

- Woolcock, M. 1998. 'Social Capital and Economic Development: Toward a Theoretical Synthesis and Policy Framework', *Theory and Society* 27: 151–208.
- Ybarra, J.A. 1991. 'Industrial Districts and the Valencian Community', International Institute for Labour Studies, Discussion Paper No. 44. Geneva: International Labour Organization.
- Ybarra, J.-A., et al. 2004. *El calzado en el Vinalopó, entre la continuidad y la ruptura*. Alicante: Universidad de Alicante.
- Zelizer, V.A. 1988. 'Beyond the Polemics on the Market: Establishing a Theoretical and Empirical Agenda', *Sociological Forum* 3(4): 614–634.

7

## Flexible Capitalism and Transactional Orders in Colonial and Postcolonial Mauritius

A Post-Occidental View

*Patrick Neveling*

In the early 1970s, a series of crises struck Western advanced capitalist societies. As the number of workers in industrial manufacturing declined, it seemed as if the whole world was changing. Sociologist Daniel Bell's *The Coming of Post-Industrial Society* (1973) provided a catch-phrase for such sentiments. In Europe, Alain Touraine's *The Post-Industrial Society: Tomorrow's Social History* (1971) gave voice to a similar mood. Not least in the social sciences, those years would cast a long shadow. To this day, the early 1970s have been regarded as a turning point towards post-Fordism, flexible accumulation and so forth (see Harvey 1990). Nash (1995), however, has long pointed to the spatial and, hence, analytical limitations to the notion of 'post-industrial society'. Neither Bell nor Touraine took into account that changes in Western core areas had to do with the relocation of industrial manufacturing to other regions. The bigger picture was, indeed, a 'global shift' (Dicken 2003). From an analytical perspective, notions such as 'post-industrial society' thus emerge from what may be seen as a particular and limited conception of change, which is recurrent as Kjaerulff points out (see Introduction, this volume), and which has profoundly shaped recent 'end of work debates' (e.g. Strangleman 2007). Gloomy declarations of the end of a 'golden age' of manufacturing and the coming of flexible capitalism forget that only a few decades earlier the same societies had lamented the social disruptions caused by the advent of industrial manufacturing (ibid.: 91). Analytical engagement with capitalism at the scale of the global, the regional or the factory therefore has to consider spatial and temporal

limitations of change. Caution is advised whenever the coming of a new era is declared, be this post-industrial, post-Fordist or flexible capitalism (cf. Baca 2005; Neveling 2006).

This chapter is an enquiry into anthropology's position regarding such processes. What can a discipline claiming understanding of a wide range of societies contribute to debates over the end of work, the flexibility of capitalism and its impact on social structures across the globe? To address this question, I focus on the long history of capitalist practice in Mauritius and how this history informed changes in the 1970s, when garment and electronics manufacturing was established in an export processing zone (EPZ) on a large scale. These developments were partly shaped by relocations from Western and Asian regions, as many companies expanded their business ventures and set up new production sites in Mauritius. This small Indian Ocean island nation-state was not alone in using EPZs as an export-oriented development strategy. India (see Neveling 2014; see also Cross, this volume), Malaysia (Ong 1987), Mexico (Fernández-Kelly 1983), South Korea (Kim 1997) and many other nation-states have done so since the 1970s or earlier. EPZs have become a market where nation-states bid for manufacturing relocation to their territories. Central features of this market are investment incentives, including tax and customs duty holidays, special labour laws, low-cost factory space, credit portfolios and so on. Such particular relations of exchange between capital, state and labour mean that EPZs are one focal point in global, flexible capitalism (cf. Neveling forthcoming).

My concern is thus with the coming rather than the departure of large-scale industrial manufacturing in the 1970s, because this is the flipside of developments captured in debates about the end of work and post-industrial society. But rather than establishing a synchronic juxtaposition of regions 'giving' away manufacturing jobs with regions 'receiving' those jobs, I do not take for granted that EPZs (sometimes also called special economic zones or free trade zones) are 'cornerstones of flexibility' that have 'made informality and precariousness an integral part of . . . many global commodity chains' (Cross 2012: 4). Analysing Mauritian developments requires diachronic enquiry as well, and I go back in time and juxtapose the advent of new industrial manufacturing in the 1970s with the development of the colonial sugar industry. The latter was established after 1810 and, as I will show, has dominated Mauritian socio-economic relations ever since, creating highly flexible and precarious labour relations embedded in a competitive global capitalist system.

The chapter, then, extends Garsten's observation (Garsten, this volume) that change is 'an everyday constant' (in the labour process at Apple Computer), to the long history of capitalism in Mauritius. This move requires a reconsideration of those conceptual tools that economic anthropology uses to understand the advent of industrial manufacturing in a particular location. That reconsideration provides the analytical bracket for the three sections below, and is grounded in the following reflections which are expanded on in the course of the chapter. The relocation of industrial manufacturing to non-Western regions has often been portrayed as the advent of commoditized exchange relations in places that had so far been dominated by gift exchange, barter and, on a different analytical level, by what Scott (1976) has identified as a 'moral economy of the peasant'. This juxtaposition essentializes both 'Western societies' and 'non-Western' societies. The notion of the latter as gift-driven and the former as capital-driven is core to 'Occidentalism' in anthropology (cf. Carrier 1992). As I will show, such Occidentalism is also latent in the distinction between long-term and short-term transactional orders (Bloch and Parry 1989), when long-term transactional orders become synonymous with pre-capitalist ways for securing 'the reproduction of the cosmic and social order', and short-term transactional orders are seen as synonymous with capitalism's 'individual competition' (ibid.: 24). In this view, individual competition contradicts the cosmic and social orders of many non-Western societies and therefore needs 'cosmic purification' – as in India, for example, 'where even wealth acquired through the most devious means by merchants, bandits and kings is unproblematic so long as a proportion of it is gifted to Brahmans as part of the long-term cycle' (ibid.: 25). This ignores the fact that most societies, if not all, have for long been integrated into global capitalism, and that a long-term transactional order may well offer the 'greatest potential for capital accumulation', particularly so if it is coupled with development efforts and monetary exchanges (Gregory 1980: 627).

I build on the latter insight to explore how religion and cosmic order may serve as ideological foundations for flexible, capitalist exploitation. To do so it is necessary to go beyond a traditional anthropological conception of a 'native's point of view' that assumes coherent social formations. Instead, my analysis of the historical trajectory of flexible capitalism concentrates on the conflicting views that a population, in a given space at a given time, holds about cosmic and socio-economic orders. The approach is mirrored in Zigon's work, which abandons normative distinctions of moral and immoral

by introducing the concept of moralities (Zigon 2007). This approach links situated, individual points of view on events and actions to wider social settings as contested rather than coherent. Such concerns have largely yet to be developed for economic anthropology where the moral/immoral nexus prevails, though Narotzky (this volume) has made important steps in this direction. Likewise, economic anthropologists have begun increasingly to consider the coexistence of gift and commodity exchange in a given capitalist social order (indeed this is a general thrust of this volume). To further this analytical move, we need to go beyond normative views on exchange as either moral/pre-capitalist or immoral/capitalist. Such normative views are implied not only in Bloch and Parry's distinction of transactional orders and in Scott's conception of a 'moral economy of the peasant' (see above), but also in one of anthropology's core texts on women's work in EPZ factories, where Ong (1987) argues that spirit possession among women workers is driven by the painful transition from a moral economy of the peasant to an economy of commodities (see below). Building on an analysis of spirit possession in Mauritius, I contradict this view and show how spirit possession is an excellent example of the way workers criticize the ideological foundation of capitalism in long-term transactional orders.

The chapter correlates the historical establishment of a long-term, capitalist transactional order in the colonial and postcolonial Mauritian sugar sector with gendered exploitation in postcolonial EPZ factories, and the way that women have contested this exploitation by commenting on the ideological linkages and continuities between capitalism and religion, rather than lamenting radical ruptures. In other words, I introduce the problem of inequality and class struggle. This allows me to highlight the fundamental role that gifts and many other forms of supposedly non-capitalist exchange play in the expansion and maintenance of the capitalist system at all scales.

In order to develop these perspectives on solid empirical ground, the following section outlines how a capitalist, long-term transactional order was established as an integral part of global market adjustments affecting the Mauritian sugar industry throughout colonial times. The next sections analyse the establishment of the Mauritian EPZ in the 1970s, and how this rested on gendered exploitation and informed conceptions of short-term and long-term transactional orders. The final empirical section shows why spirit possession in Mauritian EPZ factories is best understood as a critique of the persistence of colonial capitalism's long-term cosmic-religious transactional order. In my concluding remarks I suggest how, in

Mauritius and elsewhere, flexible capitalism may be understood in terms of ambiguous practices of exchange which have been at work through centuries rather than being a sudden arrival, and how this is best framed in anthropological research.

