

*Review*

# Reconceptualising the African state in the strategic relational approach: A case of Mauritius state and trade policy-making

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The view of a crisis of the nation-state in Africa has culminated into a number of emerging solutions most of which do not adequately address the relationship between political actors and the state. Central to the examination of African states is the wide usage of the concept of neo-patrimonial state – a concept criticised for inadequately explaining African states. This paper seeks to reconceptualise the existence of African states as structures – that is the contexts within which political actors formulate socio-economic policies and pursue strategies for economic and social development; laying the basis for engagement in the international political economy. Giving an example of Mauritian trade policy-making, the paper argues that trade policy is a political output decided by human actors in the context of state structures that favour certain actors as they engage in a deliberative and consultative manner. The author also argues that this has created a ‘deliberative democratic developmental state’ that retains the sovereignty to provide contexts for trade making-policy that forms the basis for engagement in the international trade system.

**Key words:** Mauritius, strategic relational approach, African state, neo-patrimonial, deliberative democratic developmental state, trade policy-making.

## INTRODUCTION

A lot of literature on the engagement of African countries in the international political economy is without much consideration of the domestic processes of policy-making that contribute to our understanding about how these countries engage with the rest of the world. Yet examinations of these domestic processes and the contexts in which a number of actors besides political leaders (political leaders, elites, private sectors representatives and civil society representatives) interact reveal considerable insight on how some African countries relate with the international political economy the way they do. It becomes important to address the gap between policy-making and its influence on engagement in the international political economy. Leftwich and Hogg (2007), and Leftwich and Wheeler (2011) have identified this gap in worldwide thinking on policy and the important role played by leaders, elites and government coalitions in the politics of development. However our understanding of the policy-making processes is dependent on

our conceptualisation of African states. Yet the views on the crisis of the nation-state in Africa have not so far been conclusive and remain largely divergent with a number of solutions emerging – solutions which have not been able to shed much light on policy-making processes. Central to the examination of African states is the wide usage of the concept of neo-patrimonialism – a concept that has been under considerable criticism in recent years and indeed a concept that does not give us much in terms of policy-making analysis. This paper seeks to try and reconceptualise African states as structures – that is contexts within which actors formulate socio-economic policies and pursue strategies for economic and social development as they relate with the state. This allows us a greater understanding on how different African states make policy, the actors involved and in some instances how the policy relates with the world at large.

Bearing the afore-mentioned in mind, one will use the strategic relational approach (SRA) as elaborated by Hay

(1995, 1996, 2002, 2004) and Jessop (1990, 2000, 2004a, b, 2007) to examine and explain economic policy-making in Mauritius. The author focuses on Mauritius because of three main considerations. First, Mauritius' atypical characteristics within an African context, (for example, absence of neo-patrimonial forms of governance, relatively higher per capita income, a strong capable and relatively autonomous bureaucracy) makes it a good example of none neo-patrimonial state. Second, Mauritius offers an example of an African country that in spite of what Bunwaree (2001: 3) calls "entrenched dependency" has paved its way up the development ladder to be classified as a middle income country albeit through open trade policy – earning a status as a development 'superstar' (Mukand and Rodrik, 2005; Brautigam and Diolle, 2009). Third, Mauritius unlike other African countries has a long history of collaboration between government and private sector in trade policy-making and engagement in the international political economy. However this does not mean that all aspects of the Mauritian case can be generalisable to Africa but it is a suitable case in that it tells us something about Africa and not everything – making it a useful case study.<sup>1</sup> Giving Mauritian trade policy-making as an example, the paper argues that trade policy-making in Mauritius is not an output of political leaders alone but an outcome of deliberation and interaction between various actors and the context in which they find themselves. The author argues that Mauritian trade policy is a political output decided by policy makers, negotiators, political elites, diplomats, civil society representatives and business representatives through a process of deliberation and interaction albeit state structural constraints faced by these actors in making such decisions. This, as it will be argued ensures that those actors negotiating and promoting the development of the political economy of Mauritius in the World Trade Organization (WTO) act in accordance with wider societal interests (intended or otherwise) and act to advance the development of Mauritius' political economy. Since this work is examining Mauritius' engagement in the WTO my analysis focuses on the period beginning 1995 (when the WTO was created) to the present. This work uses new qualitative evidence to support my argument, which has been drawn from personal accounts of Mauritian diplomats, policy-makers, business and civil society obtained from speeches, written accounts and elite interviews. Interviews have been carried out in order to ascertain, collaborate and help in the interpretation of the information found in documents and other sources – in a way confirming the information from these sources as well as add new empirical information. The article is structured as follows; argument for reconceptualising African states that will be used to identify the Mauritian state; argument that the

Mauritian state provides social, economic and political conditions for policy makers, negotiators, political leaders/elites, diplomats, civil society representatives and business representatives to decide on policy albeit on uneven terrain; argument that under such conditions the political elites have limited control over policy formation and impact on authority over the state; to examine the deliberative and consultative nature of domestic actors and political processes and their influence on Mauritian trade policy-making; conclusion was made by noting that the Mauritian trade policy is an outcome of deliberation and interaction between a numbers of actors within an uneven state terrain. Trade policy as such is an outcome of inter-subjectivity taking into account interests of various stakeholders to try and transform the state to what they see fit in meeting (whether intended or otherwise) the wider aspirations/interests of Mauritians.

