

**Citizenship, National
Belonging and the Grain
Regulation Question in
Britain and France, 1750-
1780**

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PhD Thesis

Declaration

I, Daisy Gibbs confirm that the work presented in this thesis is my own. Where information has been derived from other sources, I confirm that this has been indicated in the thesis.

Abstract

During the prelude to the industrial revolution, as Britain and France experienced the first age of globalisation, with its associated expansion of markets and regional specialisation, certain assumptions were called into question. These included the traditional *mentalités* of trust in local markets; belief in the economic responsibilities of political authorities; and the idea of 'the economy' itself in relation to the region and nation. While globalisation could offer increased income and consumer choice, this could come at the cost of restricting the life and autonomy of regional economies.

Historians have explored these tensions in treatments of the friction between capitalism and adherence to a moral economy. However, even capitalistic ideas about free trade were heavily concerned with national economic competitiveness. This thesis addresses this dynamic by examining theoretical and practical approaches to the grain trade. It aims to unravel contemporary interpretations of the role of government, regions and individuals in national economic stability and growth, which in turn informed ideas about national belonging. It explores attempts by French and British writers, legislators, and people to assert their interpretation of economic identity, and design an economic destiny for their nation or region.

Since this thesis is chiefly concerned with national belonging and citizenship, it draws on the work of historians who have examined the role of commodities in forming or defining national identities. These include Anderson's treatment of vernacular print literature, which differentiated European nations,¹ or Morieux's depiction of the shared economic interests that bridged the Channel.² It uses primary sources relating to administration (such as laws, parliamentary debates, and local court rulings) and contemporary published economic works to produce a thorough comparison of economic identity in each nation.

¹ B. Anderson, *Imagined Communities* (London, 2006), p. 67.

² R. Morieux, *Une Mer pour deux Royaumes* (Rennes, 2008), p. 345.

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List of Abbreviations

AD I&L	Archives Départementales d'Indre-et-Loire
AD SM	Archives Départementales de la Seine-Maritime
AN	Archives Nationales
ANOM	Archives Nationales d'Outre-Mer
BL	British Library
BNF	Bibliothèque Nationale de France
BNF, JdF	Bibliothèque Nationale de France, Collection Joly de Fleury
<i>EHR</i>	<i>Economic History Review</i>
<i>HJ</i>	<i>Historical Journal</i>
NRO	Norfolk Record Office
<i>P&P</i>	<i>Past and Present</i>
TNA	The National Archives
<i>WN</i>	<i>An Inquiry into the Nature and Causes of the Wealth of Nations</i>

Introduction

During the first age of globalization, the increasing capitalisation of agriculture in Britain and France confounded customary and supposedly outmoded localist consumption practices. For it meant stamping a national political economy on regions and peoples accustomed, economically at least, to autonomy and self-sufficiency. Even as it was challenged on humanitarian grounds, this process was usually peddled as congruent with the national good and hence generally beneficial to all citizens. This thesis examines issues of citizenship and national belonging by looking at these changing patterns of thought about grain and the nation, as well as the practical fallout from structural changes in society in eighteenth-century Britain and France.

This introduction offers a brief survey of the historiography of the nation and nationality. It begins by introducing the notion of the nation state, and the scepticism or enthusiasm with which various historians have embraced this framework of analysis. In a second section it looks especially at the challenge which jurisdictional fragmentation poses to the idea of nation states. Often accounts of jurisdictional fragmentation have focused on traditional privileges and changing conceptions of liberty, which form an essential strand of this thesis.

The third section addresses the lack of a human element which institutional accounts of the nation may suffer. It introduces the emphasis that the thesis places on popular politics and interactions between the people and authorities on a local basis. Globalisation was a great threat to the economic life of these local communities, and this is

explored in the next section. This section contemplates especially the complex history of the term mercantilism. It also explores the problems of applying the term to economic writings of the past, and considers the intellectual history of economics. The final section of this introduction deals with the transnationalism of intellectual history, and the comparative framework which characterises the thesis. This section brings the introduction to a close by describing the structure and argument of what follows.

