most of the rubber exported from the Portuguese Congo district was already tapped from regions beyond the river Kwango, thus outside Angola. Precisely why the rubber frontier moved inland is a question still open for study, but a number of likely causes can be identified. First, the product from the interior was of a higher quality. Around 1900, rubber was still being tapped in the coastal hinterland from trees, but since it was of much lesser quality than the Landolphia types little was made of its exploitation. Second, the destruction of the rubber plants during the production process forced traders to look steadily further east for new collection areas. Third, the moving rubber frontier was a simple consequence of market pressure. As the product was easily transportable over long distance, there was no reason for the inhabitants of rubber-producing regions deeper inland not to join in the rubber boom or for traders to seek out new, remote areas to tap. From this angle, the only limit to the expansion of the rubber economy was posed by the increasing costs of transportation, particularly by land.[7]

The rubber trade of northern Angola was largely in the hands of Zombo entrepreneurs from eastern Kongo, who, since the mid-eighteenth century, had controlled part of the caravan routes leading from Malebo Pool (now Kinshasa) to the lower Zaire and the Atlantic coast. These routes were knit together by a number of regional markets, held throughout the Kongo at regular intervals based on a four-day week. The four days gave their names to smaller markets, in which mostly local produce was sold. Regional fairs were held every other week and served as selling and buying points for rubber and ivory traders. After purchasing rubber at markets like Lula-Lumena, Kinzamba, Matoba or in places across the Kwango, the Zombo traders would carry their cargoes directly to a European factory or sell them at markets on the way to the coast (one of the major hubs was Kimbubuge). But African merchants other than the Zombo also engaged in the regional long-distance trade, like the Makuta from northern Kongo and the Sonso and Pombo from southeast Kongo. In principle, all people living along the trade routes between Malebo Pool, the Kwango and the Atlantic coast were able to participate profitably in the legitimate commerce as it kicked off in the 1860s. But apart from the Zombo traders, it seems, caravans rarely went further from home than six or seven days.[8]

Initially most of the rubber traded in Kongo was directed towards Ambrizete and a number of smaller ports on the Atlantic coast. But in the 1890s these coastal outlets lost ground to the lower Zaire as large steamers began to navigate the river up to Noki. This port, in 1882 still described as 'a place without importance',[9] quickly became the Congo district's major loading point – and Angola's third largest rubber outlet – basically due to its relative proximity to the rubber-producing areas. The development of Noki in turn stimulated the movement of European factories inland. In the 1880s, a few houses had already opened stores in Mbanza Kongo, a key node in the regional long-distance trade. In the following decade, traders from the coast moved still closer to the sources of rubber supply, as many set up shop in Makela do Zombo, the capital of the Zombo district and one of the major centres of the rubber trade. Already in 1905 about ten different firms had opened more than 20 factories in Makela. From there a few adventurous traders moved even further east, until reaching the Kwango itself. The Zombo adapted to the arrival of European traders by making their expertise in procuring and transporting rubber available to the European buyers. Besides still organising their own caravans, they hired out their labour to the Makela factories to find more rubber at inland markets and carry locally stored produce to Mbanza Kongo and Noki.

By the turn of the century the rubber trade in Portuguese Congo had been redirected from the Atlantic coast, where trade had formerly concentrated in Ambrizete, north to the Zaire River (Figure 4.2). While the coastal ports experienced a dramatic decline of trade, the river ports were heading towards a peak in 1906, the year Noki

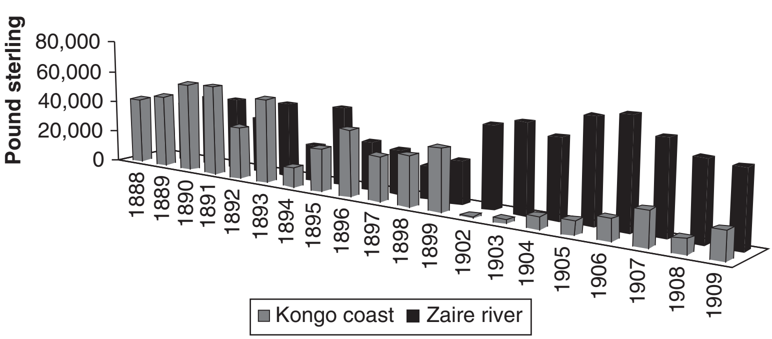


Figure 4.2 Rubber exports from Portuguese Congo, 1888–1909
Sources: Cardoso, *No Congo Português*; Clarence-Smith, *Third Portuguese Empire*; Mesquita, *Dados estatísticos*; Pereira 'Um anno no Congo'.

was described as the biggest commercial hub in the Congo district.[10] By this time, rubber traded at markets in southeast Kongo was still mostly dispatched to Europe from ports on the Atlantic coast. The movement of factories inland from trade houses based in Ambrizete, including John Holt's, therefore targeted the Damba district in particular.

European competitors

Along the coast of northern Angola the export trade was dominated by less than a handful of companies from northern Europe, who had moved to this part of West-Central Africa in the middle decades of the nineteenth century. The largest of these was the Nieuwe Afrikaanse Handelsvennootschap (NAHV) from Rotterdam, followed by Hatton & Cookson from Liverpool and Daumas, Béraud & Cie from Marseille. The central stores of these firms in Banana and Cabinda distributed trade goods among numerous factories set up along the Atlantic coast and the banks of the Zaire. In addition, they carried freight for many small Portuguese companies, who often relied on one of the bigger houses for access to European merchandise to sell and for maritime and river transport.

As Roger Anstey observed in his classic study of the colonial partition of Congo, British commercial interests in the region were considerably larger than the modest nominal ranking of Hatton & Cookson suggests. First, British subjects owned part of the capital of the Dutch house. Second, many of the goods exported to the Congo from Rotterdam, Marseille and other continental ports were re-exported British manufactures, including cotton textiles, guns, powder and other hardware. Third, the Dutch increasingly relied on British (besides German) steamer services to transport goods to and from the Congo. On the eve of colonial rule, the total volume of British trade in the Congo – indirect as well as direct – may have attained £2,000,000, which was roughly two-thirds of the value of British trade in the Bights of Benin and Biafra together.[11]

In the 1850s, the early days of legitimate commerce, several British traders had operated on the Congo coast, but by the 1880s, when the rubber boom kicked in, only Hatton & Cookson remained (although Edwards Brothers from Liverpool still supplied the Portuguese house of Castro & Leitão north of the Zaire). The growing produce trade attracted a few new firms to the Congo, most notably the Congo and Central African Company and the British Congo Company, but these proved unable to survive the whimsical nature of trade in this region and the competition from the larger companies. Hatton & Cookson had started trading in West Africa around 1840 and, only a decade later, were among Britain's six largest importers of palm oil. Their success, according to Martin Lynn, lay in their opening up of the 'South Coast': the coast below Gabon, where they developed a trade in products other than palm oil and kernels, notably ivory, ebony, barwood, coffee and rubber.[12]

John Holt became an established name in the Liverpool African trade after expanding his business in the late 1860s from the small island of Fernando Po in the Gulf of Guinea to Cameroon and Gabon, and from there up to the Niger Delta and Lagos, where he opened a shop in 1887. In contrast to Hatton & Cookson and other merchant companies, Holt never relied on the larger British Lines for the transport of trade cargoes but instead set up and managed to keep his own shipping company. Holt became familiar with the Angolan market in the 1870s through a small-scale commission trade with British agents in Luanda, but he never wanted to expand his own business further south than the Ogowe River in modern Gabon. The trade in West-Central Africa did not seem promising enough to warrant the creation of expensive new factories, which would have to enter into competition with the established houses in the region. Nevertheless, in 1887 John Holt was drawn into the Congo trade as he was asked to become home-manager of the British Congo Company (BCC), which had just taken over the properties of the Congo and Central Africa Company. Two years later, the BCC was liquidated and sold to Keymer & Horridge, who continued the firm's business under the name of the Lower Guinea Company. They gave John Holt & Co. complete control over the conduct of their business, which included the purchase, transport and sale of goods and produce between Liverpool and Africa, services that Holt provided on a small commission basis.[13]

The barter practices of commerce

The series of Coast Letter Extracts in the John Holt & Co. archives runs from 1906 to 1911. The extracts were taken from letters written by local agents of the Lower Guinea Company in Ambrizete and Damba and addressed to John Holt.[14] By 1906, the firm had concentrated its commercial operations on the coast in Ambrizete. The company also possessed factories in Ambriz, Kisembo and Musserra, but these were partly abandoned or let to other traders or to government functionaries, and eventually they were sold. Around the same time, however, the Lower Guinea Company had followed a number of other coastal traders and established a factory in the interior to get closer to the rubber frontier. The focal point for all of them was a place some 200 miles inland in the Damba region called Sangi. This movement must have taken place not long before 1906, as Holt's agents were still in the process of gathering basic information about the place in that year. Hatton & Cookson also had a store in Sangi, and there were rumours that Edwards Brothers would open a shop there as well, but the other local firms were all Portuguese. The biggest in size was the house of Vale & Irmão, who had pioneered the movement inland from the Atlantic coast before the turn of the century, when they already had a factory near the market of Kimbubuge, half-way to Damba. According to information received from Hatton & Cookson, this Portuguese firm bought in Damba on average 8,000 pounds of rubber per month. It was added, however, that Vale & Irmão were able to catch relatively large amounts of rubber as they had opened stores in four different places in the Damba region, whereas the British houses limited their inland operations to one factory only. Holt & Co. set their targets considerably below what Vale & Irmão collected. It was estimated that 'with a good stock' of imported goods they should be able to buy four to five thousand pounds of rubber per month.[15]

Sangi was something of a colonial frontier town. At the time European trade houses opened their stores in Sangi, the Damba region, like most parts of the Congo district, had no Portuguese government presence. Although from Sangi many factories spread out to other places, they rarely strayed further than one or two days' journey by foot. Penetrating the interior eastward in the direction of the river Kwango was problematic for two reasons. First, traders found it difficult to find carriers in Sangi to transport goods further inland. Second, lack of government protection brought significant risks for traders. They relied on the goodwill and protection of a powerful

African overlord able to limit their exposure to a potentially harsh political environment.[16]

While the European traders were allowed to settle in Sangi and managed to recruit carriers for the transport of produce to the coast, they also provided some unwelcome competition to the independent African caravan traders of the area. In 1906, it was observed that traders from Damba wanted 'to bring their trade down to the Coast as before, establishing at Sangie is one of the natives' big grievances'.[17] The establishment of foreign factories in the Damba district created a two-tier trade system: one branch was in the hands of Africans, who bought rubber on their own accounts and organised their own caravans; the other was controlled by Europeans, who collected rubber in their Sangi stores and hired transport to the coast. Carriers employed themselves to more than one European firm at a time.[18] Possibly some also worked both lines simultaneously, carrying rubber for themselves as well as for the European houses.

Produce was generally collected and stored in Sangi during the wet season (October–May), then carried to either Noki or one of the coastal ports in one of the dry months, when travelling was easier. The Sangi factory was supplied by the head factory in Ambrizete, which paid standard salaries for porter services. For bringing one full load of trade goods to Sangi, carriers received between 20 and 25 quilts; the quilt was the local unit of account, which in Holt's factory at the time was valued at one shilling.[19] The payment for carrying one bag of rubber to Ambrizete was five shillings. Although the route through the hilly grasslands from Ambrizete to Sangi could be covered in 18 days if travelling non-stop, African carriers could take somewhere between two and six months to cover the distance. This slow pace was much to the annoyance of Holt's coastal agent, who thought the value of his textiles suffered from these delays: 'Nearly every piece of cloth has to be refolded'.[20] Robberies by roadside bandits were another nuisance ('but as a rule, we succeed in getting the value back').[21] In 1907, the Portuguese authorities in Ambrizete prohibited carriers from travelling to Sangi alone; they were allowed to go only in caravans with a headman who was responsible for the safe delivery of the goods.[22]

Independent traders would go wherever they found the best prices for their produce, or the market that best suited their needs of the moment. For example, in 1907 part of the Kongo rubber trade was diverted to Luanda, as traders from the Damba region were looking for 'a special kind of shells', which they were planning to re-sell in the interior. These were the particular sea-shells from Luanda Island, *nzime mbuli*, which still served as a currency in eastern Kongo and beyond. Holt's agent in Ambrizete knew little about them and sent samples to Liverpool in the hope to get more of them; of course the only place to buy them was Luanda.[23]

News travelled along the trade routes ahead of the caravans themselves, which often paused en route for trading purposes, social gatherings or tax negotiations. Since the caravans at some point along the way decided on their coastal destinations, the merchants on the coast were usually able to make rough predictions of the volume and directions of trade. In April 1910, Holt's agent observed:

> Only to-day I hear that of the two places Mussera and Ambrizette, the latter place will have the larger share of trade this year. My informants tell me there is a fair amount of rubber waiting to come into Ambrizette, but at the present time they cannot pass the rivers.[24]

One strategy that traders employed to lure caravans to their factories was to 'push trade' by sending imported goods up the road to, in effect, buy a delivery in the future. On several occasions Holt's agent dispatched considerable quantities of trade ware (valuing £15) to Zombo to 'push' rubber down to Ambrizete.[25]

Cash for oils – barter for rubber

In the first decade of the twentieth century most trade in Ambrizete was still carried out through barter. The dominance of rubber in the local economy stemmed from its value to Africans in acquiring high-value imports. It was, in effect, a hard currency. Barter worked efficiently as rubber and European manufactures were, in the words of A. G. Hopkins, commodities that could be easily 'paired'; that is, the cost of rubber was almost directly translatable into imported goods.[26] Second, rubber was produced in markets where modern European coins counted for little but where Western manufactures were in strong demand. Indeed, rubber caravans from the interior sustained a demand for such imports of long standing as textiles, gunpowder and older commodity currencies like beads and sea shells. By contrast, lower-value vegetable oils and coffee were produced in areas closer to the Atlantic coast, where a market for European coins had already started to develop by the 1880s. The new cash economy was spreading gradually inland, following the movement of government agents, missionaries and trade houses, but by 1910 coins had not yet reached eastern Kongo.

In ports where vegetable oils and coffee were dominant, Europeans were increasingly able to buy these commodities direct from producers using internationally accepted forms of money. In Ambriz, a port heavily relying on the export of coffee, a cash trade was settling in at the time, with only one in three houses still 'having a shop' for barter trade. But the use of cash and barter also depended on which firm was doing the trade. For example, the Dutch, who dominated trade on the coast, were keen to stick to barter and used very little cash, as they had better access than most other firms to the cheap cloth popular among African sellers. Indeed, as Holt's agent somewhat enviously observed in 1906, the Dutch seemed to have the best stock of all. Banana also had a bit of cash trade going due to the local trade in palm produce, but it was small, only 'sufficient for one house', for the port of Banana had developed primarily as a distribution centre. In this context, the coastal assets of Hatton & Cookson in 1901 show a notable difference between their Ambrizete agency and the agency covering the Zaire factories, which purchased a fair amount of palm produce. Whereas the latter had over £2,000 of cash on hand against a stock of £21,500 (thus cash still accounted for only 10 per cent of the river trade), the cash assets of Ambrizete amounted to less than £400 against a stock of £9,000, or less than 5 per cent.[27] Cash trade in Ambrizete, a port thriving on rubber, was barely developed.

Reports from the Congo Free State from 1907 and 1908 show that the goods most in demand on the Kwango rubber markets were different types of cloth, cotton blankets, rifles and flintlocks, gunpowder, salt and beads of varied shapes and colours. This list roughly corresponds to the list of goods that a Portuguese official recorded as those most procured by rubber traders. Beads were called *nzimbu-a-mbudi*, which later became a term for European money, too. They should be distinguished from the *nzime-mbuli*, sea shells that were imported from Angola and, like beads, served as currency. Around 1907, the demand for rifles surged. A number of reports from that year mentioned Zombo merchants from Angola travelling up to Popokabaka on the Free State side of the border, where they were able to buy rubber with nothing but guns. The rising demand for arms was probably caused by an earlier ban on the sale of percussion guns in the Congo Free State (the import of flintlocks was still allowed). Since the gun trade continued as usual in Angola, this prohibition gave a new impulse to the cross-border rubber traffic. In 1909, Holt's agent reported that the region between the Kwango and the Kasai was known for its imports of guns from Angola.[28]

Among the textiles, blue baft and red flannelette were particularly popular. Blue baft possibly ranked as the most important commodity. It was traded directly not only for rubber; Europeans also exchanged it for locally produced 'jute' squares (probably the *mbadi* cloth that was produced from the fibre of palm leaves and served as currency in certain parts of Kongo), which were subsequently used in the long-distance trade. Salt was also much wanted in Damba and other interior regions, but like the Luanda sea-shells it was not supplied by European trade houses. It was produced by Africans from coastal lagoons and distributed in part independently from European commerce. In Damba, for example, it was purchased from African long-distance traders in exchange for beans.[29]

The 'quilt' was the standard monetary unit of account in Ambrizete, against which all trade goods were measured. For instance, one quilt equalled one 'jute' square of a particular size, four yards of heavy stripes, three yards of blue baft, three yards of indigo prints or seven heads of tobacco. Alternatively, one umbrella had the same value as two quilts; one woollen shawl was worth six quilts; and so on. To build up a stock, the European trader first of all needed to get a fix on the right assortment of these goods; then his home supplier had to get those goods to him as cheaply as possible in order to compete successfully with the other houses. In 1907, Holt's agent in Ambrizete valued one quilt of his stock at one shilling, but he was hoping that the firm could bring it down to 11d.[30]

There was, however, no rate of direct exchange between rubber and quilts. Rubber was carried in so-called bundles (*mutetes*), normally weighing between 40 and 50 pounds. The value of a bundle was reckoned, according to its weight, by a multiple of a hundred, with each hundred representing a different value in quilts.[31] In addition to the basic costs of a bundle, the trader paid the rubber carrier two litres of rum for every hundred, a 'dash' of four quilts to the owner of the rubber, and a commission of six quilts to the coastal middleman who brokered the trade for him. 'This is the way the Rubber Trade is done here on the shore,' Holt's agent commented. 'It seems to be a reminder of the old days, which has lost its meaning and would be unintelligible unless you know what the natives mean.'[32] Of course the system had not yet lost its meaning; it was perhaps hard to grasp only for traders better accustomed to the cash trade of West Africa.

In the interior, at Sangi, the standard unit of account in the European trade was called a *cabuca*. The standard measure for a *cabuca* in 1907 was five feet of Strong Stripes, the textile favoured by the Damba traders. African traders were pushing to have one *cabuca* equal six feet and also tried to get 140 *cabucas* for a bundle of rubber, meaning that the current payment must have been slightly less. At the time 5 feet of Strong Stripes equalled 6d. At these ratios, if rubber was paid for with this type of cloth only, a full bundle would cost roughly 70 shillings (£3.5), which was more than the price of a bundle in Ambrizete if paid for solely with quilts! However, Strong Stripes were also 'the most expensive *cabuca*' in the stirling currency of ultimate interest to Holt & Co. When making up a bundle of trade goods, several less expensive goods (in pounds stirling) were included, so that the produce came out at a lower final price to the company. For example, one *cabuca* of Strong Stripes (6d) equalled one box of gun caps (3 ½d), one yard of blue baft (4 ½d) or one yard of red flannelette (4d); three *cabucas* equalled one bottle of gin (7 ½d) or one unit of standard liquor (8d).[33]

It was, and is, therefore difficult to establish prices for rubber in Africa using European monetary equivalents. The value of rubber was measured in barter units that both Europeans and Africans could understand. But within Africa, these units and the way they were translated into different assortments of individual trade goods varied from place to place. For European firms, getting assortments that gave them advantageous currency costs of purchasing Africans' commodities was a delicate affair that required knowledge of African consumer demand and the complexities of the barter system. In this context, it is fair to assume that the movement of factories inland was not primarily price-driven; the real motive was to gain a larger share of the rubber market by jumping up the stream of commodities flowing towards the coast. In other words, the idea was not to get it cheaper by getting closer to the source but to get more of it by buying it ahead of rival firms.

Central figures in the barter system were the African brokers, called *mafucas* or *linguisteres* on the Kongo coast.[34] Each factory on the coast employed at least one; Holt's agents had five in their service. These middlemen carried out the negotiations between the European firms and the caravans coming down from the interior. All commercial transactions passed through them. Or as Holt's agent put it, these brokers, 'not the bush people, are selling the trade here. This is an old instance here.'[35] Brokerage was a service performed on a commission basis. Sometimes the *mafucas* took charge of other tasks as well, such as loading cargoes for the Sangi factory or onto the firm's steamers, for which they received a monthly 'dash' of about six shillings. More fundamental was their role as interpreters. They 'speak to the natives (the natives want Mafucas) to push trade and to hear what other houses are doing'.[36] Indeed, they were indispensable agents, even if Europeans were not always keen to admit this fact and rather liked to depict them as annoying but unavoidable rent-seekers. This suspicion was to some extent caused by the fact that brokers operated with a large degree of autonomy. Europeans were unable to control the levels of the commissions that the brokers claimed for themselves. As Holt's agent explained, in Ambrizete the middlemen are allowed 'to go with the bush people to the point and arrange the price to "take" from every bundle . . . Such circumstances are hardly to be credited, but nevertheless perfectly true.'[37] In short, they negotiated a healthy margin between the costs paid to the rubber traders and the prices for which the rubber was sold to Holt & Co.

One of the central rules governing commercial relations on the coast was that European traders were not allowed to market their goods publicly. Hopkins has pointed out that in pre-colonial West Africa negotiations over valuable commodities took place in closed settings.[38] This confidentiality was the case in Ambrizete, too:

> There is . . . no law prohibiting you from buying rubber before it enters Ambrizette. Only as soon as it has entered Ambrizette you are not allowed to influence the traders by showing your goods to them [on the street] or trying to buy it except in your factory. That is nonsense, but we can do nothing against it.[39]

Purchasing rubber in the interior, however, was also possible only through the mediation of the *mafucas*:

> I beg to say there is no possibility of buying cabucas of rubber before they enter Ambrizette. If I was to go and try to buy these cabucas before they enter here I should be subject to a heavy fine. We can send the mafucas of the house to push it for the house they represent, but we cannot go ourselves.[40]

Mafucas generally belonged to ruling families, who in the first decade of the twentieth century still wielded considerable power in relation to the white men on the Kongo coast, including Portuguese government officials. Conflicts between European traders and their African brokers could therefore have serious political repercussions. In any event, the rubber trade in Ambrizete was not a free market, where buyers and sellers could bargain openly. Prices were established within the factory. *Mafucas* controlled much of the knowledge on local prices, and along with trade caravans returning to their homes in the east they distributed price information in the interior selectively, to the advantage of themselves and their friends.

Conclusion

Hopkins, in his *Economic History of West Africa*, argued that two developments after 1850 undermined the barter practices established on the West African coast during the era of the slave trade and opened the way for 'a recognisably modern organisational structure for the expatriate firms'; he referred to a trade in cash and a separation between importing and exporting. The first development was the switch from sail ships to steamers. The second concerned the arrival of modern money and the collapse of transitional currencies, which led to the demise of the barter system 'in the key exporting areas'. According to Hopkins, for African producers there were strong advantages in being paid in modern money. It gave them general purchasing power, more freedom in relation to European firms and greater independence from African brokers who used to dominate the barter system:

> It was no coincidence that francs and shillings spread in areas where legitimate exports were developing most quickly, and it was

> no coincidence either that low denomination coins were in great demand, for they were an indication of the growing importance of small producers and traders in the new export economy.[41]

This West African trend towards modern economic practices presents a number of stark contrasts with northern Angola, as well as striking similarities. The coast south of the Zaire was one of the most valuable export regions of West-Central Africa in the days of legitimate commerce. In Kongo, the new export economy also gave small producers and traders opportunities for enrichment. The collection of palm produce and rubber, as well as initial processing and sale, and also the cultivation of groundnuts and coffee were all based on family labour. In the case of rubber, the Kongo often organised their long-distance trade caravans on a village basis; although it made some people wealthier than others, it offered possibilities of enrichment to many. However, this democratisation of the export economy was accompanied only partly by the introduction of modern money. Overall, barter characterised commercial relations between European and African traders until the early twentieth century; that is, until the moment that the rubber trade collapsed.

The relatively small share of Kongo's export trade in vegetable oils impeded the formation of a cash economy of small producers. Elsewhere in Africa producers and traders of groundnuts and palm oil and kernels were eager to sell for European coins, as it gave them flexibility and independence, as Hopkins explained. But these products played only a secondary role in the Kongo economy and originated mostly from the immediate coastal hinterlands. By contrast, rubber caravans from the interior and the private networks of transactions run by the *mafucas* at the coast sustained a demand for traditional imports such as textiles, gunpowder and indigenous currencies like beads and sea shells. European coins therefore circulated in the coastal hinterland but less so further inland.

Trading for cash was far more straightforward than the old barter trade. The rubber trade kept the barter system with its complicated negotiations in place, which, as Hopkins explains, favoured the business of both the African middleman and the established European firms:

> As long as barter and transitional currencies remained firmly entrenched, newcomers were at a severe disadvantage, for they

> had to master the complexities of a pre-industrial monetary system, itself a serious barrier to entry; they had to acquire these strange currencies, in some cases from the established firms; and they had to be prepared to engage both in importing and exporting... No wonder the old-established European firms... strove to maintain the barter system for as long as possible.[42]

In northern Angola, small Portuguese firms had established themselves especially along the banks of the lower Zaire River, where many sheltered inlets offered opportunities to carry out a small trade in vegetable oils; but the rubber trade was concentrated on the coast (though later in Noki) and required stocks that small firms could usually not afford. The larger expatriate firms possessed the assets to dominate the trade. Two of the oldest companies, the NAHV and Hatton & Cookson, still controlled the export trade in northern Angola around 1900; they had the best stocks and were well acquainted with the barter system. However, under John Holt's management the Lower Guinea Company was able to break into the Kongo rubber trade and stay until 1913 when the African wild rubber economy collapsed. As one of Liverpool's more powerful traders, Holt had direct access to the merchandise required for the rubber trade. This chapter has shown that his agents also learned to master the intricacies of the barter system, which treated them and their oligopsonistic suppliers well.

Notes

1. The term Kongo (K-) is used to describe the region formerly covered by the Kongo kingdom, which is roughly demarcated by the Atlantic coast in the west, the river Kwango in the east, the river Congo's south bank up to Malebo Pool (Kinshasa) in the north, and the river Loge (Ambriz) in the south. The people living in this area, which is roughly the size of Portugal, all speak one variety or another of the Kikongo language. After 1885 the southern and larger part of Kongo was incorporated in the Portuguese colony of Angola. By contrast, Congo (with a C-) denotes the Zaire River as well as the larger region surrounding it.
2. Hopkins, *Economic History of West Africa*.
3. See Hochschild, *King Leopold's Ghost*, and bibliography. By 1944 Angola had become Africa's leading coffee producer, and in the years 1953–57 it held second place after Ivory Coast, with a majority of coffee being exported to the United States (Van Dongen, 'Coffee Trade, Coffee Regions, and Coffee Ports in Angola'). The relative paucity of

English-language studies of Angola's world commodity trade can be seen in the limited number of suggested readings on West Central Africa in Robin Law, *From Slave Trade to 'Legitimate' Commerce*. For excellent general accounts in Portuguese, see Vellut, 'África central'; and Dias, 'Angola'. On the agricultural transition in the Luanda hinterland between 1850 and 1880, see Freudenthal, *Arimos e fazendas*. On economic change in eastern Angola, see Castro Henriques, *Percursos da modernidade em Angola*, parts 3 and 4. Clarence-Smith, *Slaves, Peasants and Capitalists* remains an exception in the Anglophone literature. For the Trans-Atlantic Slave Trade Database, see http://www.slavevoyages.org; and for the history of the Angolan slave trade, publications by the Luso-American scholars José Curto, Roquinaldo Ferreira and Mariana Cândido.

4. The following paragraphs are partly based on Vos, 'Kingdom of Kongo', pp. 45–6, 117–22, 153–64, 183–4.
5. Arquivo Histórico Ultramarino (AHU), Secretaria de Estado da Marinha e Ultramar, Direcção Geral do Ultramar (SEMU-DGU), Angola, 2a Repartição, Pasta 1, Relatório de José Baptista de Andrade, Luanda 28/10/73; Ministério da Marinha e Ultramar, *A questao da borracha em Angola*, p. 84; Soares, *A borracha,* p. 41. The real breakthrough for the global rubber industry came with Dunlop's invention in 1888 of rubber tyres for motor vehicles (Soares, *A borracha*, p. 34).
6. Dummett, 'Rubber Trade of the Gold Coast and Asante', pp. 88–9.
7. Hopkins, *Economic History*, p. 73.
8. Hilton, *Kingdom of Kongo*; and Herlin Broadhead, 'Trade and Politics on the Congo Coast', pp. 67–70, which distinguishes between expeditions for the short haul and more professional long-distance caravans. See also Hopkins, *Economic History*, p. 64.
9. Pinto, *Angola e Congo*, p. 381.
10. Arquivo Histórico Nacional de Angola (AHN), Cx. 4147, no. 25, Cabinda 3-11-1906.
11. Anstey, *Britain and the Congo*, pp. 30–3.
12. Lynn, *Commerce and Economic Change in West Africa*, pp. 24, 99.
13. Holt, *Early Years of an African Trader*; Pedler, *Lion and the Unicorn in Africa,* pp. 139–41; Gertzel, 'John Holt', pp. 124–25; Rhodes House Library (RHL), MSS Afr. S1525, Box 1/1; National Archives (United Kingdom), BT31/2954/16547, BT31/3429/20645; LRO, 380 HOL 1/4/5, 255, 272, 284, 291, 304, 400, 413, 423, 729. In 1882, the CCAC had incorporated the firm of Isaac Zagury, who had in turn built his business on that of Domingos Gomes (Pinto, *Angola*, pp. 373, 384–5).
14. Although the extracts never show the name of the author, from another source we know that the agents representing the firm in northern Angola after 1900 included John William Eccles, George Haslam, Clarence Topham, and Paul Hein (probably a Dutchman). See RHL, MSS Afr. S1525, Box 1/1.
15. Liverpool Record Office (LRO), 380 HOL 1/9/1, Ambrizete, 9 November 1906, 24 January 1907, 11 May 1907, 9 June 1907.
16. LRO, 380 HOL 1/9/1, Ambrizete, 9 December 1907, 5 November 1909.

17. LRO, 380 HOL 1/9/1, Ambrizete, 28 May 1906.
18. LRO, 380 HOL 1/9/1, Ambrizete, 9 December 1907.
19. LRO, 380 HOL 1/9/1, Sangi, 20 August 1906; Ambrizete, 9 February 1907.
20. LRO, 380 HOL 1/9/1, Ambrizete, 10 January 1907.
21. LRO, 380 HOL 1/9/1, Ambrizete, 9 June 1907.
22. LRO, 380 HOL 1/9/1, Ambrizete, 9 December 1907.
23. LRO, 380 HOL 1/9/1, Ambrizete, 9 March 1907.
24. LRO, 380 HOL 1/9/1, Ambrizete, 16 April 1910.
25. LRO, 380 HOL 1/9/1, Ambrizete, 9 October 1907; 10 August 1909.
26. Hopkins, *Economic History*, p. 67.
27. LRO, 380 HOL 1/9/1, Ambrizete, 24 January 1907, 28 February 1906, 9 September 1909; Unilever Historical Archives, UAC/2/33/BU/1/2/3, Agreement for sale of assets.
28. Ministère des Affaires Étrangères (Belgium), Archives africaines (AA), 260/294; AHN, Cx. 3408, Residência to Secretaria do Governo do Districto, no. 308, S Salvador 4-7-1900; Leal, 'Memórias d'África', p. 71; Dartvelle, *Les 'N'Zimbu'*, pp. 160–173; AA, 209/65; LRO, 380 HOL 1/9/1, Ambrizete, 12 May 1909.
29. LRO, 380 HOL 1/9/1, Ambrizete, 9 June 1908, 23 March 1907.
30. LRO, 380 HOL 1/9/1, Ambrizete, 9 March 1907.
31. LRO, 380 HOL 1/9/1, Ambrizete, 9 October 1907. Portuguese accounts suggested weights between 15 and 20 kg (Vasconcellos, *Exposição colonial de algodão, borracha, cacao e café*). These numbers are merely indicative, as Africans did not measure their loads in pounds or kilograms.
32. LRO, 380 HOL 1/9/1, Ambrizete, 19 June 1907.
33. LRO, 380 HOL 1/9/1, Sangi, 5 December 1906; Ambrizete, 23 March 1907.
34. For the Loango Coast origins of the *mafuca* title and its spread to the Kongo coast, see Martin, *External Trade of the Loango Coast*, pp. 97–8; and Broadhead, 'Trade and Politics', pp. 57–63, 177–97. 'Linguister' stems from the Portuguese word *linguista*, used for a spokesman, agent or interpreter.
35. LRO, 380 HOL 1/9/1, Ambrizete, 10 August 1909.
36. LRO, 380 HOL 1/9/1, Ambrizete, 9 March 1907.
37. LRO, 380 HOL 1/9/1, Ambrizete, 10 August 1909. Ambriz and Ambrizete both had a 'Mafuca Point', a site where trade was brokered since the days of the Atlantic slave trade.
38. Hopkins, *Economic History*, p. 63.
39. *LRO, 380 HOL 1/9/1, Ambrizete, 22 July 1907*.
40. LRO, 380 HOL 1/9/1, Ambrizete, 7 September 1906.
41. Hopkins, *Economic History*, pp. 149–151.
42. Hopkins, *Economic History*, p. 151.

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5

Coercion and Resistance in the Colonial Market: Cotton in Britain's African Empire

Jonathan E. Robins

Throughout the nineteenth century, the American South was the world's leading producer of raw cotton. European – especially British – textile firms used American cotton to supply the world with cheap manufactured cloth. The African continent was on the periphery of this transatlantic circuit: forced into slavery and transported to the Americas, African peoples supplied much of the agricultural labour on which the cotton industry rested, but the African continent itself remained isolated from the expanding reach of the 'empire of cotton'.[1]

The first decade of the twentieth century saw a major change in this global system of agriculture, industry and trade. Concerned with rapidly rising prices for American cotton, textile manufacturers began to look to sub-Saharan Africa for new sources of the vital fibre. Businesses and governments rushed into the cotton-growing business across the continent: Portugal lured foreign investors to its colonies with free seed, subsidised freight and tax holidays; American entrepreneurs experimented with cotton in Congo and Sudan; German firms expanded buying operations in British colonies; even Bombay's textile manufacturers invested in East African cotton fields.[2] Proponents of cotton growing in Africa claimed that the continent would soon supplant the American South as the world's major supplier of cotton. Some saw the transfer of cotton agriculture to Africa as a repatriation of sorts, setting right the evils of slavery and forced migration that had made American cotton production feasible. The British journalist and humanitarian activist E. D. Morel predicted: 'What the West African Negro has done in a land of exile as a slave, or hired servant, he can accomplish in his own land, as a free man, and landowner in his own right.'[3]

The British Cotton Growing Association

Britain's colonial cotton-growing movement was a private venture, launched in 1902 by a coalition of Lancashire manufacturers and Liverpool and Manchester merchants. The new British Cotton Growing Association (BCGA) combined scientific research with agricultural outreach and commercial cotton-buying operations, operating under what its founders called a 'semi-philanthropic' model. The idea was to use capital raised in Lancashire from private subscribers to finance 'missionary work' in the colonies; once cotton growing was established, the Association would switch to a fully commercial role and begin paying dividends to shareholders. With the grant of a royal charter in 1904, the Association agreed to defer dividends for a fixed period of seven years to support a 'statesmanlike policy' that would take risks 'that no ordinary commercial undertaking would accept'.[4] Steeped in the ideology of free trade and laissez-faire, the BCGA's Lancashire-based founders believed that private enterprise, private philanthropy and market forces should play the leading parts in colonial development.

Most recent scholarly work on colonial cotton has focused on the BCGA's counterpart organisations, France's Colonial Cotton Association (ACC) and Germany's Colonial Economic Committee (KWK). This literature has emphasised the role of state power and direct coercion in cotton growing, showing how colonial states used violence to recruit and manage labour that market incentives alone could not attract.[5] This chapter takes a different approach: while I acknowledge the fact of colonial violence, I emphasise more subtle forms of coercion and control that the BCGA and British colonial administrations developed in their quest for an imperial cotton-growing industry. By manipulating markets and seizing control of key points along the commodity chain, the BCGA tried to control African labour without the need for overt violence.

Across Africa, farmers subjected to cotton-growing policies had many options for accommodation and resistance. They were not, as Allen Isaacman says, 'passive recipients of a colonial mandate'.[6] They resisted metropolitan impositions directly, but they also 'used the market against the state' by selling their produce to local buyers, adulterating produce, tapping into better-paying markets across state borders, or otherwise subverting cotton-growing regimes.[7] The BCGA often mistook resistance and opportunism for economic irrationality, and it developed a range of policies that used the market – and eventually the state – against farmers. These policies made fictions of Britain's supposedly free markets in colonial produce, and as this chapter tries to demonstrate, power exercised in the colonial marketplace could be just as oppressive and inimical to the best interests of producers as heavy-handed, state-directed cotton-growing programmes.

Moritz Schanz, director of the KWK's cotton programme, identified four conditions necessary for the cost-effective production of cotton: 'Suitable climate and soil, large extension of suitable tracts, sufficient supply of cheap native labour, and finally, reliable and cheap means of transport.'[8] Schanz was ultimately right about the criterion for the cheap production of labour-intensive commodities; unfortunately for the colonial powers, he and his colleagues were wrong in assuming that these conditions could be easily met in Africa. Transportation was not easy or cheap, and while there was plenty of arable land, little of it was anything like the rich river-delta lands of the Mississippi or Nile rivers.[9]

What the African colonies did have was an African population, which was for imperial powers synonymous with 'cheap native labor'.[10] Schanz explicitly listed 'a strong coloured population, easily accustomed to agricultural work at low wages' as Togo's most crucial asset for cotton growing.[11] BCGA chairman J. Arthur Hutton similarly declared that cotton was 'the black man's crop'.[12] Cotton manufacturer and BCGA vice-president William Howarth agreed, saying that 'cotton of any variety other than Sea Island must necessarily be a black man's crop. The return per acre is not sufficient to adequately remunerate white men'.[13]

The BCGA's primary goal was to ensure a supply of cheap cotton from the British Empire, and the only way to achieve this goal was through the exploitation of cheap labour. Only cheap labour could produce such an outcome. Europeans assumed African labour was inherently cheap, and this mistaken assumption lay at the basis of all the imperial cotton programmes. Once this racial ideology entered the discourse of economic development, race became an excuse to intervene forcefully in economic processes.

Direct coercion in the British Empire

The BCGA's strategy was based on a simple economic theory: the creation of sufficient demand would call into existence new supplies to meet it. By building ginneries and sending agents into the countryside to buy cotton, the BCGA hoped to lure African cultivators into cotton production. Anticipating the 'vent for surplus' theory, the BCGA's leaders believed that African communities had, for lack of other market opportunities, surplus labour that could be quickly applied to cotton cultivation.[14] Unfortunately for the BCGA, the prices it could afford to offer for raw cotton in Africa proved unattractive to many farmers. The 'surplus labour' of African farmers was anything but cheap. Facing disappointing results from the very first year of operations, the Association looked to extra-economic measures to push farmers into cotton growing.