## RECONCEPTUALISING THE AFRICAN STATE

Jackson (1987, 1990), and Clapham (1996, 1998) have given strong arguments describing African states as 'quasi-states' which cannot meet the criteria for statehood. This view is an outcome of attributing the failure of the African nation-states to the continent's colonial past which created artificial boundaries (Jackson, 1987, 1990; Jackson and Roseberg, 1982; Martin, 2000; Nnoli, 2000; Christopher 1997). This in a way created what Jackson (1987) called 'juridical artifacts' of international law and politics of an 'anti-colonial ideology of self-determination' – (Buzdugan, 2009). Christopher (1997) goes further to argue on the emergence of 'collapsed states' in the post-colonial and post Cold War era due to the revival of ethnic identities. Such developments have contributed to a diminishing state presence in the 1990s that signifies the passing of post-colonial states in Africa – heralding a multitude of actors, war lords, civil society, religious groups, women's groups, individuals, private sector, informal traders etc (Young, 2004). Ellis (2005) calls such states 'failed states.' Yet we can still talk about the existence of African states which in most instances are different given their different socio-economic and political conditions.

Moreover, a weak state does not entail conflict but the inability to promote economic development in a given country (Hare and Davis, 2006). A view supported by Khan (2004), and Ndulu and O'Connell (1999) who argue that a failed state is when the ruling elites and other elite groups get hold of assets and enrich themselves at the expense of the society and are not bothered to engage in productive accumulation. A successful state on the other hand is when the elite accumulate assets and use them for the economic development of the country. Again Van Wyk (2007) emphasises the characteristics of weak states in terms of structural inequality comprising of economic differentiation, cultural inequality and political inequality. Acknowledging the existence of inequality in

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<sup>1</sup> Gerring (2004) argues that a single case study should not only focus on elements that are generalisable in order to avoid being narrow and misleading.

African states Engelbert (2000) attributes this to the post-colonial African state not being an outcome of a 'social contract', 'instrument of collective action' nor based on a common ideology but the adoption of neo-patrimonial policies. However these various interpretations on the weakness or strength of states threaten coherent analysis. A possible solution is provided by Jessop (2000) when he suggests we allow more 'variability in state capacities by policy areas over time and specific conjunctures' which calls for the use of the SRA as will be shown later in the paper.<sup>2</sup>

In its usage in the African context, neo-patrimonialism entails the furtherance of personal interest of the political elite through often the employment of coercive instruments of state to monopolize power and deny or restrict political rights and opportunities to other groups (Akokpari, 2004; Taylor, 2007; Taylor and Williams, 2008). Looking at the political culture in West Africa, Taylor and Williams (2008) are convinced that the elites are concerned about neo-patrimonial regime protection rather than democratic and human centred concerns. On the other hand Akokpari (2004) and Davies (2010) argue to the effect that Structural Adjustment Programmes (SAPs) and the benefits coming with multiparty states have helped entrench neo-patrimonialism. As argued by Nabudere (2000: 30) that SAPs saw the 'down-sizing' of the African post-colonial state that meant the erosion of the state's role as a 'defender and promoter of "national" interests and the "social agenda" and contract.' Instead there was an adoption of policies that are against the interests of the majority of the population. As a result, African states have 'failed to mature into nation-states' remaining at the level of 'imagined communities.' However such views on African states concentrate on the ability of state managers to independently exercise power without influence from the state and other non-state forces. It elevates the 'causal primacy of agency over structure' (Hay, 2006). Yet a closer look reveals the influence of a variety of agents such as individuals, pressure groups and social movements on the managers of the state let alone the 'complex and ever changing relationship between the state and society, the public and the private' (Hay and Lister, 2006).

At the same time the argument that neo-patrimonial regimes dominate African countries (Taylor, 2005, 2007; Akokpari, 2004; and Davies, 2010) might be erroneous. As argued by Pitcher et al. (2009: 128) that it produces a kind of 'African exceptionalism in political science literature' that provides a 'convenient catch-all concept' for African poor economic performance. Indeed Chazan et al. (1992: 250) think the neo-patrimonialists have depicted a view of Africa that is 'simultaneously well documented and brutal.' This according to Lumumba-

Kasongo (2002) has contributed to the negative perception of African states as weak, failed and conflict ridden which has become part of the dominant scholarship in the West.<sup>3</sup> Such a perception contributes to the weakening of a critical understanding of the different African states. Indeed Fukuyama (2005) warns against stateness being provided from outside because of the potential of undermining the ability of domestic actors to create their own effective institutions. As such grouping the types of neo-patrimonialisms together obscures the empirically varying degrees of badness as presented by each regime (Van Gool and Beekers, 2010). As Brautigam and Diolle (2009) argue, one way to understand leadership is to examine the way structure choices for national political leadership. As such neo-patrimonialism is created contingently by political actors in social, political and economic conditions in which they are situated (Van Gool and Beekers, 2010).