### The Flexibility of Capitalism in the Long-term Transactional Order: The Colonial Sugar Sector

Mauritius was one of the few uninhabited places colonized by Europeans. Possibly because there was no settled population to exploit, early capitalist ventures failed. The Dutch East India Company abandoned the island around 1710; French colonial rule lasted from 1735 until 1810. As the island had gained strategic relevance because of its proximity to major international shipping routes, new British and old French rulers struck a deal after takeover in 1810. Trade and privateering were to end. In exchange, Mauritius was incorporated into the West Indian Sugar Protocol in 1825. This meant preferential access to the British Empire's markets, and turned the island into a mono-crop economy. As subjects of the Empire, French settlers had to accept the abolition of slavery in 1835, albeit with financial compensation. The latter was invested in new production technology, banking capital and, not least, in importing contract labourers to replace slaves and sustain a cheap labour supply (Teelock 1998; Neveling 2013: 126). The cycle of sugar cane cultivation and processing now determined external relations, population structure and class divisions. French-British joint ventures mushroomed in agriculture, banking and transport, and would soon include Indian Ocean business communities. Chambers of commerce and agriculture were set up, while successive British governors facilitated the exploitation of labour within and beyond the legal limits. An overall racist consensus dominated everyday life, but otherwise this life was anything but stable. For one thing, the political battle over free trade or protectionism in Britain meant that preferences and export quotas for Mauritian sugar changed several times throughout the nineteenth century and well into the twentieth century (Neveling 2013: 123–29).

One crucial change came with the First World War. The war years meant stable prices for sugar, and were followed by a brief surge in prices before the global recession of the 1920s and 1930s hit the industry. This crisis was resolved with the ratification of the International Sugar Agreement (ISA) in 1937, which effectively ratified an existing long-term transactional order of capitalist, reciprocal

exchange relations. The Empire's centre granted preferential quotas to the colonies for the import of sugar, and some of the customs duty collected by the United Kingdom authorities was handed back, trickling down the commodity chain of sugar to reach even small planters. Contradicting the common distinction between gift-based and commodity-based systems of exchange, the ISA thus facilitated the global movement of commodities by way of a reciprocal recognition of bilateral trading agreements. This, to some extent, ended a period of volatile macro-structural integration for Mauritius (ibid.: 129–36).

All the same, volatile macro-structural exchange relations continued to affect developments within Mauritian society, allowing significant room for Mauritians' manoeuvring. Investment in indentured labour, for example, created considerable turmoil. Being used to an abundant supply of cheap slave labour, Mauritian 'plantocrats' called for ever more indentured labourers, and ignored the fact that this new system of exploitation introduced factors beyond their control. One such factor was that indentured labourers sent remittances to their families. Around 1845, supplies of money fell short. Then the British banking crisis of the late 1840s hit the island and two out of three local banks went bust. Suddenly, there was no credit to fund the next harvest and, despite intervention from the colonial state, the structure of the sugar industry changed radically. Many plantations went bust, and landless white settlers filled the ranks of upper-management in those surviving enterprises that now modernized and built steam-driven mills. The shift from extensification to intensification is well captured in the number of sugar mills. This rose from 157 mills in 1823 (Teelock 1998: 96) to 303 in 1863, and then declined steadily to 43 just after the First World War (North Coombes 2000: 141).

While processing was increasingly centralized, cultivation moved in different directions. Large establishments took over fertile lands from bankrupt ventures, but other plots were parcelled out and sold off. Historians distinguish two periods of land sales, a *petit morcellement* from 1839 to 1859, and a *grand morcellement* following the crisis of the early 1870s. Mainly former indentured labourers bought plots of land, not least because this gave them rights of residence and protection from marauding hordes of the bourgeoisie hunting down everyone who had no residence permit. Thousands of land acquisitions meant a 'major restructuring of rural social and economic relations' (Allen 1999: 117). Postcolonial Mauritian nation-building ideology and academics alike interpret this restructuring as an emancipation and liberation of former slaves and indentured labourers.<sup>1</sup>

But the unfolding of events during the long crisis of the 1920s and 1930s suggests that the Mauritian *morcellement* was a process of outsourcing market risks which, effectively, is an example of 'flexible capitalism'.

Indenture ended in 1923. Ideally, Mauritius would have seen rising numbers of free wage labourers. But developments on the ground set workers on a different trajectory. The highest number of land sales took place before and around 1920. Then, sugar prices were high and so were land prices. Once world market prices declined, many newly landed labourers fell short on their mortgage repayments and entered a debt spiral. Although classified as smallholders (*petits planteurs*), out of roughly 14,000 such businesses operating in 1930, more than 90 per cent held plots of land that could not sustain a household. The result was that 'emancipated' planter households sent men, women and children to earn additional income as seasonal labourers on larger plantations, and dependency on the established bourgeoisie persisted. Around 2 per cent of *morcellement* plots were rather large. These households became wealthy. They sent their children to school to fill the ranks of bureaucrats and politicians in the late colonial and postcolonial state (cf. Teelock 2001: 323–50).

The colonial state played a crucial role in maintaining this dependency of labour on capital. It supported large planters and millers with subsidies and tax holidays throughout the 1920s and 1930s. In 1937, the island's first development bank provided a safe haven where larger businesses could move their debts (Neveling 2012: 161–91). Owners of small plots received no relief from hardship. Steady jobs with monthly incomes were scarce, and during the harvest season there was competition from an ever-growing semi-urban and urban population. Hiring was 'by task work or by day or if they were cutting canes by tonne. Those who loaded canes on trucks were paid by week' (Teelock 2001: 361). Such workers had next to no bargaining position, and wages fluctuated related to the prices sugar fetched on the world's markets. Rising demand for the right to unionize from workers in transport and in the mills, and deadly protests by smallholders in 1937, coupled with efforts to keep the population on the British side during the Second World War, meant minor improvements in the 1940s. But rights to unionization were confined to permanently employed workers (cf. Allgoo 1985).

In short then, there is little empirical evidence for a 'Fordist' or Keynesian era with stable employment and a certain degree of prosperity in Mauritius during these times (cf. Neveling 2012: 302). Instead, the lives of most Mauritians continued to be integrated into

global capitalism in highly flexible ways. This is vividly illustrated in a report on the Mauritian economy written by the British economist James Edward Meade in 1960. It counts a total active workforce of 200,000 in 1958, with 75 per cent male workers and 25 per cent female workers, and an unemployment rate of 15 per cent. The vast majority of so-called permanent agricultural labourers were hired by 'job contractors' who sold their labour on to estate owners and millers. Meade concludes that there was a 'casualisation of labour' in the late 1950s (Meade 1961: 62).

But the preceding also suggests continuity and change in terms of what can be conceived as a long-term transactional order in Mauritius, shaped by various socio-economic factors. Mono-crop agriculture meant that changes in the global sugar commodity chain had particularly strong repercussions, and British imperial policies also delineated a succession of labour regimes. Class divisions on the other hand were rather stable, and only small fractions of the population enjoyed upward socio-economic mobility. These are all historically specific factors related to the production of sugar, which have profoundly shaped experience through time in Mauritius, and so outlooks in terms of social, political and cosmic order. The way the production of sugar cane marks the landscape in Mauritius even today may serve as a simple entry point for appreciating how this is so. Before the harvest season starts in June, the mountainous slopes are covered with green cane. As this is cut, the landscape turns brown and scraggy, only for the next generation of cane to blossom a few months later. Well into the 1960s, this cycle dominated social life in Mauritius. Household incomes varied according to harvest and planting/growing seasons. There was also a credit cycle for small and large estates alike that was completed only once the sugar cane had been processed and the final returns from customs rebates for sales on the London market had come in. That the crop cycle also has dimensions of a 'cosmic' transactional order is manifest in a ritual marking the beginning of the harvest season, known as 'La Coupe'.<sup>2</sup> In the first decade of the twenty-first century, when centralization had reduced the number of sugar mills to nine, La Coupe was held in a different mill each year. In 2004, the minister of agriculture was invited to the Savannah sugar mill as the main speaker. Addressing an audience of mill owners, managers, ordinary workers and journalists, he expressed hope that Mauritian sugar would continue to thrive, despite the World Trade Organization's efforts to abolish all trade preferences (to the effect of opening up Mauritius to competition from Thailand, Brazil and elsewhere). Heading an entourage

of celebrities from the world of agribusiness and politics, he then walked up to start the crushing machine engine. Lower-ranking personnel sat and watched. Afterwards, there were drinks and snacks for the workers and the anthropologist, while celebrities rushed off in black limousines. In the days before, religious services had been held in Catholic, Hindu and Tamil houses around Savannah, and congregations had asked for a successful harvest season. La Coupe gives a condensed but vivid example of the way agribusiness, politics and religious leadership concur on affirming a kind of long-term transactional order with both cosmic and social dimensions, shaped by the history of sugar production and trade, as it has marked experience through time in Mauritius. I expand on the perspective below.