Taxation was one way to shape the economic behaviour of colonial subjects. The BCGA and its allies in the Colonial Office saw taxation as a coercive force that could work in the interests of the cotton industry. Once established, money taxes worked as a 'push factor' for the growth of commodity exports. Farmers who might have otherwise eschewed commodity production had no choice but to grow and sell commodities in exchange for cash, if they were to meet their tax obligations. In Nyasaland, for instance, the colonial government doubled the poll tax in 1901, and then offered 50 per cent discounts to those holding certificates showing that they had worked on a white-owned plantation growing cotton, tobacco or coffee. Even more appealing to J.A. Hutton, the BCGA chairman, was the possibility that taxes could be collected in kind.[15] In 1904, Hutton discreetly asked Governor Frederick Lugard if he could compel farmers to pay taxes with cotton in Northern Nigeria. Lugard replied that 'the paying of taxes in cotton was long ago sanctioned', but he complained, 'I cannot *force* them to pay in cotton if cash is tendered.'[16]

Colonial states did use taxation to stimulate cotton production in some areas, though the object was revenue rather than increased cotton supplies for manufacturers. 'The people were not taxed in order that they might be made to grow cotton,' wrote an early critic of Britain's cotton-growing policies. 'Rather, they were urged to grow cotton in order that they might be able to pay taxes.'[17] Taxation altered existing economic systems and forced Africans to look for ways to meet tax obligations, but taxes alone rarely drove labour to specific industries. Colonial taxation was an important 'push factor', but it 'was never a sufficient one'.[18]

The colonial state undoubtedly had a privileged position from which to influence the behaviour of producers, but the BCGA and other cotton programmes also used indigenous elites to extend cotton cultivation. Elias Mandala argued that in British colonies, the successful production of export commodities in fact 'depended on [the state's] capacity to deploy the indigenous elites'.[19] Elites participated in colonial economic schemes because they offered opportunities for personal gain. When BCGA field manager W. H. Himbury visited the Alake of the Egba in 1905, he noted in his diary:

> The Egbas are glad they planted cotton and have promised to plant more this season . . . The [local ruler, the] Alake opens some champagne and agrees to subscribe for 100 shares in the Association as he seems very pleased with the work we are doing.[20]

In Northern Nigeria, the colonial administration encouraged elites to shift their plantations and sharecropping systems to American cotton. An undated note from Lugard's secretary to the residents in Nigeria ordered those officials to:

> impress on the Emir, local chiefs, and people, that if they grow this cotton they will find a ready sale to the European traders, and that it will also be much better for their own local manufacturers.[21]

During his tenure as Governor of Northern Nigeria, Hesketh Bell 'strongly impressed upon the Emir [of Zaria] our desires' regarding cotton, finding that local elites were eager to earn money from new export industries.[22]

In Uganda, the BCGA and colonial authorities worked with the Kabaka and local chiefs to promote cotton as an export industry. Chiefs in Uganda routinely had their subjects grow cotton on communal plots in response to colonial requests that they experiment with cotton, offering workers beer and food in exchange for labour.[23] The Kabaka's direct role in cotton growing is unclear, but the BCGA appreciated his services enough to spend £150 hosting his entourage during a 1913 visit to Manchester. BCGA minutes state that it 'was money well spent', expressing the hope that 'the visit of the Kabaka and his chiefs would prove very beneficial to cotton-growing in Uganda'.[24]

Resistance to coercion

Farmers across Britain's African colonies did not passively accept the new burdens of cotton cultivation, whether imposed by colonial officers or local elites. Some examples of resistance may have been overtly political, defying the colonial state's claims over the land and labour of colonised peoples. Most of the evidence from the cotton-growing campaign suggests more mundane motives, however: farmers were unhappy with the kind of work cotton growing involved, the time it demanded or the prices the commodity fetched, and they found ways to manipulate systems of political and economic control 'to their minimum disadvantage'.[25]

As the BCGA discovered, farmers had an array of resistance strategies available. In Northern Nigeria, where many individuals were still bound by slave status to local elites at the onset of colonial rule, workers simply walked away from cotton plantations, protected by new anti-slavery statutes. Ugandan peasants slipped away at night with bags of cotton and sold it directly to merchants, taking less than the open market price to circumvent high fees that local chiefs imposed in their role as middlemen. Cultivators in Gold Coast and Nyasaland slipped across colonial borders to sell cotton to rival cotton-growing programmes, growing cotton with free seed offered by the British and then selling the fibre at highly subsidised prices in German and Portuguese colonies. In Southern Nigeria, farmers added dirt and rocks to cotton or sprinkled it with water to increase its sale weight, gaming the BCGA's policy of offering fixed prices regardless of quality.[26]

Farmers openly challenged colonial authority when the costs of compliance outweighed the perceived dangers of rebellion. In Uganda, Governor Hesketh Bell was shocked to find cotton bolls rotting in neat, tidy fields that had been planted under the supervision of colonial officers. Farmers feared the agents of the state enough to comply with orders to plant cotton, but as soon as the government presence withdrew, farmers stopped cooperating. Local chiefs, who were supposed to supervise the care and harvesting of the cotton, were unable to convince their subjects to continue working. Bell explained with some sympathy:

> The idea of having now to carry their crops on their heads all the way to ginnery at Kampala, ninety miles off, was, however, much more than they were prepared to do, even to please the chiefs or the government.[27]

In 1912, peasants in some regions of Uganda went so far as to burn their fields instead of wasting labour harvesting what they deemed a poorly paying crop.[28] Such extremes were uncommon, but they illustrate how flimsy the mechanisms of coercion could be in Britain's African empire.

Rule of experts

The ability of farmers to defy colonial authorities as well as indigenous elites convinced the BCGA's leaders that an intensive array of technical instruction, surveillance and regulation would be required to extract meaningful quantities of cotton of consistent quality from African producers. A fully developed regime of state-backed, technocratic agricultural management would not mature until the 1920s and 1930s in Britain's African empire, but its origins lay in the cotton campaign of the first decade of the twentieth century.[29] No other agricultural commodity excited such attention and frustrated so many metropolitan visions. BCGA chairman J. A. Hutton came to believe that coercion and technical management were essential to the success of cotton production by free peasants, a contradictory position that emerged out of his frustration with the rational reactions of African cultivators to low cotton prices. Two aspects of this 'rule of experts' stand out:[30] the deployment of technical expertise and supporting legislation to reshape African work processes, and the use of a cotton monopsony for coercive and regulatory purposes.

The BCGA's experts performed the same functions as later state agricultural staff, lecturing on agricultural techniques in the countryside, running demonstration farms and training local teachers and inspectors. Colonial officials and the BCGA shared racist assumptions about the inability of Africans to improve their own agricultural systems, believing that scientific expertise was necessary to revolutionise African agriculture. European writers often caricatured Africans as ignorant of agriculture, barely 'scratching' the earth with hoes but reaping a bountiful harvest through the innate fecundity of African soils.[31] The Guggisbergs (who would eventually govern the Gold Coast colony) argued that foreign experts would discover the 'simple devices by which the natives, far too lazy to attempt such a feat themselves, can improve both the quality and quantity of their crops'.[32] The trope of peasant conservatism was widespread: in one of the BCGA's first field reports, its expert in the Gambia complained that the natives 'were very slow in adopting new methods', words repeated by foreign experts for decades.[33]

Some experts, like Wyndham Dunstan of the Imperial Institute, took an optimistic view of African farming, calling it 'primitive yet effective'.[34] But most early reports from 'men on the spot' were far more critical. Gerald Dudgeon, a former planter in India hired by the BCGA to work in Africa, condemned African farming practices like shifting cultivation and soil mounding as wasteful and primitive. Dudgeon though African spent insufficient time weeding, used insufficient fertiliser and carelessly collected seeds for replanting.[35]

During his tenure as Director of Agriculture in Nyasaland, Samuel Simpson decried local farming practices as 'exceedingly primitive'. 'The seed distributed should be of the best and grown under European supervision,' Simpson argued, lest the seed be 'badly mixed' with local varieties.[36] Hutton complained of inefficient practices and he blamed a peasant mindset that sought to maximise cash-crop production while minimising the labour and resources those cash crops took from food production. This was a completely rational response, and Hutton understood why farmers chose certain agricultural methods, but he nonetheless lamented that '[t]he native is too much inclined to go in for quantity irrespective of quality'.[37]

The task of the expert, then, was to make African labour work more scientifically, to increase the quality and quantity of farm produce. Touring instructors gave lessons and distributed leaflets in local languages, explaining how cotton should be grown. New techniques like monocropping, deep hoeing of fields, ridging between rows of crops, heavy thinning of plants and total uprooting of plants at the end of the season were emphasised. These tasks required a lot of labour, especially when compared to the efficient systems of mixed agriculture that had evolved around the continent.[38] That is not to say that these new agricultural methods were wrong: they could, and did, increase yields and reduce crop losses to pests and disease. The point is that the methods were alien to (and often inappropriate for) different regions of the continent.

Expert interventions were intended to combat the resistance of African farmers and to make cotton more profitable, but the BCGA also mustered scientific expertise to battle the cotton plant itself. When allowed to grow freely, cotton is a promiscuous pollinator, creating hybrid varieties that can be commercially useless. Only careful pollination or generations of natural selection could produce plants that thrived in local environments and also produced economically viable quantities of fibre. Thus to grow American cotton in Africa, the BCGA had to do more than simply convince Africans to grow it. The Association had to prevent its imported seeds from being hybridised with local cottons, to keep American cotton from losing the colour, texture and staple length that made it so desirable. The agronomy of cotton thus justified interventions in local economies and agricultural systems that went far beyond the regulation of farmers who willingly participated in BCGA projects.

Surveillance, regulation and control in a colonial free market

The Association's 'pioneer' work – establishing ginneries, buying cotton in remote areas and offering fixed prices – was part of a trade-off with colonial officials. In exchange for offering agricultural services on a philanthropic basis, the BCGA received special privileges when colonial regulations regarding cotton were created. Colonial rules restricted competition in cotton buying and ginning and allowed the BCGA to control what cotton could be grown, where seed would be distributed and how cotton would be raised.

After initially failing to convince the Colonial Office that 'the Association should be given control over all seed' in its first major policy request, the BCGA settled for a monopoly on ginning.[39] Hutton had a keen interest in ginning technology,[40] and the BCGA chairman recognised that cotton agriculture could be effectively controlled through a ginnery. Ginning, which separated seed from fibre, was necessary to prevent germinating seeds from ruining the bolls. Removing the seed also removed much of the weight of the fibre, making cotton easier to transport. Farmers had to have their cotton ginned to sell it and gin operators could use their strategic position in the local economy to indirectly shape agricultural processes.

Under the BCGA's terms, the gin was not merely a service provider but rather the purchaser of the farmer's cotton. When the BCGA bought the cotton, it also bought the seed. Ginners could reject cotton that was 'mishandled', forcing farmers to work harder to meet BCGA quality standards. The gin operator could also refuse to buy 'undesirable' varieties of cotton. Centralised ginning by machine allowed the BCGA to collect all cotton seed in a given catchment area, preventing farmers from replanting their own cotton. Because they handed their seed over to the BCGA along with their cotton, farmers had to use the seed the BCGA distributed, limiting the kinds of cotton farmers could grow. In effect, the BCGA's ginnery policy allowed the Association to control the production of cotton in British colonies without controlling the land, labour and other economic resources of Africans.

Effective enforcement required monopolistic conditions, however, to prevent producers from obtaining unauthorised seeds or selling 'substandard' cotton to less scrupulous buyers and gin operators. In the early years of its operation, the BCGA argued that 'undue competition in cotton buying' was 'responsible for a good deal of inferior cotton being shipped to Liverpool', suggesting that only the BCGA, with its 'semi-philanthropic' status, could serve as an effective guardian of quality.[41] The BCGA tried to ease concerns over its apparent abandonment of free-trade principles, saying in its propaganda that '[a]ll authorities are agreed *that the most vital factor* in successful cotton growing is the provision of the best selected seed', and that 'this control can only be effectively obtained by retaining the ginning in the hands of the Association'.[42]

While maintaining the illusion of freedom for producers to grow and sell cotton, the BCGA worked to shut out forces that might weaken its control over the production and processing of cotton. In Uganda, Indian and African entrepreneurs who had erected hand-cranked roller gins in remote locations were shut down by expensive licensing requirements at the urging of the BCGA. The smaller, widely distributed roller gins made good economic sense, because they reduced transportation costs for cotton by removing heavy seeds, but the BCGA feared that these gins would allow farmers to collect and replant their own seeds, rather than the imported varieties Lancashire desired.[43]

Despite finding several commercially attractive native cottons growing in West Africa,[44] the BCGA decided to eradicate them, taking 'particular pains to eliminate all undesirable varieties . . . and to issue only pure sound seed to the natives'.[45] Pamphlets produced by the BCGA and colonial administrations, like the following example from Uganda, gave literate farmers and agricultural officials clear instructions:

> 34. What kind of cotton should be grown?
> A: The best kind to grow in Uganda is American.
> 35. Should the native cotton be grown?
> A: No; it is best to root up all plants of the native kind, because the cotton is a very bad kind, and the plants growing on from year to year breed insects and disease.[46]

Favouring one variety over another was not a trivial issue. As Thomas Bassett observed in his study of France's cotton-growing campaign, colonial planners never asked 'whether the high performing plant was one that brought the biggest economic return to the grower'.[47] Foreign cottons introduced by the colonial powers were not adapted to African climates, and they had other characteristics that made them unappealing to African cultivators. The burs of the American 'Black Rattler' variety, for example, had the unfortunate habit of 'lacerating the hands of pickers',[48] but Hutton nonetheless had 80 tons of seed sent to West Africa in 1905.[49]

An enormous disincentive for would-be cotton farmers was the BCGA's requirement that imported cotton seeds be grown as annual crops in a monoculture. The idea of monocropping was transferred from the Southern United States, where the practice increased cotton yields by eliminating competition for sunlight, water and soil nutrients from other plants. The BCGA also believed that monocropping reduced the risk of crop diseases and pests.[50] French planners also imposed monocropping and row-field layouts, following the latest scientific cotton-growing standards while also making it 'easier for district guards to delimit cotton fields and to supervise their cultivation'.[51] Monocropping in the American South relied on mule-drawn equipment to efficiently prepare large, straight tracts of land, however, and Southern farmers with access to regional and national markets for foodstuffs did not have to concern themselves with the production of subsistence foodstuffs. In tsetse fly-infested regions of Africa, animal-drawn implements were impractical, and the prospect of imitating plow furrows through hand-hoeing could hardly have appealed to African farmers. Most producers also had little access to imported food in the early colonial period, and regional markets for food were only gradually expanding. Intercropping cotton and foodstuffs on smaller, hand-cultivated plots made sense as a survival strategy.

Perennial cotton also appealed to peasants. In many parts of West Africa, cotton was traditionally grown as a quasi-perennial, yielding the most lint in the second or third year, with deterioration in successive years. By the fourth or fifth year, the cotton was uprooted and the field planted with other crops.[52] As A. G. Boyle, the acting Governor of Southern Nigeria, put it in 1912: 'A native naturally prefers a crop which [is] of a more or less permanent nature and personally were I a planter I should be inclined to agree with him.'[53]

Regulation through legislation

Farmers had ways to avoid the BCGA's monopsony and to escape colonial efforts to capture their labour. The BCGA responded to this resistance by urging colonial states to criminalise evasive activities and discipline offenders. In an early example, BCGA managers in Lagos sought punishments for farmers who showed up at BCGA ginneries with cotton that failed to meet the Association's standards, instead of taking the simpler step of offering a price differential to encourage higher-quality produce.[54] Nearly a decade later in Sudan, Hutton asked colonial officials to supervise and discipline farmers during cotton picking, because farmers were sensibly harvesting the crop as fast as they could to take advantage of fixed prices. If farmers 'were compelled to gather their cotton in the proper manner and if there were careful selection of seed,' he argued, 'we might produce a really satisfactory type of cotton most useful to Lancashire.'[55]

In Nyasaland, the BCGA worked closely with the Agriculture Department and Samuel Simpson, the Director of Agriculture, to produce the 1910 Cotton Ordinance. Simpson was one of a handful of scientifically trained officials at work in British Africa before 1914. His cotton ordinance did not force anyone to grow cotton, but it deeply affected the lives of farmers by prescribing new tasks and by reigning in the market for cotton and cotton seed. Faced with an annual tax bill, men had to make an unpleasant choice between working on a white-owned plantation, migrating to work in the mining sector, or growing cotton on the BCGA's terms.

According to the ordinance, farmers who chose the latter had to uproot their entire cotton crop and burn the plants after the harvest. This was an effective disease-fighting measure but one that prevented the cultivation of perennial cottons and added a time-consuming step to labour routines. Farmers who failed to follow the law were charged for the cost of destroying their plants. The ordinance also restricted the agricultural autonomy of farmers by restricting seed availability: all seed sales to rural communities required the agricultural department's approval. Even more rules burdened the sale of harvested cotton. Non-BCGA cotton buyers faced strict licensing rules, and all native-grown cotton was to be ginned within the Protectorate, cutting farmers off from outlets in Mozambique. The BCGA's ginning monopoly also denied farmers access to their own seed stock, as BCGA ginneries kept all seed for crushing or redistribution. Violators of any of the 17 rules could be fined up to £5 or imprisoned for a month.[56] Such regimes were intended to improve the quality and quantity of cotton, but they did so by dramatically increasing the surveillance of producers and intensifying farmers' labour inputs without any additional remuneration.

Only in Uganda were farmers able to protect the local variety of cotton from proscriptive regulation, and they only accomplished this with the help of the local Agricultural Department. Uganda cotton (a localised variant of *Gossypium barbadense* that substituted for Egyptian rather than American cotton – *Gossypium hirsutum*) found a ready market in Lancashire and even commanded a premium over the American cotton varieties the BCGA distributed. Hutton complained that agricultural officials in Uganda encouraged farmers to aim for high prices, pushing the local 'exotic' cottons over the new, less valuable American imports. The Ugandan government's cotton expert P. H. Lamb stood by Ugandan farmers. Lamb believed that specialisation in finer grades of long-stapled cotton was the best choice for Ugandan farmers, having come to the conclusion during a 1908 tour of the United States that competition with the American South in its staple grades was futile.[57]

When Lamb was transferred to Nigeria in 1911, Simpson – the architect of Nyasaland's cotton policies – replaced him. Surprisingly, Simpson continued to defend Ugandan cotton.[58] Simpson used his newfound authority to harshly criticise the BCGA for all manner of sins, beginning with the decision to send seeds for Black Rattler and other American cotton varieties to Uganda. Simpson taunted Hutton (who saw Germany as a model for cotton growing) with the fact that:

> Uganda cotton is having very satisfactory sales in Hamburg and Havre, and the German East Africa Government has given us an order for 60 tons of seed for German East Africa.[59]

Simpson further charged that Hutton had maliciously dispatched saw gins to Uganda, intending to destroy the better-paying local cotton varieties and replace them with American Upland cotton. The saw gin had been invented to remove the strong fibres of *Gossypium hirsutum* from the seed, and it did so by violently pulling and cutting the lint. The simpler roller gin was perfectly adequate for ginning long-staple cotton like the *Gossypium barbadense* being grown in Uganda, but saw gins mangled these cottons, greatly reducing the value of the lint. Every single BCGA ginnery in Uganda was outfitted with saws designed for American Upland cotton instead of rollers.[60] Simpson complained, 'the work of this Department is being nullified to a great extent' by the BCGA's choice of machinery.[61] Ultimately Simpson's defense of Ugandan cotton was vindicated by the market, and firms in Lancashire praised the local cotton as 'rather better than Texas'.[62] Private ginning firms in competition with the BCGA chose roller gins to protect the long staple, and by 1918 rollers outnumbered saws by four to one.[63]

In the long run, the BCGA was wrong about what kinds of cotton would find a market and pay the grower. Hutton lamented that Sudanese farmers were having so much success with Sakellarides (Sakel) cotton, a variety that Hutton thought 'very few spinners can use', making it 'unsaleable even at a low price' despite being 'a heavy cropping variety, early maturing and very fine and strong'.[64] Despite its many virtues, it was not American Upland cotton. (Sakel was in fact very successful commercially.) Sea Island and other 'superfine' varieties that the BCGA discouraged in the Caribbean succeeded admirably, and Ugandan cotton flourished (exports increased from 54 bales in 1904–05 to 321,348 bales in 1936).[65] Hutton was forced to admit by 1917 that there was 'a large and growing demand for [long-staple] cotton, which is solely limited by the supply'.[66]

The BCGA was also wrong about the viability of 'impure' indigenous cottons. Imported American seeds, when they successfully germinated, did not produce good crops. Lamb 'regretted that the old acclimatised variety had been destroyed through measures to extinguish the mixed seed in 1908',[67] and another agricultural official agreed that there was 'no doubt that cultivation using native varieties was the way forward'. BCGA efforts 'to introduce exotic American and Egyptian cottons on large-scale plantations had . . . been a failure'.[68] Governor Egerton reminded the BCGA in 1907:

> The American product is the result of over 100 years careful selection and cultivation. Was it originally better than the West African plant? Is it not more than probable that greater success will result in careful propagation of this plant rather than by the introduction of an exotic of doubtful superiority.[69]

Hybridised American cottons succeeded only after decades of research that replicated what had already been going on in African fields for centuries.[70] Hutton's single-minded effort to introduce American cotton in Africa and to protect it by eradicating indigenous varieties wasted tens of thousands of pounds and nearly two decades of agricultural work.

Conclusion

The BCGA worked as a for-profit development NGO, encouraging cotton growing without directly buying land or hiring labour. This model of development promised to leave colonial farmers in control of their own resources and their own economic decisions. In practice, the BCGA's development model was fraught with contradiction. Ideologically wedded to the idea of peasant production in a free market, the Association nonetheless used the structural conditions of colonial rule to manipulate markets and labour. The BCGA underestimated the value of labour to African cultivators as well as their ability to pursue alternative sources of income. Constrained by a global capitalist market and a desire to reach profitability, the BCGA simply could not pay the prices necessary to compete with rival crops. The Association tried to boost the productivity of cotton to make it competitive in Africa, but its scientific methods demanded new regulations, new labour regimes and close surveillance that stripped African farmers of economic agency.

'Peasant conservatism' was undoubtedly a real phenomenon, but it was not as serious an obstacle as contemporaries (and later development theorists) made it out to be. During his tours of West Africa, BCGA manager W. H. Himbury preached a gospel of wealth to would-be cotton farmers, and he found enthusiastic responses in areas where relative prices and a lack of better-paying alternatives made cotton an attractive prospect. At a village near Oyo:

> [he] spoke strongly and told them men were sent into the world to improve themselves not just to live the life of the ordinary animal, and that if they planted cotton they would get a good price for it, and so be able to purchase more of life's comforts.[71]

Himbury felt that his work 'might be likened to a messenger from Mars advising British farmers to grow nothing but tulips'. He rhetorically asked, 'I wonder how many farmers would take this advice?'[72]

Across Africa, farmers adopted cotton growing where it was profitable and where it fit with the needs of local communities. Thomas Bassett showed that in Cote d'Ivoire, peasant communities in the second half of the twentieth century embraced a cost-effective development 'package' of seeds, fertilisers, tools, techniques and pesticides that offered high yields and good returns on cotton. The key was giving farmers a say in the formulation of agricultural policy, tailoring it to meet the needs of producers. There was nothing inimical to experimentation and progressive development in either the cotton plant or African peasantries. Peasants could and did transform centuries-old farming practices when 'the opportunities and relative security offered by the cotton program' outweighed the usual 'risks and uncertainties' of rural life.[73]

Notes

1. Beckert, 'From Tuskegee to Togo'.
2. See the annual reports of the International Federation of Master Cotton Spinners' and Manufacturers' Associations (published in Manchester, 1904–13).
3. *West African Mail*, 17 April 1903.
4. Tewson, *British Cotton Growing Association*, p. 20.
5. For an overview, see essays in Isaacman and Roberts, *Cotton, Colonialism, and Social History*.
6. Isaacman, *Cotton Is the Mother of Poverty*, p. 9.
7. Bassett, *Peasant Cotton Revolution*, p. 15.
8. Schanz, 'Colonial Cotton Growing and Germany, 1910'.
9. Davis and Wilburn, *Railway Imperialism*; Dunn, *Cotton in Africa*, pp. 8–9; Isaacman and Roberts, *Cotton, Colonialism, and Social History*, pp. 13–14.
10. Isaacman, *Cotton Is the Mother of Poverty*, p. 3.
11. Schanz, 'Colonial Cotton Growing and Germany, 1911'.
12. Minutes of Evidence relating to Imports of Cotton taken before the Board of Trade Committee on Textile Industries, 1917, Evidence of J. Arthur Hutton, given 8 June 1916, University of Birmingham Special Collections, British Cotton Growing Association papers (BCGA hereafter), BCGA 2/6/1. Ironically, Americans were encouraging the immigration of Italians to the South, believing that they could replace black Americans in cotton fields. As Sir Charles Macara, Lancashire's self-appointed spokesman, said, the Italian immigrants 'were infinitely superior to the negroes, who are hopeless as regards getting to be possessors of the soil themselves' (Minutes of a meeting with Sir Percy Girouard, 12 January 1911, BCGA 1/4/6). See also *Manufacturers' Record* (Baltimore), 7 April 1904.
13. *Textile World Record* 35:2 (May 1908), p. 115.
14. For an explanation of the theory and its application to West Africa, see Hopkins, *Economic History of West Africa*.
15. Coutinho Mandala, *Work and Control in a Peasant Economy*, p. 112; Hose, 'Britain and the Development of West African Cotton', p. 207. The rebates were not abolished until 1921.
16. Lugard to Hutton, 20 December 1904, West African correspondence, Africa confidential print, Colonial Office records, the National Archives (UK), CO 879/84/745 (CO hereafter). Emphasis in original.
17. Wrigley, *Crops and Wealth in Uganda*, p. 16.
18. Swindell, 'Struggle for Transport Labor', p. 153.
19. Coutinho Mandala, *Work and Control in a Peasant Economy*, p. 111.
20. Himbury, West Africa tour diary, 144, 1905, BCGA 7/3/1.
21. Untitled memorandum, Hazzledine to Residents, n.d., in West African Correspondence, Africa confidential print, CO 879/84/745.
22. Hesketh Bell, report on Northern Nigeria, n.d. but July 1910, BCGA 6/1/1.
23. Taylor, 'Role of the British Cotton Industry', pp. 18–19; Engdahl, 'Exchange of Cotton', pp. 60–61.

24. BCGA minutes, 12 August 1913, BCGA 1/2/1. See also *Visit of the Kabaka of Uganda to Manchester*, BCGA pamphlet, July 28–31, 1913, in BCGA 1/4/6.
25. Hobsbawm, 'Peasants and Politics'. Also Scott, *Weapons of the Weak*, pp. 290–1.
26. Lovejoy and Hogendorn, *Slow Death for Slavery*; Nonnenmacher and Onyeiwu, 'Illusion of a Cotton Paradise', pp. 141–3; Engdahl, 'Exchange of Cotton', p. 69; Dumett, 'Obstacles to Government-Assisted Agricultural Development', p. 167; Zimmerman, 'A German Alabama in Africa'; Coutinho Mandala, *Work and Control in a Peasant Economy*, p. 265; Wardle, 'History of the British Cotton Growing Association', p. 551; Robins, 'Cotton Crisis', Chapter 4.
27. Taylor, 'Role of the British Cotton Industry', p. 37.
28. Engdahl, 'Exchange of Cotton', p. 58.
29. Hodge, *Triumph of the Expert*.
30. See Mitchell, *Rule of Experts*.
31. Hodge, *Triumph of the Expert*, Chapter 2.
32. Guggisberg and Guggisberg, *We Two in West Africa*, p. 102. It is not clear whose view the passage represents: F. G. Guggisberg notes in the preface to the book, 'Throughout the book my wife talks – I write'.
33. BCGA Executive Committee minutes, 3 July 1903, BCGA 1/1/1.
34. UK Parliament, 'British Cotton Cultivation', p. 16.
35. Hodge, *Triumph of the Expert*, p. 66.
36. Simpson, 'Report on the Cotton Growing Industry'.
37. Hutton, Sudan tour diary, 12, 1911–12, BCGA 7/3/2.
38. Engdahl, 'Exchange of Cotton', pp. 54–55.
39. BCGA-CO minutes, 13 October 1904, BCGA 1/5/1.
40. Hutton's notebooks contain several technical diagrams and plans for gins and baling presses (Hutton daybooks, BCGA 7/2/1-3).
41. BCGA minutes, 2 June 1908, BCGA 1/2/1.
42. 'Appeal to Employers and Operatives', 12 December 1906, Oldham Master Cotton Spinners' Association papers, John Rylands University Library, OLD 2/5/5 (OLD hereafter). Emphasis in original.
43. Engdahl, 'Exchange of Cotton', p. 86. Seeds make up 60–80 per cent of the weight of unginned cotton, and dispersed ginning facilities would have greatly reduced transportation costs for growers of cotton.
44. BCGA Executive Committee minutes, 28 July 1903, BCGA 1/1/1; Atkins, 'Supply of Cotton'.
45. Hutton to CO, 5 February 1908, in BCGA 2/6/13.
46. Dawe, 'Simple Guide for Peasant Growers'.
47. Bassett, *Peasant Cotton Revolution*, p. 57.
48. Tyler, *Varieties of American Upland Cotton*, p. 35.
49. Hutton daybook 1, 5 January 1905, BCGA 7/2/1.
50. Watts, *Silent Violence*, p. 195; Bassett, *Peasant Cotton Revolution*, p. 33.
51. Bassett, *Peasant Cotton Revolution*, p. 58.
52. Bassett, *Peasant Cotton Revolution*, p. 33; Morel, *Nigeria*, p. 236.

53. Boyle to CO, 22 October 1912, enclosed in Southern Nigerian government report, 28 October 1912, BCGA 6/1/2.
54. BCGA-CO minutes, 16 November 1905, BCGA 1/5/1.
55. Hutton, Sudan tour diary, 193, 1911–12, BCGA 7/3/2.
56. 'Nyasaland Cotton Ordinance', 1910, enclosed in 19 August 1911, BCGA 6/1/2.
57. Hutton to CO, 20 July 1911, Correspondence on Cotton no. 953, CO 879/105; Lamb, 'Account of Tour of Cotton Belt'.
58. Wrigley, *Crops and Wealth in Uganda*, p. 31. Wrigley notes that Simpson was 'publically rebuked' in 1920 by the Development Commission for his hostility to white planters, and Wrigley suggests that Simpson's attitudes were deeply shaped by his experience in Nyasaland, where 'there had been land-grabbing on a large scale, and where, moreover, European agriculture had enjoyed only a very moderate measure of success'.
59. S. Simpson to CO, 6 February 1914, BCGA 6/1/3.
60. BCGA West Africa indents, vol. 2, 52, BCGA papers, Manchester Central Library, M257/2. For a fascinating account of how Eli Whitney and other American inventors worked to convince manufacturers to use the inferior lint produced by saw gins, see Lakwete, *Inventing the Cotton Gin*.
61. Simpson to CO, 28 November 1913, BCGA 6/1/3. Simpson had a personal grudge against the BCGA: at their request, he was pulled from his job as a cotton expert in Egypt and sent to central Africa. Simpson said: 'This practically ruined my career, but it has not been allowed to spoil my life which I have tried to make useful.'
62. Oldham Master Cotton Spinners' Association letter to members, September 1913, OLD 2/5/3/2.
63. Engdahl, 'Exchange of Cotton', p. 88.
64. Hutton, Sudan tour diary, 22–3, 1911–12, BCGA 7/3/2.
65. Jaquay, 'Caribbean Cotton Production'; Frankel, *Capital Investment in Africa*, p. 274.
66. Hutton, *Development of the Cotton-Growing Resources*, pp. 15–16.
67. Engdahl, 'Exchange of Cotton', p. 161.
68. Hodge, *Triumph of the Expert*, p. 67.
69. Egerton to BCGA, 17 January 1907, West African Correspondence, Africa confidential print, CO 879/92/835.
70. Hodge, *Triumph of the Expert*, p. 67; Bassett, *Peasant Cotton Revolution*, pp. 32–33.
71. Himbury, West Africa tour diary, 39, 1904–05, BCGA 7/3/1.
72. Himbury, 'Empire Cotton', p. 269.
73. Bassett, *Peasant Cotton Revolutions*, p. 183.

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6

A Periodisation of Globalisation According to the Mauritian Integration into the International Sugar Commodity Chain (1825–2005)

Patrick Neveling

This chapter shows that the analysis of commodity chains can be fruitfully employed to respond to recent calls in the field of global/world history for a periodisation of globalisation.[1] The commodity-chain 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 chapter 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 and its sugar commodity chain. I discuss Mauritian history within 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.

After briefly sketching the early centuries of colonisation I analyse the inclusion of Mauritius in the British Empire's 1825 West Indian Sugar Protocol. From there on, I divide the chapter chronologically into four broad periods: first, the long nineteenth century of

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intra-empire trading agreements and economic diplomacy; second, between 1919 and 1937, when the sugar sector in Mauritius transformed into a system of income redistribution; third, the period through the Commonwealth Sugar Agreement (CSA) of 1951 up to the Lomé Convention of 1975; and finally, the contemporary developments, shaped by the extension of the Global Agreement on Tariffs and Trade (GATT) into the World Trade Organisation (WTO) and a revival of free-trade ideology.

The Mauritian position within the capitalist world economy prior to 1825

Mauritius was 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).

The Dutch period was a rather unfortunate business venture for the Dutch East India Company,[2] and the opening up of the island to capitalist exploitation only happened in the eighteenth century, with the arrival of the first French colonialists who ventured into forms of pre-industrial capitalist agriculture. Mauritian integration in the first two centuries of settlement was rather exceptional as it happened independently of existing local pre-colonial economic practices and markets. This had consequences. Economic activities were not shaped by the integration of local or regional structure into the emerging Europe-centred world economy. The challenge was to establish a regional structure on the fringes of world trade and turn this into a profitable venture. The French established a free port on the island, with the emphasis on 'free trade' based on privateering.

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.[3] 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. All changes following Mauritian integration into the Empire's system of preferences for the sugar 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.

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.[4] 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'.[5] 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 sugarcane; 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.[6]

In other words, my periodisation of globalisation for Mauritius along the lines of a commodity-chain analysis begins with sugar. Preferential access to the Empire's market for this commodity established a new bottleneck for the Mauritian economy and substituted the bottlenecks to flows created by French piracy before 1810. These had been built on the island's strategic position in the Europe–Asia trade. But the turn to piracy had also been effected by the failure of the French East India Company to establish profitable commercial agricultural businesses in Mauritius.[7]

When French Isle de France fell to the British Empire in 1810, the island not only received a new name (Mauritius) but suddenly became part of the Empire's market, which 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, sugar production quickly increased after 1815, as the new crown colony enjoyed lower export duties.[8] A driving force behind the transformation of the domestic economy was the first British governor, Robert Farquhar (1810–17, 1820–23). Accounts differ as to whether he realised himself that sugarcane was best suited for the rough Mauritian climate and therefore negotiated duties equal to Caribbean sugar; or whether he was pushed to do so by the Mauritian planters.[9] Because there was no private banking system in Mauritius before the 1830s, planters depended heavily on the colonial government's financial support. Thereby the British established an early monopoly as the island's merchant bankers.[10]

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. Mauritian planters had already been sending memorials to London, demanding that the extra ten-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.[11] But Mauritian efforts to establish large-scale sugarcane 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.[12]

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: they had the same rights to the Empire's market – a concession rarely granted to non-European populations.

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. Production continued to increase until 1846, when Britain abolished preferences on its market in the Sugar Equalisation Act and sugar prices fell rapidly.[13] Disagreement on the rules and morals of the trade nevertheless arose earlier, 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 imagination defining the working population's different set of skills along race clusters had become inscribed into Franco-Mauritian minds. The end of legal slave trading coming after British conquest in 1811 triggered illicit trade in the following decades; and at approximately the same time, contract workers from the vast British possessions in India were gradually imported to replace the slaves on the plantations. These two succeeding regimes of coerced labour determined the labour process on Mauritian plantations throughout the nineteenth and into the twentieth centuries.[14] Of particular interest for Mauritian integration into the sugar commodity chain is the transition from one labour regime to the other.

The abolition of slavery brought fresh capital to Mauritius in the form of a £2 million compensation. But a furious showdown with the colonial administration before 1835 (including 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) helped Mauritian slave owners to further negotiate the right to association, to print a newspaper and to open private banking houses and print money. This ultimately gave them control over a state-like system of rights operating under the umbrella of colonial dependency.

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.[15] 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. The Caribbean estates had amassed substantial debts and therefore a substantial amount of their share of the £20 million compensation paid for ending slavery in 1832/33 went into liquidation. The money received by Mauritian slave owners went where the money in the Caribbean did not go: into 'investment in social overhead capital and agricultural improvement'.[16]

A second factor I want to highlight was the planters' ability to adjust to the new rules of the market. The contrast to the old modes of production 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. Mauritian entrepreneurs responded early to 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 as one of three 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.[17]

This demonstrates that it was set up to actively maintain and improve the island's position in the global system. Gathering and spreading knowledge about changes in the market and other business-related issues among the local planters and millers was 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. For this, the French settlers established close alliances with British traders operating on the island.

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. The founding director of this company, James Blyth, had already been central to the first successful establishment of a banking house in Mauritius (1830). 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, travel times were long. This caused problems even in the simplest forms of communication, such as in 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 steamships connecting Port Louis to the outer world. Blyth Brothers & Co. held business interests in these and related matters and was the ideal ally for the MCC. The acting company's director, H. J. Jourdain, was elected Chamber President in 1864. In the following decades all Blyth Brothers' successive directors came to the Chamber Presidency. 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 & Co. became involved in buying and selling land and plantations in Mauritius.[18]

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. When in 1854 London sugar tariffs fell, a system of differential import rights based on polarisation was introduced. In cooperation with the Chamber of Agriculture (MCA), the MCC sent a special envoy to London to lobby for a better import regime for Mauritian sugar with high polarisation. I have outlined several earlier activities of a similar kind above that were more successful. It is then surprising that the unsuccessful mission of 1854 has been interpreted as the advent of Franco-Mauritian private sector diplomacy in London.[19] Nevertheless, that mission resulted in a change of strategy that continues to be salient.

As the efforts had not brought the intended harvest, the MCC went on to counsel Mauritian planters on how to best grain their sugar. The British trading company M. M. Travers & Sons was also consulted to advise how to advertise test packages of Mauritian sugar. Many local producers had, for example, advertised their highest quality sugar to buyers and then ended up paying indemnity as the bulk cargo delivered was of lower quality.[20]

Nevertheless, the 1860s decline in prices for sugar from the colonies 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, and already in 1863 Bombay was buying 10,000 tons of Mauritian sugar while substantial quantities of rice, flour, lentils and grains moved in the other direction, feeding a growing population of mainly South Asian contract workers and their descendants. The tightened commercial link between the two colonies was followed up by the introduction of the Indian rupee as Mauritian currency. 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 bounty-fed sugar imported to India in the interest of Mauritius. 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. From 1914 onwards the island's sugar was and would remain part of the European market.[21]

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

As I have said, the period between Mauritian integration into the British Empire's sugar commodity chain and the First World War was characterised by the introduction of the sugar regime. 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 contracts ended. Therefore, the duration of contracts was another challenge for Mauritian private-sector diplomacy. Longer contracts meant more time to exploit labourers and recoup expenses for their immigration. In some periods, planters had the upper hand and the Mauritian administration granted five-year contracts. In other periods, the British administration in India stopped the migration of indentured workers altogether or insisted that contracts would be limited to one or two years. In the difficult years after 1860, the Mauritian plantocracy turned an existing system of small-scale land sales to former slaves into a profitable means to outsource parts of their business to former indentured labourers.