Moreover, the use of the terms patrimonial and neo-patrimonial in the context of Africa has been seen to be conceptually problematic and a misreading of Weber (Pitcher et al., 2009). For Pitcher et al., in its Weberian sense the term patrimonial refers to a legitimate type of authority and not a type of regime. This type of authority includes 'notions of reciprocity and voluntary compliance between the rulers and the ruled' that allows the ruled to check on the actions of the rulers (Ibid) – an aspect that is overlooked by neo-patrimonialism in the context of Africa. It becomes difficult to ascertain which African states meet the neo-patrimonial concept unless backed by evidence. As a result there is need to move away from these misrepresentations, only to invoke the patrimonial and neo-patrimonial concepts when supported by evidence and allow a comparative analysis of Africa states with states elsewhere (Pitcher et al., 2009). Again as argued by Sangampam (1993), African states are not any different from most post-colonial states in Asia and Latin America and should not be viewed differently. Such a view by Sangampam tends to invalidate the causal link between the softness of the African state and its socio-economic features. Given such inadequacies about the neo-patrimonial state, it is important to examine different states individually. This will allow a movement away from the use of the neo-patrimonial term as 'handy labels to describe leaders, regimes and systems' (Pitcher et al., 2009: 130). Instead we are able to identify a particular state for the purposes of a particular analysis.

This need for a rethink on the term neo-patrimonialism also comes in the wake of the renaissance of African leadership and the proliferation of actors challenging the state and its authority of power (Van Wyk, 2007; Akokpari, 2004). This comes as no surprise in view of the changing configuration of the ruling elite in most African countries following the conjecture of changes in the global economic environment (Tyalor, 2001; Taylor and

<sup>2</sup> The SRA in state theorising according to Jessop (2007) is an ongoing project so much that the changing nature of the state and state power continues to bring new theoretical and empirical problems for strategic-relational analysts to address, which is the case in its application to Africa in this paper.

<sup>3</sup> This perception is also shared by African scholars such as Nabudere (2000), Nnoli (2000), and Cheru (2002).

Nel, 2002; Kotze` and Steyn, 2003).<sup>4</sup> Moreover the composition of the configuration of the ruling elite differs with societies (Leftwich, 2010). Given such changes it is fitting to rethink the neo-patrimonial state. Indeed Taylor (2006) on looking at the prosecution of past presidency in Zambia and Kenya offers a challenge to the neo-patrimonial scholarship that suggest embedded corruption in the African presidency. Taylor argues for the emergence of new norms and mechanisms of accountability in nascent democracies which besides facing constraints explain the changing state structures in emerging democracies.<sup>5</sup> As suggested by Leon (2010), that the 'big man rulers' are facing demise owing to the creeping of liberal democratic values on the continent – helping to create a 'nuanced picture of Africa'<sup>6</sup> Such views support the argument for re-examining African states in relation to the changes taking place within and outside Africa.

Bearing the afore-mentioned debate in mind it is important that we try and adopt a differentiated understanding of African states and examine them as 'social constructs consciously brought about by political actors and societies' (Mkandawire, 2001: 310). As acknowledged by Taylor and Williams (2008: 147) that the state is not a 'homogenous and monolithic creation' but is a 'social construct' influenced by the 'societal soil in which it tries to take root and develop.' Dowden (2008) also acknowledges this view noting that African states are different and different leaders are a product of their societies. Englebert and Tull (2006) also see the need for state differentiation noting the importance of country-specific characteristics especially as guarantors of domestic and international political order. Such observations call for the reconceptualisation of African states for us to be able to examine their policy-making processes that form the basis of their engagement in the international system – especially in view of the changing global environment. This re-conceptualisation of the African state must highlight the divergent roles of the state which pre-existing literature tend not to emphasise – one such role is that African states present different contexts in which human actors interact as they relate with the state. It is therefore important to understand the contextual role of political elites that occur within given configurations of power, authority and legitimacy that is shaped by the structure (Leftwich, 2010; Von Doepp, 2009).

Acknowledging the controversies in identifying African states the author propose the use of the SRA as elaborated by Hay (1995, 1996, 2002, 2004) and Jessop

(1990, 2000, 2001, 2004a, b, 2007) as an alternative lens for identifying and examining African states. This is because the approach allows us to see states as different structures with different socio-cultural, economic and political contexts. The SRA starts from the premise that structures and agents are mutually constitutive and their interaction is not reducible so as to treat structural and agential factors separately – inseparable analytically and interwoven practically (Hay, 1995, 2002.). According to Hay (2002: 94) structure entails "context and refers to the setting within which social, political and economic events occur and acquire meaning"; and agency refers to action or 'political conduct', which entails the "ability or capacity of an actor to act consciously, and in so doing, to attempt to realize his or her intentions." A definition shared by McAnulla (2002: 271-291) that structure refers to "context; to the material conditions which define the range of actions available to actors" and agency refers to "individual or group ability to effect their environment". For Hay (2004: 3) "it is agency – the capacity of actors to exercise genuine choice in a given context – that is the key to the complexity of social and political systems." However agency is exercised on an uneven terrain preferring some interests over others. As such SRA is an attempt to examine 'structure in relation to action and action in relation to structure' (Jessop, 2001: 1223) making us able to identify a strategic actor within a strategically selective context' (Hay, 2002). This means analytically structures are treated as strategic in their 'own form, content, and operation, and actions are thereby treated analytically as structured, more or less context sensitive, and structuring' (Jessop, 2001: 1223). Thus structure and agency are dialectically related (Hay, 2002; Jessop, 2007), providing us the "very conditions of social and political interaction" (Hay, 1995:192). At the same time structures have no meaning outside 'specific agents' who look for 'specific strategies' (Jessop, 1990, 2001, 2004a, 2004b, 2007 and Hay 2006). However in the interaction between structure and actors given structures may benefit some actors, identities, strategies and actions over others when choosing a course of action (Hay, 1995, 2002; Jessop, 1990, 2001, 2004b). In this instance SRA treats social phenomena in terms of social relations.