The Nation State

Britain has never seemed more like a composite state than it does today. Devolution; a referendum in favour of a compromising unity; and the overwhelming electoral victory of the SNP in Scotland have emphasised Charles Tilly's claim that Britain, like France and Germany, has never met the ideal of a fully realised nation state.¹ Nevertheless, the nation state remains the organisational principal of choice for learning about, understanding, and explaining European development after the collapse of the potential universalism of the Middle Ages.

In spite of the failure of the nation state to fully materialise in three major European contexts, the national configuration is still the focus of Tilly's book, as he strives to explain why Europe 'converge[d] on different variants of the national state'.² The argument goes that, in the course of nearly one-thousand years, the fiscal-military needs generated by wars of religion and conflicts over mercantilist exploits between European institutions forced the fusion of scattered sovereignties, as well as remote markets and local economies, into a series of discrete roughly national entities.³

¹ C. Tilly, *Coercion, Capital, and European States, AD 990-1992* (Cambridge, MA & Oxford, 1992), p. 3.

² Ibid, p. 5.

³ Ibid, pp. 27-8; P.K. O'Brien and P.A. Hunt, 'The Rise of a Fiscal State in England, 1485-1815', *Historical Research*, 66:160 (1993), p. 129

Revenue maximisation and autonomy on the part of the national state became critical. The central state is therefore traditionally portrayed as an engulfing power. On the pretext of territorial defence in increasingly costly wars, it absorbed the tax and other powers which had customarily belonged to alternative institutions. At the same time, it encouraged the commercial, and hence taxable, activity of a national exchange economy.¹ Fixed borders and a national identity needed to be established and stabilised, either replacing or resting upon existing devotions to alternative often local denominations.²

However, Tilly is among those historians who are more sympathetic to the weaknesses of the concept of the nation state. He accepts that to visualise a coherent and successful national state is to turn a blind eye to the persistence of more resilient and sometimes preferred alternative structures. Accordingly he admits that 'arrangements at the level of household, village, or region clearly affected the viability of different kinds of taxation, conscription, and surveillance' - some of the key activities of any state that would dominate the nation.³ Moreover, as useful as it may seem, J.H. Elliott has pointed out that, far from perfect harmony, the notion of the nation state has mostly generated disunity in the five hundred years of its history.⁴ As a result, revisions of the concept tend to deal with the failures or sticking points of national consolidation, developing an image of the nation state in the negative.⁵

Historians have sometimes ascribed the relative success or failure of states to their constitutional configuration. Douglass North and Barry Weingast, for example, argue that it was thanks to the Glorious Revolution that England proved successful in a systematic programme of fund-raising. The revolution of 1688, they claim, instituted a new

¹ G. Ardent, 'Financial Policy and Economic Infrastructure of Modern States and Nations' in C. Tilly (ed.), *The Formation of National States in Western Europe* (Princeton, 1975), pp. 165-6.

² P. Sahlin, *Boundaries* (Berkeley & Oxford, 1989), p. 8.

³ Tilly, *Coercion*, p. 34.

⁴ J.H. Elliott, 'A Europe of Composite Monarchies', *P&P*, 137 (1992), p. 48.

⁵ R. Grafe, *Distant Tyranny* (Princeton, 2012), p. 4.

'credible commitment' on the part of the crown to the security of individual rights and hence private wealth. This meant that finance, mostly in the form of loans, was more forthcoming.¹ The evolution of the military fiscal state went in tandem with the unfurling of representation, rights, and political liberties to members of the nation who faced taxation. North and Weingast therefore associate the apparent institutional and political developments of the Glorious Revolution with economic freedom and growth.²

This is how Liah Greenfeld seems to interpret political and economic development in England (and later Britain) and beyond from the seventeenth century onwards. Coming to the rescue of all historians who could understand how, but supposedly not why, European economies took-off in this period, Greenfeld argues that it was nationalism that propelled economic growth.³ She invokes the work of Albert Hirschman, who, although apparently also struggling with causation, describes the gradual ideological change which saw the pursuit of personal gain become a socially acceptable activity. According to Hirschman, human behaviour was for a long time thought to be determined by passions. However, eventually it was imagined that the unwieldy passions of ambition, power, and lust could be offset by more amenable passions, such as greed and avarice. These in turn were transformed into the supposedly relatively harmless, and fashionably rational, notion of interest.⁴