In the early 1870s, a large-scale process of *morcellements* (divisions) began that would last until the onset of the global economic crisis of the 1920s. Substantial plots of cane land were parcelled and sold, turning former contract workers into smallholders. Present-day Mauritian nation-building narratives often describe this process as emancipation. But the *morcellement* is best understood if other significant changes in the industry are accounted for too. It coincided with a centralisation of sugar mills whose numbers reduced by nearly 90 per cent from 1860 (303) to 1937 (38), while the average annual extraction capacity of mills rose from 450 to 8,210 metric tons in the same period. Actually, *morcellements* had very different effects. They helped large businesses to secure their survival twice, during the global recessions of the 1870s and 1920s, and pushed two new professions up the Mauritian economic hierarchy: estate agents and brokers, who both acted as go-betweens linking sellers and buyers, and later millers and small-scale planters. It was only the smallholders who hardly saw any prosperity coming their way.[22]

So far, most historical research on the *morcellement* has focused on transactions in the years before 1914. This covers only parts of the picture and ultimately leads many historians to (unwillingly) affirm present-day nation-building ideologies. More insightful is to include the vast plots of land changing hands in the wake of the abolition of indenture (1923), particularly for the years 1918 to 1921. Then, sugar prices were at an all-time high, and thousands of new smallholders bought their plots at peak prices and saw their profits dwindling with falling sugar prices. This meant that during the peak of sales huge sums of fresh capital went to landowners and to a new professional group: estate agents. Land was often bought, parcelled and sold by joint venture companies of European-Mauritians and traders of South Asian descent, some of them former contract workers, with Indian merchants and banks lending capital to buyers. 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. 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.[23]

The *morcellement*, in my interpretation, should be understood as a huge campaign to generate fresh capital and outsource market risks for those controlling a centralised system of mills on which the new smallholders depended to sell their produce. The extent of this dependency became evident to contemporaries in the global crisis of the 1920s and 1930s that consolidated the highly uneven control over the intra-Mauritian nodes in the sugar chain. For once, an intra-island market in which planters and millers openly negotiated prices for cane could not emerge as transport facilities were extremely limited and planters were bound to sell their canes to nearby mills. Secondly, large businesses controlled the island's institutions where the scientific breeding that generated new canes with higher yields was done. Small businesses were thus excluded from another important means for increasing profit.[24] Finally, changes to Mauritian incorporation into the capitalist world system came with the development of a new, local bottleneck institution and significant changes in imperial and global trade.

The said new bottleneck institution emerged from a reorganisation of marketing and financing within the Mauritian sugar industry. After 1825, former British governors like Farquhar had supported the planters' interests within the imperial system of trade preferences. Following the establishment of the MCC in 1850, 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 1914. The end of the First World War marked major changes in the British Empire's sugar commodity chain.

A system of tariffs to reduce commercial in favour of military transport was established during the war.[25] In 1919, a system of imperial preferences was introduced to replace the wartime restrictions and revive trade. While free trade had never been fully implemented either in the Empire or in its relation to global markets, this new system marked the end of the free-trade propaganda/ideology. In Mauritius, planters reacted to this with the foundation of a new umbrella organisation, 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 MSS 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 CSA and ISA.

- The Central Arbitration and Control Board as a semi-official body that determines conditions and terms for the sale of cane to mills.
- The Mauritius Sugar Producers Association as an employers' union representing the millers' interests towards the planters.[26]

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, a large group of the latter attacked one of the mills that had declared it would buy up their sugarcane at reduced prices only. Four planters were shot by armed employees of one mill and a commission of enquiry was set up. Following the recommendations of this commission, the MSS was officially turned into the bottleneck that from then 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 of Mauritian produce was exported at a guaranteed price under the system of imperial preferences, the remainder was sold at shifting world-market prices. The overall income was then pooled and split according to shares of total produce among the millers and owners of large plantations. In my view, smallholders are best 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, a redistributive system was already operating before 1937 as millers and owners of large plantations not only pooled and collectively sold their sugar but also shared the risk of selling a certain amount of sugar on the 'open' world market. However, this redistributive system extended to the small planters only via intermediaries: millers and brokers. Small planters' canes had to be processed by millers and they kept a substantial margin as payment for their services, usually handing small planters the equivalent of approximately two-thirds of sugar that could be gained per ton delivered. Such a significant deduction could not be justified with the mere costs of milling only. It was also said that the small planters' canes were of lower quality, as they did not plant those varieties that were bred for high yields in Mauritius' scientific institutions. 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, making the small planters full members of the MSS.[27]

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 extending preferences to subsidise ailing Mauritian and other colonial producers, on the other hand. From 1937 on, Britain and other contracting parties of the ISA mutually acknowledged existing quota systems to the degree that these were written into the agreement (albeit some of them amended following negotiations).[28]

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

When colonial dependencies rose up with growing success against colonial exploitation after the Second World War, many colonial powers already had a safeguard system in place. 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, the United Nations, World Bank, International Monetary Fund, etc.). 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, as well as their colonies, which were to be transferred one to one in cases of transition from a colonial to a postcolonial state.[29] Mauritius as a British colony became a member of the GATT in 1947: 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 the GATT according to provisions reserved for newly independent countries in 1967.[30]

Under the GATT, trade in all goods with special provisions for former colonies as well as other bilateral or multilateral 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 (EEC). The Common Agricultural Policy, protecting and subsidising EEC producers heavily against world-market competition, strongly resembles the principles of the CSA in its seclusion from world-market mechanisms. Whereas other imports of sugar were levelled by high import duties to European prices after subsidies, 79 former European colonies in Africa, the Caribbean and the Pacific were granted duty-free purchase at intra-EEC price levels for their agricultural products under the Lomé Convention ratified in 1975. 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 15 years), the guaranteed price brought in revenues that facilitated financing a policy of export-led development. This started with the opening of an Export Processing Zone (EPZ) in 1970 and ultimately led to a booming textile and garment industry with 50 per cent of investment coming from the local sugar industry, making the Mauritian EPZ that with the highest ratio of local capital worldwide.[31]

After independence, Mauritian economic diplomacy continued as a joint endeavour of the postcolonial state and the private sector. Until the early 1990s, Mauritian governments lacked funding to send delegates to Brussels or London for tariff negotiations. These instead were pursued with the support of the MSS, MCC and MCA representatives in European countries, and the Mauritian public–private (diplomacy) partnership negotiated the highest of all sugar quotas among the so-called ACP (African, Caribbean and Pacific Group of States) countries, 79 former European colonies from Africa, the Caribbean and the Pacific, in the Lomé Convention of 1975.[32]

The trade regime established after the Second World War cannot be understood and interpreted without a short reference to its dominant ideologies. While questions about 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 regulatory 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 Gross Domestic Product (GDP). 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. Part and parcel of this division of the world were the ideologies of development and modernisation that defined fixed patterns of action to be followed if a country's position was to be improved. Thus, one can speak of a neo-evolutionary concept that positioned nations and their economies in time according to their stages of development.[33] Inherent in the promise of development and prosperity was a system of aims and norms inscribed into the 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.[34]

It was exactly this concept of reciprocal and mutually advantageous arrangements that was transformed in the heydays of development policies in 1965. Now, preferential trading agreements between the

EEC and former European colonies were legitimate although they were non-reciprocal.[35] 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; but 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 World Trade Organisation (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 multilateral 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 two years, 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.[36] These rounds are split according to three 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 shared interests in one of the three sectors. An example of such a type of formation is the group of ACP states benefitting from the Lomé Convention of 1975 and successor agreements. This group met in preparation for the 2003 summit in Fiji in May to agree on common grounds for trade in agricultural goods.[37] 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 these harmed the export prospects of most African countries, the ACP states supported the EU/US initiative as they profited from preferential access to the European market. Thus, the Mauritian position in Cancun was somewhat schizophrenic as for once it went along with the ACP in trade in agricultural goods.

On the other hand, Mauritius supported the OAU 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. Furthermore, the Mauritian government 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 represented as a coherent national economy 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: sugarcane, 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

In 2012, sugar production still shapes much of social life in Mauritius. The sugar fields dominate the landscape with 40 per cent of acreage under cane cultivation. The industry also strongly impacts future Mauritian economic prospects. This chapter has outlined the continuous importance of the cooperation of governments and the private sector in maintaining sugar and its production regime for the period from 1825 to 2005. What became evident are continuities in the nature of the business and its fundamental political-economic structure. If this is considered, certain ideas concerning how to periodise globalisation can be questioned while others come to the fore.

Given the unbroken legacy of early nineteenth-century public–private partnerships in Mauritius, one central idea for periodising globalisation seems doubtful: that there was an era of free trade in the nineteenth century. From the perspective of Mauritian sugar and later industrial sectors, this has always and continuously been based on insider deals cut in front- and backroom diplomacy, as well as by positioning the island within power struggles guiding the long-term workings of the global system. But free trade was also not the dominant pattern of actual practice. Take, for instance, 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.

Osterhammel and Petersson, however, equate an era of free trade, which they date from 1846 to 1880, with the emergence of a global economy. For the same period, these authors identify the emergence of a global consciousness.[38] Here one might add other examples that contradict this periodisation. Campaigning for and against the abolition of slavery around 1830 was a conscious global movement as well. This calls for shifting attention from the often-invoked consumption patterns to critiques of labour regimes established along commodity chains across the globe.

In other words, globalisation can be periodised by analysing 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 large-scale global capitalist production, this factor itself defines a macro-period of globalisation. Within this period, changes in world-market prices and global economic developments might be identified as secondary macro-factors that in moments of fundamental crisis, such as in 1937, trigger internal and external regulatory procedures that may alter the Mauritian positioning within the sugar commodity chain and especially the nature of the central nodes of the chain: its bottlenecks. Periodising globalisation for Mauritius (or any other post-colony) should therefore involve studying the interstate system and its uneven regulation of global trade over the past two centuries.

Notes

1. McKeown, 'Periodizing Globalization'.
2. Moree, *Concise History of Dutch Mauritius*.
3. Boudet, 'La Construction Politique'.
4. Allen, *Slaves, Freedmen, and Indentured Laborers*, p. 12.
5. Storey, *Science and Power*, p. 26.
6. Wallerstein, 'Great Expansion', pp. 113–4.
7. Vaughan, *Creating the Creole Island*, p. 61.
8. Mintz, *Sweetness and Power*, pp. 188–90; Teelock, *Bitter Sugar*, pp. 42–3.
9. Macmillan, *Mauritius Illustrated,* p. 44; Teelock, *Bitter Sugar*, p. 43.
10. After British take-over, the Colonial Bank of Mauritius, Bourbon (Reunion) and Dependencies had been established in 1812 but operation ceased in 1813 (Berthelot, *Histoire de la Chambre de Commerce*, p. 45).
11. Storey, *Science and Power*, p. 26; Teelock, *Bitter Sugar*, pp. 43–4.
12. *The Times*, 6 June 1825.
13. Mahler, 'Britain, the European Community, and the Developing Commonwealth', p. 473.
14. Vaughan, *Creating the Creole Island*; Allen, 'Licentious and Unbridled Proceedings'. Tinker tries to link the two regimes even closer, calling contract labour *A New System of Slavery*.
15. Boudet, 'Les Abolitions de l'Esclavage'; Boudet, 'La Construction Politique'; Bräutigam, 'Strategic Engagement', p. 67.
16. Sheridan, 'West India Sugar Crisis', pp. 548–9.
17. Berthelot, *Histoire de la Chambre de Commerce*, p. 15.
18. Lagesse, *Blyth Brothers*, p. 120; Berthelot, *Histoire de la Chambre de Commerce*, pp. 29–33, 153–7.
19. Bräutigam, 'Strategic Engagement'.
20. Berthelot, *Histoire de la Chambre de Commerce*, pp. 44, 56, 72, 87.
21. Lagesse, *Blyth Brothers*, p. 118; Berthelot, *Histoire de la Chambre de Commerce*, p. 60; Griffin, 'Sugar Industry', pp. 41–2; Anonymous, 'Trade Movements'.
22. Allen, *Slaves, Freedmen, and Indentured Laborers*, pp. 72–4; North-Coombes, *Studies*, p. 141.
23. This issue is rarely raised in Mauritian historiography (see, for example, Teelock, *Mauritian History*, pp. 323–50).
24. Storey, *Science and Power*.
25. Mahler, 'Britain, the European Community, and the Developing Commonwealth', p. 475.
26. Meade, *Economic and Social Structure*, pp. 79–80.

27. Hooper, *Report*; Meade, *Economic and Social Structure*. Small planters in 1960 owned and worked 40 per cent of the Mauritian land under cane.
28. See Gilbert, 'International Commodity Agreements'.
29. Hoekman and Kostecki, *Political Economy*, 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, 'International Commodity Agreements'). This is outlined in GATT, *Territorial Application*.
30. GATT, *Status of Mauritius*.
31. Mahler, 'Britain, the European Community, and the Developing Commonwealth', pp. 476–80; Neveling, 'Spirits of Capitalism'.
32. Bräutigam, 'Strategic Engagement'.
33. Ferguson, 'Decomposing Modernity'.
34. GATT, *General Agreement*, emphasis added.
35. Ziai, 'From Development Discourse'.
36. Hoekman and Kostecki, *Political Economy*.
37. 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.
38. Osterhammel and Petersson, *Geschichte der Globalisierung*, pp. 60–3.

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7

In Cane's Shadow: Commodity Plantations and the Local Agrarian Economy on Cuba's Mid-nineteenth-Century Sugar Frontier

Jonathan Curry-Machado

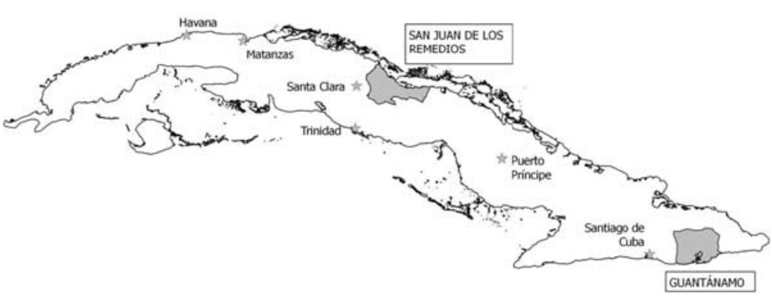
> There is nothing in nature more enchantingly wonderful to the eye than this perpetual blending of flower and fruit, of summer and harvest, of budding brilliant youth, full of hope and promise and gaiety, and mature ripe manhood, laden with the golden treasures of hopes realized, and promises fulfilled

So wrote the North American, Benjamin Moore, following his travels through the Cuban countryside in the 1840s.[1] Yet during the nineteenth century, this vision of Cuba's agricultural self-sufficiency was sacrificed in favour of spreading commodity cultivation, in particular sugarcane, of which Cuba became the world's leading producer. Sugar plantations increasingly dominated the landscape, casting an ever-longer shadow over the island's agricultural diversity; and by the early twentieth century it seemed legitimate to claim that 'without sugar there is no country'. In the process, the island's environment became radically altered, such that in 1905 a Cuban agronomist remarked:

> Passed . . . is that happy age in which with pride we could say that Cuba was the promised land, in which it was sufficient to cast the seed over the terrain in order to harvest shortly afterwards

> flavoursome, exquisite and abundant fruits. Cast the seed on the majority of the cultivated land . . . and in vain will you wait for them to produce abundant fruit.[2]

However, a large proportion of the rural population lived and worked on peasant smallholdings. Whether these were directly or indirectly tied to larger estates, or seeking to scratch out an independent living from the land that the plantations were unable to exploit, they resulted in a hidden rural diversity belying the absolute dominance of cane. These formed the backbone of an agrarian economy that ranged from basic subsistence agriculture, through local markets and informal exchange, to a wider range of exportable crops. Nevertheless, and despite the growth in the number of such smallholdings alongside the spread of the cane plantations, as the nineteenth century progressed Cuba found itself unable to meet its basic food requirements.[3] This chapter combines a national overview with a comparison between two local cases of the nineteenth-century sugar frontier: to "San Juan de los Remedios, in the centre of the island, and Guantánamo, in the extreme east (see Map 7.1)." Both districts saw cane cultivation rapidly rise from insignificance, such that by 1862 each accounted for almost 5 per cent of the island's total sugar production. At the same time, neither district became entirely dominated by this one crop during the period (though they would be subsequently), thereby enabling the detailed relationship between the growth in sugar production and the local availability of basic food crops to be observed.



Map 7.1 Cuba, showing position of San Juan de los Remedios and Guantánamo

Raising cane

Until the nineteenth century, the district surrounding San Juan de los Remedios (on the north coast of Las Villas province) remained sparsely populated, and the land was largely unexploited, with much of it remaining covered in extensive forests.[4] But the area's proximity to Santa Clara, along with the possibility of coastal trade connecting Remedios with the island's western ports, gradually encouraged the cultivation of a number of commodity crops. In 1827, of the 1,448 recorded farms in the Remedios area, although only 17 were primarily sugar-producing (barely unchanged from 1775, when there were 15), 75 cultivated coffee and 107 tobacco. However, these estates were not particularly productive, when compared with national averages (Table 7.1). Alongside these, though, Remedios was until the early nineteenth century the most important cacao-producing district in the country, cultivating 85 per cent of Cuba's recorded production in this crop.

Alongside these estates numerous other farms were thriving, either rearing livestock or cultivating a wide range of food crops. Although occupying only 4 per cent of the total land available in 1827, the district's agriculture was producing food roughly at the national per

Table 7.1 Commodity production in Remedios (1827) and Guantánamo (1846)

	Number of farms	**Production (arrobas)**	**Average production per farm (arrobas)**	**National average per farm (arrobas)**
REMEDIOS				
Sugar	17	24,245	1,426	8,172
Coffee	75	34,700	463	1,395
Cacao	41	20,150	491	397
Tobacco	107	6,792	63	89
GUANTÁNAMO				
Sugar	12	120,400	10,033	13,186
Coffee	42	37,303	888	880
Cotton	13	4,014	309	94
Tobacco	524	40,120	77	88

Source: Zaragoza, Cuadro estadístico; O'Donnell, Cuadro estadístico.

capita average. Meanwhile, although commodity crops helped bring some measure of prosperity to Remedios, by the 1840s (immediately prior to the growth of the district's sugar industry) the previous diversity in these had already greatly declined. While the number of sugar estates was back to the level it had been in 1775, the number of tobacco *vegas* had fallen to 86, coffee production was a sixth of its 1827 level, and cacao cultivation had almost entirely collapsed. Most of the farms previously producing these had turned to food crops.

Guantánamo was rather different to Remedios prior to the arrival of mass sugar production. Situated in the extreme east of the island, it was largely ignored by Spanish settlers, who left largely undisturbed the small aboriginal communities located there.[5] In the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, a combination of French planters displaced by the revolution in neighbouring Saint Domingue and the search by the oligarchy of Santiago de Cuba for fresh lands began to populate the region – displacing the original subsistence-farming inhabitants towards the extensive mountain ranges, which also came to provide a haven for escaped slaves. Unlike Remedios (administratively autonomous from an early date), Guantánamo did not receive such recognition until the mid-nineteenth century. By the early 1840s, only 3,776 were recorded as living there, of which half were slaves – a similar proportion to that seen throughout the region of Santiago de Cuba, of which Guantánamo at this stage still formed part (compared to the 17 per cent in the remainder of Oriente province). At this point, immediately prior to the rapid advance of sugarcane cultivation, there was just a single sugar estate, compared with 26 coffee estates on which about a third of the total population lived. The remaining 200 farms were primarily subsistence-based smallholdings.

Although sugarcane had been cultivated in Cuba since the sixteenth century, the spread of cane plantations was slow, with most planters favouring tobacco and coffee into the eighteenth century. In 1760, the island was exporting just 5,500 tons; and while the occupation by the British of the Havana region in 1762–63 stimulated plantation development and trade, growth in the sugar industry continued to be very gradual, reaching just 16,700 tons by 1791. Nevertheless, the foundations of the Cuban sugar industry had already been well established, albeit on a small scale, and the island was perfectly placed to benefit from the collapse in sugar production in Saint Domingue following the revolution there. Not only did this immediately remove from the world market the most important sugar colony of the period, but also resulted in a sharp increase in sugar prices, which made it particularly attractive for Cuban planters to expand their cane fields into virgin lands and to move existing cultivation away from other crops. By the mid-nineteenth century, Cuba had emerged as the world's leading sugar producer; and what had once been primarily concentrated around Havana, by the 1840s had shifted its centre to Matanzas and Cárdenas, and the movement eastwards continued throughout the century. Meanwhile, new landowners tamed the region around Sagua la Grande and Remedios with cane; while along the south coast, the relatively small plantations of Trinidad gave way to the large estates in the region of the newly established city of Cienfuegos. In the east of the island, the already existing sugarcane plantations around Santiago de Cuba expanded into neighbouring Guantánamo.[6]

At the same time, the way in which cane was cultivated, and sugar produced, changed. Well into the nineteenth century, sugarcane continued to be grown and crushed in small quantities on smaller farms, combined with a variety of food crops and livestock. But as sugar production began to spread from the late eighteenth century, and as planters moved into previously unexploited lands, cane cultivation increasingly occurred on ever-larger plantations, with a higher percentage of land devoted to cane, a greater need for large bodies of slave labour and the construction of ever-more technologically advanced sugar mills. Alongside this came the development of transport systems (most importantly railways) whose primary function was to speed the movement of the sugar to the coastal ports, and the linking of Cuba firmly into international commodity-trade networks.[7]

In 1843, Guantánamo was established as an administrative region in its own right, and its population continued to grow, doubling between 1841 and 1846, and again by the early 1860s – although with barely 20,000 throughout the region by then, it was still among the most sparsely populated. Although coffee cultivation continued to maintain its importance, much of this growth was due to the advance of sugarcane cultivation. In the early 1840s, 12 plantations were established, and though their average production was slightly lower than the national (Table 7.1), they were clearly considerably larger than most others in eastern Cuba, where outside Guantánamo the average sugar-estate production was barely 2,000 arrobas a year. Although Santiago de Cuba had been a fairly important sugar-producing region from the eighteenth century, it was in Guantánamo that the modern plantation system first became established, presaging some of the developments in the Cuban sugar industry that would become more generalised later in the century. Of particular importance was the quality of the sugar produced. Whereas the western sugar plantations that continued to dominate the island's sugar production were, in the 1840s, still priding themselves on the high quality of their end product, Guantánamo's sugar planters favoured quantity over quality: in 1846, more than 96 per cent of Guantánamo's sugar was *moscabado*, mainly sent to the United States for refining. This tendency continued to be accentuated, such that by the 1860s only 0.3 per cent of the region's sugar was locally refined. By this time, 23 sugar plantations were established in Guantánamo, producing 15 times as much cane in 1862 as had been 16 years earlier, on cane fields that on average produced 3,800 *arrobas* of sugar per *caballería* – a considerably higher level of productivity than the national average of approximately 2,200.[8] This would be expected, given the newness of the cane fields, whose soil still had not been exhausted, and the high amount of virgin land available to planters to expand into.

Cane cultivation also began to take off around Remedios in the early 1840s. Here, although less accentuated, most of this increase was also in *moscabado*: whereas 77 per cent of the production of the earlier sugar estates had been of higher quality sugars, by 1846 the proportion had been reversed with 63 per cent with a lower level of refinement. In 1862 – by when the number of sugar plantations had increased to 71 and total production was eight times its 1846 level – 98 per cent of sugar from Remedios was *moscabado*. Initially concentrated in a spreading area primarily to the west of the town, by the 1860s a second focus for cane cultivation had opened up in the previously subsistence-farming area to the east, around Yaguajay. The cane fields of Remedios had a productivity that was close to that of Guantánamo – 3,683 *arrobas* per *caballería* in 1860 – again a reflection of the fertility of soil that had only recently been deforested and begun to be cultivated.

In both Guantánamo and Remedios can be seen a combination of older forms of cane cultivation and sugar production (exemplified by the animal-powered mill) and modern plantations employing steam power. In a list of 44 sugar mills in Remedios in 1860, only 27 could be described as modern (though these produced 86 per cent of the region's sugar), and 13 out of 25 in Guantánamo (accounting for 83 per cent of production).[9] At the same time, there were signs of the sugar industry bringing with it rural development: improved connectivity with neighbouring districts (as well as in local transport), growing towns (and an increase in the number of rural settlements) and some increase in rural industry and services.

Ability to feed

While the late eighteenth century began to see sugarcane cultivation spread more widely, and its production became both more concentrated and extensive, alongside this was a process of ongoing agricultural diversification, in which not only food farming continued to develop but farmers were also attracted by increasing access to external formal and informal trading networks. They were encouraged to develop other commodity crops, such as coffee, cotton or indigo, and to introduce new cultivations, such as mango, which would quickly become such an integral part of the creole diet that its foreign origins would be forgotten. By the mid-nineteenth century Cuba had a growing importance for the transnational commercial networks upon which the global economy had by then become dependent. Although Cuban exports were increasingly dominated by sugar and its derivatives, coffee and tobacco continued to play a significant role; and as the nineteenth century progressed, some crops more generally associated with subsistence also became exploited as commodities, such as bananas and other fruits.[10]

The evidence would suggest that the expansion of plantations may have actually increased the amount of land cultivated in other ways. As the sugar frontier extended, the old haciendas became subdivided, leading to the purchase of land 'by small-scale farmers with modest resources as well as by those with greater ambitions'.[11] There seemed to be a clear connection between the spread of the two, with many leading figures of the creole 'sugarocracy' believing that the island's future could be founded on peasant smallholders, cultivating not only export crops but also those of basic consumption.[12] The development of sugar plantations helped open up unused land, bringing employment and some measure of wealth into the district. Although it is known that most of the profits made by producing sugar were channelled out, back to the cities or abroad, the large numbers of workers required on the estates had to be fed – and unless the shortfall were to be met entirely by importing, what could not be produced by the plantation itself had to be met by local producers. This helps to explain the increase in small farms alongside the development of the plantation economy – not in contradiction to it, but with a certain symbiosis.

Sugar plantations also brought with them more diversified cultivation in that typically slaves (and later emancipated workers) would be allowed small plots of land (*conucos*) on which to plant food crops, or raise livestock, thereby supplementing their diet and enabling them some access to local markets. While *conucos* also helped tie labour to the plantation, the harsh conditions of slavery also pushed some slaves to escape, resulting in *palenques* becoming established in more remote areas, eking out a basic subsistence from the land. Africans brought with them considerable knowledge of sub-tropical farming, and their importance as rural labourers (even if they were enslaved) was a positive contribution to the development of Cuban food farming.[13]

Sugarcane has a tendency to rapidly exhaust both the soil on which it is grown, and the neighbouring wood supplies needed for the production process. As a result, it was common for plantations to become dismantled, and land to be converted to other agricultural uses – livestock rearing and farming for subsistence or the local food market – while cane cultivation moved into new areas. For example, Santiago de las Vegas, close to Havana, had been a cane-growing district in the eighteenth century, but during the nineteenth became characterised by its agricultural diversity; and Guanabacoa, although cane-producing during the first years of the early nineteenth-century sugar boom, a century later only had a single *caballería* planted to cane. Of the 164 farms in that district, 101 were growing diversified food crops. At least until the mid-nineteenth century, it seemed realistic that sugar might continue to develop and generate wealth in tandem with the spread of smallholdings cultivating a wider range of crops: for subsistence, local markets and export. This was the view of many prominent commentators of the time; and the project of '*Cuba pequeña*' ('little Cuba') generated a vision of the island that would end its dependence upon slavery, and develop on the foundations of a strong peasantry.[14]

In the midst of the plantation system, these small farms – largely rented from larger landowners – occupied a significant space. Even in Matanzas, at the heart of the island's sugar industry by the 1840s, a continuing diversity could be seen, with about a third of the population living and working 'on crop- and stock-raising farms', and in those districts on the edge of the sugar frontier this rose to as much as 70 per cent. Even though sugar cultivation continued to increase its macroeconomic hold over the province, in 1862 this same proportion of the population continued to inhabit 'other types' of farms, primarily smallholdings, 'scattered among or nearby the sugar mills'.[15] If the period running from the end of the eighteenth to the second half of the nineteenth century can be characterised by the spectacular rise of the Cuban sugar industry, it could equally be described in terms of the spread of peasant cultivation: with the number of farms increasing from less than 8,000 in 1778 to over 50,000 by 1862, in which year only one-seventh of cultivated land was under cane, compared to two-thirds producing food crops.[16] This was reflected in the numbers of farms (Figure 7.1), and in the fact that throughout the mid-nineteenth century more than half of the rural population continued to live and work on smallholdings.

To what extent was there a direct relationship, at a local level, between the parallel increases in plantation and non-plantation farming? There seems to have been a close link in Remedios. While the number of sugar plantations increased from 37 in 1846 to 71 in 1862 (and the region's sugar production became eight times greater), the number of crop-cultivating *sitios* and *estancias* increased threefold, cattle-rearing *potreros* doubled and the number of *vegas* (combining tobacco cultivation with diversified food production) rose from 86 to 453. In the Tiguayabon district, where 16 of the 34 new sugar plantations were established, the increase in non-plantation farming was particularly visible: the number of smallholdings grew from 48 to 306. In other districts, the spread of sugar plantations seems to have led to a local reduction in smallholdings. For example, in Yaguajay while sugar plantations were established (producing a third

Figure 7.1 Number of farms, 1775–1862
Source: Torre, *Noticias*; Zaragoza, *Cuadro estadístico*; O'Donnell, *Cuadro estadístico*; Toledo, *Noticias estadísticas*.

of Remedios sugar in 1860), the number of small farms dropped from 70 to 59. However, at the same time neighbouring Mayajigua saw its population triple, and the number of smallholdings increase from 86 to 131, possibly stimulated by the close proximity of increasing cane cultivation. A similar situation can be seen in Guantánamo – although here most smallholdings were tobacco *vegas* combining this commodity crop with subsistence-food cultivation. While sugar production increased fifteen-fold between 1846 and 1862, the total number of smallholdings doubled from 644 to 1,239. As in Remedios, there seems to have been a close local link. In Tiguabos, where 71 per cent of Guantanamo's sugar production was concentrated in 1860, the number of mainly food-cultivating smallholdings increased from 58 to 282.

At a basic level, smallholding peasants produced for domestic consumption and local exchange. However, because the majority of them rented their land from larger landowners, they needed to produce some surplus, to enable either payment in kind or labour or for sale – directly to neighbouring plantations, through itinerant sale or through the ubiquitous rural *bodegas* (a combination of small store and tavern, where local farmers could trade their produce, and buy supplies, as well as meet to have a drink, play cards or take part in cockfights), in local markets in the rural population centres that gradually developed, or to feed the burgeoning demands of the island's cities. A wide variety of crops were cultivated, ranging from grains (rice, maize, millet and sago), root vegetables (yucca, potatoes, malanga, boniato), through various beans, to a range of green vegetables and fruits. Through the mid-nineteenth century, despite a drop in the 1840s due to the impact of hurricanes, food production increased. By 1862, the total amount of food produced in the island was almost twice what it had been in 1827, with the bulk of the increase in the Matanzas and Santa Clara regions, where most of the advances in sugar plantations were occurring.

For all that sugar seemed to be sweeping all before it, during the nineteenth century agricultural diversification in Cuba may have actually increased.[17] Not only could smallholdings yield a range of subsistence crops 'for family consumption or for sale', but they could also provide the option of cultivating cane or other export crops,[18] with peasants alternating commercial and subsistence crops 'in correspondence to their monetary and self-sufficiency needs';[19] on the plantations themselves, crops such as bananas or plantains and maize were used in association with cane and tobacco, and to a certain extent within a programme of crop rotation. Not all land was suitable for cane, thereby offering the possibility of developing other crops, such as henequen on rocky coastal soils. Even the development of the new large sugar centrals in Oriente later in the century was often combined with the extensive cultivation of bananas and coconut for export, with Cuba coming to supplant Jamaica and other banana producers in the region within the US market; and elsewhere other agricultural products were grown to take advantage of the new possibilities for tropical fruits in the US market. Güines became in this way effectively an allotment for the United States – continuing the region's history of ongoing sugar production with more diversified cultivation, becoming the island's main commercial producer of tomatoes, onions and potatoes.[20]

Though much of this was another form of commodity production, sometimes sugar colonies were developed to be self-sufficient, such as the Guabairo Colonia, where 'a sufficient quantity of corn and vegetables were grown for all the requirements of the colonia, so we never had to purchase'.[21] There may also have been a classificatory problem, accentuating the impression of cane's dominance, whereby many lands classified as devoted to sugar were in fact 'subdivided into smallholdings or dedicated to alternative agricultural activities'.[22] This would become particularly important by the early twentieth century, in the large sugar *latifundia* that had by then developed. On the Tuinucú central near Sancti Spíritus, small-scale food cultivation by workers and cane farmers was actively encouraged, offering prizes to whoever 'could cultivate the most fruits and vegetables': 'those who grew more than their families could consume sold the surplus for extra income'.[23] The Chaparra and Delicias sugar centrals were so large and dominating that the local port (Puerto Padre) was effectively their dependency. Such plantations controlled far more land than was ever cultivated with cane (in 1919, while 8 per cent of the island's total area was occupied by cane fields, the sugar *latifundia* occupied three times this area); and though they imported a lot of their food requirements, they also probably produced a lot of this locally.[24] However, just as much subsistence cultivation by smallholding peasants would never reach official figures (and therefore tend to be under considered), so too would such cultivations not necessarily appear in any documents external to the plantation, thereby adding to the erroneous impression of cane cultivation to the exclusion of other crops.

Nevertheless, as the nineteenth century progressed, Cuba found itself increasingly unable to meet its food needs. The problem of smallholders switching from subsistence crops to cane (or surrendering their lands to this end) was already evident in the seventeenth century, and this tendency intensified in the early nineteenth century, by when it was clear that the island was not self-sufficient in many staples – such as beans, which, although grown locally, was not in sufficient quantities to satisfy the growing population, resulting in the need for imports. Early attempts at some form of crop rotation – such as harvesting rice one year prior to planting cane, or interspersing cane with corn – came to be opposed by leading planters; and by the mid-nineteenth century official bodies displayed a clear prejudice in favour of cane cultivation.[25]

Even though the number of food-cultivating farms continued to grow (as did the number living and working on them), they were not able to meet the requirements of the island's burgeoning population. This may in large part have been due to such farming being carried out by white, European settlers, generally unfamiliar with the specificities of a climate and environment such as Cuba's. The number of Spanish migrants in the island grew from 47,023 in 1846 to 117,114 in 1862, and many of these arrived as agricultural colonists. While those who could afford to obtain slaves may have been able to benefit from African farming expertise, most were poor and struggled to adapt to Cuban conditions; and it would not be until the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries that a serious attempt began to be made to introduce scientific methods to the production of food crops. The average food-crop production per *sitio* and *estancia* in the mid-nineteenth century shows a drop in productivity: from 2,857 *arrobas* per farm in 1827 to just 1,169 in 1846, and only slowly improving (to 2,088 *arrobas* per farm) by 1862.[26]

It would seem that in the early nineteenth century, Remedios was largely self-sufficient in food (although beans, already an important food import for Cuba as a whole, seem to have been in short supply) – with a diversity seen not just in the quantity of principal staples, but also in the quantity of vegetables and fruit. Indeed, the region appears to have been growing an excess of food, with sufficient vegetable and fruit to potentially supply other districts. However, as in the country as a whole, from early on there was a shortage of rice; and although the region cultivated this grain in increasing quantities, this could not keep pace with the growing population. Initially, the indigenous crops of cassava and maize were the primary staples, but during the century cassava production collapsed while reliance upon rice increased, with most of this needing to be imported from elsewhere. Cultivation of maize, which extended its importance throughout Cuba during the mid-nineteenth century, increased greatly, though again it probably was not sufficient to keep pace with local needs. A similar story can be seen with other key crops, such as root vegetables and bananas, with increased cultivation on the growing number of smallholdings failing to keep pace with demand. A particularly striking feature of the local food market in Remedios is that, as the century progressed, the availability of vegetables and fruit apparently plummeted. Indeed, average food production per *sitio* or *estancia* in Remedios steadily fell through the period, from 1,803 *arrobas* in 1827 to 1,130 in 1846 and 1,059 in 1862.

The situation in Guantánamo seems to have been somewhat different. Here, prior to the rapid growth in sugar cultivation in the mid-nineteenth century, the local food market was rather meagre. Many of those living in the region were essentially subsistence farmers, often on farms whose primary economic activity was the cultivation of tobacco, which they would supplement with food cultivation. In the 1840s there appears to have been a shortage of all foods except maize – though cassava was probably grown widely, for domestic consumption by isolated rural communities, rather than market sale. Unlike Remedios, in Guantánamo as sugar plantations took hold, their demand for food staples helped stimulate the increasing cultivation of bananas, maize and root vegetables. Not only was local cultivation able to keep pace with the growing demand but even seems to have outstripped it – with local production in these more than enough to make up for the local shortage in rice (which was probably being met by imports anyway, in particular for the plantations). It is likely that much of this surplus was traded in Santiago de Cuba. Average food cultivation per smallholding in Guantánamo grew considerably, from 1,838 *arrobas* per annum in 1846 to 9,588 in 1862 – a further indication of the rise of very large commercial food farms in the region.

Thus the argument that spreading sugar cultivation brought an increasing inability for the island to feed itself, and dependency on external sources of food – which is generally asserted at a national level – would only seem to be partially confirmed at the local level: while in Remedios, there does indeed appear to be a drop in self-sufficiency, despite the increase in the number of small farms, in Guantánamo food cultivation actually increased substantially.

An unequal relationship

Alongside export-commodity cultivation, from early on can be seen the development of trade in imported food commodities: first of all beans, but also rice, as this became an important staple in the Cuban diet during the nineteenth century. Meanwhile, as the plantation economy took hold – with its accompanying increase in demand for food crops – mass cultivation of some key foods (as a commodity for the national market, but also eventually for export) developed. Crops such as maize and bananas (as well as rice) began to be produced in some areas in great quantities, to be traded elsewhere in the island, taking advantage of the transport and trading networks that the commodity-driven economy (primarily led by sugar) had developed. Such food-producing farms need to be distinguished, as part of the commodity system, from those farms that continued to produce essentially for subsistence and the local market. However, while such developments were already nascent during the mid-nineteenth century, they should not be overstated. As Ramón de la Sagra (director of Havana's botanic gardens during the period) pointed out, food cultivation in Cuba did not greatly change during the middle years of the century, and 'has not yet acquired the importance it demands and needs, both in quantity and in the number of products'.[27] Nevertheless, the foundations were clearly set for later expansion.