Sugar is thus an important pillar of colonial and postcolonial capitalism, and the industry itself has been a stable factor in much of Mauritian history. But, as the above shows, labour relations were highly flexible long before Mauritian independence in 1968 and the foundation of the EPZ in 1970. There was a large, free-floating proletariat in villages, semi-urban and urban areas, living precarious lives as unemployment peaked well above 20 per cent in the late 1960s.

### Diversifying Flexible Capitalism in the Postcolonial State: The Mauritian EPZ

The colonial state provided capital with incentives, and this was continued by the postcolonial state. Building on advice from the World Bank and the United Nations Industrial Development Organization, as well as recommendations from local economists and business people, the Mauritian EPZ received significant financial input from 1970 onward. This state investment is important for an anthropological analysis of flexible capitalism and deserves attention. But this does not mean that the sugar sector and the EPZ can be treated as one and the same. The colonial plantocracy had sourced labour globally, buying slaves and indenturing labourers from Africa and Asia before outsourcing cane cultivation to small planters and generating fresh capital from land sales. Investments had been fixed in space, and it was the organization of production and the supply of labour that granted flexibility. In the EPZ, these spatial and temporal relations between capital and labour would be inverted to some extent. EPZ investors move factories and knowledge rather than labour around the globe. Their business strategy was and is to seek 'low-skilled, export platform assembly' work, and prototypical EPZ investors will

be ready to relocate if another zone offers a higher surplus. In this sense, EPZ factories are 'world-market factories' (Fröbel, Heinrichs and Kreye 1981: 347).

The Mauritian state contributed to this by granting tax and customs duty holidays for periods of ten years. This was a significant step. On the one hand, expenses for industrial zones and other infrastructure were enormous. On the other hand, tax and customs revenues as a potential means for refinancing these expenses were waived. In order to understand why the state made such a significant gift to investors, it is instructive to look at how Mauritian politicians imagined export-led development.

In 1970, the Mauritian parliament debated EPZ laws and investment incentives. Whether it was necessary to set up an EPZ soon became a side issue. Instead, opinion was split over its negative impact on social order and morale. In parliamentary debates over the matter, some said that the arrival of foreign managers and new production processes would upset public order and undermine morals.<sup>3</sup> Free-market liberals instead imagined a prosperous future with jobs for everyone, and Mauritius joining the ranks of Taiwan, Hong Kong and Singapore as world-famous examples of rapid industrialization.<sup>4</sup> The latter arguments carried the day, not least because everyone agreed that mainly women would work in the EPZ. And because women would be part of a household with a male breadwinner who could make up for the low EPZ wages and ensure the enforcement of morals, the minimum wage for the EPZ was set much lower than for the national economy.

Interestingly, conservative members of the Mauritian parliament had little regard for the fact that their island had been integrated into a highly volatile world market for sugar all along, and that morals had been changing all the time. Similar to Western sociologists declaring the coming of post-industrial societies or an end of work, a stable past that is under attack and subject to rapid rupture was constructed in these parliamentary debates. Setting up an EPZ as a second pillar for the national economy thus had little to do with offering workers an alternative to the long-term transactional orders of the sugar sector and its flexible employment conditions.

On the investors' side, continuity rather than change prevailed as well. Throughout the 1970s, many joint ventures between Mauritian sugar companies and foreign corporations from the electronics and garment sectors were set up. Soon, the first fully Mauritian-owned factories emerged, and the local plantocracy could reap the full benefit of generous EPZ incentives. In this, they collaborated with

established foreign businesses, which shifted to Mauritius with the explicit aim of exploiting a cheap labour force, whose wages were 30 per cent below the already low wages of Asian EPZs (World Bank 1973: 3).

In 1975, there were seventy-nine EPZs in twenty-five countries (Fröbel, Heinrichs and Kreye 1981: 306), and Mauritius competed with the Irish EPZ in Shannon, Taiwan's EPZ in Kaohsiung and *maquiladoras* in the larger cities along the Mexico-US border. For Mauritians entering EPZ factories, this maturing global labour market was a manifestation of how the 'historical geography of capitalism' (see Harvey 1990) cuts across space and time. Some factories hired training personnel from Hong Kong, German managers ran others and, as one company owner remembered, even retired officers of the British colonial army would be recruited to make workers meet production targets. Newspapers invited EPZ factory managers to talk about Mauritian workers' lack of productivity.<sup>5</sup> On the shop floor, line managers regularly repeated how much faster and better workers in EPZs in the Philippines and elsewhere operated.

The factory environment was a challenge in itself. Before 1970, labour had taken place mainly outdoors or in rather modestly sized manufacturing establishments, and only workers in sugar mills had experience of highly standardized and rhythmic production processes. In this sense then, work in EPZ factories was indeed a new experience. Those predominantly women workers who spent ten-hour working days in cheaply built and non-air-conditioned factories surely had new views on the subtropical Mauritian climate. Unfamiliar work routines, constant demand for high performance and precision, the noise of industrial machines and the smells and garment fibres filling the air on the shop floor added to the challenge. Considering that husbands and families often demanded household labour to be finished before and after factory shifts, these women workers indeed had to be highly flexible.

These demands could not always be met. A late 1970s study revealed that most workers were slim, malnourished and lacked both the financial means and the eating habits necessary to maintain the pressure on their bodies (Hein 1984: 256). The way this problem was dealt with is another example of how the long-term transactional order of colonial days extended into the new factories.

Milk and yoghurt are rather expensive consumer goods, as they have to be imported to an island whose agricultural sector is dominated by sugar. For EPZ businesses, they were surely affordable, as moderate estimates put the annual value added per worker around

\$2,000 for the early 1970s (World Bank 1973: 21). But when it was evident that EPZ workers needed such additional nutrition, EPZ companies adopted the following stance:

Past studies have revealed that an important factor responsible for low productivity, and illnesses leading to absenteeism has to do with inadequate or unwholesome nutrition . . . We believe that Government, with MEPZA [Mauritius Export Processing Zone Association, the association of EPZ employers] help, should seriously consider a meals-on-wheels type of operation freely supplying either 2 glasses of milk (a gift from some friendly country may surely be arranged) or 2 yoghurts and possibly be partly subsidising a well-balanced meal. (Forget 1983: 92, my addition)

This is quoted from a report financed by the Mauritius Commercial Bank Ltd. This is the island's oldest bank, and a stronghold of the 'native' Franco-Mauritian upper class, which still holds considerable economic power today. Although asking for 'a gift from some friendly country' was surely an inventive move, the above indicates that EPZ investors showed little flexibility in their approach to exchange relations with workers, the nation-state or Western countries. The latter were seen as outlet and culprit, ultimately responsible for the shortcomings of EPZ employment.

Continuity was also evident in paternalistic attitudes towards the workforce. The report further states that, 'there are also indications that wages earned in the free zone are substantially wasted on non-essentials like clothing and make-up while satisfactory diets are not achieved' (ibid.: 92).

So far, my analysis of the Mauritian EPZ highlights continuities with the sugar industry, except for the new experience of working in factories and working for highly mobile investors. I now turn to scrutinize whether EPZ employment changed the overall Mauritian social setting, enabling me to analyse whether or not there was the social rupture commonly associated with flexible capitalism.

Crucially, the above underlines how the establishment of the EPZ also established double moral standards. On the one hand, female labour was declared to be of lesser value and, hence, women could be paid lower wages. If EPZ employment posed a challenge that was too high for women workers, it was these women and their irrational spending habits that were to blame on the one hand, and Western consumer markets and their grip on the world market on the other. But then, the success of the Mauritian EPZ was crucial for sustaining the postcolonial developmental state and its government, which

had invested huge sums to build a new industrial infrastructure and to ultimately change the island's historical geography of capitalism.