Again, Greenfeld's claim is that nationalism can explain why this process took place.⁵ This is reminiscent of a point made by Bob Harris. His more nuanced version refers also to continuing contemporary ambivalence towards commerce, and particularly towards the corrupting luxury associated with overseas trade, not to mention the

¹ D.C. North and B.R. Weingast, 'Constitutions and Commitment' *The Journal of Economic History*, 49:4 (1989), p. 829, quote from p. 824.

² *Ibid*, pp. 830-1.

³ L. Greenfeld, *The Spirit of Capitalism* (Cambridge, MA & London, 2003), p. 1.

⁴ A.O. Hirschman, *The Passions and the Interests* (Princeton, 1977), pp. 40-43.

⁵ Greenfeld, *Spirit of Capitalism*, p. 487, n. 2.

ever-lingering anxiety about the private greed of merchants.¹ However, in spite of these doubts, Harris maintains that patriotism in Britain helped commerce to earn and maintain a respectable reputation. He suggests that in the absence of the French menace 'deep-rooted tensions between mercantile activity and patriotism... would become more apparent'.² Thanks to the French threat, there were relatively few issues capable of driving a wedge between the landed and commercial interests.³

Greenfeld's argument also draws heavily on the work of David Landes, who considers British national identity as a key early advantage over less consciously unified European units.⁴ To demonstrate this national consciousness, Greenfeld relies on mercantilist authors and assumes that they alluded to the nation in the same sense as it is understood today. In this way, she argues that nationalism appeared fully-formed in seventeenth-century England, and spread from there to France, Germany, Japan and then the United States. This new spirit transformed seventeenth-century England, not only because it justified the pursuit of individual wealth in contemporary consciousness, but also because it came with a notion of equality and freedom inherent in the idea of the sovereignty of the nation (that is, the people).⁵

Later, in France, an imported nationalism was at first rejected by adherents of the absolute monarchy, and then, ultimately, contributed to the political upheaval of the French Revolution. This, therefore, was a nationalist and emphatically not a bourgeois revolution, which allowed for political maturity and sustained economic growth in a French nation state.⁶ The economies of Britain and then France took off, according to

¹ B. Harris, *Politics and the Nation* (Oxford, 2002), pp. 273-4.

² Ibid, p. 275.

³ Ibid, p. 276.

⁴ D.S. Landes, *Wealth and Poverty of Nations* (London, 1998), p. 219.

⁵ Greenfield, *Spirit of Capitalism*, p. 2.

⁶ Ibid, p. 139-147; D.A. Bell, *The Cult of the Nation in France* (Cambridge, MA & London, 2001), p. 18.

Greenfeld, in part because an egalitarian notion of nationalism ensured economic freedoms and the right to secure property.¹

However, the notion that property rights went unchallenged from 1688 onwards, even in England and later Britain, has itself been challenged. Hence Julian Hoppit argues that there were instances even in the eighteenth century when the British state intervened in property rights. The pertinent example of the abolition of heritable jurisdictions, in particular, shows that Parliament was perfectly prepared to 'extinguish' certain kinds of property for state-building purposes, in spite of its otherwise credible commitments to the sanctity of property.²

Furthermore, Regina Grafe suggests that arguments about constitution and economic development, in the style of new institutional economics, risk offering a false dichotomy. She argues that this places 'parliamentary' in opposition to 'absolutist' state-building schemes in a fixed linear European pattern of the development of the final ideal of the centralised nation state.³ Grafe therefore questions the paradigm of a *successful* nation state as well as the importance of external pressures in the development thereof. She argues that Spain, rather than failing to become a centralised fiscal-military power, pursued its own de-centralised course of modernisation. This included deliberate restraint on war spending and hence also on the employment of fiscal measures. Spain did not fail as a nation state, but rather elected to develop as an alternative decentralised version. European states in general, she suggests, had a heretofore overlooked 'degree of agency and choice' when it came to their efforts at fund-raising and centralisation. She therefore challenges the traditional story of the formation of nation states.⁴

¹ Ibid, p. 26.