For example if we look at African states as a structures then the states provide us 'the very conditions of social and political interaction' (Hay, 1995) – where politics is exercised as 'a process of governing an activity or range of activities' that are made 'meaningful, significant and worth investigation by virtue of the context' in which politics occur (Hay and Marsh, 1999: 7). This brings us to the importance of SRA in explaining African states. Admittedly there has been a diversity of state theories which give us a diverse understanding of the state. As such the state has meant a 'variety of different things in a variety of different perspectives' (Hay and Lister, 2006: 4). However despite such diversity there is a general agreement that the state 'is fundamental to social, poli-

<sup>4</sup> Leftwich (2009) argues that the concept of elite is 'spongy and porous and elusive to pin down empirically with membership changing overtime as people come and go.

<sup>5</sup> Van Wyk (2007) argues that two out of every five African countries was regarded as democratic.

<sup>6</sup> This view does not in any way assume the total demise of semi-authoritarian and authoritarian states which tend to be neo-patrimonial in Africa but it would be of merit if states are examined individually.

tical and economic analysis' (Ibid: 1). In this paper, the Mauritian state is looked at not as a distinct form of authority that is independent of the actors who give effect to its power as argued by the neo-patrimonial approach that looks at the state as synonymous to the rulers or state managers. Instead an approach is looked for that allows us to examine the relationship between the state, society and actors. As argued by Jessop (2007: 1) that the state and political systems are parts of 'broader ensemble of social relations' and the state cannot be fully described without reference to the 'differential articulation with this ensemble.'

Hay and Lister (2006) in their search for 'family resemblance' in the theories of the state show how these theories (particularly pluralism, elite theory and Marxism) are greatly influenced by two aspects of the Weberian understanding of the state – (Lister and Marsh, 2006). First, that the neo-statist and institutionalists put emphasis on the ability of state managers to use power independently and autonomously of non state forces, the power of the state to bring order in modern societies and the ability of institutional structures of a particular state to undermine or enhance such capacities at particular moments (Hay and Lister, 2006: 8). The neo-Marxist state theory, neo-pluralism and the public choice theory have not been able to escape the spell of this influence either. Second, these theories have been influenced by the Weberian view that emphasises state mechanisms in its preservation of its monopoly to authoritative rule-making, focusing on the question of legitimacy. This issue of legitimate monopoly to authority has also influenced the neo-Marxists and the neo-pluralists (Hay and Lister, 2006). What does this mean in terms of examining African states?

Just like anywhere else in the world, it is difficult and impossible to develop a general theory of the state, making it impossible to have a single theory of the state in the African context. Whilst it is agreed that state theories as argued earlier can be useful in examining African states and help us expose a variety of different things, for the purposes of this paper these theories have inherent weaknesses. As Hay and Lister (2006) argue, the theories tend to be one-sided, focusing on the state's internal political factors and as such do not give us much in terms of political factors outside and beyond the state; and they tend not to develop an understanding of the ever-changing relationship between state and society, the public and private – (Jessop, 2007). Yet we know that different states (African states included) are built on different societies and have different relationships with the societies in which they are built. As such, the reliance on theories of the state on certain conceptions and understandings of the nature of the state makes it difficult to identify an analytical and precise definition of the state as an object of enquiry (Hay, 1996: 3) – (Hay and Lister, 2006; Jessop, 2000, 2007). Indeed Watson (2005: 179) talks of the under theorization of the concept of 'the state'

within International Political Economy (IPE) with most scholars viewing the state as a 'political authority,' equating politics with "the state's pursuit of some pre-given national interest." Yet the state has no 'pre-given national interest' existing "only as a theoretical abstraction" and is not a "unified collective actor" (Ibid. 181). Thus we cannot reify the state but it can be seen as a 'complex ensemble of social relations within given social formations' (Jessop, 2000: 31, 2007).

Bearing the afore-mentioned in mind, and for the purposes of this paper, the SRA provides a useful lens for a better understanding not only different African states but their relationships with the societies in which they are built, state managers, institutions, the private and other political actors. Indeed African states differ to a significant extent given their political, social and economic context in which political actors are situated. This makes it difficult to agree on the nature of states in Africa but easier to agree on the nature of a specific African state. It calls for the need to take into account the individual character of states and the ability to treat the states differently (Ellis, 2005). This is a challenge that we face in our examination of African states, which the neo-patrimonial approach fail to address. Instead they examine African states in terms of the activities of state managers only as if their actions are deterministic. Again some state theories, Marxist, institutionalism, green theory, feminism and public choice theory have been accused of structuralism 'reproduced independently of political actors' (Hay and Lister, 2006: 11). Yet the state cannot be independent of the actors in it. As argued by Lister and Marsh (2006: 251) that it is increasingly common to see that the relationship between actors and structure is dialectical; 'that is interactive and iterative' – a conceptualisation common in modern Marxism, elitism and historical and discursive institutionalism.