Anthropologists studying Mauritius have by and large focused on the issue of ethnicity (cf. Neveling forthcoming), and have thus paid little detailed attention to the phenomenon of large scale EPZ employment. Although 20,000 new jobs were created throughout the 1970s, and another 70,000 jobs were added in the 1980s, from 1995 onwards an increasing number of workers were laid off. Hein (1984) provides rich statistical material, and helps to put the impact of EPZ employment on women in perspective. Female participation in the labour force stood at 19.7 per cent in 1972 – a strong reminder that the sugar sector employed a significant number of women. This moved up to 26.9 per cent in 1982, and manufacturing generated nearly 90 per cent of this increase. EPZ manufacturing was, in short, a female domain (ibid.: 254).<sup>6</sup> The increasing participation of women in industry conflicted with a society that had an 'underlying belief that employment is much more important for a man who must support his family than for a woman who normally has a husband or father to support her' (ibid.: 253).

This 'myth of the male breadwinner' (Safa 1995) obviously not only distorted Mauritian reality in the 1970s, but also that of earlier periods. The following will show how the treatment of women as workers of lesser value added to the sustenance of inequality resting on what I conceive as a long-term transactional order. Some 70 per cent of respondents to a survey conducted by Hein in 1977 were younger than twenty-five. For many, factory employment was their first job. More than two-thirds of new entrants had been 'recruited' by friends or relatives already working in an EPZ factory. Although this at first indicates that respondents did not depend on wages, as they had not actively sought such income, most respondents contributed at least one-third of their earnings to their household (ibid.: 256). This belies the above-cited claims of employers that income was wasted on non-essentials. It also questions considerations in parliament that women's wages were insignificant as regards household incomes. Explicit sexism in the workplace added to these central ideological foundations for the devaluation of women's labour. Below I provide an indicative outline.

In the 1970s, most Mauritians seeking EPZ employment did not have birth certificates or identity papers. In order to check whether applicants matched the legal minimum working age of fifteen, women were subjected to what managers called a 'tit test'. As many underage women were highly dependent on wages and knew that managers

would grab their breasts in this demeaning 'test', they would stuff their bras with tissue to make their breasts appear bigger and to decrease its intimacy. Similar to EPZ factories in Mexico (Fernández-Kelly 1983: 133–44), sexual harassment extended to everyday workplace relations in Mauritian factories. Outside the factory, women were discriminated against by right-wing groups that had voiced concerns over moral disorder in the parliamentary debates referred to above. Religious groups blamed workers for abandoning public morals by having affairs with their male co-workers. Similar to employers' claims, wages earned were denounced as 'lipstick money'. In other words, conservative public discourse actually sanctioned and naturalized low factory wages, branding it income used only for conspicuous consumption (cf. Neveling 2006). Women workers thus had to defend themselves against sexism inside and outside the factory.

But such sexism did not extend to all strata of the population. Although Hein maintains that 1970s Mauritius was 'a society where segregation of the sexes is considered desirable' (Hein 1984: 253), her data show that 43 per cent of parents expressed no concern at all about their daughters working in factories. Workers themselves also seemed to be anything but ashamed of their employment, expressed satisfaction with their work, were happy to earn money and to have the opportunity to establish social relations outside the household. Still, only a fraction of workers would continue work after marriage without the consent of their husband (ibid.: 256–57). This indicates that the majority of young women considered their employment temporary, a phase in their life that would end once they set up their own household.

Such flexible biographies are also documented for EPZ workers in South Korea (Kim 1997), where they were similarly denounced for conspicuously spending their income. South Korean workers supported their families and saved earnings to pay future dowries, hoping that marriage 'would free them from the burden of factory work' (ibid.: 67). Not every marriage involves dowry in Mauritius, but workers used their income for similar purposes. Looking back on their youth in 2004, many older women told me how EPZ employment was part of a larger strategy. This included wearing lipstick and nice clothes, saving for wedding-related expenses and spending money on education. One aim was to find a husband who would not be violent, not drink too much, who would have a good job and family background, and let them be who they wanted to be.

In light of my concern with long-term and short-term transactional orders, it is interesting to note that women in various locations

around the world may well have similar ways of coping with EPZ employment. This indicates that, rather than cultural differences that derive from a spatial understanding of difference in human populations, working conditions, gender and class structures are much more relevant for understanding individual actions and notions of agency in EPZs. Only if we drop the victimization stance and consider the entry of women into world-market factories as a strategic decision taken within the limits set by capitalism can we acknowledge that these women are, so to speak, rational economic actors. This is not to say that their behaviour verifies the assumptions of neo-classical economics and the idea that humans are driven by the making of rational choices, but to say that these women are well able to set up short-term and long-term transactional orders for themselves within the said limits. In the above, gains from short-term factory employment are intended to provide long-term income security and happiness. Such calculations do not make EPZ labour less exploitative.

As I said, many women who had been working in EPZ factories for one, two or more decades are nowadays looking back on their work in light of these conscious choices. What was belittled as 'lipstick money' was an investment in finding a better marriage partner. Often, women stopped work when their first child was born. Later, they resumed factory labour once or several times to increase household income in order to qualify for mortgages, to pay for their children's higher education or, if marriages had not worked out, to make a living as single mothers. Work in EPZ factories was much more difficult and tiring as they got older. But they knew about differences in working conditions, distinguishing between established factories where pressure on the shop floor was lower, and runaway shops where pressure was high. Piece-rate work in runaway shops offered monthly salaries three times higher, and women would choose to work there if a larger sum of money was needed, being aware of all the difficulties this entailed.

These conscious choices of actors are important for assessing long-term and short-term transactional orders in factory labour. Bloch and Parry's (1989) notion of long-term transactional orders as bound to 'the reproduction of the cosmic and social order' (ibid.: 24), and opposed to short-term transactional orders informed by 'individual competition' (ibid.), falls short of capturing the experiences and motivations of all groups of actors in Mauritius's EPZ. It is tempting to follow their argument that morally questionable income from transactions of a short-term order is in need of 'cosmic purification', and to suggest that, for example, women workers' savings going into dowry

payments or other morally sanctioned marriage-related activities are a purification of this kind. But such an analysis would portray EPZ workers as anxiously maintaining social stability in the same way as an Indian merchant is said to do by Bloch and Parry (*ibid.*: 25), and this understanding would come at a high price. It would imply that all workers are conservative traditionalists who consciously accept that their position becomes morally ambiguous as they enter the EPZ factories. Furthermore, it would mean that anthropology acknowledges the existence of a morally dubious sphere of individual competition and portrays this in the way that the paternalistic Mauritian state, investors and conservative religious groups do when they belittle the relevance of women's income and declare it 'lipstick money'. There is, however, an alternative to this view.

Bloch and Parry's distinction between short-term and long-term transactional orders resembles what Gregory (1980) distinguished respectively as 'gifts-to-men' and 'gifts-to-god' systems. The latter, argued Gregory in the context of Papua New Guinea, offers the 'greatest potential for capital accumulation in the context of a "modern cash economy aimed at development"' (*ibid.*: 627). The affinity between 'gifts-to-god systems' and the notion of long-term transactional orders as I develop it here enables us to see how capitalism operates and thrives in terms of long-term transactional orders. Such an approach to capitalist practice in Mauritius is convincing for various reasons.

It should by now be evident that gender inequality is an important feature of EPZ employment. Discrimination against women is also part of religious and other aspects of Mauritian everyday life, ideologically backed by right-wing groups, the early postcolonial government and capital. This discrimination is, however, contested by women working in EPZ factories. Also, it is contested at the household level, as there was a significant number of households that did not mind their daughters working in EPZ factories. Such differences in opinion and world-view are common in most societies, where conflicts over long-term transactional orders prevail, and neither the predominance of religious beliefs nor of sexism or capitalism goes uncontested. This has to do with inequality. In the Mauritian case, the insistence on the immoral nature of EPZ employment serves the interests of an alliance of political, economic and religious ruling classes who have vested interests in continued inequality among the population.

Economic anthropology knows many examples of societies where people in power have successfully established and continue

to nurture those notions of cosmic and social order that portray the particular social matrix which produces inequality as the natural order of things. One excellent example that helps us understand the patriarchal underpinning of Mauritian EPZ capitalism is Godelier's analysis of the Baruya. Among this Melanesian group, similar relationships between gender inequality and long-term transactional orders are manifest and maintained with the aid of 'sacred objects and secret formulas' (Godelier 2007: 188). These are called *kwaim-atnie* and they serve male elders (and thereby all men) to sustain the fiction of being able to create male life without the aid of women. Rituals, and particularly those rituals signalling the transition from one life cycle to another, were instituted to legitimize and naturalize gender inequality (see Godelier 1999). The developments in the Mauritian EPZ during the 1970s and afterwards can be interpreted in the same way. Events are of course somewhat less dramatic, as the issue in Mauritius is not the creation of life but the reproduction of households via monetary income, for example. Male dominance and female subordination was asserted as the postcolonial state supported the entry of young, lower-class women into factory labour as a rite of passage from adolescence to marriage. Sexist practices such as the 'tit test' can be regarded as rituals marking the entry of women into this sphere.