² J. Hoppit, 'Compulsion, Compensation and Property Rights in Britain, 1688-1833', *P&P*, 210 (2011), p. 115.

³ Grafe, *Distant Tyranny*, p. 11.

⁴ Ibid, p. 23.

Jurisdictional Fragmentation

Efforts at centralisation were generally met with the ‘jurisdictional fragmentation’, to which Tilly and Elliott were alluding. Much historiography, including the above examples of Grafe’s and Hoppit’s work, has been concerned with the state’s attempts to absorb or reform traditionally locally held rights and privileges, especially the lucrative ones, and with efforts to resist the process. Where Grafe has focused on the rights and privileges over the taxation and marketing of products such as salted cod (or *bacalao* as it is known in Spanish) which were located in the historic territories of Spain, and has argued that the resilience of these institutions caused the state’s ‘seeming self-restraint’ in military spending,¹ and Hoppit has explored the matter in terms of private property rights,² others still have researched rights held by estates, corporations or the church.

Thus, Michael Kwass traces the disgruntlement of the privileged class of French society when confronted by the strengthening of central institutions and controls, specifically in the form of a new taxation regime. Taking for his historiographical context Alexis de Tocqueville’s emphasis upon state centralisation as the cause of the French Revolution, Kwass considers particularly the resistance of non-monarchical institutions, such as the French parlements, to the changes.³ The parlements grew outraged not only because, as elites, their members were struck hard by a new programme of direct taxation, but also due to the fact that responsibility for collecting the new tax was awarded to intendants. This bypassed the parlements’ own traditional jurisdiction over the matter.⁴ These courts articulated their grievances in the language of liberalism, primarily in terms of the freedom of the citizen from arbitrary state intervention, which they, as

¹ Grafe, *Distant Tyranny*, p. 32.

² Hoppit, ‘Compulsion’, p. 125.

³ M. Kwass, *Privilege and the Politics of Taxation in Eighteenth-Century France* (Cambridge, MA, 2000), p. 48.

⁴ *Ibid.*, pp. 51-2.

'temporary organs of the nation', defended.¹ They attempted to re-establish their own sovereignty by alluding to their role as representatives of a sovereign nation.

However, in spite of high claims of 'equality', 'justice', 'liberty', and the 'nation', Kwass suggests that these institutions were principally concerned with particularism and maintaining jurisdictional fragmentation in the same way as Grafe's historic territories were.² Evidently, the concept of the 'nation' could also serve as a pretext for political manoeuvring on the part of institutions other than the central state. Kwass turns to the literary sphere, however, for the origins proper of French liberal thought. Therefore, here he again follows Tocqueville, and more recent historians, such as Keith Baker, who has looked to the 'conceptual space' of the Old Regime for the origins of a 'revolutionary script'.³

This is the source to which Arnault Skornicki also attributes French revolutionary liberalism. He too suggests that it was the struggle for power between the crown and aristocracy that spawned free-trade thought and, by extension, liberalism in France. However he places the literary sphere on the other side of this discourse. Thus, in some disagreement with Kwass, Skornicki argues that French liberalism was created endogenously as the by-product of the French crown's struggle to assert itself over the aristocratic order and the traditional system of privilege.⁴

For Skornicki, liberalism was not, therefore, the product of the rationalisations of a class of economic actors, but the creation of a state and its supporters (which actually included the greatest advocates of free-trade, such as Turgot). These supporters of liberalism *and* the state intended to make use of that great menace of the aristocratic order,

¹ Ibid, p. 210.

² Ibid, p. 213.

³ Ibid, p. 4; K.M. Baker, *Inventing the French Revolution* (Cambridge, 1990), p. 4.

⁴ A. Skornicki, *L'Économiste, la Cour et la Patrie* (Paris, 2011), p. 375.

merchant capitalism, to enhance the crown's monopoly of governmental institutions. Overall, French liberalism was not the same as non-intervention, but was originally intended only to purge the state of privilege and hence alternative sources of power.¹ In this sense, liberalisation was supposed to entail the removal of petty tyrants and their arbitrary government by a distant but constitutional central absolutist government.² The liberalisation programme in France was therefore simultaneously a programme of nationalism.