On the other hand the SRA shares the same conceptualisation with the other theories, which allows us to examine different African states as providing contexts within which political actors are situated analytically, providing the institutional landscape which political actors must negotiate. But argues on the landscape being strategically selective providing an uneven strategic terrain in which actors must orient themselves if they are to achieve their intended outcomes. As argued by Hay (1996: 7), the state is strategically selective and that its "structures practices and *modus operandi* are more amenable to some types of political strategy and certain types of intervention than others" – and that it is an uneven playing-field privileging some interests over others. A view also stressed by Jessop (2000, 2007) that by virtue of its selectivity and always specific strategic capacities the state's power is always 'conditional or relational,' making it important to treat the "essential dynamism and complexity of the state as integral to its very nature" (Hay, 1996: 7). Bearing this in mind, the state provides an institutional landscape that is

'strategically selective' and more conducive to certain strategies and preferences of certain actors than others (Hay, 2002; Hay and Lister, 2006; Jessop, 1990, 2007). Thus for Hay (1995, 1999, 2002) the state exists as a context or 'set of structures' providing the 'very conditions of social and political interaction' – economic, political and social containers (Jessop, 2004b) and state crisis is a moment of transformation, a 'moment of decisive intervention' that must be made and mark the 'periodisation of the development of the state' (Hay, 1999: 317-344) – (Jessop, 2004a). The SRA also emphasises that the apparatus and practices of the state are 'materially interdependent with other institutional orders and social practices' that can be examined as the sources and product of strategies (Jessop, 2007:5). As such, examining African states using the SRA lens allows us to run away from viewing the African state managers in voluntarist terms. We also move away from dualism which leads to the privileging of either the state or the actors. This is because the use of the SRA allows us to show that actors including state managers are constrained in their actions by the state and that the state is strategically selective, choosing certain strategies and actors than others. This becomes critical at a time when most African states are experiencing the involvement of more non-state actors in modern governance with the role of the state becoming different with increased emphasis on the co-ordination of complex modes of governance and less on state monopoly control over legitimate force

Indeed Hay (1996: 6) is of the opinion that we can agree on a set of core institutions of the state and be 'clear for the purposes of particular analysis.' Hay further elaborates that in instances in which the state is regarded as a nation the state is seen as a community, the state as a national people (Ibid). The state boundary is symbolic or discursive (Hay, 1996; Jessop, 2002). The state comes from participation in a collective national culture and common identity through mobilisation of sense of belonging to national identity, nationalism and loyalty to a sovereign authority. As a territory, the state is seen as a strictly bounded sovereign territory – (Jessop, 2002, 2007). Lastly the state as institution refers to the administrative and organisational dimension of national identity with the state viewed as an assemblage of more or less centrally coordinated apparatuses, institutions and practices – (Hay and Lister, 2006; Hay, 2002; Jessop, 2002, 2007). Accordingly like Hay, this work is rejecting the notion of a state as a means of fixing thereby making the state static when the state constantly experience a changing network of relationships and institutional practices and procedures. As a result of this changing nature of the state, this work moves away from defining the state as a single, elusive, essence of 'stateness' but rather define a number of different aspects of stateness-the state as a nation, state as a territory and the state as an institution. It is in view of this explanatory power of the

SRA that this work seeks to try and identify a Mauritian state amidst a debate full of ambiguity and inconclusiveness on the understanding of Africa states. Most importantly Mauritian state is looked at as an uneven playing field that is strategically selective for social, economic and political interaction. Such consideration are important because of their potential to provide valuable insight particularly not to see political actors in 'voluntary terms' in control of their destiny but to see actors in terms of their ability to realise their intentions in complex contexts which impose their own 'strategic selectivity.'

## **MAURITIAN STATE STRUCTURE**

The use of SRA as discussed earlier is an attempt to enhance our understanding of the Mauritian political, economic and social relationships in policy formulation and how such policy also helps us in our understanding of Mauritius' engagement with the rest of the world. This is because the approach allows us to examine the Mauritian state as a structure in which actors are involved in deliberation and interaction in the construction of the structure, institutions, policies and the conduct of actors. To this end, this work will examine the extent to which policy-makers, negotiators, political elites, diplomats, civil society representatives and business representatives (who are the strategically selected actors) interact within the state and with the state over which they have minimum control and the extent to which the same actions are a product of rational intentions by these actors. This will allow me to show a relationship between the Mauritian state and the actors with the state providing us the social, economic and political context in which individual actors interact as well as have a range of potential actions. At the same time the Mauritian state must not be seen as existing independent of the activities it governs and does not exist independent of policy-makers, negotiators, political elites, diplomats, civil society representatives and business representatives' conception of what it is. The conceptions of what the Mauritian state is, is due to these strategically selected actors' not having full knowledge of the context but manage to aggregate their interest to determine Mauritian interests and policy through inter-subjectivity. This makes them agents of change with the state being a creation of the history of 'struggle' (ANSA, 2010). As such, the role of the afore-mentioned strategically selected actors is to try and transform the state to what they see fit in meeting (whether intended or otherwise) the interests of Mauritians which can only happen through the daily struggles of the people. As a result for us to understand the role of human actors in the developmental process of Mauritius we need to examine the role of these selected actors in order to critically engage with the politics of economic growth, state building and social inclusion

(Leftwich, 2010).