The material presented so far still carries implications that women accepted factory labour as a rite of passage. Although they made it part of their individual calculus and used some of their income to invest in longer-term reproduction, Mauritian workers still supported the overall workings of flexible EPZ capitalism. The Mauritian EPZ grew rapidly in the 1980s, and the island was awarded labels such as 'Africa's first tiger'. Therefore, some might object that women workers' individual ambitions could be read as compliance with the postcolonial government's aim of developing the nation and employers' aim of making profits. In order to address this question, it is important to assess how factory workers commented on and acted against gendered and capitalist subordination.

### Spirit Possession as a Fight against the Legacy of Colonial Capitalism and Exorcism as a Naturalization of Capitalist Gender Inequality

Analysing a Malaysian EPZ, Ong has described how female factory workers' possession by 'evil spirit[s] of an archaic Malay world'

(Ong 1987: 7) brought factory production to a standstill on a massive scale. To show how such spirits mediate 'the conflict between [non-] capitalist and capitalist modes of objectifying the human condition' (Taussig 1980: xii, cited in Ong 1987: 9), Ong relates workers' possession to disciplining production regimes and to moral discrimination inside and outside EPZ factories. Possession, then, was an act of resistance, expressing what Raymond Williams has called a 'structure of feeling' (cited in Ong 1991: 281), in this case of Malaysian factory workers exposed to flexible capitalism, 'traditional' gender hierarchies and new lifestyle opportunities. As workers were possessed and shut down the production of multi-national corporations, they invoked 'spirits of resistance' to confront a regime that would otherwise not allow them to lay down their work. These spirits could only be expelled by a local *bomob*, a male spirit healer (ibid.: 88). Spirit possession in Malaysian EPZ factories indicates that the employment of women interfered with the long-term transactional order, not least because male religious authorities could control the spirits. The following section reconsiders Ong's observation, and is based on the above critique of Bloch and Parry's Occidental model of transactional orders. It exemplifies how anthropological misrepresentations of EPZ workers as irrational actors locked in traditionalist world-views can be avoided.<sup>7</sup>

Women in Mauritian factories knew how to react to shop-floor pressures. This is evidenced by the 'spirits of resistance' that haunted Mauritian shop floors in the 1970s, which led to similar work stoppages as in the Malaysian factories described by Ong. The two cases I consider offer grounds for comparison within the diverse Mauritian setting. One happened in 1973 in a factory employing mainly workers from an urban setting; the other occurred in 1978 in a factory employing workers from a rural setting.

In 1973, the total number of EPZ workers in Mauritius was around 3,000, and there was only one industrial zone, in Plaine Lauzan, just south of the capital Port Louis, where members of the free-floating working class had been rehoused in the 1960s. One day, machinists in one factory fell to the floor, experiencing cramps and screaming, and claiming they had seen a ghost. They refused to resume work, and perplexed factory managers called for support from a Catholic priest. The workers were mainly Catholic, and the priest called in was an influential figure in everyday life, even though Mauritian Christian churches have always been close allies of the ruling class.

When I spoke with this priest in 2004, he illustrated vividly how upon his arrival he found the Plaine Lauzan factory in a mess.

Although he recited a prayer and gave blessings to workers, panic prevailed. Knowing about the hardships of factory workers, he recommended that the factory close for some days so that everyone could get some rest. During this time he found out that the ghost of a French colonizer who lay buried underneath the factory had haunted the workers. The priest decided an exceptionally strong performance of God's power was needed: an exorcism. But to perform an exorcism and not violate the Vatican ordinance, he needed a psychologist or psychiatrist to confirm that matters went beyond those professions. The priest was a member of a private, upper-class club called Stella Clavisque, and this club's founder was a famous Algerian psychiatrist working in Mauritius.<sup>8</sup> A phone conversation was sufficient to obtain the psychiatrist's go ahead, and the exorcism commenced. In the priest's version of this, all workers and machines were carefully blessed and the ghost was not seen again.

Word spread, and over the following years, the priest was approached for advice on several other cases of spirit possession in factories. Based on what I heard from retired factory managers, the ghosts involved could be those of dead sailors roaming a factory building that had once been a brothel near the harbour, for example. According to the priest, factory managers and local religious authorities quickly became capable of handling spirit possession themselves. Only one other time was he called to exorcise a ghost. This was in a factory in the rural district of Moka. Expanding businesses had opened up subsidiary factories in such regions since the mid 1970s, when cheap labour became scarce in the urban belt around the capital. Inhabitants of the area had different legacies though: dependency on agriculture was high, and rural districts were strongholds of right-wing political and religious movements. Women EPZ workers therefore had to deal with much more rigid moral codes.

In 1978, workers in a large factory in St Pierre encountered a spirit. As word spread and the factory could no longer operate, this medium-sized rural centre and its Hindu inhabitants were in serious turmoil. Speaking in 2004, the Catholic priest recalled, with a certain *schadenfreude*, how local religious authorities – the local Hindu Pandit, the Kusari Tamil, and even a *longaniste* (a kind of freelance spirit healer offering anything from cursing one's neighbour at midnight on the graveyard to healing diseases at noon) – had failed to evict the spirit. As with the case in Plaine Lauzan, the priest 'went in strong' to show the workers that he was 'the man who can face the forces of evil'. But his initial success was jeopardized because factory

operations continued. In Plaine Lauzan, a few days rest were crucial to give workers time off from the 'social revolution' that the establishment of new industries had caused in the 1970s, putting immense physical and psychological strains on women EPZ workers. Proving him right, possession ended once workers were given some leave. In the Moka case, the priest also had to obtain consent from the same psychiatrist to exorcise the ghost. But the priest's recommendation that the haunted factories be closed and workers given rest derived from his awareness that it was a 'social revolution' that put strain on workers' lives, not mean spirits. What are we to make of this apparent contradiction between his expertise and the way his approach was informed?

If spirit possession was a way for workers to resist, then we should consider what workers actually expressed during instances of possession rather than taking them as one of many 'weapons of the weak', as Ong (1987) suggests. Elsewhere I have argued that the spirits appearing in Mauritian factories in the 1970s were 'spirits of capitalism' (Neveling 2006). Here I will extend this understanding and show, on the one hand, how capital, politicians and religious leadership used the appearance of spirits to present a general social problem as an irrational sentiment. On the other hand, the actual comments that workers made amount to a critique of the persistence of capitalism's long-term transactional order. This perspective is suggested by the fact that the concrete possessive spirits (like the French colonizer and the dead sailors mentioned above) were from the same historical reactionary world as EPZ employers, the priests and moralist conservative groups.

Two further accounts appear to consolidate this perspective on spirit possession in the Mauritian EPZ. The first is a novel by the Mauritian writer Lindsey Collen (1991). Although this is a work of fiction, it is authoritative. Collen migrated from South Africa to Mauritius in the early 1970s, and became a leading figure in the *Mouvement Militante Mauricien* (MMM), a hybrid socialist movement influenced by the European uprisings of 1968, as well as anti-colonial and anti-imperialist movements in the Global South. Its union wing, the General Workers' Federation (GWF) organized strikes throughout the 1970s, and the *Muvman Liberasyon Fam* (MLF, 'Women's Liberation Movement') attracted many EPZ workers to the fight against gendered exploitation. In the MLF, Collen met many of those women and made their experiences central to her novel. The main character, Shiny Tiny, encounters sexism, high production pressure, tough working conditions and everything else

that EPZ factories have to offer, not least an exorcism performed by a Catholic priest:

A Roman Catholic Priest who specialized in exorcism was called in as an emergency by the boss. He and his sakristen [minister] arrived. Both were in full fancy dress. Long robes, gold crosses, purple cummerbund and what-nots.

The unconscious Deomala was picked up first by the priest and his assistant, laid on a table, and hit firmly on each side of the jaw.

'O nom di-per, di-fis, di-sen-tespri' [In the name of the father, the son, and the holy ghost].

Sign of the cross.

Deomala came round.

'Next', bawled the priest . . .