Jeff Horn sees a similar course of development of liberty and centralisation in France. Privilege under the Bourbon state, he argues, actually constituted an effective tool for promoting economic growth. Rather than the 'enemy of capitalism', which contemporaries such as the physiocrats and also historians have portrayed, the Bourbon state was a dynamic force which increasingly granted privileges in the form of exemptions from existing privileges, in order to foster growth.³ This seemingly archaic mercantilist and patronage-based political economy in fact attempted to modernise the economy by challenging and redefining old-fashioned attitudes towards profit and wealth, which were inherent in the society of orders.⁴

Horn overhauls the conventional story of the Bourbon centralising endeavour, offering a far more complex account of state granted privilege, as well as loopholes and enclaves of liberty, with their own powers of privilege, which all opposed uniformity, but could also foster growth.⁵ The 'persistent clamor for "unrestrained liberty"' which surfaced after 1750, he argues, was only a rhetorical cloaking device, obscuring the longstanding practice, on the part of the state, of curbing traditional guild style liberties of privilege in favour of exemptions.⁶ Though in the 1770s a more concerted attempt to institute

¹ Ibid, p. 29.

² Grafe, *Distant Tyranny*, pp. 116-7.

³ J. Horn, *Economic Development in Early Modern France* (Cambridge, 2015), p. 9.

⁴ Ibid, pp. 14-15.

⁵ Ibid, p. 56.

⁶ Ibid, p. 205.

unrestrained liberty in French manufacturing, commerce, and, indeed, agriculture was advanced under the leadership of Anne-Robert-Jacques Turgot, Horn has emphasised its limits. Ultimately he shows that a course of compromise between the two extremes of privilege and total liberty was finally established under Jacques Necker.¹ It is in this context that any central policy which made claims to 'liberty', especially in the sense of subverting local privileges economic or political, needs to be considered.

Thus, more recent historiography, of eighteenth-century absolutist states especially, is turning to the internal conditions which seem to have generated notions of liberty and rights for newly nationalised subjects. Liberty and libertarianism therefore feature in this thesis as important themes, particularly as they relate to the rights of citizens to private economic gain. Sometimes this latter was perceived as the only legitimate or prudent form that liberty could take when applied to the nation at large. This is because political liberty remained a subversive issue in this period, and even more so in the period after the French Revolution.²

Meanwhile, political economy served to mediate between the individual and the state, and was often concerned with the idea of individual contribution.³ It was understood that the value of this contribution had a great deal to do with freedom from intervention from the state.⁴ This meant that much time was spent ruminating on how forms of government could invite or extort economic growth and therefore bolster the greatness of the nation state. Often this led to contemporary international comparison, as the virtual republicanism of Britain was

¹ Ibid, pp. 224-226.

² E. Rothschild, *Economic Sentiments* (Cambridge, MA & London, 2001), pp. 56-60.

³ E.S. Furniss, *The Position of the Labourer in a System of Nationalism* (New York, 1965), pp. 6-7.

⁴ Q. Skinner, *Liberty before Liberalism* (Cambridge, 1998), pp. 62-4; I. Hont, *Jealousy of Trade* (Cambridge, MA & London, 2005), p. 197.

juxtaposed against the absolute monarchy of France.¹ These themes are explored in particular in chapters 3 and 4.

In the accounts of both Kwass and Skornicki, however, the matter of centralisation, so vital to Tocqueville's account, also remains a significant factor. Taken together, accounts such as these raise the possibility that the meaning of the term 'nation' and the implications of nationalism remained unfixed in the eighteenth century. Ideas such as national sovereignty and liberty could potentially be deployed on either side of the centralising initiative. This thesis, then, takes an approach similar to those of Kwass and Grafe, in order to explore the relationship between a centralising national state and local power structures of both the political and social varieties.