The division between the local agrarian economy and the commodity networks was never a clear-cut one. Many smallholdings included in their activities the cultivation of small quantities of commodity crops. This was obviously true of the tobacco *vegas*, but the small *sitios* and *estancias* did not necessarily distinguish between food and cash crop, if these could obtain them some advantage in the local market. While sometimes such produce would contribute to the district's overall production for export, smallholdings more usually met local demand for such merchandise: be it sugar, coffee or tobacco, or even cotton. However, with the expansion of sugar plantations, local areas became more firmly drawn into the export-oriented trading networks that spread as a part of this. In the process, the local food markets appear to have become increasingly geared towards commodity trade, rather than being sites for local trade in a diverse range of food crops. Where local markets had previously served local needs, they increasingly came to form part of the servicing of the plantation complex. To an increasing degree, basic food requirements (of crops that could be readily produced in large quantities, transported and hence commodified) came to be met by import from abroad or other parts of the island, while at the same time dominating the output of local food-producing farms. Meanwhile, fresh foods – vegetables and fruits, which were somewhat harder to commodify due to transport and durability problems, and therefore took longer to succumb to this commodification process – continued to be cultivated or collected, but more for domestic consumption or informal local exchange: be it barter between neighbours, itinerant sale or through local *bodegas*.

At the same time, the plantations themselves developed their own forms of subsistence cultivation – whether as *conucos*, or through other means of internal cultivation of food crops to supplement supply. This resulted in a continuing diversity that remained somewhat obscured by cane's shadow. Although there may well have been a tendency towards the limitation of the amount of land made available for slave *conucos*, far from disappearing these were maintained post-emancipation, partly as a means of continuing to tie workers to the plantations when otherwise they could easily have left to seek their livelihoods elsewhere. Early experiments in centralisation of sugar production, while obliging *colonos* to cultivate cane, did not expect this to be exclusive. When Francisco Diago experimented with distributing peripheral, otherwise underutilised land to *colonos* to help supply his Tinguaro mill, the contracts only required a proportion of the land to be planted with cane, with the rest available to produce other foods and rear animals.[28]

Three key developments tilted the balance away from '*Cuba pequeña*' towards the emergence of large sugar *latifundia*, which dominated the island by the early twentieth century: hurricanes, war and agricultural reorganisation. The first of these occurred in the 1840s, when a series of massive storms swept across the island, in particular affecting the rich agricultural lands of the west. The 1844 hurricane followed a period of water shortage, and a newspaper reported in 1844 that

> the results . . . will subject this fertile part of the island . . . to new and greater damage than was experienced with the drought. The planted fields of rice, corn, yucca, plantains – everything has perished. Fences, houses, trees, forests – everything has been left destroyed.[29]

Peasant smallholders were the worst affected, with reports coming in from around the country of the 'sorrowful effect on the condition of families in the countryside, creating unemployment and misery'.[30] Damage was not only caused by the high winds and heavy rains. Saltwater was also carried deep inland, contaminating freshwater supplies to the ongoing detriment of crops. Two years later another massive hurricane struck, again devastating agriculture and rural communities. Although sugar crops were also damaged, they were the quickest to recover, and plantation owners were financially in a better position to do so. One of the effects of the storms was to further the collapse of Cuban coffee production: whereas one-seventh of cultivated land in Cuba was taken up by coffee estates in 1842, this had fallen to just one-twentieth ten years later.[31] The hurricanes highlighted the social and economic disparity between small farmers and rural labourers, and the sugar planters. With the absence of rural banking and credit facilities that might have assisted them in their recovery, they found themselves increasingly more dependent upon the plantations, which continued to expand across the country and to dominate local markets.

This process was intensified during the final third of the nineteenth century by the three wars of independence (1868–78, 1878–79 and 1895–98). As with the hurricanes, it was the rural poor that was worst hit, losing their land, crops and livelihood. In the 1895–98 war, some 80 per cent of smallholdings were destroyed – and in some districts the destruction was almost total: not only as a result of fighting and pillage, but also of the Spanish policy of forcing the rural population into the towns where they could be more closely controlled – with large numbers dying of starvation and disease. Even more than with the hurricanes of the 1840s, there was a clear disparity between the damages suffered by smallholder agriculture, and the increasingly large sugar plantations, as too in their respective ability to recover. While investment was forthcoming to promote the continuing advance of the latter, peasant farmers were faced by debts they were generally unable to meet – and for which the military orders imposed by the occupying US army prior to the granting of Cuban independence allowed no relief. Losing their lands, many came to the cities or tramped the land in search of employment. Contemporary reports abounded of the state the country had fallen to, so far removed from the bright image of 'little Cuba' half a century before.[32]

The sugar industry came out as an obvious winner of the wars, and the first two decades of the twentieth century saw the completion of cane's dominance of the island's economy and land use, extending now to every part of Cuba where it could conceivably be grown. However, the plantations of this period were very different to those that had characterised the earlier period. By the 1880s, beet sugar had surpassed cane sugar in the world market, bringing with it a

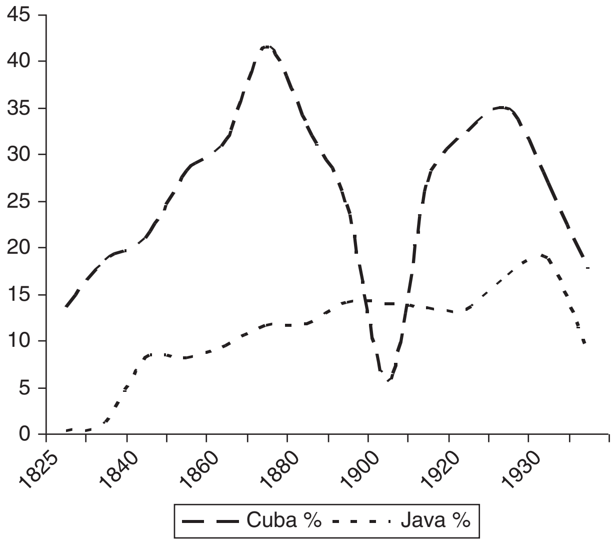


Figure 7.2 Cuba and Java's share of world sugarcane
Source: Bosma and Curry-Machado, 'Two Islands, One Commodity'.

drop in prices and provoking a crisis in the Cuban sugar industry. This was further aggravated by the emergence of rival sugarcane producers, notably Java – where a more scientific approach to agriculture resulted in greater efficiency in land use.[33] As Figure 7.2 shows, Cuba's share of world trade in sugar collapsed, and it was only through the radical reorganisation of the island's production methods that it was able to recuperate its position in the early twentieth century.

Sugar production became concentrated in large central factories while cane cultivation was divided up among planters whose role was to provide the factories with the necessary raw material. In those places where the sugar industry already existed, the strongest mills took on the central role while others became reduced to cane cultivation; while in those places, in particular in the eastern half of the island where till then sugar had been little more than a small local industry producing low quantities for local consumption, investors (many of them foreign) were able to establish massive *latifundia*, acquiring vast quantities of land that was either previously unexploited or in the hands of the weakened peasantry. Unlike earlier experiments aimed at encouraging the settlement of land by peasant farmers, as the formation of sugar centrals accelerated, and with them their demand for ever-larger quantities of cane, existing agricultural land became swallowed up. With the rural population in an increasingly precarious position, the opportunity to become *colonos*, planting cane for the sugar mills, offered the chance to obtain an income and means of subsistence based not upon the cultivation of their own food crops, but on participation in the sugar economy. It was also seen as a means of attracting farmers back to the land, which they had abandoned during the war years.[34]

Dependency had thus moved from sugar wealth helping to stimulate local food cultivation and trade (albeit with demand outstripping local supply), to the latter becoming subsumed within the former. Cane proved attractive to many as a crop, since it was easy to plant at minimal expense and had an apparently guaranteed market, thanks to the hunger of the sugar mills, while vegetable cultivation required greater skill but for a lower return. Even livestock farms became dismantled during the last third of the nineteenth century, and subdivided with much being turned to cane.[35] There could be seen the spread of an attitude among many that rather than seeking self-sufficiency and independently sustainable rural communities, it was preferable to participate in the economy of monetary exchange. One commentator remarked in 1882: 'if the question is between cane or bananas, should we have to choose between the two we prefer to do without bananas rather than to live without money'.[36] The new centrals swallowed up '[l]ands that before had been composed of forests, grassy savannas, and crops, or subdivided into ingenios, potreros, estancias, and other types of farms'.[37] Unlike earlier experiments in centralised production, these new centrals generally established restrictive contracts governing the *colonos*, denying them freedom to choose which crops they wished to cultivate; it was seen as preferable to purchase and import necessary foods for the farming population rather for them to divert any land from cane in order to produce this themselves.[38]

The number of food-growing smallholdings fell from 34,546 in 1862 to 17,094 by 1877 (during the first war of independence), and then only slowly recovered, reaching just 23,238 before the outbreak of the 1895–98 war.[39] This was further accentuated in the aftermath of the war of independence, when, despite attempts to encourage peasants back to the land, the ongoing difficulties faced by small farmers in obtaining credit were compounded by a combination of effects: perceived dangers and insecurities; urban employment; sale of farms or expiration of contract; or death of the family's menfolk during the war. In the east of the island, which had largely escaped the advance of sugarcane in the nineteenth century but which became increasingly important during the early twentieth century, 'expansion of the sugar system foretold the extinction of small fincas and the expulsion of farmers': in Guantánamo, smallholdings fell from 1,262 in 1899 to 419 in 1911, and a similar tendency can be seen throughout the region.[40] With each round in the cycle of oscillating sugar prices bringing a fresh expansion in cane cultivation, and a new burst of peasant displacement, resulting in the gradual destruction of an independent peasantry:

> A community made up largely of self-sufficient farmers and peasants was reorganized into a society consisting largely of dependent rural workers, frequently working for foreign corporations, eating foreign-produced foods, living often in company towns, and buying from mill stores.[41]

As the Cuban anthropologist Fernando Ortiz observed:

> The small Cuban landowner, independent and prosperous . . . is gradually disappearing. The farmer is becoming a member of the proletariat, just another laborer, without roots in the soil, shifted from one district to another.[42]

Nevertheless, despite the macroeconomic balance tilting so firmly in favour of sugarcane, the vision of '*Cuba pequeña*' continued to persist, albeit in the margins and the interstices of the sugar complex. But the survival was a difficult one, and considerable rural discontent and conflict arose, prompted by the precariousness of rural life, the tendency to find themselves displaced by cane and the frustrated expectations of the liberation struggle. The burning of cane fields had, since the nineteenth century, been symbolically very important as an expression of this, and this continued in the twentieth century,[43] while 'many rural communities defended their lands tenaciously.'[44] Rural banditry, supported by extensive peasant kinship networks, also was a commonplace phenomenon in the Cuban countryside, from the time of the Ten Years' War onwards. But little could stop local agrarian economies from becoming gradually subsumed within the commodity system; and while 'little Cuba' did not vanish, it became increasingly invisible, pushed further into the ever-deepening shadow cast by the cane.

Notes

1. Norman, *Rambles by Land and Water*, p. 52.
2. Cruz, *Primer informe anual*, p. 27.
3. Le Riverend, *Historia económica*, p. 169.
4. On Remedios, see Venegas, 'Consideraciones en torno a la economía remediana colonial'.
5. On the development of Guantánamo, see Maure, 'El proceso de formación de la región histórica de Guantánamo'.
6. Moreno, *Ingenio*; García Rodríguez, *Entre Haciendas y Plantaciones*; Marrero, *Cuba*; Le Riverend, *Historia económica*; Curry-Machado, *Cuban Sugar Industry*.
7. Zanetti and García, *Sugar and Railroads*.
8. Rebello, *Estados relativos a la producción azucarera*. An *arroba* weighed 25 pounds; a *caballería*, in Cuba, represented an area of 33.2 acres.
9. Rebello, *Estados relativos a la producción azucarera*.
10. Le Riverend, *Historia económica*, p. 134; Stubbs, *Tabaco en la periferia*; Pérez de la Riva, *El café*; García, *Costa cubana del guineo*; Fernández, *Cuba Agrícola*.
11. Bergad, *Cuban Rural Society*, p. 55.
12. Venegas Fornías, 'Estancias y sitios de labor'.
13. On this occurring elsewhere in the Americas, see Carney, *Black Rice*.
14. Funes, *From Rainforest to Cane Field*, pp. 30, 35–6; Fernández, *Cuba Agrícola*, pp. 60, 65, 124; Sagra, *Estudios coloniales*; Venegas Fornías, 'Estancias y sitios de labor'.
15. Bergad, *Cuban Rural Society*, pp. 32–3, 95, 140.
16. Marrero, *Cuba*, Vol.10, p. 86.
17. Fernández, *Cuba Agrícola*, p. 59.
18. Rebecca L. Scott, *Slave emancipation in Cuba: the transition to free labor, 1860–1899* (Princeton, 1985), p. 246.
19. Fernández, *Cuba Agrícola*, p. 303.
20. Fernández, *Cuba Agrícola*, pp. 125–6, 269, 280, 295; Letter from Joaquín Alfonso y Madan, to Capitan General Gobernador de Cuba, 24 April 1889 (Archivo Histórico Nacional, Madrid (AHN), Ultramar, Fomento de Cuba (UFC), 173/18); Funes, *From Rainforest to Cane Field*, p. 196; García Alvarez, 'Las economías locales en el oriente de Cuba', p. 222.
21. US War Dept., *Informe subre el censo*, pp. 529–30.
22. Iglesias, *Economía del fin de siglo*, p. 62.

23. McGillivray, *Blazing Cane*, p. 132.
24. McGillivray, *Blazing Cane*, p. 103.
25. Funes, *From Rainforest to Cane Field*, p. 31; Moreno, *Ingenio*, Vol.1, p. 96; Zaragoza, *Cuadro estadístico*, p. 32; Humboldt, *Ensayo politico*; O'Farrill, 'Exposición', p. 122.
26. Maluquer de Motes, *Nación e inmigración*; Naranjo Orovio, 'Cara y cruz de una política colonial'; Fernández, *Cuba Agrícola*; Fernández, *Espacio de poder*.
27. Sagra, *Cuba en 1860*, p. 179.
28. Sagra, *Cuba en 1860*, p. 179.AHN, UFC 66/18.
29. *Faro Industrial*, 12 October 1844.
30. Report on Cienfuegos, Francisco Zoyestino to Governor General, 2nd November 1844, Archivo Nacional de Cuba, Fondo Donativos y Remisiones, cited in Pérez, *Winds of Change*, p. 63.
31. Pérez, *Winds of Change*, pp. 64, 86–92.
32. Iglesias, *Economía del fin de siglo*, pp. 23, 95; Balboa, *Protesta rural en Cuba*, pp. 178–9.
33. Bosma and Curry-Machado, 'Two Islands, One Commodity'.
34. Rebello, *Estados relativos a la producción azucarera*; Ibáñez, *Proyecto*, p. 11; Report, Sección de Agricultura, in letter from Capitan General, 7 September 1889 (AHN, UFC, 173/18). The first examples of the central sugar factory concept appear to have been promoted by the French sugar engineering company, Derosne and Cail, in Reunion (1838) and Guadloupe (1844) (Smith, *Emergence of Modern Business Enterprise in France*, p. 210; Herold, 'Import of European sugar machinery', p. 15). Shortly afterwards in Cuba, the Conde de Mopox y Jaruco proposed the promotion of white colonisation through distribution of lands, partly tied to cane cultivation, on his La Reserva estate (AHN, UFC, 17/8). Further experiments took place in the pre-war years, but the model did not become established until after the Ten Years' War in the 1880s, when the Spanish government received numerous calls for support (the granting of concessions, tax breaks etc.) for their establishment (Ibáñez, *Proyecto*). Thereafter, the central system spread progressively, until by the early twentieth century – hastened by the 1895–98 war forcing many of the smaller sugar mills out of business – while Cuban sugar production continued to grow, it did so in fewer units. Whereas in 1862 there had been 1,473 ingenios producing 454,758 tons of sugar, in 1890 there were only 450 remaining (producing 636,239 tons), and by 1920 around 4 million tons were being produced in just 193 centrals (Marrero, *Cuba*, p. 278; Moreno, *Ingenio*, Vol.3, pp. 36–9; Schwartz, *Lawless Liberators*, p. 265).
35. Funes, *From Rainforest to Cane Field*, pp. 185, 197, 219.
36. *La Nueva Era* (1/6/1882).
37. Funes, *From Rainforest to Cane Field*, p. 219. Also Pérez, *Lords of the Mountain*, p. 16.
38. Balboa, 'Transición política', p. 329; Ibañez, *Proyecto*, pp. 23–5; Balboa, *Protesta rural en Cuba*, p. 74.

39. Toledo, *Noticias estadísticas*; Scwartz, *Lawless Liberators*, p. 265.
40. Pérez, *Lords of the Mountain*, pp. 137–8.
41. Pérez, *Lords of the Mountain*, p. 175.
42. Fernando Ortiz, *Cuban Counterpoint: Tobacco and Sugar* (New York, 1970), p. 53.
43. Balboa, 'Transición política'; McGillivray, *Blazing Cane*.
44. Pérez, *Lords of the Mountain*, p. 180.

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8
Cuban Popular Resistance to the 1953 London Sugar Agreement

Steve Cushion

In 1953, faced with a catastrophic fall in the price of sugar, representatives of the major sugar-producing and consuming nations of the world met in London to agree on a mechanism for stabilising the international sugar market. Cuba was heavily dependent on the export of sugar and any change in either the price received for the sugar crop or the amount that could be sold had a huge effect on the island's economy. By the 1950s, Cuba had two independent markets for its sugar exports, one provided by the US quota system and the other being the so-called 'world market'. However, when the political threat of a reduction in the US quota coincided with a heavy fall in the price on the world market, the Cuban sugar industry faced a crisis.

Not only was sugar vital to the island's economy, representing 80 per cent of exports, but Cuba also was the world's largest producer, with an annual harvest in the region of 5 million tons. This made attempting to influence the market price an important policy objective, while the sheer size of Cuban production seemed to offer the possibility of success in manipulating the market to maintain price levels. The government tried to do this, first by a unilateral cut in exports and then through participation in the International Sugar Agreement, which attempted to restrict the amount of sugar on the world market by allocating a quota to each signatory country that was smaller than their previous production. This approach had been tried before in the 1930s with the 'Chadbourne Plan', when it had not been particularly successful as other countries, not members of the scheme, had simply increased their production and undermined the effect.[1] This time, however, 44 governments were present at the negotiations in London and the Cuban government, one of the most enthusiastic backers of the approach, had greater hopes that the sugar price might be stabilised.

The Cuban government, which had come to power in a military coup in March 1952, had more economic problems to solve than just the falling price of sugar. A report for the World Bank had recommended wage cuts, easier dismissal regulations and mechanisation of industry as part of a package to raise productivity and increase profitability by reducing the share of the national income that went to labour. Cuban workers had a long tradition of militant defence of their wages and conditions, and so any attempt to increase productivity – which would have resulted in increased unemployment and lower standards of living for Cuban workers – required an authoritarian regime capable of overcoming resistance from the trade unions. This can be seen as one of the reasons why big business in Cuba was initially such a strong supporter of the *de facto* regime led by General Batista.

Given the importance of sugar for the economy, any attempt to generally increase profitability could not succeed unless profits from sugar could be maintained, which in turn was dependent upon arresting the fall in world prices. The method chosen to implement the cut in exports, as required by the London Sugar Agreement, was to cut production by shortening the harvesting period. This served the double objective of reducing the amount of sugar on the world market, while reducing the plantation owners' wage bill because the cane cutters were only paid during the actual harvest. Such an approach, given the militant traditions of the sugar workers, would bring the Batista regime into direct confrontation with the sugar workers and lead to their biggest strike for 20 years.

As both the London Sugar Agreement and the sugar workers' strike of 1955 are largely ignored in modern historiography, this chapter traces the course of events and argues that, in an economy dominated by an industry that was so dependent on international market conditions, the contradiction between the needs of capital and labour would give the Cuban workers good reason to support the revolution in 1959. Starting from a discussion of the detailed relationship between sugar price fluctuations and the crisis in the Cuban economy, it will be seen how this led to participation in the London Sugar Agreement, which in turn brought the government and employers into conflict with the sugar workers. Before recounting the details of the 1955 strike, the chapter analyses the US sugar quota system and explains the manner in which North American domestic politics exacerbated the already grave problems of the Cuban sugar industry. It will finally be argued that the different perceptions of the sugar workers and their employers as to the outcome of the strike led to increased working-class support for the revolutionary forces at the same time as many capitalist interests became disillusioned with the dictatorship.

The price of sugar and the London Sugar Agreement

Between 1895 and 1925, world production of sugar rose from 1 million to 25 million tons, and Cuba, with annual harvests of around 5 million tons, was a very significant producer. This significance was reflected in the dominance that sugar production had within the Cuban economy, although throughout the early years of the republic US capital controlled the sugar industry and consequently the wider economy. While originally producing almost exclusively for the US market, the growth of internal production of both beet and cane sugar caused the US government, faced with an efficient lobbying campaign, to increase tariffs, thereby causing the Cuban share of the market to decline. This in turn led Cuba to look elsewhere and, by the 1950s, about half of the Cuban harvest was aimed at the rest of the world so that the income from the so-called 'world market' had developed a considerable significance in the island's economic affairs.[2]

The heightened international tension at the time of the Korean War had led to stockpiling of sugar – then considered an important strategic foodstuff – leading to considerable price inflation so that, by December 1951, the world price of sugar was 4.84¢ a pound, climbing to a brief high of 5.42¢ the following March. This high price encouraged a vast increase in worldwide production, with new areas being turned over to both cane and beet farming; but, as there was not a comparable increase in consumption, the resulting crisis of overproduction led, within a year, to a collapse in the price to a mere 3.55¢ a pound. At this time Cuba was producing 18 per cent of the world total and the collapse in the market was disastrous for the Cuban economy. Cuban sugar farmers had played their part in the general international scramble to grow more sugar, and the 1952 '*zafra*' (sugar harvest) was the biggest in history, at over 7 million tons compared to the previous record of 5.5 million tons the year before. Unfortunately for the Cuban producers, however, of that 7 million tons they were only able to sell 4.8 million.[3] This posed a serious problem for the incoming government under Fulgencio Batista, for whom the restoration of profitability was one of the principal tasks.

The *Report on Cuba*, compiled for the International Bank for Reconstruction and Development (World Bank) in 1951, had identified the principal challenge facing the Cuban economy as low labour productivity. Its author, Francis Truslow, argued that increased productivity would attract investment, promote diversification and thereby reduce Cuba's dependency on the sugar industry. Given the strength of the trade unions and the fear by most workers that the productivity measures proposed would be detrimental to their income and employment prospects, there was little possibility that the Truslow report could have been implemented by an elected government. Rather, an authoritarian regime would be necessary to enforce its proposals, which, at least in the short term, could only result in a considerable increase in the already chronic level of unemployment. The army coup that brought in the Batista dictatorship was widely seen in this light at the time.[4] The approach adopted by the Batista government to deal with the sugar crisis was in line with the methods proposed by the World Bank report.

In an attempt to cope with the immediate problems of the sugar industry, the government purchased 1.75 million tons of the 1952 *zafra* to be kept in reserve and off the open market, thus hoping to use Cuba's dominant position in the market to stabilise the price. The idea of a Cuban unilateral cutback in production was further extended by decree number 78, which ruled that the 1953 harvest would be restricted to 5 million tons by shortening the length of time in which cane could be cut.[5] The tactic of restricting the length of the sugar harvest was designed to increase profits for the owners of the sugar companies at the expense of the workers. The sugar workers were only paid during the actual cane-cutting period, and therefore, if the harvest were of shorter duration, the wage bill would be reduced. Should the restriction be successful in raising or at least stabilising the price of sugar, this would maintain or increase the employers' income.

As many of its critics predicted, the unilateral action of the Batista government was a complete failure, as other producing countries took advantage of Cuba's voluntary restriction to increase their output and the price continued to fall. The national income from sugar fell from $655.5 million in 1952 to $404.9 million in 1953, while the total wage bill fell from $411.5 million to $253.9 million. Moreover, speculation, insider trading and corruption were rampant, with those who ran the Cuban Institute for Sugar Stabilisation (*Instituto Cubano de Estabilización de Azúcar*), all close allies of Batista, enriching themselves scandalously. The British government also profited from the unusually low price of sugar, by ending sugar rationing at home and buying a million extra tons from Cuba at less than 3¢ a pound.[6]

The chaotic situation in the world sugar market prompted the intervention of the United Nations. In April 1953, the United Nations invited 78 countries to send representatives to an international sugar conference in London, to take place in July of that year, with the intention of negotiating an international sugar agreement. The idea behind the agreement was to stabilise the price of sugar by allocating quotas to the different producing countries, which would, in the words of the agreement, 'regulate the world sugar market and reach an equilibrium between supply and demand that would allow the price to be maintained between the limits of 3.25 and 4.35¢ per pound'.[7] The Cuban quota was designed to allow a *zafra* of 5 million tons. In the event of the price falling below 3.25¢, quotas would be progressively cut up to a maximum reduction of 20 per cent, by which point no further action was envisaged. The final agreement was signed in August by only 38 of the 44 participating countries, while the rest of the sugar-producing world – particularly Peru, Indonesia, Brazil, Formosa and East Germany – was not bound by the treaty.[8] Not signing the agreement and increasing production was only an option for smaller producers whose economies were not so dependent on sugar. This may have been short-sighted, but it represented an opportunity for growers in these smaller producing countries to gain an income they had not previously enjoyed. If Cuba had tried this approach, such was its importance in the world market that its withdrawal would have destroyed the Agreement.

This partial nature of the International Sugar Agreement was to be its undoing, as non-member countries could increase their production as much as they wished, while importing countries who were signatories to the Agreement were not obliged to buy exclusively from other member states. Furthermore, the Agreement only restricted production in exporting countries but did not restrict internal production in participating importing countries: a particularly important loophole for European sugar-beet producers. There were also two other important sugar-regulation schemes: the Commonwealth Preference scheme and the United States Sugar quota scheme. The latter accounted for about half the Cuban production, and would have an important effect on the situation in the second half of the decade when US domestic growers succeeded in reducing the amount of sugar purchased from Cuba, thereby exacerbating the problem caused by the reduction in income from the rest of the world market. The Commonwealth scheme – which was designed to develop sugar production in the British Empire and which guaranteed an annual 2.5 million tons to Britain's colonies and ex-colonies – was an additional complication because it further reduced the potential market for Cuba.[9]

These defects became obvious from the beginning as the price dropped to 3.14¢ in November 1953, thus triggering a 15 per cent drop in quotas as soon as the agreement came into force. The price continued to fall and in May 1954 another 5 per cent cut in quotas was decreed by the International Sugar Council, but to little effect as, by June, the price had fallen to 3.05¢. The maximum cut in quota now having been reached, the agreement was powerless to act further, although the council did suggest a further voluntary cut.[10]

The failure of the London Sugar Agreement to achieve its objective of stabilising the world market sugar price between 3.25 and 4.35¢ per pound was to have serious political repercussions in Cuba, where opponents of the regime painted the Agreement as an unpatriotic surrender to foreign interests.[11] The fact that the weight of the measures adopted would fall most heavily on the workers produced a strong reaction within the trade unions.

Working-class politics

Cuban workers had a militant history but, by 1953, the main trade-union federation, the *Confederación de Trabajadores de Cuba* (CTC) headed by General Secretary Eusebio Mujal, had become heavily bureaucratised and relied on government patronage to maintain its position, rather than adopting more traditional trade-union methods of collective bargaining. Indeed it is commonly recognised that Mujal played an important role in supporting the Batista dictatorship, and in return the government obliged employers to deduct trade-union subscriptions from workers' wages by means of a compulsory check-off. In return the CTC restrained and undermined workers attempts to resist the employers' productivity offensive and did their best to keep the trade unions out of politics. However, despite Mujal's efforts, the CTC was not a monolithic organisation and Batista had not been able to corrupt the entire trade-union machine. As the political situation developed, the middle ground between the regime and the resistance disappeared, forcing the whole of society, trade unionists included, to choose one side or the other. As well as some honest independent trade-union leaders, the communist *Partido Socialista Popular* (PSP) still had a level of influence. This was particularly true in the countryside where social legislation was not well enforced and, given that most urban bureaucrats avoided the rural areas, some militants, including communists, managed to gain a following among agricultural workers.[12] The nature of the economy meant that the sugar workers' union, the *Federación Nacional de Trabajadores Azucareros* (FNTA), had always been the most important part of the Cuban labour movement. The seasonal nature of their employment militated against bureaucratically stable trade-union organisation, with membership numbers fluctuating widely according to the time of year, but this saved them from the dangers of conservatism that are inherent in traditional skilled trade unionism. Thus, for example, sugar workers had a tradition of cane-burning sabotage as a tactic for enforcing their demands. Moreover, the fragmenting effects of the seasonal harvest cycle were offset by the fact that most of them lived in communities in which they formed the overwhelming majority, thereby reinforcing workplace solidarity with community feeling in times of industrial struggle.

By January 1955, the fall in the international price of sugar had produced an internal crisis in the FNTA. The government had restricted the harvest to 4.75 million tons in 1953, and a further reduction was under consideration for 1955. The employers considered wage levels to be economically unviable in view of the fall in prices and they sought a pro-rata wage rate based on the price of sugar. This produced an outcry, even from the moderate leader of the FNTA, José

Martínez. Following a round-table discussion with both the employers and the unions, the government decreed a harvest of 4.4 million tons and a 7.31 per cent wage cut, which would result in a saving for the employers of 23 million pesos, 15 per cent of their wage bill. There was uproar at the FNTA conference, but Mujal persuaded the delegates to refer the strike call to the joint CTC/FNTA executive meeting. There, away from the pressure of the conference, Martínez and Mujal opposed a strike as impractical, saying that the FNTA was not prepared, with a final vote of 53 to 19 against strike action.[13]

This conference is the first sign of a developing schism in the CTC bureaucracy and the emergence of a left-wing opposition around Conrado Rodriguez and Conrado Becquer. Following the formal acceptance of the government decree, employers in the province of Las Villas started declaring mass redundancies and Rodriguez, the provincial FNTA leader, publicly accused Mujal and Martínez of betrayal. There was considerable disillusion at this climb down, both within the rank and file and among a minority of the FNTA leadership, while the employers had been looking for a much greater cut in their wage bill. Pressure increased further when the American sugar quota was threatened with reduction following protectionist pressure from southern US sugar farmers.[14]

US sugar quota and the failure of a strategy

The United States had never been part of the international sugar market, having sufficient supplies from its own internal sources and from its client states such as Cuba and the Philippines. Following US intervention in the Cuban War of Independence, US capital had come to dominate the Cuban economy in general and the sugar industry in particular. Initially, Cuba had mainly supplied the US market and then sold any excess on the world market, but the Jones-Costigan Act, passed by the US Congress in May 1934, imposed a system of quotas that were not mutually negotiated, but decided unilaterally by the US Secretary of Agriculture. This reduced the Cuban share of the US market down to 30 per cent. By the early 1950s, the United States was only buying about half of the Cuban sugar crop; but the US quota system was complicated because, as well as its commercial function, it had a political dimension. So, in May 1955, following an aggressive campaign led by Senator Allan Elender, the US Senate passed a new 'Sugar Law', which reduced Cuba's previously held right to 96 per cent of any increase in US consumption down to 29.5 per cent, which would cost Cuba nearly 100,000 tons. This reinforced working-class nationalist politics and gave credence to ideas of economic nationalism as a solution to poverty and insecurity, thus further undermining the credibility of the London Sugar Agreement, which was popularly seen as surrendering to foreign interests.[15]

The failure of the London Sugar Agreement to prevent the continuing decline in sugar prices was becoming increasingly obvious. Peru and Indonesia had refused to join, Brazil and Formosa were unsatisfied with their quota and left, while many importers were never included and the British Commonwealth received privileges that, given that London was the home of the agreement, served to further weaken the Agreement's credibility. By early 1955, the price of sugar had reached 3.15 ¢ per pound, which was 10 points lower than the agreed minimum. Cuba appeared to be taking the majority of the restriction, with a 30 per cent reduction in the production levels of 1952, the impact of which would be much worse if the US quota were to be cut further, as it now seemed likely. However, remaining a party to the Agreement helped to maintain a level of profitability for the employers and, if this was at the expense of working-class employment and living standards, this was in line with the Batista government's approach to industrial relations in general. Yet living standards for agricultural workers were already appalling. The figures contained in the 1957 report of the *Agrupación Católica Universitaria* are graphic: 64 per cent with no proper sanitation, 43 per cent illiteracy, 91 per cent undernourished and so on. Cuba's sugar workers therefore had little to lose and, while hardship does not necessarily generate militancy, when combined with a sense of injustice there is potential for industrial action.[16]

Strike

As the 1955 *tiempo muerto* progressed, workers at local union meetings started formulating their demands – a process that the authorities violently tried to intimidate up and down the country. The police attack on the workers of Central Washington in Las Villas was one example of many, but one which received wider attention because it was owned by Batista himself. When the Central Washington workers met in August 1955 to discuss the threat of 40 redundancies, the police attacked the assembly, leaving 29 workers hospitalised with gunshot and machete wounds. The sugar workers responded by occupying the site hospital and began a hunger strike, while their families staged a sit-in, first of all in the school, then, after they had been ejected from there, they occupied the church and the *ayuntamiento* (town hall). Solidarity strikes spread through the region, and Becquer and Rodriguez occupied the church tower. As the confrontation escalated, the Ministry of Labour intervened, conceded to the workers and the redundancies were withdrawn.[17]

In this atmosphere, the provincial union in Las Villas passed a resolution opposing the employers over the late start to repairs in the sugar-processing plants and the threat of ten-thousand redundancies, while rejecting what they saw as a return to 1950 wage levels. In November, the union's *plenaria nacional* supported this approach and demanded a 5-million-ton harvest, an end to wage cuts and the restoration of the previous year's 7.31 per cent cut, along with the reinstatement of all sacked workers, pay for '*super-producción*' and derogation of Clause 4 of decree 3164, which allowed employers to leave vacancies unfilled. They also raised the demand for full payment of the '*diferencial*'.[18]

Before the start of each year's sugar harvest, it had been the agreement to pay the workers a bonus, known as the *diferencial*, based on a complex and obscure set of calculations. No *diferencial* had been paid since 1951, but the idea captured the sugar workers' imagination this year. Alfredo Menendez, an economist in the Ministry of Sugar who was a covert member of the communist party, used his access to the Ministry's data to calculate that the *diferencial* should be 9 per cent, although Conrado Rodriguez popularised the figure of 7.5 per cent. The fact that confrontation should erupt over the *diferencial* highlights the gulf of comprehension that existed between employers and employed in the sugar industry. To the employers, the fact that the international price had dropped meant that they considered that they had a reduced ability to pay their wage bill and that a bonus which dated back to better times was unacceptable. The majority of workers, on the other hand, already living in conditions of miserable poverty, felt that they were being made to bear the brunt of a crisis not of their making and thus the fight over the *diferencial* became hugely symbolic for both sides.[19]

The government refused to negotiate, while the leaders of the FNTA denounced the workers' demands as unreasonable. Undeterred, starting in Las Villas province, but soon spreading nationwide, five-hundred thousand sugar workers went on strike at the end of December. Following negotiations with Batista, the FNTA ordered a return to work on 29 December when the government decreed a *diferencial* of 4.02 per cent. This was only worth 6 million pesos to the workers, considerably short of the 18 million pesos that it would have cost to pay the full demand. Becquer successfully called for a continuation of the struggle.[20]

When faced with a level of repression only previously used to attack militant students, the sugar workers themselves turned to violence and set up road blocks, burnt cane fields and occupied town halls and city centres: actions that resulted in hundreds being arrested or wounded, with several strikers killed. In addition to a complete stoppage of the sugar industry, there were solidarity strikes on the railways and in the docks and normal working was not fully resumed until the 4th or 5th of January. This confrontation destroyed many illusions and convinced a significant minority of workers that there was no longer any reformist solution to their problems. The violence used by the state against strikers had forged a bond of solidarity between workers and students as they realised they had a common enemy.[21]

Becquer and Rodriguez were removed from the FNTA executive and some provincial leaders were expelled, with the CTC using the police to enforce the decision. Attempts to form a breakaway sugar workers' union were unsuccessful and Becquer gave up the struggle in the official union. By the end of 1956, had he joined Fidel Castro's *Movimiento Revolucionario del 26 de Julio* (M-26-7) and went underground, working in Oriente province to build a clandestine sugar workers' organisation in support of the rebel army.

Outcome and the Frente Obrero Nacional Unido

The change in attitude of many trade unionists that came out of the sugar workers' strike equally helped the M-26-7 with recruitment among disillusioned workers. For those who wished to oppose the regime but who did not trust the communists or thought they were too moderate, the M-26-7 was the logical choice, not only among sugar workers but in other industrial sectors as well, there having been strikes in 1955 of railway workers, bank workers, dockers, textile workers, brewers and many others.

In terms of the relationship between militant workers and the M-26-7, therefore, it may be argued that the class struggle in 1955 was a crucial turning point. Up to that moment, *mujalismo* had, while suppressing their political aspirations, defended workers' wages and conditions adequately enough to neutralise organised labour and isolate militant activists.

The CTC bureaucracy's shameless support of Batista, despite the increasing involvement of the police in industrial relations, undermined the CTC's credibility and thereby allowed the M-26-7 to gain influence and important new recruits, particularly in the eastern provinces. The class struggles of 1955 exposed the inadequacies of the *mujalista* leadership of the trade unions and started the transfer of working-class support to the rebels, proving to a significant layer of militants that non-violent trade unionism was no longer an option and, if they wanted to defeat the employers' productivity offensive, they needed armed support.

