



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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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 metropolises 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

2 Introduction

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 destinies 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 ascendancy. 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.