As in *Distant Tyranny*, it takes as an entry point a commodity which penetrated the depth and breadth of a nation. However, it leaves the codfish to Grafe, concentrating instead on grain. For grain, like the Spanish commodity of *bacalao*,² was subject to local regulation in France. However, this was not the case in Britain. This means that studying grain can shine a light on a point of comparison between the institutional history of the two countries, the composite nature of the Britain on the one hand, and the amalgamation of provinces that was France on the other. This thesis, specifically in chapters 1 and 2, explores how local authorities perceived the role of their own region within the national economy, and how they articulated their own right to influence the control of local subsistence in comparable ways.

Yet grain is not a mere commodity. In eighteenth-century Britain and France it was a seed of contention. By tracing also the discourse about the grain trade in chapters 4, 5 and 6, this thesis follows Kwass's lead in treating the 'cultural field between state and society'.³ Through discussing the grain trade, eighteenth-century political economists

¹ Ibid, pp. 28-9.

² Grafe, *Distant Tyranny*, p. 42.

³ Kwass, *Privilege*, p. 16.

addressed not only constitutional questions about who and what amounted to the nation and the state, but they also debated the role that the state was to play in the national (or regional) economy. All together, this thesis uses the issue of the grain trade to unearth contemporary interpretations of the role of government, regions and individuals in national economic stability and growth, which in turn informed ideas about national belonging.

National Identity and Nationalism

So far, this account seems to have suffered from a deficiency diagnosed by Linda Colley, which creates the impression that ‘these organisational changes took place within a human vacuum’.¹ For example, although Grafe’s work concerns the process of the integration of local markets into a national economy, it spends little time dealing with consumer experiences of the market. Intentionally or not, her account favours institutional developments and the choices of elites only, with the common people treated as the passive victims of events. She twice casts the common consumer as simply the unreflecting and non-participating ‘loser’ of the situation.² The assumption is that the people necessarily ought to approve of measures which are economically rational in the long term. However, the British case of violent popular opposition towards Turnpike trusts confounds this simple expectation. In this case, rioters sometimes equated improved communications with higher prices, and with good reason according to Arthur Young. Therefore they rejected a measure which was economically rational in the long-run.³

Hilton L. Root has analysed the economic costs of the moral economy in Britain and France. He points out that it in fact undermined rural interests and deepened rural poverty, compromising welfare on a general level.⁴ The damage in France was worse than in Britain, due to

¹ L. Colley, *Britons. Forging the Nation 1707-1837* (New Haven & London, 1992), p. 3.

² Grafe, *Distant Tyranny*, pp. 240; 245.

³ W. Albert, *The Turnpike Road System in England, 1663-1840* (London, 1972), p. 26.

⁴ H.L. Root, *The Fountain of Privilege* (Berkeley, 1994), p. 85.

the locus of political power in each respective country. Parliament offered a forum for rural interests, whereas the urban situation of French administrative power meant that the disposition of the urban poor carried more weight.¹ The great costs which the moral economy seems in hindsight to have incurred did obviously not stop the poor and others from preferring economically detrimental policies.

In Grafe's work, the relationship between the insubordinate regional institutions and the people they served is barely explored, in an account that deals with national (dis)integration and not nationality. Similarly, though Kwass sheds light on a 'murkier world of day-to-day administration' where taxpayers of all ranks brought complaints, and Horn deals with a variety of individuals and groups enjoying or seeking concessions, Skornicki, perhaps understandably, is also entirely preoccupied with the world of the court and the upper echelons of society in his account.²

Colley, by comparison, attempts to restore the human factor to the history of the nation state by exploring the responses of British civilians to the series of conflicts between Britain and France which occurred between 1689 and 1815. She argues that a community of Britons established an identity as Protestants, which was reinforced in opposition to their Catholic enemy across the Channel.³ This interpretation, however, has been strongly criticised. Steve Pincus, for example, highlights the potential internationalism of Protestantism, questioning how it came to be understood, if it did, as an exclusively British rallying force. He also wonders why, if their Protestant identity was so vital to their nationalism, the British allied so easily with

¹ Ibid, p. 108.

² Kwass, *Privilege*, p. 119; Horn, *Economic Development*, p. 3; Skornicki, *L'Économiste*, p. 17.