Starting in the east of the island, the M-26-7 built up an impressive underground working-class organisation, most powerfully seen in the Guantánamo region, where they organised several political general strikes in which sugar workers were actively involved. Thus, for example, during the strike which started on 30 November 1956, the workers in the processing plant of the 'Ermita' sugar estate, where the M-26-7 had two active cells, successfully attacked the police barracks on the plantation. This combination of mass action with armed resistance and sabotage, called '*sindicalismo beligerente*' by its proponents, struck a chord with many sugar workers, who had a tradition of burning cane fields when they went on strike, which went back to the 1930s.[22]

In November 1958, following negotiations between the M-26-7 *Sección Obrera* (Workers' Section) and the PSP-controlled *Comité Nacional por la Defensa de las Demandas Obreras* (National Committee for the Defence of Workers' Demands), the *Frente Obrero Nacional Unido* (FONU – United National Workers' Front) was set up. This new organisation adopted a 12-point programme that called for a 20 per cent wage increase, opposition to mechanisation along with other measures against unemployment, an end to racial discrimination, more social protection for women, children and the unemployed, for the reinstatement of victimised workers, trade-union democracy and the end to the compulsory check-off as well as for the reinstatement of the 1940 constitution. On 8 December, Raul Castro, who commanded the 'Frank País Second Front' in the Sierra Cristal mountains, convened, in the name of the FONU, a congress of workers' delegates that endorsed the 12-point programme as well as formally repudiated the *mujalista* control of the CTC, while adding to the list some demands specific to the sugar industry, which were subsequently endorsed at the 'First National Conference of Sugar Workers in Liberated Territory' held on 20 and 21 December in the area controlled by Camilo Cienfuegos. The report of this conference made a comparison between the years 1957 and 1951, which both had the same harvest of about 5 million tons, while the sugar price for 1957 had risen back to 5.2¢ per pound, similar to the price of 5.29¢ per pound in 1951. The profits declared for 1951 had been 106 million pesos, but this figure had risen to 135 million pesos in 1957 while the total wage bill, at 321 million pesos, was 90 million pesos less. This was partly because of wage cuts and partly because increased mechanisation had enabled the same volume to be harvested in 13 days less. The conference went on to demand increases that would compensate them for the loss and, symbolically, demanded a *diferencial* of 10 per cent. It is significant that the London Sugar Agreement was given no credit for the higher international sugar price, rather this was attributed to the sugar workers' strike in Hawaii, a poor beet harvest in Europe, increased Russian purchases, increased international tension over the Suez crisis and a drought in Puerto Rico. So, while the Agreement had probably prevented the complete collapse of the Cuban sugar industry and would have contributed to the price rise on the world market, by the end of 1958 very few people in Cuba were prepared to give Batista and his policies credit for anything. In particular, the sugar workers themselves had borne the brunt of the policy and appeared in no mood to be charitable. The delegates displayed this mood by planning a national strike for the forthcoming harvest, pledging 20 per cent of any wage gains to the rebel army and endorsing the strategy of the M-26-7 for a revolutionary general strike supported by armed guerrilla action – a strategy that was now showing signs of success.[23]

The armed forces, while they had demonstrated ruthless efficiency when shooting down poorly armed students or unarmed striking workers, were not nearly so determined when faced with well-trained and politically motivated guerrillas who rapidly gained the military upper hand in the second half of 1958. Bonachea recalls the parallel growth in financial support coming from workers through late summer and autumn, as well as the increase in membership of the M-26-7 *Sección Obrera*, which had an estimated membership of 15,000 by the end of the year.[24]

This effort bore fruit and, by the time Batista fled in January 1959, Fidel Castro was able to call a general strike to forestall the threatened military coup.[25] This strike also demonstrated the hegemony of the M-26-7 and enabled them to form a government without other members of the opposition, a hegemony shown by their ability to take complete control of the purged CTC, which went on to become the main mobilising force in the crucial first year of the revolutionary government.

Conclusion

The London Sugar Agreement of 1953 was signed to considerable acclaim, with only a few sceptics pointing out the possible dangers.[26] Cuban participation in the scheme was designed to maintain profitability in Cuba's main industry and principal source of income, but doing so required a severe reduction in living standards for the island's sugar workers. Meanwhile, most workers saw the agreement as an attempt to maintain their employers' profits at their expense; an inevitable contradiction in a proposed cut in production when workers are paid by the hour, but their employers profits depend on an internationally determined price. This contradiction expressed itself in an industrial dispute that ended unsatisfactorily for both sides. A combination of state violence and trade-union corruption prevented the workers from gaining their demands, while the fact that the employers had to make some concessions caused displeasure among the owners of the sugar industry who felt that their profitability was being threatened. Not only were the workers being expected to sacrifice their already inadequate living standards in the interest of profit, many of the companies who would benefit were owned by American capital. In these circumstances the patriotic politics of Fidel Castro and the 26th July Movement started to gain influence amongst the Cuban working class. In previous times, the Cuban workers had been able to defend their interests by traditional reformist methods of struggle, but these had failed when confronted by brutal dictatorship that had both corrupted the unions and was prepared to use force to break strikes. This added considerably to the attraction of the M-26-7 as they provided an armed revolutionary alternative now that reformist methods had failed.

Two of the prerequisites for a revolutionary situation are the absence of a reformist solution to a society's problems and the loss of confidence in the system by the ruling class.[27] As outlined in the World Bank report, Cuba could no longer sustain its wage and employment levels within the constraints of the capitalist system and the government attempted to solve its economic problems by a drastic reduction in workers' living standards, which could only be achieved by the destruction of organised labour's ability to resist. The dictatorship's failure to deliver the required productivity advances lost it the support of the bourgeoisie, while the brutal methods employed in the attempt drove the majority of workers to welcome a revolutionary solution to their problems. The increasing military success of the rebel army through the second half of 1958, along with the progressive disintegration of the repressive forces of the state, gave Cubans a stark choice; the fact that the workers responded with an overwhelmingly successful general strike when called upon by Fidel Castro in January 1959 demonstrates this.

Notes

1. Pino Santos, *Los años 50*, p. 141.
2. Pollitt, 'Rise and Fall of the Cuban Sugar Economy', pp. 319–48; Gerber, 'United States Sugar Quota Program'; Pérez-Stable, *Cuban Revolution*, pp. 14–16.
3. Cepero, 'Política azucarera', pp. 321, 329–30, 347.
4. Truslow, *Report on Cuba*; National Archives (NA), FO 371/97516/7 – AK1015/33.
5. Chávez-Álvarez, *Matanzas de rojo y negro*, p. 16.
6. *Bohemia*, 23 January 1955; *Diario de la Marina*, 15 September 1957; Cepero, 'Política azucarera', pp. 310–12.
7. 'Convenio Internacional del Azucar', *Gaceta Oficial* 7645, 11 January 1954.
8. Swerling, 'International Sugar Agreement', pp. 848–9.
9. Swerling, 'International Sugar Agreement', p. 841.
10. Silva Leon, *Cuba y el mercado internacional azucarero*, pp. 123–43.
11. Pino Santos, *Los años 50*, pp. 135–40.

12. Spalding, *Organized Labor in Latin America*, pp. 227–38; O'Connor, *Origins of Socialism in Cuba*, p. 181.
13. *Bohemia*, 2 January 1955, 9 January 1955, 30 January 1955, 6 February 1955; NA, FO 371/108990 – AK1015/1&3 (1954), Internal situation in Cuba.
14. *Bohemia*, 6 February 1955, 26 June 1955, 3 July 1955, 10 July 1955; NA, FO 371/108990 - AK1015/3 (1954).
15. Jamieson, *Labor Unionism in American Agriculture*, pp. 243–4; Pinos Santos, 'Cuota azucarera'; *Bohemia*, 13 July 1955.
16. *Bohemia*, 4 September 1955; Cushion, 'Organised Labour under Batista'; Agrupación Católica Universitaria, 'Encuentra de Trabajadores Rurales, 1956–57', *Economía y Desarrollo* (July–August 1972), pp. 188–212.
17. *Carta Semanal*, 24 August 1955, 14 September 1955, 6 November 1955; *Bohemia*, 11 September 1955. *Tiempo muerto* was literally the 'dead time' – the period outside the sugar harvest, when sugar workers had no income from their trade and had to subsist as best they could on other employment, subsistence farming etc.
18. *Carta Semanal*, 23 November 1955. Superproduction is defined as the increase in production due to mechanisation. It was a common demand of Cuban workers in the face of such mechanisation that they be paid the same as before the new machinery arrived. This was strongly contested by the employers for whom mechanisation was aimed at reducing the wage bill.
19. *Bohemia*, 1 January 1956, 7 October 1956; Interview with Alfredo Menendez, March 2009.
20. *Bohemia* 18 December 1955, 8 January 1956; Rojas Blaquier, 1955, pp. 68–76.
21. García Oliveres, *José Antonio Echeverría*, p. 258; Pérez-Stable, *Cuban Revolution*, p. 55.
22. Comisión Nacional de Historia, Departamento Obrero II Frente Oriental 'Frank Pais' (1980), Provincia Guantánamo, manuscript; Carr, 'Mill Occupations and Soviets', pp. 129–58.
23. Alexander, *History of Organized Labor in Cuba*, p. 161; Cardona Bory, *Memorias del congreso obrero en armas*; Bonachea and San Martín, *Cuban Insurrection*, p. 278; Informe de la conferencia de obreros azucareros convocada por el FONU (1958), IHC archives, ref. 1/8.15/2.1/2–22.
24. Bonachea and San Martin, *Cuban Insurrection*, p. 263; and Alexander, *History of Organized Labor in Cuba*, p. 159.
25. Karol, *Guerrillas in Power*, pp. 167–8.
26. Swerling, 'International Sugar Agreement'.
27. Ibarra Guitart, *El fracaso de los moderados en Cuba*, pp. 2–3.

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9

Tobacco Growers, Resistance and Accommodation to American Domination in Puerto Rico, 1899–1940

Teresita A. Levy

The inclusion of Puerto Rico in the tariff structure of the United States after 1898 guaranteed the free entrance of many island products into the mainland and dramatically accelerated the existing production of agricultural commodities. Tobacco leaf was included in this tariff exemption, and Puerto Rican farmers in the highland regions of the island made the cultivation of tobacco for the American market their most important economic activity during the first four decades of the twentieth century.[1] Puerto Rico's absorption into the United States also created new and dynamic political opportunities for the island's farmers that tobacco growers exploited for their economic benefit. The study of the highland tobacco regions provides a unique opportunity to examine how a local population adapted to a new colonial regime, resisted unilateral political decision-making and redefined global (or in this case United States) commodity production.

Scholars of Puerto Rico have, since the 1930s, described the effects of the US occupation as a simple dichotomy based on colonial relations of production between the island and the mainland. Some scholars argue that US imperialism created economic and social chaos, resulting in the pauperisation of the farmer and in the exclusion of Puerto Ricans from their own government. Puerto Ricans were a victimised and docile population incapable of confronting a rapacious imperial control. Others argue that North Americans 'saved'

Puerto Ricans from a backward society, making the ideals of democracy, freedom and economic progress a reality for the island. Here, Puerto Ricans were the grateful yet passive recipients of the material and political benefits derived from benevolent policies emanating from Washington. Additionally, although there was a myriad of agricultural products cultivated on the island, the focus of much of the scholarly discussion of commodity production has been on the cultivation and processing of sugarcane. This 'sugar narrative' is, by and large, a story of victimisation and imperial abuse, where economic, social and political decisions made by colonial administrators were designed to protect the capitalist interests of US sugar companies, often at the expense of the Puerto Rican farmer. One fundamental problem with these arguments is that Puerto Ricans are invisible: either victims of an abusive imperial power or an indifferent colonial elite, or observers of phenomenal changes in their daily lives. Another is that such a narrow focus on the cultivation of sugar omits alternative relations of production that existed throughout the island.

This chapter includes tobacco cultivation in the discussion of how the unprecedented expansion of commodity production for the North American market transformed life on the island. Tobacco farmers were neither victims nor passive observers: they negotiated the changes in the tobacco sector with the intention of increasing their possibilities of economic success. In contrast to the sugar economy, with its high degree of absentee ownership and concentration of production, tobacco cultivation was a Puerto Rican owner-operated, small-scale commercial enterprise, even in the face of massive influx of private and corporate North American capital into the industrial portion of the tobacco sector. Tobacco growers chose to participate in an economic sector that provided both monetary rewards and sustenance, and by doing so became contributors to the productive wealth of the island.

This chapter also discusses the political participation of Puerto Rican tobacco growers in order to widen the debate of Puerto Rican resistance and accommodation to the North American colonial regime. Puerto Ricans took advantage of the democratic guarantees provided by the colonial government to become advocates for change. In the highland tobacco regions, growers chose to become involved in democratic organisations to exert control over their economic sector and influence decisions that directly affected their economic interests. Through their participation in local agricultural societies, island-wide cooperative societies and the *Asociación de Agricultores Puertorriqueños* (AAP), tobacco growers became an effective political force. They applied pressure by participating in protests, strikes, political campaigns and lobbying efforts in Washington and San Juan to demand fair prices for their product, economic incentives and social programmes. In return, insular and federal officials responded to such pressure by altering legislation, providing economic relief, and including Puerto Ricans in their decision-making. This suggests that the colonial relationship between the United States and Puerto Rico, rather than being one-sided, destructive and abusive, was instead nuanced, complicated and constantly redefined.

Tobacco production in Puerto Rico

Although commercial tobacco cultivation existed in Puerto Rico throughout the Spanish colonial period, it expanded rapidly after 1898, when new colonial economic policies made Puerto Rican tobacco economically advantageous for North American cigar manufacturers. Puerto Rican tobacco was appreciated by North American smokers for its smoothness, aroma and distinctive taste, and admired for its similarities to Cuban tobacco. Precisely because of these characteristics, the island's leaf was used for the manufacture of cigars at all price points: blended with North American filler tobacco for cheaper cigars, and used alone or blended with Cuban filler tobacco for more expensive cigars.[2] The added economic incentive for using Puerto Rican tobacco was that it was not subjected to a tariff when it was imported into the United States – a colonial advantage not granted to the tobacco of an independent Cuba.

The new colonial relationship between the island and the mainland also allowed for the easy flow of North American capital into the island for the establishment of tobacco-manufacturing plants, a process dominated by the American Tobacco Company.[3] Unlike what would occur in the sugar sector, however, North American investment in the tobacco sector remained largely in the manufacturing area, leaving the agricultural process in the hands of the Puerto Rican farmers.

Puerto Rican farmers rapidly increased production to meet US demand for the aromatic leaf; perhaps this explains why the United States did not massively invest in its cultivation. In fact, the number of farms on the island that reported the cultivation of tobacco leaf more than doubled from 14 per cent in 1910 to 30 per cent in 1940. Small-scale farms, which were the predominant unit of production in the highland regions, already produced tobacco for the international market under Spanish colonial rule, and so were well equipped to accept expanded opportunities for their crop. Known as the 'poor man's crop', tobacco could be cultivated on very small tracts of land, required no major capital investments in machinery, and farmers produced a crop for the market after just one season. Tobacco farmers earned most of their cash income from the sale of tobacco, even before 1898. Tobacco, however, occupied the land for only several months out of the year, which meant that the tobacco harvest was usually followed by the planting of corn, green beans, rice and sweet potatoes. Some of these crops were sold in local markets, but most were used for family consumption and had a major effect on the well-being of the families in the highlands.[4] Thus, the motivation for farmers in the tobacco regions to meet rising demand for their product appears clear: a potential increase in cash income without the loss of food crops for family sustenance or for sale in local markets.

A detailed analysis of the periods of expansion and contraction of the tobacco economy is outside the scope of this chapter. It is important to note, however, that farmers of the highland regions of Puerto Rico increased their tobacco plantings dramatically, making tobacco a valuable commodity. From 1907 through 1917, tobacco was the third most important commercial crop produced on the island after sugar and coffee; but in 1918, tobacco surpassed coffee. The export value of tobacco on the island peaked in 1920, when tobacco surpassed sugar and represented 38 per cent of the total value of commodities produced in Puerto Rico (sugar accounted for 25 per cent). From 1921 to 1940, tobacco remained the second most important commercial crop after sugar.[5] Throughout the first four decades of the twentieth century, tobacco growers had to adapt to economic and political forces both in the island and the mainland that affected the number of *cuerdas* under cultivation, total production and the prices paid for tobacco leaf. To do so, tobacco farmers became political actors in the new colonial regime.

Tobacco growers and cooperative societies

Farmers' political participation and activism were most evident through their involvement in cooperative societies and agricultural organisations. Initially, cooperative societies operated as local marketing agencies and tobacco banks, and were moderately successful in securing higher tobacco prices for their members.[6] Economic, political and natural factors that began in 1926, however, created a 'perfect storm' that pushed tobacco farmers first to affiliate in greater numbers, and then to expand the goals of their organisations from economic access to social and political equality.

In preparation for the 1926 harvest, farmers increased the number of *cuerdas* they planted in tobacco to 58,000 *cuerdas* for 1926 (from 34,023 for the 1925 crop year), partly due to reports that tobacco supplies from other parts of the world would be limited and of inferior quality. In July of that year, however, Hurricane San Liborio devastated the western-central portion of Puerto Rico. Damages were calculated at over two million dollars and the greatest losses were reported among coffee and tobacco plantations. Throughout the tobacco regions, 65 per cent of all tobacco-curing barns were destroyed. As a result, it was estimated that the tobacco crop for 1926 would be 30 per cent lower than the previous year. A reduction in available tobacco on the island after the hurricane, together with correct predictions of a reduction in tobacco stock from around the world, resulted in a 34 per cent increase in prices paid to farmers (38.17 cents per pound) over the previous year.[7]

The unexpected success of the 1926 crop in a year of hurricane destruction made the farmers overly confident. Expecting that prices would continue to rise, farmers once again increased the acreage planted for the 1927 season. There were also consistent reports that the tobacco harvest in Santo Domingo would be 'considerably reduced', from 50 million pounds in 1926 to an expected 15 to 20 million pounds in 1927, due to heavy rains followed by an extended drought. Tobacco of inferior quality, which translated into low demand and prices, was also projected to be the result of the 1927 season in the Philippines. In addition, plantings in the United

States were reportedly 4 per cent lower than the previous year, and the Cuban harvest suffered from both the fury of a tropical storm and a drought. Farmers in Puerto Rico, therefore, increased their plantings with the assumption that they were fulfilling a need that other countries would not be able to meet. In fact, the tobacco sector was so optimistic in their outlook for the 1927 market, that *refaccionistas* (local financiers) willingly increased the amount of money available for production credit.[8]

Tobacco farmers increased the total acreage under cultivation in 1927 to 81,900 cuerdas, a rise of 41 per cent from the previous year. The planting season was uneventful and the harvest was a resounding success. Production totaled in excess of 50 million pounds, an increase of 39 per cent over 1926. What began as a season of high hopes ended in disaster, however, when it became clear that tobacco reductions in other countries were not as low as had been expected. The US market could not absorb such an enormous increase in supply from Puerto Rico, nor did it need to, since they could circumvent Puerto Rican sellers if the price was not agreeable to them. Puerto Ricans, on the other hand, had no other purchasers due to trading restrictions set in place by the colonial charter. Prices paid to tobacco farmers, consequently, dropped dramatically to 19.84 cents per pound, a decrease of 48 per cent, making the 1927 crop a ruinous one for tobacco farmers across the island. The local tobacco cooperatives were not strong enough in either membership or capital, and could do nothing about the resulting severe price declines. To aggravate the situation, it was clear that much tobacco remained in warehouses across the island. If tobacco growers wanted to stabilise prices, they would have to take dramatic action.[9]

In response to this financial crisis, tobacco growers established insular cooperative societies: the larger the cooperative, the stronger the alliance against reductions in purchase price or increases in loan interest. The *Cooperativa Insular de Tabacaleros de Puerto Rico*, an insular tobacco cooperative that combined five existing local cooperative societies, was established in 1928. By 1929, the *Tabacaleros de Puerto Rico*, as it was known, was meeting regularly and was being visited by insular agricultural administrators and representatives from the insular legislature.[10]

Tabacaleros de Puerto Rico was an attempt to create a sophisticated financial organisation by becoming involved in every aspect of the production and distribution of tobacco leaf.[11] *Tabacaleros* assisted their members from the very beginning of the cultivation process by purchasing all materials needed, such as seeds, fertilisers and farming tools. The cooperative then promoted cultivation methods that would guarantee a high quality product. Once the tobacco was harvested, the cooperative would assist their members in the curing, storage and classification of the leaf. Finally, the cooperative packaged the leaf to sell to the market, advertised in industry publications and organised transportation to deliver the leaf once sold. *Tabacaleros* supported existing tobacco banks, lobbied elected officials both in Puerto Rico and the United States, and maintained relationships with agents from the federal banks. This was the most comprehensive mission for a cooperative society thus far and it was successful in helping its members secure better financial returns.

The 1928 season began with an often-volatile debate on whether the number of acres dedicated to tobacco production should be reduced in an attempt at avoiding another catastrophic year. The *Tabacaleros* led the acreage-reduction campaign, with the cooperation of the *Asociación de Agricultores Puertorriqueños* (the island-wide farmers' association), and the insular Department of Agriculture. The result was that a little over 40,000 acres were prepared for tobacco, a slightly more than 50 per cent reduction in acreage from 1927. Hurricane San Felipe II swept through the island on September of 1928, resulting in financial losses calculated at one-hundred million dollars. In the tobacco regions, newly planted seedbeds and curing ranches were destroyed. Ironically, the damages caused by San Felipe II had a positive effect on farm prices. Together with the reduction in acreage spearheaded by the *Tabacaleros*, the consequently smaller harvest of 27 million pounds, and the hurricane, there was an increase of 20 per cent in the price paid to farmers for the 1928 harvest. This slight recovery, however, was quickly annulled by the stock-market crash in the US in October of 1929, which reduced the farm price of tobacco to 19.18 cents per pound.[12]

San Ciprián, the most devastating hurricane of the century, hit Puerto Rico in September of 1932. The storm injured over 3,000 people throughout the island and more than 400,000 lost their homes. Property damages alone were calculated at over 40 million dollars.[13] The tobacco sector was once again devastated. A government worker in Caguas sent to survey the damage done by San Ciprián commented, 'all of the tobacco ranches that this agent has seen, and all others that he has received information about, have been completely destroyed'.[14] Rafael Menéndez Ramos, the Commissioner of Agriculture and Commerce at the time, also acknowledged the far-reaching effects of the storm: 'Farmers are mentally depressed because of the losses . . . Tobacco farmers lost one million dollars in ranches and equipment during the hurricane.'[15] The losses greatly affected the final crop, making 1932 the least productive year, measured in either total *cuerdas* under cultivation or quantity produced. A little over 10,000 *cuerdas* produced 6 million pounds, a decrease of approximately 80 per cent in both from 1931.

Unlike the price recovery that occurred after the previous two hurricanes, farm prices after San Ciprián plummeted to 11.7 cents per pound, the lowest they had been since the initial expansion of the sector in the early years of the twentieth century. Local tobacco dealers and US companies had purchased as much available stock as they could in the previous years to prepare for eventual hurricanes. When they were faced with such a dramatic reduction in the 1932 crop, they were still able to meet export demand: although 6 million pounds of leaf were harvested in 1932, over 17 million were exported to the United States, indicating that there was plenty of stock to meet demand.[16] For the tobacco farmers, the losses caused by San Ciprián were devastating; for the tobacco dealers and the American manufacturing companies, it was hardly a bump in the road.

Once again, tobacco growers attempted a redefinition and reorganisation of their cooperative organisations, and the harsh living conditions after San Ciprián fuelled a renewed passion for an island-wide, far-reaching organisation. The result was the establishment of the Puerto Rico Tobacco Marketing Cooperative Association, perhaps the most successful tobacco cooperative society. *La Marketing*, as it became known, was founded in 1934 to find new markets for Puerto Rican tobacco, improve the living conditions of tobacco farmers and secure needed services for their members. The Commission to Protect the Tobacco Industry of Puerto Rico granted *La Marketing* a $24,000 loan to establish a bank with the assistance of the Federal Farm Credit Bank of Baltimore and the Baltimore Bank for Cooperatives. By 1938, it was the largest cooperative society in

Puerto Rico, with over 4,800 members and capital assets of more than $66,000.[17]

La Marketing provided the most comprehensive member services of any cooperative society in the island – including life, fire and hurricane insurance, lower interest loans, and seed-distribution programmes. It also supplied cultivation materials, such as zinc, cloth, insecticides and fertilisers. Most importantly, perhaps, *La Marketing* consistently paid members an average two dollars more per pound of tobacco than what other buyers paid throughout the island.[18]

The affiliation of farmers into cooperative societies was not only occurring in the tobacco regions; sugar planters, coffee farmers, and fruit and vegetable producers were also establishing their own cooperatives. Although these cooperatives were supportive of each other, farmers throughout the island recognised that their power would be greatly expanded if they united. The result of these activities was the establishment of the *Asociación de Agricultores Puertorriqueños* (AAP).

The Asociación de Agricultores Puertorriqueños (AAP)

The AAP was established in June of 1924, with the intention of being 'a defender of agricultural interests, [and] a servant to the farmers'.[19] The ambitious goals of the AAP included fostering the mutual assistance and protection of all members, bringing together all 'agricultural forces for the purpose of obtaining scientific agriculture based on modern methods [of cultivation]', and 'promoting, implementing and developing, on the farmer's initiative and with the Government's cooperation, credit and production cooperatives.'[20] The AAP was interested in not only supporting the farmers, but also in securing the progress of the rural areas of Puerto Rico by demanding the development of a solid rural infrastructure that would include roads, schools, medical services, mail routes, telegraph, public safety and hygiene.

Every year, the AAP held a general assembly in which members analysed economic and political issues affecting farmers, discussed problems specific to a particular crop, and organised lobbying efforts, both in Washington and with local politicians. The first general assembly occurred on 20 December 1925 in Ponce. The AAP had 60 local committees and 6,000 members by this time. 55 of those local AAP committees were represented at the general assembly.[21]

The main issue before the membership in 1925 was concern over a scheduled visit to Washington by Governor Towner and several local legislators. The AAP was concerned that these officials would 'deceive the federal authorities with their tales of grandiose progress of the island'.[22] Members argued that since 'the power doesn't lie in Puerto Rico, but in Washington,' a commission of farmers representing the AAP should join the Governor and 'truly represent the economic situation in the island'.[23] This commission should also lobby for the extension of federal economic laws that would be favourable to Puerto Rico, in particular, the Curtis-Aswell project, which was being debated in the US legislature at the time and would allow the creation of cooperative marketing societies and more importantly, would give cooperatives the power to limit production. Finally, the commission should negotiate AAP's affiliation with the American Farm Bureau Federation. The membership raised $3,000 to cover the expenses of the trip and requested that Governor Towner support the commission. So determined were the members to be successful in their petition, that the organisation committed itself to a negative public relations campaign in the event that the governor ignored the request.[24] Governor Towner heeded the request and such a campaign was not necessary. The AAP commission visited Washington in April of 1926 and met Secretary of War Davis and General McIntyre.

The AAP publicised every detail of the commission's visit to Washington in *El Agricultor Puertorriqueño,* the official publication of the AAP. The members of the commission presented their formal report at the general assembly meeting held on 11 July 1926. The fact that a commission of Puerto Rican farmers was able to meet with the Committee of Insular Affairs, General McIntyre, and representatives of the Department of Agriculture suggests that rather than a one-sided colonial relationship, there was participation from the Puerto Rican population affected by federal laws. In addition, federal and insular officials recognised the importance of the AAP and, rather than making decisions without consultation, they were willing to discuss repercussions and examine alternatives. The record of the conversations between all the parties concerned show remarkable candidness and a no-holds barred attitude on the part of the AAP representatives to make the situation in Puerto Rico known to American officials, conversations that occurred on a regular basis. For example, Enrique Landrón spoke of the extreme levels of poverty in the island. He then criticised the level of taxes paid by the Puerto Rican taxpayer when compared with the American taxpayer, arguing that for Puerto Ricans this amount represented a hardship and a heavier burden than for their American counterparts. Later in their visit, the commission met with Lloyd S. Fenny from the Bureau of Rural Economies to lobby for an agricultural survey of the island.[25] The Bureau of Agricultural Economics of the federal Department of Agriculture eventually conducted and paid for the survey.

The AAP leadership, with the support of the general membership, lobbied both insular and federal politicians and bureaucrats to secure the funds, laws or commitment they needed to carry forward their agenda. They had great success. In 1928, an extraordinary session of the AAP was held to discuss the devastation after Hurricane San Felipe II hit the island on 18 September, causing a great deal of destruction to many agricultural districts. It was decided that a cable would be sent to Washington describing the dire situation of the island and to 'solicit that the American Congress approve legislation to liberally extend credit to Puerto Rican farmers to save the only source of wealth for the country'.[26] A few months later, the AAP received a visit from Senator Hiram Bingham, Chair of the Committee on Territories and Insular Possessions to witness the effect of the hurricane. Relief funds followed shortly thereafter.[27]

During the 1930 AAP general assembly, the membership approved a resolution to solicit the US Congress the immediate extension of the Smith-Lever and Purnell laws to Puerto Rico. The Smith-Lever Law would create agricultural extension services and the Purnell Law would provide support to the agricultural experiment stations. Both programmes enjoyed widespread support from the farmers, and both laws were extended to Puerto Rico shortly thereafter. An AAP commission traveled to Washington in 1931 to solicit additional funds for economic recovery after San Felipe. Their efforts resulted in the creation of a rehabilitation commission with an appropriation of \$6 million in agricultural rehabilitation loans, \$2 million for repairs to schools and roads, and \$100,000 for the purchase and distribution of seed to farmers.[28] In addition, the commission lobbied successfully for temporary tax reductions for those affected by the hurricane. These examples suggest that farmers were not only involved at all levels of the island's governmental structure, but had learned how to skilfully lobby and influence the policies of the US government that directly affected their interests.

The AAP agenda was not only concerned with agricultural development, it was equally involved in the political arena, although the official AAP mission statement stated that it was not a political organisation. In 1927, the AAP became involved in several political campaigns, supporting candidates who were friendly to farmers. An attempt at creating a political platform was made that same year. At the general assembly on 25 March 1928, the membership agreed that the AAP should support 'their men' in the upcoming elections for the insular Senate and the House of Representatives. These men would serve with the 'principal objective to promote the wellbeing of the agricultural sector . . . free of political compromises when [legislation] is incompatible with the prosperity of the agricultural class'.[29] The AAP went as far as declaring that they would put all of their economic resources and political influence at the service of the political party which best represented the interests of the farmers.

Evidence of the complex relationship between the AAP and the insular and federal government can also be found in the pages of *El Agricultor Puertorriqueño*. The AAP openly criticised the Governor, other insular elected officials and the federal government when decisions seemed unfair. Editorials in *El Agricultor Puertorriqueño* called both the insular and federal governments uncaring, abusive, unfair and willing to sell out the farmers when politically convenient. Puerto Rican farmers created the democratic space within the colonial system to effectively comment on critical issues facing them in their daily lives. The handling of the crisis after the 1927 harvest provides a good example of how Puerto Ricans applied political pressure to garner economic advantages.

After the 1927 tobacco harvest, when it became apparent that tobacco growers were facing financial difficulties, the AAP requested that Governor Towner convene an extraordinary session of the legislature to discuss possible solutions, but he declined the request. The editors of *EAP* criticised the Governor and accused him of being unethical, buying into 'political fanfare' and describing how he 'manipulated our political establishment'.[30]

Governor Towner and the legislature had to respond. The result was Law #53 enacted on 23 March 1928 that created the Commission for the Protection of Puerto Rican Tobacco. The Commission would fall under the jurisdiction of the insular Department of Agriculture and Labor and would be financed by the issuing of a three-million dollar bond. It would then be supported by a contribution of one cent per pound of tobacco grown, processed or sold in Puerto Rico, to be paid by farmers, manufacturing companies and tobacco buyers. The Commission was charged with providing credit for tobacco cooperatives, acting as the intermediary between growers and buyers, and regulating the acreage of tobacco plantings. The law also required that all 'persons, firms or corporations that are dedicated to the financing of the cultivation of tobacco . . . must be authorized to do so with a license issued by the Commission'.[31] Those operating without said license would be fined between $100 and $1,000 per infraction. Governor Towner vetoed the law. It was once again enacted by the insular legislature on 18 February 1929 only to be vetoed again in a 'new destructive action' by the Governor.[32] This time, however, the Governor's veto did not stand and the Commission was established.

The influence of the AAP on local legislators was crucial in the enactment of this law. The inclusion of five tobacco growers, to be chosen from a list of 15 candidates submitted to the Governor by the AAP on behalf of a general assembly of tobacco growers, was a triumph for the AAP and for tobacco growers throughout the island. Unfortunately, the Commission was unable to meet the goals of the law, mostly because the required contribution proved too costly for already struggling farmers. In addition, tobacco manufacturers actively resisted the application of licensing fees, which would have guaranteed operating funds for the Commission.[33] Although it remained operational for a few more years, the Commission proved ineffective and was dissolved.

The AAP, however, continued its struggle on behalf of tobacco growers and in 1935 it pressured the legislature to establish the Tobacco Institute – an organisation dedicated to first, conducting scientific research that would address tobacco's cultivation problems and second, with assisting farmers in the implementation of improved cultivation methods.[34] To do so, the Institute set up a facility that included agronomy and chemistry departments, and regularly published scientific findings in both the local and US press. Unlike the Commission, the Tobacco Institute was funded by the insular legislature as a budget-line item. Additional funding was acquired through the levying of a 15-cent tax on each *quintal* of tobacco sold in Puerto Rico, so there was no direct cost for farmers associated with the Institute. Like the Commission, the Institute was responsible for lobbying the insular legislature for additional funding and for laws that would protect the Puerto Rican tobacco industry, all in consultation with the membership of the AAP. The influence of the AAP on the Tobacco Institute extended to its operations, for the Institute's full-time director was appointed by the governor from a list of candidates submitted by the AAP. During the Institute's second year of operations, when Governor Winship submitted nominations for the director's position, the AAP protested and stated that they were not bona fide farmers and that they would recommend that the farmers withhold their cooperation until the 'nominations are corrected'.[35] The nominations were, in fact, 'corrected'.

El Agricultor Puertorriqueño was the main propaganda instrument for the AAP. The editors often commented on the hot topic of the time, whether it was absentee landowners, the latest insular political scandal, or the nutritionally poor diet of the typical Puerto Rican farmer. The magazine published letters from farmers, legislators, and insular and federal government bureaucrats, as well as interesting news from the United States and the world. There were also articles on nutrition, agricultural techniques, botany and literature, and advertisements for farm equipment, fertiliser, college courses and insurance. Perhaps the most important section of the magazine was titled 'Market and Prices', which listed the latest prices paid to farmers for products such as sugar, tobacco and citrus fruits.

Many tobacco farmers contributed articles to the newspaper. These dealt with a variety of topics, from tobacco cultivation techniques to larger agricultural issues, such as banking and credit. The ever-changing tax code received plenty of coverage and the magazine usually included copies of official forms, surveys, or names and contact information of those who should be called for questions. Farmers also commented on the living conditions and general well-being of the population of the countryside.

The AAP's support of tobacco growers included reports in *EAP* of meetings, incessant comments on the status of the crop, and the publication of every minute transaction during the buying season. Through the magazine, the AAP disseminated information to tobacco growers regarding global market conditions, including the quantity and quality of tobacco grown in places as far as India and the Philippines and commenting on potential buyers of Puerto Rican tobacco. *El Agricultor Puertorriqueño* regularly reported on the quantity of tobacco in the hands of American buyers and the names and corporate affiliation of tobacco buyers visiting the island.

Farmers established the AAP to address cultivation problems in the island and to act as the public voice of the farmer in the insular and federal legislature. The AAP was consistently successful, particularly in their efforts to support tobacco growers. Through their affiliation with the AAP, tobacco growers became a political force in the halls of Congress as well as in the Puerto Rican *Capitolio,* and this culminated in the establishment of the Commission for the Protection of Puerto Rican Tobacco in 1929 and the Tobacco Institute in 1936. Together with their contributions to *El Agricultor Puertorriqueño,* their involvement ensured that the health of the tobacco sector remained central to government officials both on the island in the mainland.

Conclusion

The study of tobacco cultivation in the highland regions of Puerto Rico from 1898 to 1940 provides an opportunity to examine how a local population responded to a rapidly expanding commodities market under a new colonial political system. Tobacco growers quickly expanded production to meet the demands of the large North American market, now wide open to the Puerto Rican leaf, and in the process challenged unilateral political decision-making. Rather than observing from a distance and being victims of a tyrannical colonial government, tobacco growers' actions show how Puerto Ricans were involved in every level of government. Their activities had a direct impact on both insular and federal policies and legislation and affected their everyday lives.

Notes

1. The highlands of the island cultivated 89% of all tobacco *cuerdas* and produced 91% of all tobacco leaf in Puerto Rico from 1910 to 1940 (US Bureau of the Census, *13th Census*, pp. 72–7; *14th Census*, pp. 408–15; *15th Census*, pp. 232–37; *16th Census*, p. 60.

2. Gage, *Tobacco*, p. 16; Colón Torres, 'Financing Low Income Farmers'.
3. Gage, *Tobacco*, p. 16.
4. US Bureau of the Census, *16th Census*, p. 181; Colón Torres, 'Estudio económico', p. 12. The tobacco-cultivation cycle would last from six to seven months, usually from June/July to December/January.
5. Esteva, *Annual Reports*, p. 7.
6. An important impetus for tobacco farmers to establish cooperatives was the extension to Puerto Rico of Title I of the Agricultural Act of 1923, a federal law that established Federal Intermediate Credit Banks to provide loans to cooperative associations, banks and other credit institutions (Henderson, 'Agricultural Credits Act', pp. 518–19).
7. *El agricultor puertorriqueño*, 23 January 1926, 7 August 1926, 21 August 1926.
8. *El agricultor puertorriqueño*, 25 September 1926, 15 February 1927, 11 December 1926.
9. Serrallés and Martín, 'Precios del tabaco', p. 7. Puerto Rico was prohibited from trading with countries other than the US under the Foraker Act of 1900. This provision, even under heavy criticism, was restated in the Jones Act of 1917 and is a part of the 1952 constitution of the *Estado Libre Asociado* that still binds the island to the mainland.
10. *El agricultor puertorriqueño*, 31 January 1928, 15 February 1928.
11. *El agricultor puertorriqueño*, 15 February 1931.
12. Serrallés and Vélez, 'Precios del tabaco', p. 16. In total, 6,316 tobacco ranches were destroyed at a loss of over 1.4 million dollars, and 25 per cent of seedbeds throughout the island were lost. For details see Chardón, *Annual Report*, p. 632.
13. *El agricultor puertorriqueño*, 15 October 1932.
14. 'Informe preliminar del ciclón de 27 de septiembre de 1932 San Ciprián', Archivo Histórico Municipal de Caguas, Secretaría/Beneficiencia/Expedientes y Documentos/Huracanes, Caja 13, Sobre 1932B.
15. Menéndez Ramos, *Informe Anual*, p. 16.
16. US Department of Labor, *Puerto Rico*, p. 4.
17. *La Marketing*, pp. 1, 8, 10.
18. *La Marketing,* pp. 13–18. In 1935, for example, La Marketing paid $19.39 per pound in contrast to $17.41 per pound paid by other buyers.
19. *El agricultor puertorriqueño*, 12 December 1925.
20. 'Asamblea Organizadora de la Asociación de Agricultores de Puerto Rico', Centro de Investigaciones Históricas, Asociación de Agricultores de Puerto Rico (*CIH-AAP*), 27 June 1924.
21. *El agricultor puertorriqueño*, 19 December 1925, p. 3.
22. 'Minutes', *CIH-AAP*, 5 April 1926.
23. 'Minutes', *CIH-AAP*, 19 July 1926.
24. Black, 'Role of Public Agencies'; 'Minutes', *CIH-AAP*, 26 February 1926, 5 April 1926; *El agricultor puertorriqueño*, 2 January 1926.

25. *El agricultor puertorriqueño*, 8 May 1926, 24 July 1926; 'Minutes', *CIH-AAP*, 21 January and 26 February 1926.
26. 'Minutes', *CIH-AAP*, 21 September 1928.
27. 'Minutes', *CIH-AAP*, 20 November 1928.
28. *El agricultor puertorriqueño*, 15 January 1931, 31 December 1931.
29. *El agricultor puertorriqueño*, 15 April 1928.
30. *El agricultor puertorriqueño*, 30 September 1927.
31. *El agricultor puertorriqueño*, 30 April 1928.
32. *El agricultor puertorriqueño*, 15 May 1929.
33. *El agricultor puertorriqueño*, June 1934.
34. Esteva, *Third Annual Report*, p. 5.
35. 'Minutes', *CIH-AAP*, 7 September 1937.