The piece rate for that day was drastically slowed down. (ibid.: 144)

Here again, the priest appears firm and as the man who can face evil. But the last sentence indicates a rationality on the workers' part that we have not encountered so far. Collen further recounts how Tit Albert, a common figure in Mauritian superstition, was consciously invoked to lower a day's piece rate and give workers some rest. Both the priest I interviewed and Collen were actively involved in the world of Mauritian EPZ labour throughout the 1970s, and their accounts are surely both fictitious and biased in their respective ways. All the same, we may say that the priest entered the factories on the management's side, and Collen on the side of women workers.

A second account, a survey of newspaper reports on events in the St Pierre factory discussed above, expands on Collen's rendering in this regard, and underlines how workers chose to be possessed by spirits instead of being taken over by them. In that factory, workers had been in a dispute with management over delayed wage payments, bad working conditions and sexual harassment. They had filed their complaints individually with the Ministry of Industrial Relations in accordance with the Industrial Relations Act of 1973. The ministry should then have negotiated on the workers' behalf, but nothing happened.<sup>9</sup> Less than four weeks later, Tit Albert indeed haunted the shop floor. On this, another Mauritian newspaper plainly reported, 'New industrial disease: P'tit albert in a factory in Saint Pierre?'<sup>10</sup> In this case, rather than irrational sentiment or moral outrage marking the transition from a moral economy to one of immoral capitalism, possession was a last resort in an industrial dispute.

My overall point here is that generalizing talk of a social revolution cannot capture such conjunctures as those experienced within single factories (cf. Narotzky, this volume). But neither can many

concepts in anthropology. Thus, for Ong, possession was 'spontaneous, carried out by individual workers independently of each other', and such spontaneity expressed 'the dislocation experienced by peasants in an industrializing world' that was commoditizing their lives (Ong 1987: 210–13). This explanation is actually very close to the images of a social revolution and of a moral order threatened by the advent of EPZ employment that the Catholic priest or conservative Mauritian parliamentarians invoked. Given that commodity production for global markets was a reality for much of the world long before the 1970s, it seems rather odd to sustain a juxtaposition between a moral economy of the peasant and an economy of commodities for this and for earlier decades. As my historical outline of the colonial sugar industry has shown, Mauritius was part of a global plantation complex where disputes over capitalist exploitation as well as 'social revolutions' were common in pre-EPZ times. Equally common were ambiguous and unequal exchanges, as were many other features now portrayed as defining contemporary flexible capitalism.

It is along such lines of historical continuity that spirit possession in Mauritian factories must be read. The appearance of a French colonizer's ghost in the factory in Plaine Lauzan was informed by beliefs in ghosts, of course. Many Mauritians consider burial sites to be 'states of ghosts', ruled by kings who govern the souls of the dead, for example (Jensen 1988). But such imaginings of a hierarchical social order among spiritual beings reflect upon the organization of real-world society, which is likewise spatial in nature because economic power in Mauritius was for long defined by the ownership of land, the main means of production. If EPZ workers then claim that an EPZ factory was erected on the grave of a dead colonizer, they refer to the concrete continuity of exploitation from the days of French rule to the present. A more satisfactory interpretation of events in early 1970s Mauritius would thus be that workers did not perceive EPZ labour relations as contradicting a long-term transactional order, but rather as a continuation of this order. Stated differently, Mauritian workers used spirit possession not to lament a disruption to the social stability of a 'moral' long-term transactional order, but rather to lament a lack of disruption and the continuity of exploitation.

### Conclusion: A Post-Occidental View of (Flexible) Capitalism

The findings from Mauritius presented here challenge widespread assumptions in anthropology that the global expansion of capitalism comes in conflict with stable, long-term transactional orders which are morally sanctioned and grounded in the shared cosmic-religious world-views of given places. Instead, this chapter has shown how such long-term transactional orders and their cosmic foundations are a backbone of capitalist exploitation. Gregory's conception of 'gift-to-gods-systems' exempted, various notions resembling Bloch and Parry's 'long-term transactional order' actually rehearse romantic fictions that are otherwise coined by conservative religious movements. They slight the fact that contemporary workers are descendants of earlier generations of workers who were exposed to similar well-established systems of control and exploitation. Building on Zigon's (2007) call for abandoning a distinction between the moral and the immoral, both capitalist and non-capitalist exchange are moral. Economic morality shifts over time as exploitation is adjusted to a changing global (capitalist) system. Labour regimes such as slavery, indenture and free wage labour rest on particular moralities. Anthropologists might not like any of these regimes – I certainly do not. But if scientific analysis takes on the guise of moralism, this comes at the high cost of misleading juxtapositions of an 'immoral' Western world of capitalism and a 'moral' non-Western world of pre-capitalist societies.

A secular, post-Occidental view avoids such purification of pre-capitalist societies. Instead it considers how capitalist market relations have influenced long-term and short-term transactional orders alike, in Mauritius and elsewhere. Women's investment of their EPZ wages in finding the right spouse, for example, should not be read as efforts to convert income from an 'immoral' capitalist, short-term transactional order into something from a 'moral', long-term transactional order. These, as much as spirit possession, are conscious acts whereby women 'keep sane' (Zigon 2007) in a highly flexible and strenuous work environment.

My insights have further analytical implications for anthropology's analysis of flexible capitalism. In the 1970s, Mauritius was a location for relocation. Because of a lack of attention to such relocations, scholars like Bell and Touraine declared the coming of post-industrial society. But this era was emerging neither in the West

nor at a global level (cf. Nash 1995; Baca 2005). Instead, for many places, the 1970s onwards saw decades of accelerated industrialization driven by national export-oriented development strategies and the opening of EPZs and SEZs (Special Economic Zones). Recently, the International Labour Organization (ILO) counted 3,500 EPZs worldwide, employing more than 60 million workers in more than 130 nations (Boyenge 2007). If anthropologists want to understand individual and collective experiences in these socio-economic settings, they might reconsider how to deal with socio-economic change and the long histories of most regions' integration into the capitalist world system. As I have argued, to portray a given locations' inhabitants as holding on to a moral economy of the peasant or to long-term transactional orders in the sense of Bloch and Parry (1989) does them no justice. When workers contest flexible capitalist practice, they may effectively equate such practice with a cosmic-religious, long-term transactional order. I have shown that such equations are pertinent, for example, where gendered exploitation is a crucial feature of the long-term transactional order of global capitalism (other economic practices, as seen for the Baruya, bear resonance with the general perspective I have outlined). The concrete appearance of such long-term transactional orders may vary according to a given region's changing integration into global markets. But everywhere this integration is based on long-standing collaboration between local economic, political and religious leaders and their well-established alliances in wider trading networks. It is such alliances and their backbone in moralist and religious ideologies and practices of capitalism's long-term transactional orders that many people in the world contest, and even hope to overcome.

### Acknowledgements

Research in Mauritius was carried out in 2003 and 2004 and funded by the Martin-Luther-University, Halle-Wittenberg. I am particularly indebted to the members of the Mauritian political party Lalit ('Struggle') and to the members of Ledikasyon pu travayer ('Education for workers') who generously supported my search for historical incidents of spirit possession. May there be a day when they see their dream of a truly postcolonial Mauritius come true. In Halle, Burkhard Schnepel has been a source of intellectual stimulation. His reminders that religion is an important dimension of global capitalism have been very influential on my work. I would like to

thank Rosie Read for her thought-provoking comments on this, as well as Jens Kjaerulff, who has been the most generous editor one could wish for. Also, comments from three anonymous reviewers have been helpful, albeit to different extents.

### Notes

- 1 Allen (1999) is the most prominent among historians supporting what I suggest to call 'the myth of the small-planters'. Teelock instead concludes on the *morcellement*, 'whether it was a "liberation", as has been stated, is a matter of further discussion' (Teelock 2001: 303).
- 2 Social anthropology has so far represented Mauritius as an island society whose main feature is ethnic and religious division. See Neveling (forthcoming) for a critique; Schnepel (2005) shows the multifariousness of identifications in the present. Accordingly, mainly ethno-religious ritual practices have so far been considered, and rituals related to economic activities have been ignored (e.g. Labour Day or La Coupe).
- 3 Debates of the Legislative Assembly of Mauritius, Third Session, Third Legislative Assembly, 10th March–30th June 1970, Debates Nos. 1–19, Vol. 1 (Port Louis: Authority of the Assembly, Mauritius Government Printer, 1970), pp. 1244–56.
- 4 Debates of the Legislative Assembly, pp. 939–45.
- 5 See e.g. 'La Floreal Knitwear Ltd. investit Rs. 225,000 dans l'entraînement des ses employés', *L'Express*, 23 June 1971.
- 6 Note that the total labour force in 1972 was around 139,000, according to Hein (1984). This would be a sharp decline from more than 200,000 in 1958, and seems unlikely given that those were years of population increase.
- 7 Parry has argued that this spirit possession indicates how women workers struggle with 'men and industry' rather than with capitalism (Parry 2005: 149–51). As I have shown above, it is not viable to distinguish between 'men and industry' on the one hand and capitalism on the other, particularly not for the case of EPZs, which build on the devaluation of women's labour and on gendered exploitation on a global scale. In my view, Parry's juxtaposition of capitalism and gender rather mirrors his earlier distinction between short-term and long-term transactional orders, introducing yet another normative distinction to the social and political practice of resistance.
- 8 The club's name means 'the star and the key', referring to Mark Twain's 1897 labelling of Mauritius as 'the star and the key to the Indian Ocean' (from Latin, *Stella Clavisque Maris Indici*).
- 9 See *L'Express*, 2 September 1978.
- 10 'Nouveau malaise industriel: P'tit albert dans une usine à Saint Pierre?' *The Nation*, 27 September 1978.