³ Colley, *Britons*, pp. 4-5. Colley's work is part of a relatively recent trend towards a 'new British history' which blossomed especially around the time of the Scottish and Welsh devolution in 1997. Other examples include S.G. Ellis and S. Barber (eds.), *Conquest and Union* (London, 1995); L.W.B. Brockliss and D. Eastwood (eds.), *A Union of Multiple Identities* (Manchester, 1997); C. Kidd, *British Identities before Nationalism* (Cambridge, 1999); and I. McLean, *State of the Union* (Oxford & New York, 2005).

Catholic powers other than France. Finally, he complains that certain of the four nations received inadequate treatment in Colley's work, and wonders whether Protestantism was as powerful a force in Ireland as in the other kingdoms.¹

It is on a similar thread which Colin Kidd bases his more sustained yet subtle attack. He sees Colley's thesis as overly simplistic because it ignores the suspicion in which the Scottish held the English upon entrance into the Union. In spite of the hypocrisy they detected in English constitutionalism, Kidd argues that Scots committed to 'English *institutions*' in order to gain a share of the 'birth-rights of Englishmen'.² He suggests that Protestantism itself was more complex than Colley allowed. Scots were not simply overawed by a sense of Protestant complicity in opposition to French Catholicism. In fact a 'strong sense of ecclesiastical distinctiveness' not only persisted in Scotland, but was also a something of a bulwark of Scottish identity against Englishness.³

Elsewhere he also undermines the importance that Colley places on a Catholic other in the formation of British identity. He concedes that the juxtaposition existed in contemporary minds, but warns against placing too much emphasis on it. This is because Europeans, he argues, were also seen as 'fellow Goths', who, following an alternative path of history, had 'the misfortune to succumb to the new political force of absolute monarchy'.⁴ Searching beyond religion, Britons could conceive of other plains on which they could connect with the inhabitants of mainland Europe.

Perhaps, then, the problem is that Colley's argument draws on Benedict Anderson's definition of the nation as an 'imagined political

¹ S. Pincus, 'Review: *Britons. Forging the Nation, 1707-1837*', *Journal of Modern History*, 67:1 (1995), pp. 133-5.

² C. Kidd, 'North Britishness and the Nature of Eighteenth-Century British Patriotisms', *HJ*, 39:2 (1996), p. 382.

³ *Ibid*, p. 365.

⁴ Kidd, *British Identities*, p. 213.

community- and imagined as both inherently limited and sovereign'.¹ His definition makes nationalism necessarily prone to pushing some people, perhaps even members of the same society, outside of its inherent limits. Anderson, however, has met with certain critics of his own. Bell points out that the term 'nationalism' should only be understood as a conscious programme, which aims to construct a nation anew. Hence, he claims that some historians, including Anderson, have been mistaken in their terminology. In Bell's conception, nationalism requires the conscious effort of recruiting members rather than excluding otherness.

This meant that in France 'nationalism' did not exist until after the Revolution. However, Bell nevertheless discerns inklings of national sentiment in French pre-revolutionary thought, for instance in Physiocratic ideas about an older and more virtuous singular French character. Bell argues that it was eighteenth-century ideas about nation and *patrie* that came to inform the post-revolutionary construction of the conceptual French nation.² In this sense, his description of the national sentiment which developed in anticipation of nationalism bears an admitted relation to the activity of imagining a unified community which Anderson had described. In each case, the nation is no genuine feature of human society, but a principle, albeit a powerful one, for organising and consolidating a large community.

In each case the authors are forced to acknowledge the limits to their version of contemporary conceptions of the nation. Thus Colley admits that 'there were always dissenting voices', and that her study deals only with the 'seeming conformists'.³ National consciousness for Anderson was located in the 'vernacularizing thrust of capitalism', which helped to formally establish separate national print languages, allowing for conceptualisation and ultimately consciousness of a nation.⁴ However,

¹ B. Anderson, *Imagined Communities* (London, 2006), p. 6.

² Bell, *The Cult of the Nation*, pp. 3-5.

³ Colley, *Britons*, pp. 4-5.