Unlike the argument given by Clapham (1998) that political elites act to ensure their survival and that of the state, the Mauritius case shows that the survival of the state allows and ensures the survival of the political elites. This is because of the intertwining relationship between the Mauritian state and a number of strategically selected actors which is in such a way that the state favours a deliberative and consultative process of policy-making which does not allow the outright domination by the political elites but the involvement of different interested stake holders. This means if we are to view the Mauritian state as strategically selective then its preferred strategy for policy-making is that of dialogue among the major identified actors. Under such circumstances different groups jostle for voice and presentation while the state provides a platform for the contest and airing of demands resulting in 'catharsis' as well as the satisfaction that success brings (Bhagwati, 2002). In the case of Mauritius, the state does not represent the working class nor is it a tool of the oligarchy, rather, the state 'favours social and economic progress through industrialisation and local accumulation- what can be called "a national logic of accumulation"' (Meisenhelder, 1997: 280). Under such circumstances decision-making has shifted from government and political elites alone to include a broader range of actors within the state. Such an arrangement on decision-making does not allow the political elites or any other elite group to highjack the state for its own purpose.

Instead the state selects certain actors and strategies. The Mauritian state has had capacity to 'secure favourable opening and to persuade domestic actors to follow' – that is, developmental state (Meisenhelder, 1997: 286). Indeed Lincoln (2006) emphasises the stewardship of the state in effecting structural change and economic development in Mauritius. The major structural change was in the form of transforming the Mauritian economy from a monoculture exporting economy to an export manufacturing economy through the establishment of export processing zones (EPZ). The second structural change that Mauritius has embarked on involves the transformation of the island into a 'cyber-island' envisaging a growth in information and communication technology (ICT) sector, 'both in gross domestic product (GDP) and employment terms' (Ibid: 60). Thus the Mauritian state has been independent of the interests of capital allowing groups and individuals to shape the history of the country and its relationship in the international system. As early as the time of independence, Mauritian authorities favoured public private sector partnership 'designed to achieve capitalist economic growth and a modern welfare state' (Meisenhelder, 1997: 292). It seems Mauritius has been able to do this because the state favours certain actors to engage in a deliberative and consultative manner in the domestic political process. This deep rooted deliberative structural

condition of the Mauritian state helps shape the effectiveness of the state power. This demonstrates that this has created a 'deliberative democratic developmental state' largely due to the way developmental policies are formulated which tends to be deliberative and consultative representing major interest groups in society. Moreover the developmental state entails government intervention as a relatively autonomous actor in economic processes to carry out developmental ideals that have been conceived by the state (Meisenhelder, 1997; Carroll and Carroll, 1997). It is in this light that the Mauritian state seems to favour a deliberative and consultative strategy to policy-making. This state selected strategy works well in Mauritius because of the presence of a large policy circle with many individuals, groups, and agencies playing a part in decision-making (Gulhati and Nallari, 1990). Nevertheless the afore-mentioned partnership has its own weakness in that it leaves large parts of the population outside as it will be shown in this paper. However the strategy seems to work well in terms of Mauritian trade policy-making as a basis for engagement in the international political economy as vividly illustrated by country's trade policy-making process and subsequent activities in the WTO. It is to this topic that will now be considered.

## **MAURITIAN STATE AND TRADE POLICY-MAKING**

According to the South Centre (2004) one of the major constraints faced by developing countries in developing negotiating capacity in the WTO is the incoherence in national policies and in national policy coordination. Indeed Narlikar (2004) argues that developing countries rarely successfully harness domestic support, including non-governmental organizations (NGOs), to promote their interests in the WTO. Moreover there are remarkable discrepancies between positions taken in Geneva and positions eventually taken by developing countries' capitals in the Ministerial meetings. Yet as argued by Hocking and McGuire (2004: 5) as the trade agenda gets more complex, 'explaining how trade policy is formulated and articulated demands that the role and interactions of government and non-governmental actors be taken into account' – what Strange (1992) has termed 'triangular diplomacy' based on the interaction between firms and governments. Indeed Rosecrance (1986) talks of the 'trading state' which demands that the government opens a dialogue with firms to prop-up the national wealth. While Lee (2004a) defines commercial diplomacy as 'the work of a network of public and private actors who manage commercial relations using diplomatic channels and processes.' For Lee (2004b) diplomatic conduct is a product of the aggregation of interests.

The situation presented by the South Centre and Narlikar looks different in the case of Mauritius which has a long history of collaboration in trade policy-making.