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10

The Battle for Rubber in the Second World War: Cooperation and Resistance

William G. Clarence-Smith

As part of a broader study, John Tully has recently tackled the social history of rubber in the Second World War, at a time when control of this commodity assumed urgent strategic significance, due to the mechanisation of the world's armed forces.[1] This is a welcome development, but Tully's story leaves many crucial gaps. Moreover, his narrative pits grasping and greedy elites against a combative and heroic workforce, allowing for few or no shades of grey.

In terms of manufacturing, Tully treats only two major case studies: the projected Nazi factory for synthetic rubber in Auschwitz and the tyre plants of America's 'rubber capital', situated in Akron, Ohio. To be sure, no global history of rubber manufacturing exists, but there are histories of individual tyre firms, albeit often taking the form of commissioned company histories.[2] There are also fine studies of the rise of synthetic rubber in different countries, even if some are more complete than others.[3] In any event, these texts abundantly

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demonstrate a crucial point missed by Tully: namely that synthetic rubber could not entirely substitute for natural rubber, especially for the production of large tyres. Tully further neglects a surge in the production of 'reclaim' rubber from scrap, a mature and unglamorous industry, but one which may have influenced the outcome of the war more than the development of synthetic rubber.[4]

In terms of the production of natural rubber, Tully's book exhibits other lacunae. Virgin rubber from the tropics, nearly all from Southeast Asia, remained essential to produce large tyres. Not only does Tully fail to grasp this, but his account also focuses narrowly on French Indochina, on which he earlier carried out significant research.[5] In consequence, he neglects the most important geographical zones: Malaya and Indonesia. Moreover, he almost entirely ignores the most significant producers: smallholders, who were rare in Indochina but crucial elsewhere. Furthermore, Tully says little about wartime experiments with temperate latex-bearing plants. Even if none of these schemes bore any real fruit, they had significant social consequences, which were tragic in the Nazi and Soviet cases.[6]

After a tremendous rubber boom in Southeast Asia during the first years of the war, the Japanese rapidly conquered the area, between December 1941 and March 1942. This led to an equally spectacular crisis, as the region was suddenly deprived of most of its markets. The Allies stared defeat in the face, and Adolf Hitler rejoiced. This boom-to-bust story had a complex impact on social relations, especially as Vichy Indochina and independent Thailand were in effect Japanese allies during most of the period of Japan's occupation.[7]

Historians have carried out little research on tropical producers of rubber beyond the boundaries of Southeast Asia, even though they were crucial to the survival of the Allies after Japan's triumph in 1941–42. One exception is Warren Dean's fine chapter on Brazil.[8] For other Latin American producers, much can be gleaned from technical works.[9] Sri Lanka, which became the Allies' single largest source of natural rubber, has been surprisingly neglected, apart from an official report after the conflict ended.[10] Africa has attracted polemical statements about the forced cultivation of wild rubber, but little of substance.[11] Tully's stress on the role of Liberian plantations during the war is thus welcome, and his book has the further advantage of including the rubber of Papua New Guinea in the global story.

A commodity chain under stress

One constant strand, running right through the history of how rubber responded to the strains of war, was that social relations in the commodity chain were much more violent and oppressive under Communist and Fascist regimes than in territories controlled by liberal democracies. In itself, this is not surprising. However, it is rarely appreciated that this contrast also held true in the colonial world. Conditions were generally worse in colonies of liberal democracies than in metropoles, but they were usually superior to those prevailing in the Communist and Fascist worlds.

Under authoritarian regimes, social relations at times degenerated into outright barbarism, encapsulated in the chilling Nazi policy of 'extermination through work', adopted from the autumn of 1941.[12] This applied with particular harshness to the extraction of latex from temperate rubber plants, even though these failed to produce almost any rubber for either the Soviets or the Nazis. The construction of new synthetic rubber facilities was another occasion for almost incomprehensible Nazi brutality. In contrast, workers producing tyres and other strategic rubber goods were often treated relatively leniently by both Communist and Fascist regimes.

Conflicts multiplied in liberal democracies, both at home and in the colonies, in times of war. Many disputes pitted workers against employers, public or private, as the right to strike was curtailed, and wages were frozen or kept down in an inflationary context. In the colonies, there were manifold tensions between planters and smallholders, planters and their workers, and the state and collectors of wild rubber. Another type of conflict, not covered here for lack of data, concerned commercial relations – for example, between smallholders and merchants, or manufacturers and retailers.

At the same time, war could also fortify collaborative relations, for it would be perilous to assume that a commodity chain was little more than a structure of exploitation. Commodities had a way of inspiring a genuine *esprit de corps*, at least across some segments of the rubber chain.[13] Moreover, there were sonorous appeals to patriotism, or the defence of established rights and freedom, in the face of a common enemy. That said, material incentives appear to have been most effective in coaxing producers to deliver precious rubber to warring armies around the globe.

Conflict and cooperation in factories for rubber goods and synthetic rubber

Numbers employed in rubber factories boomed during the war, whether producing tyres, other rubber goods, synthetic rubber or reclaim rubber. Conditions of war led all governments to press for labour discipline, but the proportion of carrot and stick applied in industrial relations varied according to circumstances. The nature of the labour force was also subject to major changes.

One little challenged consequence of war was that the number of women employees grew rapidly. American advertisements lauded 'Rosie, the riveter', while Soviet women entered war industries in droves. Michelin tyre plants in France drew in more women. In Japan, an ordinance of August 1944 specified that 30 per cent of workers in the rubber goods sector had to be female.[14] It was not all plain sailing, however, for applying identical minimum wages for men and women in British rubber factories gave rise to murmurings about the poor skills of 'untrained women operatives'.[15]

Even more contested were ethnic changes in factories. In late 1942, Dunlop sacked 13 skilled South Asian workers, who were trying to promote the Natal Rubber Workers' Union in the Durban factory in South Africa. When this provoked a strike, the company played the card of the war effort, received official backing, sacked the strikers and drafted in some 500 'Bantu', who were trained to replace more expensive Indians. In Dunlop's factory in Bengal, nearly two-thirds of Europeans volunteered for military service, and South Asians filled the gaps, provoking mixed emotions. When the Japanese seized Java in early 1942, they took over the Goodyear tyre factory, interned all white managers and transferred the plant to Bridgestone – renamed Nippon Tire in that year. It is unclear whether Indonesian workers welcomed these changes, although some appear to have gained promotion.[16]

Class conflict only temporarily abated in the United States, where the United Rubber Workers of America (URW) had emerged as one of the most militant industrial unions from 1935. The National War Labor Board (NWLB), set up for compulsory arbitration in disputes, sought to stabilise wages at January 1941 rates, albeit making provision for cost-of-living increases. There was a freeze on strikes, and overtime became mandatory.[17] Sherman H. Dalrymple, the URW president, wrote in July 1942: 'We know where the majority of our members stand – we know they don't want to let our boys in the armed forces down', and he specified that 'no handful of men has any right whatsoever to slack the all-out production of needed war materials'.[18] In 1943, he condemned strikes, which 'tend to break down the whole machine of vital war production'.[19]

American rubber workers became increasingly discontented, however, as company profits rose, while wages failed to keep pace with inflation. Formal grievance procedures were jammed with complaints, and the NWLB was accused of siding with the bosses. Absenteeism grew, slowdowns and 'disobedience' became rampant, and wildcat strikes began to multiply from 1943. A wide range of alleged contract violations motivated a major strike against Goodyear in Akron, from 17 June to 5 July 1945. It was only broken when President Truman sent in naval forces, which did not return the factory to Goodyear till the end of August.[20]

Air raids on British rubber factories seem to have sustained solidarity between employers and workers, although surprisingly few Dunlop employees lost their lives through bombing, in part because of carefully rehearsed drills since 1935. Strikes remained legal, but patriotic zeal seems to have contained worker militancy. Holidays were cancelled at short notice to deal with urgent orders, without provoking high rates of absenteeism. As the government increasingly regimented rubber workers, however, tensions emerged. In early 1943, Scottish 'girls' complained about being transferred to English places of work, with poor lodgings and food, and long working hours. The government countered by alleging that workers changed their employment without authorisation, and did not regularly turn up to work.[21]

Stalin's orchestration of the 'Great Patriotic War' may have overcome some class tensions in the USSR. The Soviet rubber industry suffered greatly from the German onslaught of June 1941, which knocked out synthetic rubber and tyre factories in Voronezh and Yefremov, on the front line. In 1943, the Luftwaffe made a concerted effort completely to destroy synthetic and tyre factories in Yaroslavl. There is a lack of information on labour conditions specific to rubber, but workers in all Soviet war industries were placed under military discipline. Holidays were suspended, overtime became compulsory and job mobility was banned. Already poor living conditions worsened after the mass relocation of workers to the east, and average real factory wages in 1945 were only about 40 per cent of the 1940 level. However, wages in war industries were considerably above average, conditions were better and productivity rose sharply. Patriotic fervour and material incentives may have combined to sustain key industries such as rubber.[22]

Workers in occupied Europe, concerned to cling to any job and avoid being sent to Germany to work, lost all traces of militancy. In France, strikes had flared up in tyre factories with the advent of the Front Populaire government in 1936. After France's humiliating capitulation in June 1940, managers and workers strove together to avoid deportation to Germany, and to keep factories limping along with imported German synthetic rubber, while conceding as little as possible to Nazi demands.[23]

In Germany itself, the labour force was sharply segmented between relatively protected citizens and allies, and foreigners and minorities who were forced to toil under duress. German workers may have reacted patriotically to Allied bombing, but there was nothing to bring forth such a reaction from forced labourers. By October 1944, Germans constituted less than two-thirds of those employed in several of IG Farben's factories in Germany proper.[24] The Allies specifically targeted rubber installations, but it is not known how the workforce responded.

It was in Auschwitz that relations between employers and forced workers broke down altogether. IG Farben, attempting to build a massive new synthetic rubber factory from February 1941, set up its own separate concentration camp for Jews, staffed by SS guards. Some 35,000 workers may have died on the company's synthetic rubber and oil factory site, in just under four years. Nevertheless, the ill-fed, badly treated, brutalised and diseased inmates proved adept at wielding the 'weapons of the weak', ensuring that the plant never actually produced any rubber for the Nazis before Soviet troops occupied the area in January 1945. A number of IG Farben executives were imprisoned for a few years after a war crimes trial held in 1947–48, having been convicted of 'aiding and abetting mass murder and slave labour'. It could be argued that they got off lightly.[25]

Coercion and collaboration in the production of temperate rubber

For the production of temperate rubber, authoritarian regimes applied particularly harsh labour coercion, obliging peasants to comply with heavy-handed official demands, and drafting in forced labour. In contrast, American attempts to grow such crops were generally premised on making it worth the while of workers and peasants.

The Soviets pioneered the cultivation of the Russian dandelion (*Taraxacum kok-saghyz*) from the early 1930s, despite its low rubber yields. On seizing the Ukraine, the Nazis found wide stretches of fertile land devoted to this crop. The dandelion generally replaced vegetables, tobacco and hemp. Cultivating the dandelion was extremely labour intensive, and harvesting in the autumn interfered with other tasks. Forced collectivisation had caused much distress, even widespread starvation in places, so that the burden of growing the dandelion was deeply unpopular. Peasants in the Baltic States ploughed up their dandelion fields as soon as Soviet troops retreated. Such behaviour may explain the reduction in German estimates of the planted area in occupied lands, from 60,000 hectares in September 1941 to 20,000 by the end of the year.[26]

Nonetheless, the Nazi conquerors ordered peasants on collective farms to maintain fields of *kok-saghyz*, and soon ratcheted up the pressure. After Heinrich Himmler had won overall control over production for his SS empire in July 1943, he ordered the rounding up of women and children in partisan zones of eastern Europe to grow the crop, and the mobilisation of school children. In 1944, prisoners, juvenile delinquents, orphans, the deaf and dumb and Russian refugees from Stalinism were all pressed into service in the Baltic States. How many people died pursuing Himmler's phantasms is not known. No more than a few hundred tons of rubber were ever delivered to the Reich.[27]

Paradoxically, the Russian dandelion saved the lives of some Jews in Auschwitz, mainly women. From early 1942, the Nazis moved most of their research facilities on *kok-saghyz* to the neighbourhood of the concentration camps. Claudette Bloch, a French biologist incarcerated in Birkenau, was selected to run the laboratory. She recruited a number of other Jewish inmates, who were allowed to reside on the premises, and who were treated somewhat better than in the main camps. The German managers were not acting to save Jews, however, but to advance their scientific careers, and to avoid being sent to fight on the eastern front.[28]

The United States launched their own temperate rubber programme in March 1942, shortly after the attack on Pearl Harbor, but generally sought the collaboration of farmers and workers. *Guayule* (*Parthenium argentatum*) was the main crop and the authorities attempted to persuade southern Californian farmers to sign contracts to supply public processing plants. There were accusations of unfair pressure to sign long-term contracts, but farmers were generally able to hold their ground in the '*guayule* wars' that broke out in late 1942. Most labour took the form of immigrant Mexican *braceros*, and local farmers complained that the authorities provided luxurious camps and scandalously high wages for these people.[29]

The American record was more dubious in other, marginal cases. In Hawaii, the authorities resorted to some convict labour to tap hevea trees left over from earlier agricultural experiments, but these yielded less than 10 tons. Japanese-Americans, interned in south-eastern California in harsh conditions, grew *guayule* for a pittance. However, this was not exactly forced labour, as allowing inmates to cultivate *guayule* was actually a concession to people bored out of their minds. The Americans then employed German prisoners of war in California, ironically to uproot and burn *guayule* after the war had ended.[30]

Labour relations on tropical estates

Western planters in the tropics had long been accused of harsh labour practices, although there were marked regional variations, and reforms had been introduced in the interwar years. Nevertheless, there was little love lost between rubber planters and their 'coolies,' and both sides reacted opportunistically to the opportunities and dangers of war.

Labour tensions grew in Southeast Asia from the late 1930s to 1941, as planters drove up rubber production sharply to meet demand from advanced economies constituting stocks. Militancy on Indochina's rubber estates flared up in 1936–37, following the election of the Front Populaire government. In May 1941, Indian workers were at the centre of serious strikes, affecting nearly all the Selangor plantations in Malaya. Wages had been kept static, despite a sharp rise in the cost of living, and some plantations did not even abide by the legal minimum wage. After nearly three weeks, the British declared a state of emergency and sent in troops to break the strike.[31]

Asian estate workers generally accepted the Japanese conquerors of Southeast Asia, and many probably welcomed the internment of Western managers. The Japanese kept top jobs for themselves, but they promoted Asians, notably clerks and foremen, to positions that they had never before occupied. Indians, and some Chinese, became managers of individual estates in Malaya. Javanese and Bataks were similarly promoted in Sumatra.[32]

Over time, however, the main problem of plantation workers came to be 'how to keep alive'.[33] The Japanese did not cut down much rubber, but attempts to pay wages soon ran into difficulties, for external markets for rubber were now extremely limited. Chinese were likely to be arrested as opponents of Dai Nippon, Indians were pressed to join Subhas Chandra Bose's Indian National Army, and any 'coolie' was liable to be sent to perform forced labour on public works, notably the 'death railway' between Thailand and Burma. Many thus absconded. In East Sumatran estates, flight, mortality and recruitment for forced labour caused the working population to fall by 15 per cent.[34]

The experience of French Indochina differed in some respects. From June 1940, the Vichy authorities clamped down hard on all forms of dissent, but they kept the Japanese at bay. Indeed, it was almost business as usual for French planters, assisted by the government's creation of enormous rubber stocks. Nevertheless, the Japanese *coup de force* of March 1945 led to severe disruptions, and many labourers then deserted the plantations. About half the Vietnamese workers on Cambodian rubber estates went home. The Vietminh targeted those who remained, and planned a wave of strikes to greet the returning French.[35]

Sri Lanka became vital to the Allied war effort from early 1942, but estates complained of serious labour shortages. An estimated 20,000 workers were required to implement a slaughter-tapping programme in 1943. However, existing workers were mainly employed to meet the rapidly expanding military needs of Allied Headquarters, and to produce food. South India was the traditional source of 'coolies' for the island, but emigration to Sri Lanka had been prohibited in 1939, because Indian public opinion had become inflamed by reports of poor conditions and discriminatory legislation. The colonial authorities experienced difficulties in overturning this ban. Labour shortages were thus partly blamed for the stagnation of the island's rubber exports, following an initial surge.[36]

Plantation workers in Allied Africa went through two sharply contrasting phases. Initially, they faced unemployment, as scarce shipping was allocated in priority to Southeast Asia, and enemy alien planters were interned in places such as British Cameroon. However, as demand soared, forcible recruitment practices recurred from early 1942. The Gaullists mobilised thousands of forced workers for the rubber plantations of French Cameroun, in line with pre-existing French legislation. On Liberia's Firestone plantations, chiefs were paid a fixed sum per worker supplied, and the country's independent government suppressed strikes. In the hectic conditions of war, employment on Firestone's estates grew from 12,500 in 1940 to 29,500 in 1947. In Tanganyika (Tanzania), the British authorities decided in March 1942 to bring nearly 6,000 hectares of derelict plantations of *Manihot glaziovii* in Usambara back into production. Conscription for periods of 12 months was introduced in Central Province, mainly targeting the Gogo people. Many died, especially in the early months, when conditions were poor. Although workers' compounds were guarded, others managed to desert. Nevertheless, some Gogo men bought cattle with their wages, and then voluntarily recontracted themselves for another stint.[37]

Workers in Brazil succumbed to unemployment for ecological reasons. In 1940, there were some ten million trees planted on 14,000 hectares of Henry Ford's gigantic concessions along the Tapajoz river. South American Leaf Blight (*Microcyclus ulei*) devastated even allegedly resistant clones, and millions of trees died in 1944–45. Having lost an estimated US$20 million, Ford sold the estates to the Brazilian government for a mere US$0.25 million in November 1945. The authorities used the money to fund redundancy payments to workers.[38]

Smallholders versus planters in the tropics

The 1934 International Rubber Regulation Agreement (IRRA) unfairly penalised Asian smallholders, through limitations on new planting, stiff export taxes and the unequal application of export quotas. Small producers still managed to account for about half the rubber output of Indonesia and Malaya, the largest global producers, but their share would have been greater if a level playing field had existed. Conditions of war led to the loosening of some constraints, but discrimination remained in place.[39]

As IRRA quotas were progressively increased in times of war, estate owners fought a tenacious rearguard action against their smallholder rivals, with the backing of the local and metropolitan state. Peter Bauer estimates that more rubber could have been extracted from Malaya and Indonesia before the Japanese overran the region had the complex and discriminatory restrictions on smallholders been entirely abolished. In effect, planters undermined the war effort through a selfish defence of their own narrow interests. Thailand's small rubber farmers, who accounted for nearly all the harvest in that independent country, initially benefited from Japan's need for rubber, but lost out when the Japanese seized Malaya and Indonesia.[40]

As for the Japanese occupiers, they could never decide whether to favour estates, which were handed over to Japanese businesses, or to back smallholders, who might support the cause of the Greater East Asia Co-Prosperity Sphere. In any event, many smallholders proved flexible in their responses to the crisis, temporarily abandoning their rubber plots to squat elsewhere and produce food crops.[41]

African smallholders were only occasionally included in Allied plans to boost output, although the British did distribute seed to smallholders in mid-western Nigeria. Hevea was already a well-established cash crop in this area, and farmers brought non-harvested trees into production as prices rose from 1942. Administrative compulsion to grow hevea, as practised in the Belgian Congo from 1933, proved much less successful. African smallholders were at times wrongly regarded as collectors of wild rubber. In Oubangui-Chari (Central African Republic), much rubber actually came from *Manihot glaziovii* trees (Ceará rubber), planted in the early 1920s, and rescued from neglect as prices rose. Portuguese Guinea's rubber exports were attributed to the exploitation of wild *Landolphia* vines, but some came from *Manihot* trees, used as hedges by Cape Verdean immigrants.[42]

The collection of wild rubber

The revival of the collection of wild rubber in times of war was widely condemned as a retrograde move, which stained the reputation of Western powers. However, accusations of a return to the scandals associated with King Leopold are wide of the mark. Thinly spread collectors in forest and bush were hard to control, and overly harsh intervention might provoke rebellions, at a time when colonial repressive capabilities were tied up in fighting the war. It was difficult to motivate such people in terms of patriotic or other ideological discourses, so that prices, of both raw rubber and trade goods, emerged as the key determinants.

In the tropical New World, there was a chronic shortage of tappers, and independent governments were not prepared to apply force to remedy this situation. The Brazilian authorities merely decreed in 1943 that a man could serve a two-year stint as a *seringueiro* (rubber collector) in lieu of military service. Despite drought in Brazil's Nordeste, the traditional recruitment ground for collectors, the high cost of scarce consumer goods acted as a disincentive, together with the risks and hardships of life in the jungle far from home. Although about 100,000 *seringueiros* were eventually recruited in Brazil, the Americans estimated that 500,000 were required.[43]

Irritated by slow progress, the American Rubber Development Corporation, an official body, attempted to short-circuit the merchants who controlled credit, supplies and purchasing in the Amazon. However, traders ran rings round the inexperienced Americans. Under the effective leadership of Chamié, a prominent 'Syrian' (probably Lebanese) merchant, they threatened to bring collection to a shuddering halt. The Americans thus backed down, agreeing to disburse three times what they paid for plantation rubber from Liberia and Sri Lanka.[44]

Collecting wild rubber in Africa led to more forceful methods, notably in the case of Vichy and Gaullist France.[45] Indeed, the French stood accused of endangering the food supplies and health of their African wards. In 1944, the Free French destroyed a village in Guinea-Conakry, because 'people fled rather than supply rubber'.[46] In French

Equatorial Africa, Pierre Kalck denounced unspecified abuses in rubber collection 'that discredited Free France in the eyes of the peasant masses'.[47]

In reality, though, it was prices that mainly impelled the collection of wild rubber in Africa during the war. Governments sought to set the remuneration for different qualities of rubber at levels that would stimulate indigenous people to seek out latex-bearing plants in forests and savannas, while still protecting cash-strapped treasuries. Attempts to extract rubber from reconquered Ethiopia became a case study in how wrong this could go, with the British ending up paying way over the odds for a paltry 25 tons of rubber. Officials also attempted to make consumer goods available for purchase by rubber collectors, and to provide essential services – notably transport, as in the Belgian Congo.[48]

Indeed, Tamara Giles-Vernick has recorded oral testimonies from southwestern Oubangui-Chari, which lament the passing of rubber gathering after 1945. Despite the abuses that accompanied it, collecting rubber entailed ready access to consumer goods, in an area where there were no obvious alternatives. As one informant put it, rather sadly: 'Africa had to close the road of rubber . . . America didn't need rubber anymore.'[49]

Conclusions

It remains unclear to what extent the Second World War forged new social relations in the rubber sector, as opposed to merely speeding up, or delaying, already existing processes. The war certainly threw up both winners and losers, shattering some old links in the rubber commodity chain, reviving others and forging new ones. The Japanese invaders broke the arrogant confidence and unquestioned political supremacy of Western hevea planters in Southeast Asia, even if the decline of plantations after 1945 proved to be a slow process. Smallholders faced new challenges after the war, in the form of predatory independent states and a thriving synthetic rubber industry in advanced economies. Neither the revival of collection of rubber from the wild nor the cultivation of temperate rubber plants survived the exceptional circumstances of the conflict. The geographical dispersal of manufacturers of tyres and footwear accelerated, but non-Western firms faced an uphill struggle in competing with multinational or public corporations, which were often those favoured by independent governments. The rise in the number of women workers in the factories of advanced economies was reversed after the war, at least in part.

Everywhere, the state assumed a much greater prominence during the war, whether as a direct participant or as a regulator of the activities of the commodity chain, and it is a moot point how much of that power was relinquished after the conflict had ended. Laissez-faire certainly suffered considerably from the combined impact of the Great Depression and the Second World War. While it was in the newly independent and expanded Communist worlds that states proved most reluctant to step aside, officials everywhere continued to intervene in the workings of the rubber commodity chain for decades to come.

One final point is that when a raw material such as rubber becomes crucial to military survival in war, the likelihood is that abundant primary sources will be generated for future generations of social historians. To be sure, some of these resources have either vanished or remain unavailable, due to the destruction of war or the narrow-minded policies of rubber companies. Nevertheless, researchers dispose of abundant archival materials with which to examine further how social relations in the rubber commodity chain responded to the conditions of the Second World War. And war, for all its terrible consequences, is a great revealer of hidden social trends.

Notes

1. Tully, *The devil's milk*.
2. Allen, *House of Goodyear*; O'Reilly and Keating, *Goodyear Story*; Lief, *Firestone Story*; Babcock, *History of the US Rubber Company;* Storrs, *Dunlop in War and Peace*; McMillan, *Dunlop Story*; Jemain, *Michelin*; Lottman, *Michelin Men*.
3. Morris, 'Development of acetylene chemistry'; Jeffreys, *Hell's Cartel*; Morris, *American Synthetic Rubber*; O'Reilly, 'A fateful friendship'; Petri, 'Opting for methane'; Petri, 'Zwischen Konkurrenz und Kooperation'; Sagers and Shabad, *Chemical Industry in the USSR*, Chapter 7.
4. Ball, *Reclaimed Rubber*.
5. For example, Tully, *France on the Mekong*.
6. Finlay, *Growing American Rubber*; Heim, *Plant Breeding and Agrarian Research*; Krotkov, 'A review of the literature'; Clarence-Smith, 'Synthetic and temperate rubber'.

7. Bauer, *Rubber Industry*; Tate, *RGA History of the Plantation Industry*; Kratoska, *Japanese Occupation of Malaya*; Yoshimura, 'Japan's economic policy'; Nawiyanto, *Rising Sun in a Javanese Rice Granary*; Jong, *Collapse of a Colonial Society*; Sato, *War, Nationalism, and Peasants*; Murakami, 'Japan's thrust into French Indochina'; Hung Le, *Impact of World War II*; Reynolds, *Thailand and Japan's Southern Advance*.
8. Dean, *Brazil and the Struggle for Rubber*, Chapter 6.
9. Notably Polhamus, *Rubber*; Baulkwill, 'History of natural rubber production'.
10. Ceylon, *Report of the Commission*.
11. Clarence-Smith, 'Grands et petits planteurs'.
12. Siegelbaum, *Cars for Comrades*, p. 162; Jeffreys, *Hell's Cartel*, p. 253.
13. For the example of one rubber company, see Clarence-Smith, 'Rivaud-Hallet plantation group'.
14. Meyer, *Once and Future Union*, p. 72; Nove, *Economic History of the USSR*, p. 278; Lottman, *Michelin Men*, p. 184; Cohen, *Japan's Economy in War and Reconstruction*, p. 321.
15. *India-Rubber Journal*, 15 March 1943; McMillan, *Dunlop Story*, p. 81.
16. Alexander, *Workers, War and the Origins of Apartheid*, pp. 48–9; Storrs, *Dunlop in War and Peace*, pp. 84–5; O'Reilly and Keating, *Goodyear Story*, p. 101; Allen, *House of Goodyear*, pp. 586, 679.
17. Meyer, *Once and Future Union*, pp. 29–78; Roberts, *Rubber Workers*, pp. 321–75, 361–5.
18. Roberts, *Rubber Workers*, p. 363.
19. Meyer, *Once and Future Union*, p. 73.
20. Meyer, *Once and Future Union*, pp. 72–3; Roberts, *Rubber Workers*, pp. 364, 383, 387–93; O'Reilly and Keating, *Goodyear Story*, p. 97.
21. McMillan, *Dunlop Story*, pp. 81–5; Storrs, *Dunlop in War and Peace*, pp. 35–44; *India-Rubber Journal*, 23 January 1943.
22. Sagers and Shabad, C*hemical industry in the USSR*, pp. 272–4; Morris, 'Development of acetylene chemistry', p. 359; Barber and Harrison, *Soviet Home Front*, p. 184; Nove, *Economic History of the USSR*, pp. 277–9, 281–2.
23. Lacroix-Riz, *Industriels et banquiers français*, pp. 158, 541–2; Jemain, *Michelin*, pp. 118–19, 122–4; Lottman, *Michelin Men*, pp. 171–3, 184; Storrs, *Dunlop in War and Peace*, pp. 96–7.
24. Mazower, *Hitler's Empire*, Chapter 10; Tooze, *Wages of Destruction*, Chapter 16; Morris, 'Development of acetylene chemistry', p. 73.
25. Jeffreys, *Hell's Cartel*, Chapters 11–15; Morris, 'Development of acetylene chemistry', pp. 74–6, 339–45.
26. Krotkov, 'A review of the literature'; Fonseca, 'A produção de borracha', p. 52; Heim, *Plant Breeding and Agrarian Research*, pp. 103 (n.24), 112 (n.67), 118–19, 124–5.
27. Heim, *Plant Breeding and Agrarian Research*, pp. 108, 120–2, 125 (n.121); Morris, 'Development of acetylene chemistry', p. 361.
28. Heim, *Plant Breeding and Agrarian Research*, pp. 130–52.
29. Finlay, Mark, *Growing American Rubber*, pp. 158–9, 202–05.

30. Finlay, Mark, *Growing American Rubber*, pp. 8, 148, 152–7, 199–202, 219.
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36. *India-Rubber Journal*, 30 January and 20 February 1943; Hurstfield, *Control of Raw Materials*, p. 168.
37. Onana-Mfege, *Les Camerounais et le Général de Gaulle*, p. 59; Van der Kraaij, *Open Door Policy of Liberia*, Vol.1, pp. 51, 441–6; Lief, *Firestone Story*, p. 109; Westcott, 'Impact of the Second World War on Tanganyika', pp. 84–6.
38. Jünger, *Kampf um Kautschuk*, pp. 170, 179; Dean, *Brazil and the Struggle for Rubber*, pp. 97–107; Serier, *Histoire du caoutchouc*, p. 191.
39. Barlow and Drabble, 'Government and the emerging rubber industries in Indonesia and Malaya', pp. 203–6; Purwanto, 'From *dusun* to market', pp. 184, 217; McFadyean, *History of Rubber Regulation*.
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11

Beyond ‘Exotic Groceries’: Tapioca/Cassava/Manioc, a Hidden Commodity of Empires and Globalisation

Kaori O’Connor

Studies of empire food commodities have concentrated on the great export commodities sugar, tea, coffee, chocolate, spices and tobacco – the first ‘exotic groceries’.[1] However, there were other ‘hidden’ commodities of empire, staples that were an essential part of imperial trade, and in some cases literally sustained it. This chapter focuses on just such a hidden food commodity, one that moved between Empires over four centuries largely unremarked although it was a part of both transatlantic and transpacific commerce. This food was involved in imperial trade in three ways: as a plant cultivar; as a finished commodity; and as the sustenance that supported the production of Empire goods and was the catalyst for the mass movement of people across continents and oceans. This food is arguably the most important food crop in the tropical and subtropical regions of the world, but it has been largely overlooked in Anglo-American food histories and studies of imperial trade for two reasons. First, it is a food that in many places was more important in the internal market than in the export trade to which it was essential, and therefore never appeared in export figures. The second reason is a direct consequence of imperial history, for the food originated in and was most important to the Portuguese Empire, which in Anglophone studies has been eclipsed by the Spanish Empire and its maize-dominated colonial food regime, in the same way that Luso-Brazilian studies have been overwhelmed by Spanish/Latin American studies under the label 'Hispanic'.[2]

This hidden food commodity is a root (*manihot esculenta*) known variously as tapioca, cassava and manioc and there are scores of regional variations.[3] These multiple names and the resultant confusion of identity have helped to further conceal its distribution and importance. From its Amazonian origins, tapioca was taken east across the Atlantic and west across the Pacific during the age of exploration, with very different initial consequences but with later similarities. Because of the considerations noted above, as well as the fact that there are many ways in which tapioca can be processed and consumed, and because of other factors including the divisive nature of area studies and the tendency of New World/Old World analyses to focus on the Atlantic and Africa rather than on the Pacific and Asia, tapioca has not been looked at in a global, joined up way before.

Here, then, is a brief hidden global history of tapioca/cassava/manioc, with a caveat. This history focuses on culture rather than on agriculture, and on what, how and why people – colonisers as well as the colonised – consumed and still consume, rather than just on what they produce for export. It is a curious feature of colonial and imperial academic studies that food security and details of food acquisition, preparation and consumption have been consistently overlooked or minimised, even though contemporary documents show these were the overriding concern of colonists' daily lives, and the basis for their relations with the colonised, and indeed the basis upon which empires were built. Although 'globalisation' is a contested term as regards definition, extent and consequences, there is general agreement that there is an urgent need to better understand the 'diverse and specific circumstances of food production in local-national-global networks, and local/actor agencies rather than structures in the globalisation of specific commodities'.[4] While agricultural economists and classic economic historians have long focussed on the economics of specific export commodities, they have, as Friedland has noted

> been less interested in studying commodity systems, let alone social, political or cultural aspects of commodities . . . most commodity chain studies by economists are usually devoid of human beings.[5]

These omissions have led to an incomplete understanding of globalisation and the complexities of empire and of connections across time and space. The anthropological approach adopted here restores human beings to a central position in the analysis, both as actors and through the human values embodied in material goods, using two main techniques. The first is the construction of a 'cultural biography' as developed by Kopytoff, which follows changes in the human values and meanings that become embedded in particular commodities. The second is the multi-sited ethnography method espoused by Marcus, in which 'following the thing' allows a sense of process and interconnectedness to emerge through the circulation of goods.[6] Among the questions this approach seeks to illuminate are: what influence do particular commodities have on human society and vice versa; and how do they connect different regions, cultures and historical periods – all fundamental to understanding empires and globalisation. What produced the producers, and how does this hidden commodity of empire impact us today?

Tapioca

Tapioca is the fourth most important staple in the world overall, and the number one staple in the tropics and subtropics, where it supports some half a billion people in Africa alone. Tapioca can grow well in poor soil, thrives in both dry or moist soil, can be harvested and planted at any time of the year, requires little or no maintenance while growing, gives high yields, is easy to propagate and presents few storage problems, as it can be left in the ground for months before harvesting.[7] Tapioca is generally resistant to disease, is hardy and reliable, and is therefore an ideal hedge against famine. It is very rich in carbohydrates, second only to sugar in that regard. Although the root is virtually pure starch, when eaten with other things it is an ideal foundation for a balanced diet. Tapioca can be baked, boiled, fried, mashed, used as a thickener, ground into flour and made into alcoholic and non-alcoholic drinks. Being almost tasteless adds to the root's appeal, since it can be easily flavoured with local ingredients. Especially in its most refined form, its melting starchiness makes it one of the world's great comfort foods and drinks. Tapioca is as close as any one plant gets to being all things to all cuisines. Indeed, it is a 'miracle plant' except for two problems: it can degrade the environment and it is poisonous. The root comes in two varieties: sweet and bitter. When raw, both contain hydrocyanic acid, in potentially lethal quantities in the case of the bitter root. Detoxification involves a combination of soaking, grating, boiling, fermentation, pressing and other techniques that were lengthy and irksome before mechanisation, and dictated certain forms of social organisation.

Tapioca, the Portuguese Empire and Brazil

Tapioca is a New World plant, believed to have originated in what is now eastern Brazil, and was among the first plants to be domesticated for food use in Central and South America, as early as the second and third millennia BC. Permanent European settlement in Brazil and the subsequent development in the northeast region of an export economy based on sugar could not have taken place without tapioca. Brazil became part of the Portuguese Empire in 1500 when ships under the command of Pedro Alvarez Cabral made landfall, claimed the territory for Portugal and sailed for India ten days later after a brief encounter with the main indigenous inhabitants of the area, the Tupi, and a cursory survey of the land from shipboard and the safety of the coast. The first accounts of Brazil were to have as profound an effect on the Lusitanic imaginary as the peoples of Polynesia had on the Anglophone and Francophone worlds.[8]

Here, apparently, were true children of nature, innocent in their nakedness, living in an earthly paradise so luxuriant it defied description. This new Eden, it was reported, was blessed with soil so rich that food appeared to grow effortlessly. Tupi provisioning relied on hunting and gathering of wild foods combined with tropical agriculture, which involved 'swidden' gardening or slash-and-burn farming; the ground was cleared, crops planted and harvested, and when the soil and other resources of an area were exhausted, the settlement would be relocated. At the centre of their food system was the tapioca, here called manioc, or manihot, which the Tupi described as 'our life' and 'our sacred plant'. In the most common method of Tupi manioc preparation, the roots were soaked in water for several days, often until they fermented, in order to soften the thick bark-like skin sufficiently to allow it to be removed. The peeled tubers were then pounded in a trough, the tough fibres were removed and the pulp was squeezed or pressed to extract moisture and prussic acid.

Grating was an alternative method to pounding. Tapioca was made from the starchy residue that collected at the bottom of the liquid from the pressing. After being soaked to remove impurities, this fine and pale meal was dried and crumbled and used to make cakes and wafers. Manioc flour (*farina*), heavier than the tapioca, was made from the pulpy meal from which the tapioca-bearing liquid had been extracted. The mealy cassava flour was dried by toasting over a fire, then stored until it was eaten, commonly in the form of a gruel of *farinha* mixed with water, to which other ingredients such as dried fish and meat, cash or other nuts, and fruits such as *acai* were sometimes added. The dried meal could also be eaten plain, like couscous. A common way of taking nourishment, appropriate to the tropical heat, was in the form of starchy drinks, fermented and intoxicating to differing degrees. The combination of manioc cultivation and hunting/gathering gave the Tupi a good carbohydrate/protein balance: all early European accounts of the Tupi describe them as healthy and well made.

Portugal's original plan for Brazil was one of exploitation and extraction – to draw upon the existing natural resources of the new possession, rather than to establish a permanent colonial settlement in order to develop new sources of wealth. Disappointingly, it was discovered that Brazil did not offer the accessible riches of the East or the gold and silver of Spain's American possessions. Portuguese settlement of the new colony did not begin in earnest until 1531–32, when Portuguese attention began to shift from the Asian arena to the Atlantic. Few of the settlers arrived with any idea of what the land was like or the challenges before them, and it was generally assumed that if supplies ran out before they were able to plant and harvest crops of the European cultigens they brought with them, they could rely on the Tupi to provide food in exchange for goods. As they became more familiar with the Tupi, the colonists grew scornful of indigenous provisioning methods and practices, which were in fundamental opposition to European modes. The colonists could not understand why the Tupi continued to hunt and gather rather than adopt a settled way of life; why they did not have proper fields but used rude clearings for their plantings; why they seemed to have no domesticated beasts for agricultural work or to serve as a food supply although they kept jungle animals and birds as pets; and why they had no thoughts of building up food surpluses but were content to produce food as needed. Of all Tupi foods, the colonists were most suspicious of tapioca, whose poison they feared.[9]

Soon, however, the early settlers were obliged to adopt Tupi foodstuffs in order to survive. The Brazilian soil was not as rich as the lush vegetation had suggested, and the tropical conditions of the northeast did not suit key European plants, particularly cereals such as wheat, the basis of the European diet. Nor did it suit the constitutions of the colonists. Digestive ailments were common, and these were often exacerbated rather than relieved by imported foodstuffs that had deteriorated due to poor conditions during transportation. The heat and humidity made it difficult to keep foods from spoiling, and in any case imported goods were scarce, expensive and uncertain of supply. The indigenous plant upon which the Portuguese colonists became reliant was tapioca, which the Tupi initially provided voluntarily as a trade good in the form of f*arinha* (flour). The settlers were struck by the many ways in which the Tupi knew how to prepare the root, which meant that relying on a single staple was no barrier to variety. It was also easily digestible, soothing and pleasant to eat, stored well and could be cooked quickly. Many Portuguese colonists came to prefer manioc, even when supplies of wheat became more readily available. Colonists found that manioc was all that was needed to sustain life. Its very success proved to be the true poison in the plant, from the Tupi point of view.[10]

The development of colonial Brazilian cuisine and the role of manioc in it – particularly in the sugar-producing centres of Bahia and Pernambuco – parallel the transformation of indigenous foods in other parts of the world under the influence of empire. In the discovery phase of empire indigenous foods are first regarded with suspicion by European settlers who, when forced to adopt them in order to survive, then attempt to adapt or 'civilise' them. To Europeans, bread was a powerful symbol of superiority, the defining food of a civilised life, an emblem of the triumph of culture over nature. It was also central to Christian belief and iconography. What particularly appealed to the first colonists was that manioc flour could be made into bread, which they taught the Tupi to make. The tremendous variety of pastries and breads that use manioc flour in Brazilian cookery today – old favourites such as cheese bread (*pao de queijo*) and cakes (*bolo de mandioca)* – are a legacy of this early phase. Manioc-based dishes became a symbol of the new Brazil and the colonial Brazilians.