## References

- Allen, R.B. 1999. *Slaves, Freedmen, and Indentured Laborers in Colonial Mauritius*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Allgoo, R. 1985. *Le mouvement syndical à l'île Maurice*. Port Louis: Artisans and General Workers' Union.
- Baca, G. 2005. 'Legends of Fordism: Between Myth, History, and Foregone Conclusions', in B. Kapferer (ed.), *The Retreat of the Social: The Rise and Rise of Reductionism*. Oxford: Berghahn Books, pp. 31–46.
- Bell, D. 1973. *The Coming of Post-Industrial Society: A Venture in Social Forecasting*. New York: Basic Books.
- Bloch, M., and J. Parry. 1989. 'Introduction: Money and the Morality of Exchange', in J. Parry and M. Bloch (eds), *Money and the Morality of Exchange*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, pp. 1–32.
- Boyenge, J.-P. S. 2007. 'ILO Database on Export Processing Zones (Revised)', ILO Working Paper No. 251. Geneva: International Labour Organization.
- Carrier, J.G. 1992. 'Occidentalism: The World Turned Upside-Down', *American Ethnologist* 19(2): 195–212.
- Collen, L. 1991. *There Is a Tide*. Port Louis: Ledikasyon pu Travayer.
- Cross, J. 2012. 'Sweatshop Exchanges: Gifts and Giving in the Global Factory', *Research in Economic Anthropology* 32: 3–26.
- Dicken, P. 2003. *Global Shift: Reshaping the Global Economic Map in the 21st Century*, 4th edn. London: Sage.
- Fernández-Kelly, M.P. 1983. *For We Are Sold, I and My People: Women and Industry in Mexico's Frontier*. Albany: State University of New York Press.
- Forget, P.A. 1983. *Wishing a Future for the EPZ Is Not Enough*. Port Louis: Mauritius Commercial Bank.
- Fröbel, F., J. Heinrichs and O. Kreye. 1981. *The New International Division of Labour: Structural Unemployment in Industrialised Countries and Industrialisation in Developing Countries*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Godelier, M. 1999. *The Enigma of the Gift*. Cambridge: Polity Press.
- 2007. 'Death of a Celebrated Truth and Others Still Worth Restating', *Journal de la Société des Océanistes* 125(2): 181–192.
- Gregory, C.A. 1980. 'Gifts to Men and Gifts to God: Gift Exchange and Capital Accumulation in Contemporary Papua', *Man* 15(4): 626–652.
- Harvey, D. 1990. *The Condition of Postmodernity: An Enquiry into the Origins of Cultural Change*. Oxford: Blackwell.
- Hein, C. 1984. 'Jobs for the Girls: Export Manufacturing in Mauritius', *International Labour Review* 123: 251–265.
- Jensen, J. 1988. 'Synkretismus und Religiöse Konfession auf Mauritius', *Sociologus* 38: 1–18.
- Kim, S.-K. 1997. *Class Struggle or Family Struggle? The Lives of Women Factory Workers in South Korea*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

- Meade, J.E. 1961. *The Economic and Social Structure of Mauritius (Report to the Governor of Mauritius)*. London: Methuen.
- Nash, J. 1995. 'Post-industrialism, Post-Fordism, and the Crisis in World Capitalism', in F. C. Gamst (ed.), *Meanings of Work: Considerations for the Twenty-first Century*. Albany: State University of New York Press, pp. 189–211.
- Neveling, P. 2006. 'Spirits of Capitalism and the De-alienation of Workers: A Historical Perspective on the Mauritian Garment Industry', Graduate School Societies and Cultures in Motion Working Paper Series No 2. University of Halle, Germany.
- 2012. 'Manifestationen der Globalisierung: Kapital, Staat und Arbeit in Mauritius, 1825–2005', PhD diss. Halle: Institute for Social Anthropology, Martin Luther University.
- 2013. 'A Periodisation of Globalisation According to the Mauritian Integration into the International Sugar Commodity Chain (1825–2005)', in J. Curry-Machado (ed.), *Global Histories, Imperial Commodities, Local Interactions*. Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, pp. 121–142.
- 2014. 'Structural Contingencies and Untimely Coincidences in the Making of Neoliberal India: The Kandla Free Trade Zone 1965–1991', *Contributions to Indian Sociology* 48(1): 17–43.
- forthcoming. 'Export Processing Zones and Global Class Formation', in J. Carrier and D. Kalb (eds), *Anthropologies of Class: Power, Practice, and Inequality*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- North-Coombes, M.D. 2000. *Studies in the Political Economy of Mauritius*. Moka, Mauritius: Mahatma Gandhi Institute.
- Ong, A. 1987. *Spirits of Resistance and Capitalist Discipline: Factory Women in Malaysia*. Albany: State University of New York Press.
- 1991. 'The Gender and Labor Politics of Postmodernity', *Annual Review of Anthropology* 20: 279–309.
- Parry, J.P. 2005. 'Industrial Work', in J. Carrier (ed.), *A Handbook of Economic Anthropology*. Cheltenham: Edward Elgar Publishing, pp. 141–159.
- Safa, H.I. 1995. *The Myth of the Male Breadwinner: Women and Industrialization in the Caribbean*. Boulder, CO: Westview Press.
- Schnepel, B. 2005. 'Inder auf Reisen', in K. Geisenhauer and K. Lange (eds), *Bewegliche Horizonte*. Leipzig: Leipziger Universitätsverlag, pp. 165–183.
- Scott, J.C. 1976. *The Moral Economy of the Peasant: Rebellion and Subsistence in Southeast Asia*. New Haven: Yale University Press.
- Strangleman, T. 2007. 'The Nostalgia for Permanence at Work? The End of Work and Its Commentators', *Sociological Review* 55(1): 81–103.
- Taussig, M.T. 1980. *The Devil and Commodity Fetishism in South America*. Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press.
- Teelock, V. 1998. *Bitter Sugar: Sugar and Slavery in 19th Century Mauritius*. Moka, Mauritius: Mahatma Gandhi Institute.

- . 2001. *Mauritian History: From Its Beginnings to Modern Times*. Moka, Mauritius: Mahatma Gandhi Institute.
- Touraine, A. 1971. *The Post-Industrial Society: Tomorrow's Social History*. New York: Random House.
- World Bank. 1973. 'Mauritius, Appraisal of the Coromandel Industrial Estate'. Washington: Development Finance Companies Department, World Bank.
- Zigon, J. 2007. 'Moral Breakdown and Ethical Demand: A Theoretical Framework for an Anthropology of Moralities', *Anthropological Theory* 7(2): 131–150.

## 8

### The Corrosion of Character Revisited Rethinking Uncertainty and Flexibility

*Jens Kjaerulff*

Richard Sennett's *The Corrosion of Character* (Sennett 1998) is a widely cited contribution to a body of literature which has emerged over the past couple of decades on the social dimensions of recent trends in economic practice. Concisely stated, a major concern in this literature, and pre-eminently in Sennett's book, has been with the ways in which new practices of flexibility ostensibly bring about unprecedented experiences of uncertainty. In her introduction to a special issue of *Ethnos* focused on 'risk', Boholm nicely summarizes this concern:

A central thought . . . is that modern society has entered a new phase in its historical development. Industrial production and the market assume novel structural features emerging from the mobility of capital, people and technology over the globe. Traditional social relationships, groupings and identities erode along with the progression of late modernity . . . The embeddedness of the individual in a firm order of meanings and expectations is disappearing. Certainty has given way to uncertainty, resulting in a state of collapsing ontological security and a sense of fundamental vulnerability and lack of faith. (Boholm 2003: 157)

Likewise, in a more recent review concentrated specifically on key contributions to newer studies in the sociology of work, Strangleman observes:

There is a shared view . . . that capitalism has changed profoundly in terms of the speeding up of social and cultural change. Capital now demands greater flexibility and pliability . . . The kind of economy that

## EASA Series

Published in Association with the European Association of Social Anthropologists (EASA)  
Series Editor: Eeva Berglund, Helsinki University

Social anthropology in Europe is growing, and the variety of work being done is expanding. This series is intended to present the best of the work produced by members of the EASA, both in monographs and in edited collections. The studies in this series describe societies, processes, and institutions around the world and are intended for both scholarly and student readership.