Mauritius has a tradition of collaboration on projects designed to improve the country's economic and trade prospects (Stoler, 2005; Ancharaz, 2006). What Handy (2008: 109) calls the 'corporatist model of policy making' or economic 'governance via negotiation.' There exists close government and private-sector collaboration on policy development in areas of trade negotiation under the WTO auspices. According to the Government of Mauritius, Mauritius has a structured approach between the government and private sector with the private sector also fully involved in the negotiations at multilateral, regional and bilateral levels (WTO, 2008a). In pursuant of such collaboration and policy development, a standing committee oversees the work of nine different sub committees where private sector and government share responsibility for policy development (Stoler, 2005). As a result the Mauritian private sector has a high level of political capacity that allowed the sector to receive a receptive hearing from the government (Handly, 2008). As observed by the President of the Mauritian Chamber of Commerce and Industry, that the chamber's contribution in developing Mauritian trade negotiating positions and in participating in the negotiations continues to make the chamber the 'common private sector partner of government in all trade negotiations' (Mauritian Chamber of Commerce and Industry, 2010). Moreover the chamber remains the focal point for almost all visiting trade delegations to Mauritius. As a result government and private sector in Mauritius are embedded in what Brautgam et al. (2002) call 'networks of social relations' or 'state-society linkages' geared at providing institutional frameworks for policy negotiations.

However, given the importance of 'national interests' when engaging in the WTO negotiations it is interesting to establish how the Mauritian state determines which domestic concerns to take to the international level, especially under conditions where trade policy focuses on balancing the economic interests of a range of domestic constituencies. According to Dulloo (2007a: 1) who is the former Mauritian Minister for Foreign Affairs, Regional Integration and International Trade, Mauritius has been able to represent the interests of Mauritius guided by the ambition and vision of improving the livelihoods of Mauritanians. This is because of the realisation that the WTO trade negotiations involve the interaction of parties in which all sides are expected to defend their countries' interests and 'where diplomats seek accommodation with other parties on the basis of quid pro quo that can be defended to their political masters' (Winham, 2007: 238). Political masters who in turn serve the people because 'it is good that we should listen to the voice of the people, to our constituents. We should put our nation first, our people first' (Dulloo, 2006: 4). But in the case of Mauritius, because voters in Mauritius are not conversant with the importance of trade in determining who to vote for and because political parties share almost the same ideology, trade policy is 'unlikely to be determined by

politics' (Ancharaz, 2010), but by the Mauritian socio-economic contexts. For example subsequent Mauritian governments have been worried about growing unemployment owing to the erosion of trade preferences under the WTO and face up to the competition that will continue to give sustainable jobs (Mauritian Times, 2010). At the same time the industry is concerned by the erosion of preferences vis a` vis global competitiveness, which the state has to deal with. Thus because of its political arrangement the Mauritian state allows the serving of a number of Mauritian interests rather than only those of individual political elites and their client patronage. This gives us one reason why the country has managed to avoid 'the relationship between export orientation and developmental failure' that is stressed by the dependency theorists (Meisenhelder, 1997: 295). This has in a way allowed successive governments and other stakeholders to be involved in trade policy formulation and its advancement in the WTO negotiations.

To this end the trade policy unit (TPU) has led trade policy formulation in a well structured and consultative manner. The TPU vision is to 'ensure the smooth integration of Mauritius into the globalising and liberalising world economy' and its mission is to 'formulate' Mauritius Trade policies to ensure that Mauritian concerns are 'adequately reflected in Multilateral and Regional Trade Arrangements and Global Trade rules' (Ministry of Foreign Affairs Regional Integration and International Trade, 2009). As argued by Dulloo (2007b:

4) that the Mauritius government has 'always pursued a proactive, adaptable and pragmatic diplomacy aimed at promoting the national interests of Mauritius in the global context'. Under the TPU the standing coordination committee has the mandate to examine all issues under the WTO Agreements (Ancharaz, 2006; Rojid et al., 2010; WTO, 2001, 2008b). The structure consists of a core group with 12 Sub-committees dealing with a specific WTO issue or agreement. The sub-committee on services further splits into five working groups indicating the importance of services negotiations to Mauritius. The working groups report to the sub- committee that reports to the core group. According to Acharaz (2006) and Interview, Deputy Director Trade Policy, Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Regional Integration and International Trade 27 July (2010) the meetings are issue driven leading to meetings being held on an ad-hoc basis. In most instances the Geneva diplomats raise an issue with the government resulting in the core group requesting for the specific sub-committee to meet and discuss until a consensus is struck and a particular policy position is adopted in relation to the issue.

For example on 15 January 2009, the Joint Public Private Sector Committee on International Trade Issues (JPPSCITI) met to initiate discussions among stakeholders on strategic approaches to enhance the participation of Mauritius in world trade in services (Boolell, 2009).



<sup>7</sup>The JPPSCITI came up with a roadmap for trade negotiations setting the priority areas in trade negotiations and to 'ensure an all-inclusive approach' in the elaboration of negotiating positions in different trade negotiations (Mauritian Chamber of Commerce and Industry, 2010). The meeting was also aimed at focusing on strategies to be adopted by Mauritius in the WTO and Economic Partnership Agreements (EPA) negotiations – 'the need to balance the offensive and defensive interests of Mauritius, the identification of sectors where Mauritius would be willing and ready to take liberalisation commitments and the need to ensure coherence and consistency to the extent possible in the different negotiations' (Ibid: 1). Such a domestic approach according to Boolell (2009:1) is meant to 'encourage participative consultations and multi-stakeholders dialogue' in developing Mauritius' 'national services export strategy as well as in developing negotiating positions.' A view supported by Chairman of the JPPSCITI that everything is done through consultations in the WTO standing committees that come up with ideas that feed in the WTO (Interview, Deputy Director Trade Policy, Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Regional Integration and International Trade 27 July, 2010). The aim is to forge an 'integrated and multi-sectoral approach to multilateral, regional and bilateral trade negotiations' (Boolell, 2009: 1).