Instead of being a source of shame or embarrassment, the *farinha de Pao* become an object of pride, and a defining part of national identity. One common saying was 'We Brazilians do not need (wheat) bread'.

Manioc's reliability as a crop and palatability as a food, and the fact that its adaptability made agricultural diversification unnecessary, facilitated the growth of the fledgling sugar enterprise. This placed ever-heavier demands on the Tupi as primary food providers and processors, for the colonists neither grew nor refined the root themselves. Imposing European methods and values, the colonists began to enslave the Tupi, obliging them to grow manioc in permanent fields for them, instead of providing it through swidden and trade. Tupi men were also made to work in the new sugar plantations, and were forbidden to move about in the region or to hunt for fear they would abscond. With their varied diet now gone, the health of the Tupi began to deteriorate as did the land, which was now farmed continually and not allowed to renew itself. Tupi women were forced to become house servants and to undertake the onerous and never-ending task of processing the manioc. By 1549, the year that the Jesuits arrived in Brazil and only 18 years after the arrival of the first Portuguese settlers, Amerindian slavery was firmly established and the indigenous population was in sharp decline.[11] Tupi labour proved insufficient to the colony's needs, leading to the importation of slaves from Africa, a trade that Portugal dominated for some two-hundred years. The African slaves in their turn became reliant on manioc; because it was so easy to grow, there was always the temptation to become over-dependent on it, which perpetuated the problems of a decline in health and the impoverishment of the soil. While it was easy to grow, manioc never became easy to process. In the mid-nineteenth century the method was essentially unchanged since early colonial times except for the occasional addition of a European wheel for crushing, which was proudly pointed out to visitors. The following passage gives insight into the attitudes of the time:

> We follow, at a distance, to the little open shed where *farinha* is prepared. Half a dozen women and boys are cleaning the *mandioca* as it is brought in . . . the roots are piled in a great wooden trough, the half of a hollowed *itauba* log; here they are grated on a board covered with sheet copper full of nailholes. Francesca in her *festa*

> dress maybe pretty, but as she stoops over the grater with a root in each hand, she affords a too-powerful reminder of that detestable northern machine – the scrubbing board. Her bare arms and black dress are spattered with the why-like juice; her rebellious hair is just falling away from the confining comb; her brown face, glowing with perspiration, gives the lie to our ideas of Indian laziness.[12]

The transformation of Brazil into a commercial plantation economy has been too well documented to require further elaboration here, but one factor has been overlooked until recently: the reliance of the export market in sugar on the internal market in manioc. Barickman and Schwartz have shown how the consumption of manioc made the operation of the African-worked plantations possible, with one bushel of *farinha* per slave every 40 days being the standard ration. Similarly, in the Caribbean, the indigenous Arawak, like the Tupi, relied on tapioca as part of a richly varied diet. The Spanish colonisers enslaved the Arawaks and made them solely dependent on manioc, which became the foundation of a slave-plantation economy later worked by Africans.[13] The extensive 2007 celebrations of the bicentenary of the abolition of the slave trade in 1807 focussed on slave life in the New World, including the development of 'slave food' in which manioc figures large in South America and the Caribbean; but this is only part of the story. What has been overlooked is the globalisation of tapioca in Africa, and its role in the building of African empires and societies built on the slave trade and its colonial aftermath.

Cassava: Tapioca in Africa

In 1594, the British explorer and adventurer Sir Richard Hawkins, nephew of Sir Francis Drake, captured a Portuguese slave ship from Brazil bound for the Guinea coast, carrying a cargo of cassava meal which he reported 'serveth for marchandise in Angola, for the Portingals food in the ship, and to nourish the negroes they shall carry to the River of Plate'.[14] This was not the elaborate transatlantic commodity circuit of later times that would link the West African coast with Brazil, the West Indies, the east coast of North America and Britain. In the early period, the route was simply Brazil–Africa–Brazil, and on the westward leg the commodity transported was human. Historians have doubted Hawkins's account, saying it is unlikely a cargo of meal would be carried on slave ships.[15] Nothing could be further from the truth. The meal was carried on Portuguese slavers precisely because it was the cargo that produced the human cargo.

After two generations, in Brazil Luso-Brazilian slavers were habituated to tapioca consumption themselves. They were also familiar with conditions around the mouth of the Congo River which they had reached by 1482, and which become the centre of their African slaving operations. Slaves from the interior who arrived on the coast in a starved and exhausted condition had to be made sufficiently fit to survive the Atlantic crossing. The slaves were often kept at the coast for some time before embarking – consuming foodstuffs that might be in short supply due to war or famine, and which in any case were highly expensive if purchased from local suppliers. So cassava to feed the slaves onshore was brought over from Brazil. Once on board for the return journey, the demands of the passage meant that the food for crew and slaves had to be as simple, quick, easy and nourishing as possible – and for this the meal made in Brazil was ideal, only needing to be mixed with water to make a porridge. At first, Luso-Brazilian slaves were fed on meal brought from Brazil as soon as they reached the coast. Then bags of meal were taken inland and used by slave merchants as food on the route to the coast, to ensure that more of their captives reached the point of sale alive. Then the plant itself was taken into the interior by Africans.

The initial movement of tapioca in Africa exactly followed the Luso-Brazilian/Congolese slave routes into the interior, with the plant arriving at the upper Zambesi Plateau by 1650, well before the first Europeans. It was soon taken up by the militaristic empires like the Ruund, which were then emerging in Central Africa. Origin myths in the region speak of the plant as having been adopted by leaders who wished to free their people from the famines that followed the frequent droughts that caused their staple sorghum and millet to fail; and tapioca did free people, but in an unforeseen way. Requiring no intensive heavy agricultural labour and minimising dependence on hunting and gathering, the plant liberated men to engage in a rapidly escalating warrior culture in which slave-taking from rival groups, an already established practice in internal African dynamics of status and prestige, reached unprecedented levels – a process Roberts described as the reproduction of the warrior state through the production of slaves. These slaves were ultimately channelled into the transatlantic slave trade, so tapioca produced the warrior state that produced the warriors that produced the slaves that produced the commodities of empire.[16]

Another quality of the plant became apparent in Central Africa: its capacity to sustain war. Normally, hostilities cease when the food runs out, but the plant proved to be a great enabler. Tapioca gardens could not be destroyed as easily as fields of millet or sorghum, nor were there storehouses of supplies to steal or put to the torch, because the root was left in the ground until it was needed. The manner of processing was also well suited to unsettled conditions. In this part of Africa, preparation of the plant was at its simplest. The full tapioca technology known in Brazil was not carried into the interior, and indeed the early Portuguese slavers on the coast did not know it either, as they relied on the Tupi to prepare the flour carried on slave ships. In Central Africa, tapioca was simply peeled, soaked, boiled and then eaten whole. Initially the root sustained large populations in places where they could not otherwise have existed, but this brought its own problems. The varied diet described by the first European explorers became a mono-meal, often consisting of boiled cassava as the staple, accompanied by the plant's leaves as the sole vegetable, which took its toll on the health of the people, and on the environment by leaving the soil depleted. The social order created by tapioca production and consumption in Central Africa outlasted slaving but left the region configured for colonial modes of work on big plantations and in mines, which required substantial labour forces that could be cheaply and easily fed, especially large numbers of males who could be mobilised for forced tied work, notably in the Belgian Congo.

The French were also involved in the eastward spread of cassava, introducing it in the mid-1700s to East Africa and to Reunion, Mauritius and Madagascar, where it became an important staple. Zanzibar had been a centre of the slave trade, and there in the 1870s the British explorer Sir Richard Francis Burton observed:

> The Wasawahili have some fifty different ways of preparing it [cassava tuber]. Boiled, and served up with a sauce of ground-nut cream, it is palatable: in every bazar sun-dried lengths, split by the

> women, and looking like pipe-clay and flour, are to be brought: a paste, kneaded with cold water, is cooked to scones over the fire: others wrap the raw root in plantain-leaf and bake it, like *greeshen,* in hot ashes. The poorer classes pound, boil, stir, and swallow the thick gruel till their stomachs stand out in bold relief. Full of gluten, this food is by no means nutritious; and after a short time produces that inordinate craving for meat, even the meat of white ants, which has a name in most African languages.[17]

The cultural consequences of cassava were different in West Africa, north of the Portuguese Atlantic slaving centres. There the plant did not become important until the nineteenth century, given impetus by the voluntary return from Brazil of freed slaves who brought the cassava-processing techniques with them, and who settled along the West African coast, from whence processing technology spread. Compared to Central Africa, there were fewer large plantations and mines in West Africa, but there were many smaller operations that grew rubber, bananas, cacao, coffee and groundnuts and harvested hardwood. There was also an extensive domestic trade in agricultural staples like yams, and gathered products like palm kernels, shea nuts and kola nuts; and workers were increasingly needed in the growing urban centres that were drawing workers from inland. In West Africa, therefore, the need was primarily for migratory workers rather than for tied labour, a requirement that was perfectly fulfilled by processed cassava, an ideal food for single migrant male labourers because it is very cheap and easy to prepare, the flour only needing to be mixed with water. Here too cassava transformed social organisation and generated specific kinds of economic activity. It also transformed family dynamics and gender relations. Yams had been the original staple, cultivated by men and constituting the basis of male prestige, wealth and social competition. When cassava was introduced, men considered it beneath them, handing its production, processing and marketing to women. As cassava grew in importance, women became financially independent of their husbands, with cassava providing the foundation for the female market-trading activities that became a distinctive and dominating feature of West African life and the internal market. The close ties between tapioca and social organisation help to explain some of the challenges to development in Africa, where the movement to mechanising cassava production has been slow, because the change would remove women from a position of power in the internal market.[18]

In Africa, as in South America and the Caribbean, the great commodities of empire could not have been produced to the extent they were without cassava but, because it never figured on the export lists, it remained hidden, its significance missed by later economic historians.

Tapioca in Asia

In contrast to its well-documented trajectory in Africa, the arrival of tapioca in Asia is shrouded in myth and legend. While the Spanish are usually given the credit, it is more likely to have been the Portuguese whose Asian trade network stretched all the way to Japan. The Portuguese certainly established tapioca in Goa, the plant had arrived in the sparsely populated Indonesian archipelago by the late sixteenth century. Initially it made little impact, and tapioca seems to have naturalised its way through the archipelago and up the Malay Peninsula, into territory where the use of rice as the principal and preferred staple had by now been established for millennia.[19] There it served as a famine food and as sustenance for the very poor, generally disregarded until the mid-nineteenth century when new markets for high grade starches for food and industrial uses opened up in Britain and America. Here, in contrast to Brazil and Africa, tapioca was seen primarily as an export product, and therefore developed an economic profile.

By 1860, the Dutch had established tapioca plantations in Java, and fine tapioca flour became an important export, an example of how quickly the plant can dominate a local economy and ecosystem. The plantation regimes of Indonesia were benign compared to those of Africa, South America and the Caribbean, and while the plant brought about the sedentarisation or peasantisation of previously mobile upland tribes in the Indonesian archipelago, this took place without serious large-scale social consequences.[20] Tapioca also attracted the attention of Chinese entrepreneurs in British Malaya. Chinese trading networks across Southeast Asia were supplied by small groups of migratory Chinese workers who grew or harvested specialised high-return commodities under short-term permits issued by the British government for tracts of Malayan forest that were sparsely occupied or uninhabited. These were highly focussed and efficient operations, the objective being to get in and out with minimum investment in money and time, and with maximum profit. The Chinese were not interested in controlling large permanent populations of plantation labourers, and they did not want to establish landed estates where they might settle permanently. This meant there was no slavery or tied labour on the African or New World model; but here it was the environment that suffered. In Malaya, tracts of virgin forest were 'cleared, cultivated, exhausted and abandoned'. Production took place in small factories, which produced high-grade tapioca in flour, flake and pearl form for foreign export, with a thriving subsidiary business in pig farming, feeding the pigs on the waste tapioca meal. It is thought the technology originated in China, first developed for processing rice. The heyday of the Chinese tapioca trade in British Malaya was between 1860 and 1890, and in that time the Chinese population there doubled and then trebled, transforming the demographic makeup of the region, and putting in place the cosmopolitan population of today. In the 1890s the British authorities, concerned at environmental damage caused by Chinese tapioca, refused further permits for the plant, and promoted a scheme to turn tapioca lands into rubber plantations, while the Chinese turned their attentions to other crops.[21]

Because Asian tapioca was an export product, we are able to see how this little-known empire commodity interacted with the consumption and production regimes of the home countries. The soothing and emulsifying properties of tapioca had been appreciated in Britain since the mid-eighteenth century when small quantities were imported from Brazil for use as a medicine. The establishment of Britain's own Malayan sources of tapioca coincided with the Industrial Revolution, which demanded cheap and filling foods for workers and their families. Imported tapioca joined the other starches that provided the basis for working-class diets, providing among other things the basis of the 'milk puddings' that became ubiquitous: a useful way of using fresh milk before the days of refrigeration. It also proved invaluable in the emerging food-processing industry. Tapioca was not only a working-class food. It was used in many ways in the elaborate middle- and upper-class cooking of the Victorian and Edwardian eras. Considered especially suitable for children, it was soon established as an essential nursery food, and as a school staple remembered by generations of British children as 'frog spawn', also turning up on adult tables as one of the simple puddings favoured well into the twentieth century. In his recently published long-lost novel *The Pursued*, C. S. Forster captures the place of tapioca in everyday culinary life in England in the 1930s, when he describes late August as a time that hints at approaching autumn, a time for laying the fires ready for the first chilly evening, and for having 'roly-poly pudding instead of tapioca for dinner'.[22]

While in Africa the processing of the root remained small-scale and largely manual, in Asia production became highly mechanised, with specialised machinery for peeling, grating, washing, sieving, sifting, mixing, beating, steam cooking and crushing. The high-grade tapioca was shipped via three main routes: through the Red Sea and the Suez Canal and by Gibraltar into the Atlantic to Europe and Britain; by way of South Africa; and across the Pacific to San Francisco and from there through the Panama Canal and up the Atlantic Coast.[23] Java was the favourite source of tapioca for the large American market because of its quality, and the recipe booklets given out by leading American tapioca brands give insight into the many ways in which it was used in the domestic kitchen. In the early twentieth century, tapioca was still unfamiliar to Americans, obliging producers to introduce it, as the Minute Tapioca Company did in its 1923 cookbook, bringing globalisation down to an everyday level:

> 12,000 miles to your table – a dinner sweet from the other side of the earth! From beyond the South Seas, beyond Borneo and its head-hunters, from a land of half-clad natives, tropic jungles and villages of straw and bamboo huts. Grown along the slopes of volcanoes, ripened through eighteen months of burning sun, brought to us from a country most world-travellers never see – this gives to Minute Tapioca something more than ordinary interest, doesn't it? It is Java, the 'Land of the Sun'.[24]

Whether or not exotic origins increased the appeal of tapioca, it soon went into more things than dinner sweets: commercially prepared foods as well as those made at home. Tapioca was used to stop pies from being too liquid; to make omelettes puffy; to keep croquettes, patties and meat loaves from crumbling; to make ice cream creamy and to thicken casseroles, soups and stews. In short, it became ubiquitous and, as in Britain, became essential to the processed food industry. But because it was usually an ingredient rather than an end product, even as an export it remained largely hidden. Soon the descriptions of exotic origins were dropped from cookbooks, and tapioca came to be seen as a naturalised American product.

Java continued to export tapioca until 1942, when the Netherlands Indies government surrendered to the Japanese. During the occupation, naturalised tapioca roots sustained refugees in the hills, and the roots also sustained inmates in the prison camps. The tapioca industry in Java never fully recovered after the Second World War. America first tried to resurrect the Java tapioca industry to supply their ever-increasing demand for tapioca and, when that failed, developed a tapioca industry in Thailand, from whence the plant continued to move through Southeast Asia. In Vietnam, tapioca was a domestic rather than an export crop, and in due course it again played a part in conflict. One of the key US policies in the Vietnam War was to bomb the rice fields in order to starve the Viet Cong out, and no one could understand how they kept going apparently without food. It is now known that they were eating tapioca. If you go as a tourist to Vietnam today, you can have a tour of the Viet Cong tunnels, and eat an authentic Viet Cong meal of tea and boiled tapioca root underground, as part of the experience.

Globalisation on a Plate

As Thomas Sankara, the former President of Burkina Faso, wrote: 'So you do not know where imperialism is to be found? Just look at your plate!'[25] While this is true, a truly global perspective demands that the pejorative aspects of 'imperialism' be suspended. Colonial exploitation and its human and environmental consequences have been well documented and require no further rehearsal here, but that is only part of the story, just as the colonial era is only one part of the longitudinal trajectory and ongoing processes of globalisation. Over the *longue durée,* appropriation may loom larger than 'resistance'; hidden commodities introduced to serve the interests of colonisers may become visible and viable for the benefit of the colonised; and connections and continuities may emerge in ways never envisaged at the outset.

In a literal reading of 'food as history', the cuisines created from tapioca are instructive. Cuisines are not just cookery techniques, recipes and ingredients; they are culture, history, identity, memory and ideology in edible form. Cuisines not only can draw people together and consolidate group identity but can also be an arena in which differences are contested and sensitive aspects of the past are brought to the surface. While academic attention has focussed on 'national cuisines' as part of the establishment of cultural borders entailed in the nation-building process, tapioca recipes from around the world bespeak the large-scale movement of people and goods over time, and of intersections and juxtapositions instead of barriers.[26] The *fufu* and *gari* of Africa; the *cassareep* of the Caribbean; the tapioca sweets and crackers of Southeast Asia; the curried tapioca of India; the baked root that has become the main starch in much of the Pacific; the tapioca-based breads and stews of Brazil and many other dishes from far-flung countries and regions connect in complex ways that have long been hidden, but which reveal much about the cosmopolitan processes of globalisation, and the articulation between imperial, transnational and comparative histories.

A 'Global Tapioca' cookbook with recipes, history and context would be an insightful narrative of global history, for it is now recognised that recipes are social documents. As a first step in that direction, here is the classic recipe for American tapioca pudding from the 1920s, the paradigm milk pudding naturalised as a quintessentially American dish:

Minute Tapioca Cream

1 quart hot milk   1 egg

1/3 cup Minute Tapioca   ½ cup sugar

Pinch of salt   Flavouring (vanilla, etc)

Boil in double boiler 15 minutes milk, Minute Tapioca and salt, stirring frequently. Beat together yolk of egg, sugar and a tablespoon of cold water, and at the end of 15 minutes stir into the milk and tapioca. Boil until it begins to thicken like custard. Remove from the fire, whip in beaten white of egg. Add any flavoring desired. American measurements.[27]

By contrast, here is a 1936 British colonial recipe, intended to be 'useful to Messing Officers and others leading bachelor lives in the tropics', in which the attempt to 'civilise' the plant is clear:

> *Cassava Croquettes*
>
> ½ teacupful cassava Grated rind of ½ lemon
>
> 1 teaspoonful chopped parsley Nutmeg, pepper and salt
>
> Beaten egg to bind.
>
> *To coat*: beaten egg, breadcrumbs.
>
> *Method*: Pour sufficient boiling water over the cassava to soak it thoroughly. Wring it dry. Add parsley, lemon rind, nutmeg, seasoning and egg to bind. Mould into rounds on a floured board. Coat with egg and breadcrumbs. Fry in hot fat 8 to 10 minutes or until golden brown. Serve on a hot dish with a plain d'oyley. British measurements.[28]

And finally, a 1945 recipe for cassava bread from the West Indies, a straightforward set of instructions showing the persistence of indigenous processing and how very little the use of the root, here the less toxic variety, had changed since colonial times, butter being the only addition:

> *Cassava Bread*
>
> 4 cups finely grated cassava 2 teaspoons salt
>
> Peel and thoroughly wash cassava. Grate very finely, and pound as well, if liked. Add salt and mix well. Taking only 1 or 2 cupfuls of wet meal at a time, hold it in a strong cloth or piece of flour-bag and wring out all the juice. Crumble the meal between the palms of the hand and pass it through a fine sieve. Put a baking stone on an evenly glowing fire and sprinkle a little cassava meal on it. When the meal browns, brush the stone and put the hoop (about 5 in. in diameter) in place. Spread about ½ cup meal evenly in the hoop – thin bread is crisper and more digestible than thick bread. As soon as the steam rises, shake and remove the hoop, then flatten and press the bread into shape using a wooden palette or

large knife. As soon as the bread is firm enough turn it frequently. When thoroughly dry and stiff, stand it on edge in the sun or near a fire – this improves the flavour and prevents the bread losing its crispness. Brown or toast, and butter before serving. American measures.[29]

So long has been the shadow cast by spices, sugar and the other exotic groceries that drove initial exploration and exploitation that relatively little attention has been paid to the commodities that literally fed these developments. Yet if 'the most damaging error' of the first wave of European colonisation of the New World had been to cultivate crops 'in lands where there was no available labour [thus necessitating] bringing vast numbers of human beings halfway across the globe',[30] the foods that made this possible must surely be significant. Potatoes and maize are usually cited as the great colonial staples that sustained the growth of Europe's New World empires, especially the Spanish possessions in present-day Mexico, Peru, Bolivia and Chile. Potatoes, a staple of the Incas, when dried and preserved as *chuño,* maintained the Indians labouring in the silver mines of Potosí and elsewhere, while maize supported the Aztecs, Incas and other peoples in their colonial subjugation. Manioc, cassava and tapioca are infrequently mentioned, if at all, in those rare New World histories in which food figures, or in any detail in the new publications that purport to show how food made history.[31]

Yet maize and potato were not the foods responsible for the transportation of vast populations from Africa to the New World in the colonial era. The majority of the population of Spain's mainland colonies were indigenous Indians, followed in the next generations by the native-born white *criollo* elite and the mixed race *mestizos*. In Brazil, by contrast, the indigenous native population and the first colonists were joined very early on by African slaves. As seen above, it was manioc rather than maize or potatoes that fed the African slave populations in Brazil, which was responsible for importing nearly 40 per cent of all slaves brought to the New World during the slaving period, much the largest national intake. Manioc sustained the social changes and warfare that led to initial enslavement in Africa and subsequent transportation across the Atlantic to many destinations. So why has manioc remained hidden despite its far-reaching consequences?

In part this can be attributed to the eclipse of Luso-Brazilian studies by Hispanic and to the fact that manioc did not form an important element in the diet of most African slaves in North America, nor did it appear in export figures. It is also due to the properties of the plant itself, and the ideas to which they gave rise. Manioc – unlike maize or the potato – did not demand attentive and systematic cultivation, or the social organisation these required. In the Aztecs and Incas, the Spaniards encountered centralised, well-organised societies with a social hierarchy they could appropriate, and sedentary agriculture of the kind they could recognise as industrious and 'civilised' to a degree. In the manioc, the Portuguese found a root that embodied the 'uncivilised' way of life of which they disapproved; a plant that seemingly grew wild, harvested by semi-nomadic hunter-gatherer tribes who refused to adopt regular cultivation, fixed settlements or European values.[32] It is true that the Brazilian elite became dependent on manioc, making it the emblematic food of the new nation, but this involved highly refined and labour-intensive uses of the root: in effect a 'civilising through cuisine' as seen in the recipes above. In its basic form, the root and the people dependent on it came to be considered inferior, uncivilised, of little account. Indeed the root seemed to facilitate ill-treatment, so easily accommodating was it to social and nutritional misuse, providing mono-meal nourishment sufficient for work to proceed without any need to waste addition time or labour on growing additional slave food, thereby supporting the indigenous people of Brazil on a lower and more abject level than they had been used to in pre-Columbian times. Thus it became – and remains – culturally invisible, despite the unique role it has played in reconfiguring the physical geography of the planet.

At a meeting of the American Anthropological Association, the environmental anthropologist Glenn Stone, with Peter Benson and the anthropologist and historian Sidney Mintz, led a provocative symposium on the theme 'The Worst Plant in the World'. There were many candidates, all associated with empires and globalisation, including tobacco, sugar, cotton and tapioca, for which I presented the case. The conclusion was that there are no bad plants; the fault lies in the uses to which people put them, and here a contemporary cautionary note should be sounded. The effect of empire commodities on the nations of the colonisers is usually overlooked, and tapioca continues to play an important but hidden role in the home countries of the old empires. Tapioca is in textiles, paper, glue, cosmetics, soaps, pharmaceuticals and especially in drink and foods – particularly cakes, pastries, puddings, bread, sauces, gravies, ice cream, cookies, snacks, and 'instant' and 'convenience' foods such as prepared frozen foods and ready-meals for heating in the microwave that are said to be responsible for obesity and health issues that currently bedevil the developed world. The mono-meal is back in another guise, one of the ironies thrown up by globalisation.

Looking ahead to the future, tapioca/cassava/manioc is increasingly seen as a source of bio-energy, with the plant, if properly managed, promising to empower the people in South America, Africa and Asia for whom it was once the instrument of colonisation. It is here that we move into a transformation of the commodity (not just in its basic form, as an edible root, but as derivatives such as ethanol) in new kinds of empires arising out of the old. It remains for time and global history to tell the ongoing hidden story of tapioca.

Notes

1. Styles, 'Product Innovation in Early Modern London'.
2. Niba and Jackson, 'Tapioca and Tapioca Flour'; Jackson, 'History of the Future'.
3. Strictly speaking, 'tapioca' refers to the very finest grade of starch extracted from the root. Generally, the root was known as *manioc, manihot* and *mandioca* in Brazil, *cassava* in Africa and *tapioca* in Asia. All three terms are used here reflecting the original sources. The default term is 'tapioca', but the plant referred to is the same.
4. Phillips, 'Food and Globalization', p. 39.
5. Friedland, 'Reprise on Commodity Systems Methodology', p. 83.
6. Kopytoff, 'Cultural Biography of Things'; Marcus, 'Ethnography In/Of the World System', p. 107.
7. Jones, 'Manioc', p. 98.
8. Jennings, 'Cassava', p. 82; Williams, 'Pero Vaz de Caminha', pp. 59–72; Rennie, *Far Fetched Facts*.
9. Beeman, 'Labour Forces and Race Relations'; Marchant, *From Barter to Slavery*, p. 69; Schwartz, *Sugar Plantations in the Formation of Brazilian Society*.
10. Freyre, *Masters and Slaves*, p. 52, 126; Pinto de Aguilar, *Mandioca-Pao do Brasil,* p. 30.
11. Marchant, *From Barter to Slavery*, p. 73.
12. Smith, *Brazil*, pp. 381–2.

13. Barickman, *Bahian Counterpoint*; Schwartz, *Sugar Plantations in the Formation of Brazilian Society*, p. 138; Schwartz, 'Somebodies and Nobodies in the Body Politic'; Watts, *West Indies*.
14. In Jones, 'Manioc', pp. 104–5.
15. Jones, 'Manioc'; Jones, *Manioc in Africa;* Miracle, 'Introduction and Spread of Maize'.
16. Von Oppen, 'Cassava'; Vansina, 'Finding Food'; Roberts, 'Production and Reproduction of Warrior States'.
17. Burton, *Zanzibar*.
18. Ralston, 'Return of Brazilian Freedmen'; Miller, *Way of Death*; Van der Laan, 'Marketing West Africa's Export Crops', p. 3; Mintz, 'Men, Women and Trade'.
19. Fuller and Rowlands, 'Ingestion and Food Technologies'.
20. Van der Eng, 'Cassava in Indonesia'; Geertz, *Agricultural Involution*; Boomgaard, 'In the Shadow of Rice'.
21. Jackson, *Planters and Speculators*, pp. 58, 74.
22. Brewer, 'The Pursued', p. 37.
23. Minute Tapioca, *Story of Minute Tapioca*.
24. Minute Tapioca, *Minute Tapioca Cook Book*, p. 1.
25. In Cusack, 'African Cuisines', p. 207.
26. Appadurai, 'How to make a National Cuisine'; O'Connor, *The English Breakfast*.
27. Minute Tapioca, *Minute Tapioca Cook Book*, p. 10.
28. Pickering, *Tropical Cookery*, pp. i, 82.
29. E. Phyllis Clark, *West Indian Cookery*, London: Thomas Nelson, p. 147–8.
30. Pagden, *Lords of all the World*, pp. 6–7.
31. Salaman, *History and Social Influence of the Potato*; Fussell, *Story of Corn*; Coe, *America's First Cuisines*; Higman, *How Food Made History*; Pilcher, *Oxford Handbook of Food History*; Kiple, *Ten Millenia of Food Globalization*.
32. O'Connor, 'Beyond 'Exotic Groceries'; Schwartz, 'Formation of a Colonial Identity'.

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12

El Habano: The Global Luxury Smoke

Jean Stubbs

'As civil liberties triumphed and political constitutions were guaranteed, the cigar came into ascendancy once more, coinciding with the advent of economic liberalism in Cuba, which threw the port of Havana open to all nations,' wrote Cuban ethnographer Fernando Ortiz in 1940 with the publication of his seminal work on transculturation. 'And in this atmosphere of free industrial and commercial enterprise Havana tobacco, by the unanimous plebiscite of the world, was awarded the imperial scepter of the tobacco world. Havana tobacco from then on became the symbol of the triumphant capitalistic bourgeoisie. The nineteenth century was the era of the cigar.'[1] Ortiz blazed new ground by fashioning a Cuban *contrapunteo* (counterpoint) out of Cuba's two major commodities: tobacco and sugar, encapsulated in the proud cigar band versus the lowly sugar sack. He used tobacco and sugar as metaphorical constructs, highlighting the fetish power of the commodities and a counter-fetish

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interpretation that challenged essentialist understandings of Cuban history.

The fetishism and counter-fetishism are of particular significance when it comes to understanding the history of the Cuban cigar, which in Spanish came to be called simply *un tabaco* (a tobacco), *un puro* (pure in that it was made wholly with Cuban leaf) or *un Habano* (a Havana, by virtue of the port city through which it made its entrée into the world). For Ortiz, tobacco and the cigar most 'transculturated' and most came to symbolise Cuba and Cubans' quest for freedom, independence and national sovereignty. By the same token, both lay at the heart of un-freedoms, dependence and a highly contested island/offshore history, one that took on new dimensions with the nineteenth-century meteoric rise of *El Habano* (the Havana) as the world's luxury smoke, competing with pipe and ousting snuff.

The lifting of the Spanish monopoly on Cuban tobacco in 1817 heralded the Havana cigar's coming of age. Nineteenth-century Spanish, German, British, French and US capital backed the vertiginous expansion of cigar manufacturing for export in Havana and palatial Havana cigar factories,[2] and the 'Havana' conquered European and North American markets. It became de rigueur in the male entrepreneurial world of the rapidly growing industrial, trading and financial conurbations of London, Amsterdam, Bremen, Hamburg, Madrid, Paris, Lisbon and New York. With its fine taste and aroma, and its smoke assuaging the senses, it was one of life's pleasurable luxuries that sent out a message of wealth, power and distinction across the world.

Its beginnings, however, were far different; and what follows explores how the Havana came to establish itself at a later and not earlier stage in life as the coveted luxury smoke, doing so amidst moral and mythical discourses, ranging from bodily and spiritual uplift to harbinger of death. It first traces cigar 'pre-history': the social life and discourse, changing values and meanings, surrounding tobacco and the cigar, which was but one of the forms in which tobacco was consumed, as their materiality was forged in a global commodity chain.[3] It then enters the nineteenth-century 'golden age' of the Havana and its aggrandised, mythicised and contested history. It ends with how this luxury handcrafted smoke, whose *non plus ultra* was *El Habano*, made a comeback in the fiercely competitive, highly mechanised and ultimately proscribed world of tobacco.

The analysis draws on a range of sources, which include my own work and that of Cuban scholars and writers, as well as academic and popular histories of tobacco,[4] and the glossy publications on the Havana cigar that proliferated in recent years.[5] It thus 'smokes' its way through a complex history of origin, production, transport, marketing and consumption of this luxury product as we have come to know it, as well as the myth and legend in which it is enveloped.

Tobacco becomes a commodity

Histories of tobacco often start with the caveat that much of what is 'known' is little more than accepted wisdom, shrouded in myth and legend. It is thus 'accepted' that tobacco is native to the Americas, where it was found some 18,000 years ago by humans of Asiatic origin who crossed the Bering Strait. Plant geneticists identify tobacco's 'centre of origin' – that is, the meeting place between the species' genetic origin and the area in which it was first cultivated – in the Peruvian–Bolivian–Ecuadorian Andes around 5000–3000 BC. Archaeologists and ethnographers concur that nomads and settlers incorporated it into their arsenal of plants with medicinal and spiritual properties.

There is also 'acceptance' that of the many species of tobacco, two – later known as *Nicotiana rustica* and *Nicotiana tabacum* – were destined to travel the world and become major global commodities, the latter in particular. Yet there was striking diversity in the ways in which tobacco was grown and used. Depending on time, place and people, it was sniffed (or 'snuffed'), chewed, eaten, drunk, smeared over body, inserted in enemas and smoked. It was offered to the gods in ritual, and it was an everyday narcotic, both pleasurable and healing. The oldest form was most likely chewing followed by snuffing (as among the Incas), but as it spread towards Central America smoking cigars (as among the Mayans) would seem to have taken precedence over other forms, whereas in the northern part of the continent smoking by pipe was most prevalent.

Thus, by 1492 – the landmark year when Christopher Columbus made landfall in the Caribbean, discovering the New World for Spain and paving the way for the conquest of the Americas – tobacco was widespread and diverse in uses, the pipe predominating in North America and the cigar in South and Central America and the

Caribbean. Tobacco and smoking were unknown to Europeans, such that when Columbus went ashore on a small island that is today part of the Bahamas, seeking precious metals, he seemingly attached no importance to the dried leaves included in the islanders' gifts. Later arriving in Cuba, he was at least intrigued enough by islanders carrying firebrands of leaves to detail two of his expedition, Rodrigo de Xerez and Luis de Torres, to investigate in the interior and report back. They tried it for themselves, becoming the first Europeans to smoke tobacco, but none of this appears to have been recounted until almost 20 years later by Fray Bartolomé de las Casas.[6]

In Spain, the habit met with either indifference or opprobrium. Note was taken of its healing properties, but there were Spaniards who, in their crusading zeal, saw it as a vice of the infidel Indians: the Devil's weed. The earliest account of what it felt like to smoke, as opposed to what it looked like or did to the Indians, is thought to have been written by Breton seafarer Jacques Cartier in 1534. Around the same time, lapsed Carmelite friar André Thevet documented its use among Christians in Brazil, and Roman Catholic clergy in the Americas adopted snuff, resulting in what is thought to have been the first tobacco prohibition in the form of an ecclesiastical decree of 1588 issued in Lima. Rodrigo de Xerez himself faced the wrath of the Inquisition and was thrown into a dungeon for publicly smoking in Spain.

Accounts of the plant's medicinal properties began to outweigh spiritual misgivings, and as word spread, so did the plant. Its tiny seeds were carried to Spain and Portugal in the 1550s and grown as an exotic new addition to palace gardens, and the plant was studied by court physicians. Jean Nicot, sent from France to Lisbon in 1559 to arrange the marriage of Catherine de Medici, took an avid interest and began experimenting medicinally; the French court began taking the 'Nicotian herb' as snuff; and its fame travelled back to Portugal and on to the Vatican, Italian states, Bohemia, Spain, the Lowlands and Switzerland.

Transmuted from Devil's herb to medical panacea, it was grown domestically, though small quantities of imported tobacco, especially from Cuba, were prized above all others. England was where it was seen to be most associated with pleasure and most commodified, thanks in no small part to the marauding ventures of Hawkins, Raleigh and Drake during the Elizabethan era. Sailors, corsairs and pirates popularised smoking, the English preference for pipe over cigar deriving from contact with and eventual colonisation of North as opposed to South America. At the English court, smoking symbolised that virile spirit of adventure, and even the Virgin Queen (after whom Virginia was named) is reputed to have inhaled, persuaded by her then favourite Raleigh.

Genoese and Venetian fleets carried tobacco to the Levant and Middle East, and the Spanish and the Portuguese to Africa and Asia. Arguably the greatest impact was on Africa, where the Portuguese had taken control of Arab trading posts, introducing tobacco from Brazil; and by the end of the sixteenth century, Africans had evolved their own practices and myths. When Africans began to be traded across the Atlantic as slaves, the enslaved would in part have been purchased with tobacco and would be familiar with its use.[7]

The seventeenth century witnessed both prohibition and expansion. The century opened in England with James I, who succeeded Elizabeth I, in 1606, blasting it as satanic and introducing taxation and an import duty; yet the Virginia Company was also set up. That same year, Phillip II of Spain introduced a ban on tobacco cultivation, which was lifted in 1614, but a special tax was introduced in addition to duty, depending on the place of origin, the highest being on Cuban tobacco. Tobacco in Cuba had been *cosa de indios y negros* (a thing for Indians and blacks), but, as it worked its way up from the lower strata of society, so did whites develop a taste for it, forbidding the Negroes from selling or cultivating tobacco except for their own use. All tobacco had to be imported into Seville, and in 1620 the first Seville tobacco factory was opened producing snuff. In 1636, the Spanish monarchy founded *La Tabacalera*, reputed to be the world's first tobacco company, and introduced state tobacco shops called *estancos*, where its products were sold and further taxed.[8]

Governments became as addicted as their people, and within decades most European countries had established taxes and duties. Much of the continent was caught up in the Thirty Years War (1618–48), driven by religious and imperial conflict, and smoking was spread by the Dutch, described as a new nation of *tabagophiles*. Protestant allies of the Protestant English, the Dutch set up the West India Company that was later the model for the English and French, attacked the Spanish fleet, traded slaves and carried tobacco as a valuable instrument of exchange, earning it repute as the first globally available luxury commodity in their trading empire.