### 1. LEARNING FIELDS

#### *Volume 1*

Educational Histories of European Social Anthropology  
Edited by Dorle Dracklé, Iain R. Edgar and Thomas K. Schippers

### 2. LEARNING FIELDS

#### *Volume 2*

Current Policies and Practices in European Social Anthropology Education  
Edited by Dorle Dracklé and Iain R. Edgar

### 3. GRAMMARS OF IDENTITY/ALTERITY

#### A Structural Approach

Edited by Gerd Baumann and Andre Gingrich

### 4. MULTIPLE MEDICAL REALITIES

Patients and Healers in Biomedical, Alternative and Traditional Medicine  
Edited by Helle Johannessen and Imre Lázár

### 5. FRACTURING RESEMBLANCES

Identity and Mimetic Conflict in Melanesia and the West  
Simon Harrison

### 6. SKILLED VISIONS

Between Apprenticeship and Standards  
Edited by Cristina Grasseni

### 7. GOING FIRST CLASS?

New Approaches to Privileged Travel and Movement  
Edited by Vered Amit

### 8. EXPLORING REGIMES OF DISCIPLINE

The Dynamics of Restraint  
Edited by Noel Dyck

### 9. KNOWING HOW TO KNOW

Fieldwork and the Ethnographic Present  
Edited by Narmala Halstead, Eric Hirsch and Judith Okely

### 10. POSTSOCIALIST EUROPE

Anthropological Perspectives from Home  
Edited by László Kürti and Peter Skalník

### 11. ETHNOGRAPHIC PRACTICE IN THE PRESENT

Edited by Marit Melhuus, Jon P. Mitchell and Helena Wulff

### 12. CULTURE WARS

Context, Models and Anthropologists' Accounts  
Edited by Deborah James, Evelyn Plaice and Christina Toren

### 13. POWER AND MAGIC IN ITALY

Thomas Hauschild

### 14. POLICY WORLDS

Anthropology and Analysis of Contemporary Power  
Edited by Cris Shore, Susan Wright and Davide Però

### 15. HEADLINES OF NATION, SUBTEXTS OF CLASS

Working Class Populism and the Return of the Repressed in Neoliberal Europe  
Edited by Don Kalb and Gabor Halmi

### 16. ENCOUNTERS OF BODY AND SOUL IN CONTEMPORARY RELIGIOUS PRACTICES

Anthropological Reflections  
Edited by Anna Fedele and Ruy Llera Blanes

### 17. CARING FOR THE 'HOLY LAND'

Filipina Domestic Workers in Israel  
Claudia Liebelt

### 18. ORDINARY LIVES AND GRAND SCHEMES

An Anthropology of Everyday Religion  
Edited by Samuli Schielke and Liza Debevec

### 19. LANDSCAPES BEYOND LAND

Routes, Aesthetics, Narratives  
Edited by Arnar Arnason, Nicolas Ellison, Jo Vergunst and Andrew Whitehouse

### 20. CYBERIDENTITIES AT WAR

The Moluccan Conflict on the Internet  
Birgit Bräuchler

### 21. FAMILY UPHEAVAL

Generation, Mobility and Relatedness Among Pakistani Migrants in Denmark  
Mikkel Rytter

### 22. PERIPHERAL VISION

Politics, Technology, and Surveillance  
Catarina Frois

### 23. BEING HUMAN, BEING MIGRANT

Senses of Self and Well-Being  
Edited by Anne Sigfrid Grønseth

### 24. BEING A STATE AND STATES OF BEING IN HIGHLAND GEORGIA

Florian Mühlfried

### 25. FLEXIBLE CAPITALISM

Exchange and Ambiguity at Work  
Edited by Jens Kjaerulff

# FLEXIBLE CAPITALISM

## Exchange and Ambiguity at Work

*Edited by Jens Kjaerulff*



berghahn  
NEW YORK • OXFORD  
www.berghahnbooks.com

Published in 2015 by  
Berghahn Books  
www.berghahnbooks.com

©2015 Jens Kjaerulff

All rights reserved. Except for the quotation of short passages for the purposes of criticism and review, no part of this book may be reproduced in any form or by any means, electronic or mechanical, including photocopying, recording, or any information storage and retrieval system now known or to be invented, without written permission of the publisher.

**Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data**

Flexible capitalism: exchange and ambiguity at work / edited by Jens Kjaerulff.

pages cm. -- (EASA series; 25)

Includes bibliographical references and index.

ISBN 978-1-78238-615-5 (hardback) -- ISBN 978-1-78238-616-2 (ebook) 1. Work environment--Social aspects. 2. Adaptability (Psychology) 3. Interpersonal relations. 4. Capitalism--Social aspects. I. Kjaerulff, Jens.

HD6955.F585 2015

331.2--dc23

2014033555

**British Library Cataloguing in Publication Data**

A catalogue record for this book is available from the British Library

ISBN: 978-1-78238-615-5 (hardback)

E-ISBN: 978-1-78238-616-2 (ebook)

## Contents

Acknowledgements	vii
Introduction <i>Jens Kjaerulff</i>	1
1 Everybody Gives: Gifts in the Global Factory <i>Jamie Cross</i>	43
2 Unveiling the Work of the Gift: Neoliberalism and the Flexible Margins of the Nation-State <i>Tinna Grétarsdóttir</i>	66
3 Flexibility Frictions: Economies of Connection in Contemporary Forms of Work <i>Christina Garsten</i>	93
4 Taking Over the Gift: The Circulation and Exchange of Options, Labour and 'Lucky Money' in Alberta's Oil and Gas Industry <i>Caura Wood</i>	116
5 How to Stay Entangled in a World of Flows: Flexible Subjects and Mobile Knowledge in the New Media Industries <i>Hannah Knox</i>	146
6 The Payoff of Love and the Traffic of Favours: Reciprocity, Social Capital and the Blurring of Value Realms in Flexible Capitalism <i>Susana Narotzky</i>	173

7 Flexible Capitalism and Transactional Orders in Colonial and Postcolonial Mauritius: A Post-Occidental View <i>Patrick Neveling</i>	207
8 The Corrosion of Character Revisited: Rethinking Uncertainty and Flexibility <i>Jens Kjaerulff</i>	235
9 Afterword: Exchange and Corporate Forms Today <i>Keir Martin</i>	261
Notes on Contributors	277
Index	281

## Acknowledgements

This volume has been long in the making. Early in the process, Jakob Krause-Jensen was my collaborator. As the project gradually took firmer shape, however, Jakob regrettably had to withdraw due to too many other commitments. I want in the first instance to acknowledge Jakob's considerable share in conceptualizing the project and getting it underway. Daniel Miller and Susan Wright also offered generous input at this early stage of the project.

The leap from project to book owes much to James G. Carrier. In his capacity as editor for the book series of the European Association of Social Anthropologists (EASA), James suggested that we converted our ideas into a book proposal for the EASA series. Ever since, James has been immensely helpful and encouraging, through what turned out to be a long and challenging process. The biggest thank you of all must surely go to James.

In my effort towards assembling the collection and shaping the project I have also benefited from exchanges with a number of other colleagues, only some of whom can be listed here. During a temporary lectureship I held in social anthropology at the University of Manchester, Chris Gregory and Karen Sykes were very generous with their time and attention to my queries extending from the project. For pointed commentary on draft versions of my introduction, I thank Hannah Knox, Jakob Krause-Jensen, Keir Martin, Susana Narotzky, Patrick Neveling, Karen Sykes and Louise Takeda. Acknowledgements also go to Berghahn's anonymous readers and editorial staff, who at different stages provided shrewd feedback. Shortcomings of course are owing to me.

Last, I want to acknowledge some less direct but profound influences underlying my own involvement in the project. Ton Otto's exemplary mentorship during my PhD years helped shape my continued interest in 'work' as a topic of anthropological enquiry. While