The Mauritian approach shows what Lee (2004b) terms the 'formal embedded business representatives' in trade policy formulation – that involves the aggregation of public and private interests '*within the state*.' For example both the government and the private sector are interested in the integration of Mauritius in the multilateral trade system and enhanced competitiveness ensure the continued growth of the Mauritian economy in a post none reciprocal preferences period. Under the Mauritian trade policy-making strategy, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Regional Integration and International Trade will focus on the tradability of services that includes market access and trade rules whilst the other sectors assume roles in formulating and development plans and frameworks in their respective areas (Boolell, 2009). The private sector is expected to help in identifying priority sectors and sub-sectors; help government in keeping watching briefs on WTO activities and negotiations in their sectors; and contribute to the preparation of a strong Mauritian service negotiating positions in the WTO. Servansing (2003), writing in the chambers news, observes that Mauritius allows private sector participation through their representation in determining Mauritian interests and negotiating positions in the WTO services negotiations. In its effort to see Mauritius achieve an E-island status and develop the country as a hub for information and communication technologies (ICT)

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<sup>7</sup> The JPPSCITI was created to strategise on the measures required to cope up with challenges of trade liberalisation and to maximise of trade arrangements signed by Mauritius.

Mauritius is giving the ICT Sector top priority in the WTO Doha Round of Negotiations for trade liberalisation as part of its international cooperation strategy in the area. As a result although Mauritius' capacities are still insufficient and seriously strained, Mauritius is more able to cope with the trade agenda (Bilal and Szepei, 2005). This has been made possible by Mauritius' well-established tradition of involving the private sector in trade policy formulation.

However because of the uneven policy-making terrain (as I have already identified) the process of trade policy formation like that of other policies has not been smooth as argued by Bhowon et al. (2004), and Ancharaz (2006). Indeed Ancharaz (2006) argues that the institutional process lacks transparency and has been influenced by the major sectors of sugar, manufacturing and services with services having the least influence. At the same time it has left out the interests of other people and groups such as those in informal trading, peasant farmers, crafts men. Indeed a Mauritian delegate to the WTO pointed out that the process of trade policy-making is not inclusive of all interested parties such as small communities and marginal groups especially when trade is discussed at the multilateral levels because of the lack of representation of these smaller groups. However the delegate thinks the process is 'quite representative' as it is dominated by the large groups who play a greater role in the economy (Interview, Mauritian Delegate to the WTO 9th August 2010). At the same time, the stake-holders concerned have been able to reach consensus on most policy issues which have driven the economic development of Mauritius. Moreover information on the WTO and trade in general has been disseminated to the public in general through press conferences and question time (Ancharaz, 2006), which has helped the trade policy-making process. This has meant that the trade policy formulation process functions well but there is room for improvement (Ancharaz, 2006). Moreover the policy-making process in general has in a way contributed to economic nationalism with the economy becoming more or less a unifying principle at the expense of inter-culturality and identity that might have lead to instability (Bunwaree, 2002). Indeed as trade liberalisation and globalisation unfold, there have been losers and winners in Mauritius resulting in unequalisation (Koop, 2005; Bunwaree, 2002). This means the need for Mauritius to find new ways to ensure the continued growth of the economy and maintain the economy as a unifying principle as has been the case.

## CONCLUSIONS

This paper have tried to use the SRA to reconceptualise African states and to identify a Mauritian state that is democratic and developmental owing to its deliberative and consultative nature in its policy-making – a process that is strategically selected by the state. The paper tried

to do this in order to demonstrate the relationship between strategically selected agents and the state. Giving trade policy-making as an example the paper tried to show that the Mauritian state strategically selects policy-makers, negotiators, political elites, diplomats, civil society representatives and business representatives in trade policy-making at the expense of other actors such as peasant farmers and informal traders. At the same time the paper also tried to show that the state also selects a deliberative and consultative strategy, through dialogue in its trade policy-making process. The selected strategy allows a deliberative and consultative interaction between selected actors to decide on Mauritian trade interests which are then taken into the WTO. Because these actors make trade policy on an uneven state terrain they tend to collaborate – making trade policy an outcome of inter-subjectivity through various agents. This has resulted in the political leaders not having outright control in the process. Instead political leaders try and balance the interests of different interest groups, including the disadvantaged, in an effort to meet the wider interests of Mauritians, leading in some instances to some leaders contingentially remaining in power.

Lastly the paper also tried to argue that because of the uneven playing field and the strategic selective nature of the state certain groups are disadvantaged in the trade policy-making process. However there remains room for improvement to include such groups as Mauritius seeks to find new ways to ensure continued trade driven economic growth – allowing the process to take Mauritius' divergent economic interests in the multilateral trading system.

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