Prohibitions elsewhere – Russia, Islamic states such as the Ottoman Empire, Japan and China – proved short-lived, as tobacco spread like a seventeenth century epidemic, dispersed as an article of maritime trade and a staple of the silk route, endemic in the world of smuggling and contraband. It was to counter this, especially the smuggling and contraband of tobacco, that the English passed the 1651 and 1660 Navigation Acts, to limit trade to English ships; and in their new North American colonies, it was tobacco that was at the heart of an infamous system of production (plantation slavery) and an intricate web of commerce (the trans-Atlantic triangular trade of goods and slaves), on the back of which fortunes were made and wars fought.[9]

Other major tobacco-producing countries in the Americas also relied on slave labour, notably Portuguese Brazil, destined to become the world's second-largest tobacco exporter after Virginia and largest importer of slaves. Among Spain's colonies, Venezuela and Cuba were Spain's largest and second-largest producers. In Cuba, *vegueros* (settler growers) rose up in arms on three successive occasions during the early eighteenth century against repressive regulation.[10] By then, the growing number of Spanish settlers, distanced from Spain, had adopted the habit of smoking cigars and many were involved in smuggling and contraband with those from other trading nations.

Most of the tobacco shipped legally to Spain was to Cadiz, to be rolled into cigars, or to be made into snuff in Seville, where a third new factory in 1758 was described as the largest industrial building of its time in the world.[11] Yet returning Spanish emigrants who had made their fortune 'clung to the expensive and aristocratic vice of smoking Havana cigars, which they had sent to them from Cuba.'[12] In Spain, it was never common to smoke Havanas!

The Havana cigar comes of age

While Spain held on to Cuba and Spanish America, Britain's American colonies sparked the Seven Years' War (1756–63). George Washington, a lieutenant colonel son of a Virginia tobacco-farming family, killed Frenchmen building a fort, and war ensued on four continents: France declared war on Britain, which in turn declared war on Spain. According to another Virginia tobacco farmer, Thomas Jefferson, this was the backdrop to the 1776 declaration of independence of the 13 British colonies, which were quick to forge alliances with France (1778) and Spain (1779) and negotiate peace with Britain (1782). Tobacco debts were negotiated as part of reparations and trade resumed.

In 1788, the Schlottmann factory was set up in Hamburg to manufacture leaf imported from Cuba, and Hamburg would become a major centre of the tobacco trade. Meantime, in France, the expenses of war and the court-occasioned taxes were deemed intolerable by a people of smokers who rose up in revolution in 1789, and snuff, the mark of aristocracy, fell firmly out of favour. It remained for Napoleon Bonaparte, having reinstated tobacco taxes to help finance his armies, to redraw the political map of Europe and profoundly change the continent's smoking habits.

Britain held firm, its navy having defeated the combined French and Spanish fleet at Trafalgar, and, while subject to continental blockade, found a weak spot in Spain. There Seville's factory had expanded to include three types of cigar and an early form of cigarette, marking a shift from snuff to smoking, which had become endemic among Spain's largely rural population. The smallest and cheapest smokes were made from *tabaco picado* (shredded tobacco), later dubbed *papelotes* (paper ones, from the paper around them); the largest and most expensive were the *puros* (pure ones), smoked by nobility, including King Fernando VII; and in between were the *papantes*.

Officers of the French army occupying Andalusia took to smoking *puros* and *papantes*, and contraband and smuggling boomed as *bandoleros* (bandits) operated in resistance to the French and were joined by a British expeditionary force in Spain in 1808, which also took to cigars. In England, the Regency period and its Romantic movement, as well as the cavalry, all extolled the cigar; and the Duke of Wellington's triumphal return from Waterloo was a triumph also for the cigar: from 1814 on, as a result of the Peninsular and American wars, the 'Spanish vice' was taking hold. In 1800, England imported 26 lbs of cigars; in 1824, 15,000 lbs; and by 1830, 250,000 lbs, including a first direct shipment from Cuba. The House of Commons had a designated smoking chamber; the smoking jacket and cap made their entrée; and the growth of cigar smoking led to tobacconists specialising in the import of cigars, crowned by the Havana. Queen Victoria came to the throne in 1837 with a court prohibition, but to little avail.

Developments in the Americas combined with those in Europe. In 1803, Napoleon raised financing through the sale of Louisiana, doubling the size of the emergent United States and moving the frontier west. West coast Hispanics smoked cigars, and along the eastern seaboard the 'Spanish' cigar was gaining popularity due to the fast-growing trade with neighbouring Cuba. During the Seven Years War, the British occupied Havana in 1762 and the settlement with Spain traded Havana for Florida. Legend has it that the North American taste for Cuban cigars developed after General Putnam returned from the British occupation of Havana with three donkeys laden with Havana cigars as plunder and sold them in a tavern in Connecticut; shortly after, the Cuban seed was imported to grow cigar leaf and produce cigars there.[13]

The 11-month British occupation of Havana broke the Spanish monopoly hold on Cuban tobacco, and, while reinstated in 1764, it was hard to enforce and finally ended in 1817. By then Spain had lost all its mainland territories in the Americas, leaving only Cuba, along with neighbouring Puerto Rico and Santo Domingo, and the Philippines in the Pacific. Cigar production boomed in Spain, and the women drafted into the factories would be later immortalised in Georges Bizet's opera Carmen (1875); but with free trade Cuban cigars gained in preference over those made in Spain, or elsewhere, with either imported Cuban or home-grown leaf.

In 1817, King Ferdinand VII of Spain restored absolute monarchy in Spain but was swayed by Cuban economist Francisco Arango y Parreño to abolish the Spanish monopoly there: 'things had been set in motion, the epic story of the Havana had begun'.[14] Shipping using the port of Havana increased, steamships shortened crossings and commerce boomed, tobacco growing and cigar manufacturing flourished, and by 1840 the *puro* had become the *Habano*.

At the same time, the wheels were in motion for competition for the Havana. The Netherlands was a case in point:

> From 1825 onward, while British and French elites, and all the others after them, devoted themselves to Havana, huge workshops were set up in the Netherlands to treat tobacco from their

> Indonesian possessions, mixed with tobacco from Brazil, Java, and Sumatra for the wrapper and binder leaf and Bahia for the filler. Their experts developed a 'special light' taste and matching prices which would make a fortune.[15]

Descendants of pipe smokers became cigar smokers, and the Netherlands exported countless more cigars per capita than any other nation except Denmark, overshadowing Spain and Cuba.

Havana factories continued to supply the elite luxury market, but the upheavals of the latter part of the century took their toll. The history of *El Habano* would be marked by in- and out-migration of growers, manufacturers and workers, along with circulation and transfer of seed and know-how. Spain, the United States, the Caribbean and Central America, but also territories across the Atlantic and far further afield, all formed part of an increasingly globalised phenomenon of 'Cuban' tobacco growing and cigar manufacturing and marketing.

Early twentieth-century US occupation opened Cuba to mass US investment, and the American Tobacco Company, or Trust as it was known, bought up major leaf and manufacturing concerns. By then more interested in profits deriving from mass-mechanised cigarette production and unable to undermine successful Cuban opposition to standardisation and the introduction of the cigar machine, the Trust ultimately transferred much of its cigar production to the United States. Smaller family firms, however, known as 'independents', fought back against foreign standardisation and affirmed their agricultural and industrial expertise.[16] They were able to hold out, many of them producing the premium handmade *Habano* right up until the 1959 revolution.

US hostility to Cuba's revolution led to a US trade embargo that – with US pressure – extended to most of the Americas (Canada and Mexico being the only early exceptions). Prior to the embargo, the US Department of Agriculture commissioned a report to document the extent to which the US cigar industry was reliant on Cuban leaf imports and advise on sourcing alternative supplies. The report's recommendation was to seek these in neighbouring Caribbean and Central American territories, whereby agronomists, growers and manufacturers would experiment in the Dominican Republic and Nicaragua in particular. Western markets became a battleground for disputed Havana cigar brands from island/offshore parallel production and marketing systems, while Eastern European socialist bloc and 'Third World' countries emerged as new Havana cigar partners.

Thirty years on, the fall of the Berlin Wall in 1989 signalled the end of Soviet bloc trade and aid that had developed in the vacuum left by US hostility and embargo, and the US response to Cuba's ensuing crisis was to tighten and extra-territorialise the embargo. Yet at the same time, the US anti-anti-smoking cigar revival was in full swing, engineered in no small part by the New York glossy *Cigar Aficionado*, created in 1992. US Cuban tobacco interests were in all-out competition with island Cuba, which courted non-US trade and investment, making cigars part of its crisis structural adjustment strategy and striking landmark credit deals in 1994 between the Cuban state tobacco enterprise and its French and Spanish parastatal tobacco counterparts. The US cigar bubble burst in 1999, but the luxury market for premium handmade cigars held around the world, most notably for the island-produced *Habano* in Europe and newly emerging Asian economies such as China, such that Cuba reported a 9 per cent increase in profits in 2011.

Quality, skill and *terroir*

What is it about the Havana that makes it so special? Ask those in the trade and they will speak of the quality and skill of growing and manufacturing in Cuba – what the French, in protecting their champagne, coined as *terroir*. The very special quality of the Cuban cigar is attributed in particular to the leaf grown in the Vuelta Abajo region of western Cuba, today's Pinar del Río province and to a lesser extent in Vuelta Arriba, in central Cuba, and to the handcrafting of the cigar itself.[17]

In 1940, José Perdomo, at the time occupying a key role in Cuba's *Comisión Nacional por la Propaganda y Defensa del Tabaco Habano* (founded in 1927), wrote:

> The Cuban cigar is a luxury article. As such, it goes to market without the intention of competing with any other cigar. Rather, it is designed for the minority who can afford such luxuries.

According to Perdomo, there were certain conditions that a cigar must fulfil to be considered a genuine Havana: it must be made with only leaf grown in Cuba, and leaf of only the highest quality, and it must be manufactured in Cuba, entirely handmade, using long filler, and bearing the official Seal of Warranty of National Origin. In the words of Perdomo:

> The entire industrial process of this cigar is carried on in Cuba in a special climatic situation where there is not the slightest suggestion of artificiality. It is only necessary to locate each department of work in the factory in the proper place. The sunshine, average temperature, and humidity of the atmosphere in Cuba are closely linked with the quality of the Havana cigar. These factors, plus the composition of the soil and subsoil, in harmonious combination, are what make it possible for Cuba to produce tobacco with both the agricultural and industrial qualities of the Havana.[18]

These claims have been echoed by many others before and since. According to Cuban expert in the trade Enzo Infante Urivazo:

> The name habano, used to designate cigars made in Cuba, was not chosen by the Cubans. It emerged somewhat spontaneously in the international tobacco markets when certain features of undisputed quality led consumers to regard as best the products that came from Havana or were exported out of Havana harbor.

Once the Havana was acknowledged the best, some said it was because of the leaf, others the cigar makers' skill, yet others the growers' skill, but, Infante Urivazo declared: 'The factors that have contributed to the prestige of Cuba tobacco are found first and foremost in the soils.' After that, the Havana cigar 'is both an art and a science'.[19]

According to Cuban geographer Antonio Nuñez Jiménez:

> Havana tobacco is the favoured child of Cuban agriculture, thanks to the combination of extraordinary geographical factors and the expert, painstaking efforts of our agricultural and industrial workers, which have favoured our unparalleled leaf.[20]

Cuban cigar maker-historian-educator Gaspar Jorge García Galló placed more emphasis on the skills involved in the cigar's making, and wrote extensively on the psychology of the cigar maker as well as a biography of the cigar itself. Towards the end of the latter, he declared: 'The intention of this book has been to celebrate creative work.'[21]

Seeds, people, skills and know-how can all be transferred, but *terroir* cannot. Hence the power of the concept, which means, as expressed by Vahé Gérard: 'Cuba is still the promised land for the cigar lover.'[22] However *terroir* has to be defended, not least by seals of approval and branding. Ortiz himself wrote that Havana tobacco

> can display crowns, sceptres, the emblems of royalty, and even an emperor's title. Tobacco proudly wears until the moment of its death the band of its brand; only in the sacrificial fire does it burn its individuality and convert its ashes as it ascends to glory.[23]

Curiously, nonetheless, in accounting for the rise of *El Habano*, relatively little explanatory attention has been given to royal favour, stamps of warranty and sumptuous labelling. This is somewhat intriguing when manufacturers such as Bernardo Rencurrel and Hija De Cabañas y Carvajal curried royal dispensation (in 1810) for being purveyors to the Spanish crown, and the latter (making cigars since 1797) is attributed with having introduced the first Havana 'segar' on the London market, before Spain lifted its monopoly on Cuban tobacco in 1817 and predating the Office of Patents and Brand Names of Havana set up that same year.

By the 1830s, there were voices calling for protective measures to guarantee the quality and prestige of the Havana cigar, and in 1839 the *Real Sociedad Económica de Amigos del País* founded a school for apprentices in tobacco. In 1842, the Spanish Captain General issued a decree forbidding the use of all brands other than those approved by the Civil Government and warning engravers not to print seals for manufacturers without approval. In 1843, two German brothers, Herman and August Upmann, travelled from Bremen to Cuba looking for a business opportunity, and in 1844 opened a cigar store in Havana. Said to be the first foreigners to be authorised, they went on to become merchants in cigars and banking, solidly establishing in both by the 1860s.

In 1847, the *Real Sociedad Económica de Amigos del País* sponsored Havana's First Public Exhibit of Products of the Industry, awarding medals to local manufacturers for their products. At the time, in the words of Narciso Menocal in his book on the glory days of Cuban cigar labels, the Cuban cigar 'was enjoying a moment of supreme international predominance'.[24] Cabañas took the Gold Medal at the 1851 Queen Victoria's Great Exhibition in London, and in 1867 Partagás took gold at the Paris World Fair.

Cigar brands had to be registered under Municipal Ordinances, but there was such concern over brand profusion that in 1889 the Union of Cigar Manufacturers of Havana was authorised to vet members placing a seal on boxes as a guarantee of origin. The seal bore the royal crown and the coats of arms of Spain and City of Havana on the left and on the right Columbus. In the centre it read:

> The Union of Cigar Manufacturers guarantees the origin and legitimacy of the cigars bearing this seal and will, pursuant to the law, prosecute anyone attempting to falsify or amend it.[25]

Significantly, the age of the cigar was also the age of the lithographic industry. Invented in the late eighteenth century in Germany, lithography was developed in the early nineteenth century in France as chromolithography, which, from 1840 on, became the 'art form of the middle class' and was also adopted for advertising. Cuban scholar Zoila Lapique Becali documents how lithography was available in Cuba three years before it was in the United States and four before Spain. In 1822, a first French shop was opened in Havana for printing music sheets, known as La Litografía de Música or La Litografía de La Habana. In 1840, two lithographic shops were set up, almost in unison, one French and the other Spanish, initially to reproduce engravings of Cuba but soon used by manufacturers to print labels. Demand was such that within five years new lithographic shops were opened involving Cubans and Europeans.[26]

The iconography on Cuban cigar labels for export assured an international clientele that they were buying a Cuban product, and not an imitation: 'Like all exceptional quality and expensive products, cigars are counterfeited. Havana cigars are the most affected, including boxes, packaging and certification labels.'[27] They were also, however, incredibly richly embossed gold and coloured labels, designed to denote a quality product that stood out. They were, in the words of Cuban expert Adriano Martínez Rius:

> ... expressions of luxury and power ... of the brands with magnificent lithography that further empowered and consolidated the universal grandeur of the Habano. From that moment on, the Habano had a presentation in accordance with its lineage.

Martínez Rius continued:

> From a purely informative phase it moved into what in the present-day we would call MARKETING, aimed at attracting potential consumers and promoting the various manufacturers' trade marks.[28]

Taste and 'Cubanicity'

Ask smokers today what makes a Havana cigar so special, and they'll celebrate its taste, feel and aroma, and the experience of the smoke. Again in the words of Martínez Rius:

> In the contemporary world, the cigar is known as a genuine symbol of pleasure, and if it's a Havana, it's the NON PLUS ULTRA of its kind, the preference of those who know how to enjoy an excellent smoke.[29]

Ortiz opened Cuban Counterpoint with the statement: 'Tobacco is born, sugar is made. Tobacco is born pure, is processed pure and smoked pure.' He continued:

> In the same box there are no two cigars alike; each one has a different taste ... the merit of tobacco lies in ... the exquisite aroma of the pure Havana cigar, which is intoxicating ... tobacco affords satisfaction to the touch and sight ... What smoker has not passed his hand caressingly over the rich brevas or regalias of a freshly opened box of Havanas? ... catharsis for nervous tension to the smoker who handles them and holds them delicately between lips and fingers? (...) Poets who have been smokers have sung of the rapt ecstasy that comes over them as they follow with eyes and imagination the bluish smoke rising upward ... Whereas sugar appeals to only one of the senses, that of taste, tobacco appeals not only to the palate, but to the smell, touch, and sight.[30]

Ortiz singled out the Havana cigar as an article of pleasure and vice, a luxury article like champagne, something unique that cannot be surpassed or substituted.[31] Tobacco's enduring appeal, he argued, derived from natural and social factors whose effects can be reduced to two: hedonism and utilitarianism. First feared and regarded with suspicion, contempt, repulsion, 'a thing for the savages', it then spread among the lower ranks of new settlers before those of higher social standing. In Cuba, in the cleansing rituals of Afro-Cuban religions, cigar smoke was to ward off evil; in England, Chaucer upbraided cigar smokers of London as 'English Moors', having fallen into the 'Negro's introduced fashion'. It was not long, however, before the partisans of tobacco divided into two groups – hedonists and panaceists – the former were the real victors while the latter provided the rationale:

> Pleasure sought tobacco, the dislike of new things and austerity opposed it; but medicine justified it for reasons of its own, and sensuality was able to hide behind the cloak of curative science.[32]

Smoking a Havana became not only a symbol of position and wealth but an exotic luxury consumed and reduced to ashes, a high cost for wasteful and fleeting pleasure, making this a luxury of rare distinction: 'People smoked ostentatiously, the same way they displayed a little Negro slave, a cage of talking parrots, a mahogany coach, or a tortoise-shell cane.'[33] The 'Ortizian' approach would be echoed in two contemporary studies, one by Jarrett Rudy in his 2005 book on smoking in nineteenth-century Montreal and the other by Matthew Hilton in 2000 on smoking in nineteenth-century Britain. Each, however, took the analysis a stage further.

Rudy rehearsed some of the same arguments:

> The cultural categories of tobacco connoisseurship were most clearly exemplified in the cigar. It was a symbol of wealth and power, and its smokers were criticized for their extravagance. The most expensive and most prized cigar was the Cuban.

The St James Club, one of Montreal's elite men's clubs, imported Cuban cigars specifically for its members. 'They pointed to the skilled labour of the cigar maker and the terroir of the tobacco as the cultural categories that accounted for the value of the cigar.'[34] Connoisseurs were 'men of taste', theirs was the acquired taste of 'men of culture', and the cigar was made by skilled labour in a male-dominated cigar-rolling process, learned through long apprenticeship and control of entry into trade:

> As with grapes used to make champagne and French wine, it was the experience of the cultivator and his relationship to the soil and climate that determined the quality of the tobacco leaf.[35]

However, Rudy makes an acute observation: 'While the quality of Cuban tobacco probably fluctuated, the suggestion of tobacco being Cuban was more important than the actual quality of the tobacco.' The appearance of being Cuban was a priority for cigar manufacturers and 'Through advertising, they evoked a sense of "Cubanicity" that could be attached to any cigar to raise its value.'[36] What was important was not its origins but its perceived origins.

Thus, from 1900 to 1940 the Montreal firm Granda Hermanos y Cía made 'authentic' Cuban cigars in Canada. The Granda brothers learnt cigar making in Cuba and acquired the special skills of 'Spanish' as opposed to 'German' handwork, using long filler instead of the short filler of cheaper cigars and sorting into many more shades than the German three or four. Granda's advertising was extensive compared with other cigar advertising and their Spanish name captured the cachet of Cubanicity.

Hilton subsequently argued that the mass phenomenon of smoking that has remained central to individual and group identity is rooted in the bourgeois liberal context of smoking, involving the specific liberal notion of the self, especially promoted by gentlemen smokers of pipe and cigar in the mid- to late nineteenth century:

> It is bourgeois because the culture of smoking was promoted by a specific cohort of the male population which had sufficient economic and cultural capital to buy expensive pipes, cigars and tobacco mixtures . . . The context is liberal because the understanding of smoking . . . stressed the central tenets of this national political, economic and cultural creed: individuality and independence.[37]

Hilton pursues this idea further to argue for an understanding of how a particular section of the male population legitimated their activity in the perceived feminine world of consumption by first emphasising the rational, pointing to the intellectual, the skilful and the purposeful aspects of smoking. They then used this as a solid base from which to explore the more irrational or ephemeral, demonstrating aspects of their individuality through knowledge of figures such as Columbus, Nicot and Raleigh, as well as the more masculine domains of production and manufacture, including descriptions of Cuba's growing regions and Havana factories. Theirs was 'a freemasonry of smokers' and a camaraderie based on a shared command of the tobacco experience.

Where if not in the cigar establishment would that knowledge and that 'freemasonry of smokers' and camaraderie be forged? Iain Scarlet's *A Puff of Smoke* paints a very clear picture of one such London cigar establishment that has endured to this day as James J. Fox & Rupert Lewis on St. James's, Picadilly. He opens: 'London is arguably the cigar capital of the world and Robert Lewis is certainly the longest established cigar merchant in London and probably the United Kingdom.' His book marked the bicentenary of the firm in the part of central London, close to the royal palace, which to this day 'has a worldwide reputation not only for pomp, pageantry and gentlemen's clubs' but also exclusive shops (hatters, tailors, gunmakers and the like).[38]

When the troops returned home after fighting with Wellington in the Peninsular wars, Scarlet recounts

> the craze for cigars swept London with much the same enthusiasm as the hula-hoop 150 years later . . . The shop in Great Newport Street began to resemble a club. Gentlemen came not only to buy their cigars and tobacco, but to relax and (seated on nothing much more comfortable than a tobacco tub) enjoy a chat and a smoke and, perhaps, a glass of sherry.

In 1834–35, the lease was taken on St James's Street and 'It was a wise move. The street which had once been famous for its coffee and chocolate houses was now the centre of gentlemen's clubland and a fashionable shopping district.'[39]

The owners travelled to hotels all over the country by rail with sample cases, including Havana cigars, laying them out in private rooms of the best hotels, inviting tobacconists, hoteliers and innkeepers to view and place their orders, and at the end of the day wining and dining on a grand scale. Mr Churchill opened his account at the shop in 1900, after being introduced to the Havana cigar while serving as a soldier in Cuba in the 1890s. He purchased 50 Bock Giraldías and would repeat his order for many years to come. Later, during the Second World War, Havana cigar manufacturers combined together to send him 5,000 cigars, and the gift was repeated annually until after the war.

The ultimate smoke

Sander Gilman and Zhou Xun in their 'Introduction' to *Smoke: A Global History of Smoking* wrote of Europeans' encounter with smoke on arriving in the New World:

> Smoke, ineffable yet perceivable; real yet illusionary; present yet transient; breathable yet intoxicating. It was smoke that captured the world's imagination. It was an experience for which they had initially no vocabulary and to which they sought (and continue to seek) to give meaning. Smoke was a cure, but it soon became a passion.[40]

They continued:

> The cigar is a prime example of how tobacco continued to re-invent itself, enchanting the world once more – and at its roots was one of the original ways of consumption. The cigar became fashionable first in Spain, then in Britain and other parts of Europe. It was first conceived of in Cuba and was launched into full swing in the Philippines. A not-too-distant cousin of the way that the Cubans had smoked when they met Colombus's sailors, it was pure smoke.[41]

While the eighteenth century was the century of snuff, the early nineteenth century appeal was that of Lord Byron in 1823: 'Thy naked beauty – Give me a cigar!' Cigars became the mark of status for aristocrats, the privileged, wealthy and social elites. With the twentieth-century rise of the cigarette, the tobacco industry created a product that could be virtually all things to all people. In the words of Gilman and Xun, 'Its promotional strategies demonstrated "a sophisticated notion of culture and its operative mechanisms" representing "innovative notions of social and cultural 'engineering' ".'[42] Where cultural norms and expectations proved an obstacle, the answer was to change the culture.

By the twentieth century, across the globe, humankind had a tobacco habit. In the four centuries since Rodrigo de Jerez and Luis de Torres smoked a Cuban cigar, tobacco production, trade and consumption had soared. The First World War and the Second World War, and the intervening and initial post-war years, were a smoker's paradise, as the cigarette rode supreme – in reality and on screen. The cigarette, however, with its monopolies, global corporations and immense profits, was also to be tobacco's downfall. Its addictive dangers ushered in health prohibitions throughout the Western world, though fostering new booms in the non-Western world, where there were no such prohibitions.

It was counter to this that the cigar made a 1990s comeback. The new rich were to be seen frequenting newly created cigar divans of London and New York. In the words of Iain Gately, they were

> ...dedicated to the pleasures of owning and smoking the most expensive and flamboyant of smoking devices...The cigar revival is explained in part by the spirit of conspicuous consumption which permeated the age...Cigars were a field in which discrimination and purchasing power could be excercised with equal freedom, and smoking a cigar was a perfect demonstration of both.[43]

Aaron Sigmond, founding director of *Smoke* magazine, wrote in 1997, at the height of the 1990s cigar boom:

> Each cigar is a new and sensual experience which instantly distinguishes a smoker from those around him. When two cigar enthusiasts meet, a bond is created that words can do little to convey. Cigars embody a certain sense of fraternity which spans generations, diminishes political differences, and somehow makes all quarrelling suddenly seem petty.[44]

Yet the new answer to 'why smoke?' was really power-smoking, in the same fashion as power-dressing, and the most sought-after 'power smoke' of them all was Fidel Castro's erstwhile specially hand-rolled Cohiba, which takes us to a different kind of terroir, one which has political and cultural caché.

When Cuban writer Reynaldo González published *El Bello Habano* (The Fine Havana) in 2004, it read as a modern-day ode to the Havana cigar, with evocative chapter headings: '*Una caja de recuerdos magicos*' (A Box of Magical Memories), '*El Diablo es buen negocio*' (The Devil is Good Business), '*Caballo medieval, montura renacentista*' (Medieval Horse, Renaissance Trappings), '*Los piratas tambien fuman*' (Pirates Smoke Too), '*Don Habano, caballero ilustrado*' (Don Habano, Educated Gent) and '*Incendios libertarios: humo de tabaco*' (Libertarian Fire: Cigar Smoke). He covered traditional ground:

> The secret of the exquisite legitimate Havana lies in the privileged land where it is grown, the virtuosity of the plant and the care that goes into it, and it's exclusively handmade by women and men jealously guarding their craft.[45]

In the more heady years of the late 1960s, however, a young Swiss by the name of Zino Davidoff wrote in a more personal vein: 'When I was twenty, I fell in love with the great tobacco plantations in Cuba. This passion of my youth has never been spent.' His father encouraged him to travel to the Americas to learn about the tobacco trade: ' "I am not able to give you much money," he said, "only some letters of introduction to tobacco merchants. But if you use them correctly, these letters are worth gold. In our business, friendship is not a vain word." ' He went to Buenos Aires and then Bahia, where one day an old planter said, 'Son, you love tobacco. Go to Cuba – to the land of the red clay soil. There you will discover the puro, the pure cigar. Then, nothing else will exist for you.' He left for Cuba 'in the state of anticipation a young archeologist might for Greece or a seminarian for Rome'. For two years he stayed there wrapped in 'a veritable state of excitement which affected all the senses'. He worked on a farm, was curious about everything and in his words:

> I learned very quickly that just as there are no two great wines which are the same, no two cigars are identical . . . Eventually I knew which were the best cigars in the world – and why.[46]

Davidoff was captivated by Cuba's cigars and they would dominate his life for the next 30 years:

> When I returned to Europe, I decided to dedicate my talents to the tobacco business. The puro of Cuba is not a cigar like any other . . . It is the king of tobacco products and should be treated according to its rank . . . Irreplaceable virtues of this magic island: its geology, wind, water, its miraculous soil . . . For Cubans, and for me, the puro can be nothing other than Cuba, nothing other than a Havana.

He wrote at the time (1969):

> Neither war nor politics has altered the cigar. Great cigars still come from the same precious land. Surviving every vicissitude, a good Havana with a gold or purple band, in its wooden box with cedar shavings, encased in its baroque splendour, is still the master of the cigar world. It cannot be cut off from its glorious past or its obscure origins. Of noble lineage, it will never be a simple manufactured object . . . It is something that commands respect . . . A good cigar contains the promise of a totally pleasurable experience . . . If there is a secret to the cigar, it is to be found in the slow movements, the dignified measured smoking. The movements are more than mannerisms; they are ceremonial acts . . . The conversation of cigar smoking ought to be slow and majestic . . .[47]

He continued:

> A cigar cannot be truly enjoyed without contemplation, without thinking. You cannot smoke anything at any time, in any place. A cigar should fit your mood, habits, personality, surroundings . . . There is an occasion for each cigar and a cigar for each occasion.[48]

Davidoff acknowledged that in the early years of revolution, when cigar manufacturing was nationalised, 'the great names, the best Havanas – vestiges of decadent capitalism and the power of money – were condemned without appeal'.[49] Sales plummeted, some dispossessed owners sued in The Hague, others established themselves in

Virginia, Florida, Philippines, the Canary Islands and the Middle East. In the 1970s and 1980s, he saw himself as part of reviving the quality and brands in Cuba, and for many in Europe Davidoff would become synonymous almost with Cuban cigars. That was until his falling out with Cuba, 30 years later, and his move to the Dominican Republic, where his cigars are produced to this day.

By the late 1990s, Cuban cigars were again on the ascendancy, so much as to occasional claims such as that by Nancy Stout in *Habanos*:

> Throughout the history of the cigar, the habano has been unequivocally considered the pinnacle of smoking pleasure. The unparalleled quality of the Havana cigar has bound the idea of Cuba with its most coveted export, and has held the imagination of aficionados around the world for 500 years.[50]

She continued:

> Throughout the world and throughout the history of the existence of cigars there has been one, and one only, that has been recognised by the true connoisseur as the ultimate cigar, the legendary and peerless one, the non plus ultra, and that is the habano. Habanos are cigars produced only in Cuba, shipped only from the port of Havana, made entirely of special varieties of Cuban-grown tobacco, and marketed only by the designated name habano . . . They are smoked by the most famous people, and sold for the highest prices, They are imitated and counterfeited. And, always, as the true sign of a rare luxury item, supply sometimes cannot meet demand.[51]

Nevertheless, the imitations and the counterfeits are not always what they seem, as they might be made with Cuban leaf by Cubans and in very similar climes. At the height of the boom, all kinds of new arrangements surfaced, one of which was the Graycliff story in the Bahamas. As recounted by Jean Edmond in a 1996 Graycliff brochure, there Avelino Lara, 'King of Torcedores (cigar rollers)' was 'like a fine XO cognac' deploying '40 years of wisdom to create a new masterpiece cigar that will surpass even his greatest accomplishments'. His tobacco blends remained 'as secretive as a CIA operation' and 'with Avelino's background, the Graycliff line will be nothing short of sensational':

> Flamboyant entrepreneur and proprietor of Graycliff, Enrico Garzaroli, is in ecstasy for he knows the demand will far surpass what can be produced and at a price tag only for the very affluent. Graycliff also has the largest selection and collection of authentic Cuban cigars than any other restaurant in the world.

Lara had been head of Cuba's El Laguito factory that makes Cohiba, and, in Lara's words 'the Cohiba is to Cuba as Dom Perignon is to France. It represents something very special to the country.' Having Lara there, Garzaroli said, 'it's almost like having Picasso come to your home and create five years of art which you make available to the public'. Edmond himself wrote while staying at Graycliff: 'As I sat in the parlor with a snifter of Delamain Reserve De Familie Rare, a cognac as superb as the cigar I was about to light, I felt like the Czar of Russia in the days of extreme elegance.'[52]

If ever a story could encapsulate the many contemporary twists and turns to the luxury Habano's history, this must surely be one!

Notes

1. Ortiz, *Cuban Counterpoint*, p. 309.
2. As beautifully illustrated in Martínez Rius, The Great Habano Factories. See also Carlos Venegas Fornias, 'La Habana: ¿ciudad industrial? in Catauro, in a special issue of the journal that was given over to tobacco.
3. Classics linking materiality and regimes of value remain. Appadurai, *Social Life of Things* and *Modernity at Large*; and Gereffi and Korzeniewicz, *Commodity Chains and Global Capitalism*, which includes Hopkins and Wallerstein, 'Commodity Chains'. See also Miller, 'Consumption and Commodities'; Carrier and Heyman, 'Consumption and Political Economy'; Tungate, *Luxury World*; Berg and Eger, *Luxury in the Eighteenth Century*; and Berry, *Idea of Luxury*.
4. Stubbs, *Tobacco on the Periphery*; 'Havana Cigars and the West's Imagination', in Gilman and Xun (eds), *Smoke: A Global History of Smoking*; and '*El Habano* and the World It Has Shaped: Cuba, Connecticut and Indonesia'. Cuban 'classics' are those by Rivero Muñiz (*Tabaco*) and García Galló (*El tabaquero cubano*; *Biografía del tabaco habano* and, with Correa García, *Story of Havana Cigars*). A cultural studies approach can be found in González, *El Bello Habano*, akin to the earlier Cabrera Infante, *Holy Smoke*. Examples of more general studies are Gilman and Xhou (eds), *Smoke*;

Gately, *Tobacco*; Goodman, *Tobacco in History*; and Kiernan, *Tobacco*. See also Schivelbusch, *Tastes of Paradise* and Walvin, *Fruits of Empire*. Also, Catauro 7, 12, published by the Fundación Fernando Ortiz in Havana, was a special issue given over to tobacco.

5. The early 1990s saw the New York launch of the glossy magazine Cigar Aficionado, which was instrumental in engineering the 1990s cigar revival, and the late 1990s saw the publication of a spate of coffee table books by both Cuban and non-Cuban authors. These included Nuñez Jiménez, *Journey of the Havana Cigar*; Gerard, *Havana Cigars*; Deschodt and Morane, *The Cigar*; Infante Urivazo, *Havana Cigars*; Espino Marrero, *Cuban Cigar Tobacco*; Del Todesco, *Havana Cigar*; Stout, *Habanos*; and Martínez Rius, *Habano el Rey*. A later volume, most impressive of all for its sheer size, was Nee, *Illustrated Encyclopaedia of Post-Revolution Havana Cigars*.
6. Casas, *Obras Completas*. This was revisited in Armando Rangel Rivero 'El tabaco en Cuba, ¿único desde 1492?' and Reynaldo González 'La estela que dejó el tabaco en la cultura internacional', Catauro (2005).
7. Kiernan, in *Tobacco*, among others, writes of how tobacco spread so quickly round the world by trade, possessing, as French historian Fernand Braudel expressed it, the supreme asset of flexibility in adapting itself to the most diverse climates and soils.
8. This is recounted in the classic works on Spanish tobacco history by Pérez Vidal, *España en la historia* and *Historia del cultivo*. See also Rodríguez Gordillo, *Un archivo para la historia del tabaco*.
9. Among other works, see Kulikoff, *Tobacco & Slaves*.
10. See Rivero Muñiz, T*res sediciones de los vegueros*. Also Cosner, 'Rich and Poor, Black and White, Slave and Free' and 'Vegueros and Tabaqueros'.
11. See Pérez Vidal, *España en la historia* and *Historia del Cultivo*. Also Luxán Meléndez et al., *Mercado del tabaco*, on state finances, contraband and consumption.
12. Ortiz, *Cuban Counterpoint*, pp. 76–7.
13. Ortiz recounts this thus: 'It was well on in the second half of the eighteenth century, after the conquest of Havana by the English in 1762, that Havana cigars set out to conquer the world. It was then that Havana cigars traveled to England in the red coats of the British officials and to North America with the Yankee officers who had been in charge of the colonial regiments that helped occupy Havana and not long afterwards, in 1776, were to win the independence of their own country. After this momentous episode in Cuba's history the taste for cigars began to spread beyond Spain. In 1788 the first factory manufacturing cigars was set up in Hamburg by H.H. Schlottmann, and by 1793 they were in wide use in all Germany... In the nineteenth century it was the invasion of Spain by Napoleon's armies and Lord Wellington's troops...' (*Cuban Counterpoint*, p. 77).
14. Deschodt and Morane, *The Cigar*, p. 55.
15. Deschodt and Morane, *The Cigar*, p. 169.

16. The dispute was encapsulated in a volley between Bock, *Truth about Havana Cigars*, and the counter-attack on behalf of the 'independents' by journalist and cigar maker González Aguirre, *La verdad sobre la industria del tabaco habano*.
17. Interestingly, in 1772, Felipe de Fondesviela, Marques de la Torre, in recognition of the quality of its tobacco, decided the area should be separate from Havana and have a municipal government of its own, at the time called New Philippines. An excellent 'pocket' analysis of *terroir* can be found in Epstein, *Champagne*.
18. Perdomo, *Léxico tabacalero cubano*, p. 193.
19. Infante Urivazo, *Havana* Cigars, p. 11, 13.
20. Nuñez Jiménez, *The Journey*, p. 57.
21. García Galló, *Biografía*, p. 271.
22. Gerard, *Cigars*, p. 8.
23. Ortiz, *Cuban Counterpoint*, p. 43.
24. Menocal, *Cuban Cigar Labels*, p. 25.
25. Menocal, *Cuban Cigar Labels*, p. 37.
26. Lapique Becali, *La memoria en las piedras*, 'Los sucesos de la historia' and 'La litografía en el siglo XIX'. Frédéric Miahle and Edouard Laplante were particularly famous for their engravings of Cuba at the time (Cueto, *Frédéric Mialhe*).
27. Gerard, *Cigars*, p. 68.
28. Martínez Rius, *Habano el Rey*, pp. 24, 69.
29. Martínez Rius, *Habano el Rey*, p. 28.
30. Ortiz, *Cuban Counterpoint*, pp. 8–9.
31. Ortiz, *Cuban Counterpoint*, p. 71.
32. Ortiz, *Cuban Counterpoint*, p. 201.
33. Ortiz, *Cuban Counterpoint*, p. 213.
34. Rudy, *The Freedom to Smoke*, p. 47.
35. Rudy, *The Freedom to Smoke*, p. 60.
36. Rudy, *The Freedom to Smoke*, pp. 62–3.
37. Hilton, *Smoking in British Popular Culture*, p. 3.
38. Scarlet, *Puff of Smoke*, pp. 1, 3.
39. Scarlet, *Puff of Smoke*, p. 13.
40. Gilman and Xun, *Smoking*, p. 9.
41. Gilman and Xun, *Smoking*, p. 17.
42. Gilman and Xun, *Smoking*, p. 343.
43. Gately, *Tobacco*, p. 342.
44. Aaron Sigmon in Stücklin, *Cigar Handbook*.
45. González, *El Bello Habano*, p. 125.
46. Davidoff, *Connoisseur's Book of the Cigar*, p. 3.
47. Davidoff, *Connoisseur's Book of the Cigar*, pp. 7–8.
48. Davidoff, *Connoisseur's Book of the Cigar*, pp. 29–30.
49. Davidoff, *Connoisseur's Book of the Cigar*, p. 44.
50. Stout, *Habanos*, inside cover.

51. Stout, *Habanos*, p. 9.
52. Emond, 'Avelino Lara King of the Torcedores'.

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Index