⁴ Anderson, *Imagined Communities*, pp. 39-45.

he draws attention to the fact that the standardisation of language due to the rise of the press inevitably created 'languages-of-power' in each nation, which challenged and subordinated alternative dialects (which sounds something like a conscious programme of cultural uniformity, or Bell's nationalism).¹ Finally, Bell's account poses the issue most strongly, as he describes how, in the wake of the Revolution, observers of the national character eventually became alarmed at the apparent lack thereof, and also turned on linguistic diversity within France.² In each case, the organising principle of nationality either failed to reach the entire target community, or else it met with opposition from the periphery.

These central-outwards accounts of national consciousness have been met by periphery-inwards versions, amongst which Grafe numbers both her own offering and that of Peter Sahlins.³ Sahlins concentrates on the Cerdanya Valley of the Pyrenees, where the border between France and Spain now lies 'dead', as modern theorists describe an uncontested frontier.⁴ The author describes, however, the life of the French-Spanish delimitation, from its inception as a border between local jurisdictions and their people, to its confirmation as a territorial demarcation and a national frontier.⁵ Ultimately he argues that 'both state formation and nation building were two-way processes', since international events on a grand scale left an undefined border, which came to be definitively assigned only through the experiences of village communities on the periphery.⁶ These came to regard their village limits as the dividing line between 'us' and 'them'.⁷

Renaud Morieux, another historian of the edges of nations, however, objects to the notion of the frontier as 'a simple dividing line between

¹ Anderson, *Imagined Communities*, p. 45.

² Bell, *The Cult of the Nation*, p. 171.

³ Grafe, *Distant Tyranny*, p. xv.

⁴ Sahlins, *Boundaries*, p. 1.

⁵ *Ibid.*, pp. 6-7.

⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 8.

⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 9.

states'.¹ Overall he depicts the frontier as something rather more fluid – a space for international encounters – in a book which describes how economic interests on a very local or individual level could bridge the English Channel. Contact, between fishing communities for instance, persisted in spite of the Anglo-French rivalry and often open hostility in a period (1689-1815) sometimes misleadingly known as the Second Hundred Years' War.² If cross-Channel interactions such as these highlighted any limits, it was those of the rules and rhetoric of the centre, and not those between nations.³

This thesis, therefore, also takes a cue from the work of Anderson and Morieux, using economic interactions to establish just how far common people experienced national sentiment when it came down to an everyday yet vital aspect of their lives: the grain trade. For the institutions which regulated the trade, on a local basis particularly, therefore connected legislators, common consumers and capitalists in a nexus of responsibility, need, and profit, perhaps to rival the imagined community of a nation state.

Grafe's account of market integration in early-modern Spain briefly alludes to the idea of a moral economy. E.P. Thompson himself argued that, despite the 'parasitism of the State at the top, and the erosion of traditional relations by free labor and a monetary economy at the bottom', certain traditional patron-client structures, which had dictated social relations and order in the pre-modern economy, remained in place well into the eighteenth century.⁴ Grafe shows that these sorts of paternalist structures remained in place in Spain in spite of attacks from the state. Policy-making in relation to commodities such as *bacalao* was in the hands of local elites, who prioritised local issues in order to preserve their own position.

¹ R. Morieux, *Une Mer pour deux Royaumes* (Rennes, 2008), p. 26. This and all following translations of French language texts are my own unless otherwise stated.

² Ibid, pp. 17-8.

³ Ibid, p. 347.

⁴ E.P. Thompson, 'Patrician Society, Plebeian Culture', *Journal of Social History*, 7:4 (1974), p. 387.

This meant Spain suffered from an 'allocative inefficiency'.¹ However, the alliance of local authority and the poor potentially shielded local communities from the shocks of participation in an unforgiving global market. This is why, Grafe suggests, Spain experienced relatively few food riots in the period.² It is these sorts of interactions, unfortunately crammed into a mere aside in the work of Grafe and others, which this thesis also aims to develop.

The Local and the Global

There is something to be said for the privilege accorded to the peculiarities of place by the *Annales* historians and for their problem-oriented analysis, as opposed to a narrative method. Their approach allows for the study of a greater range of historical activities, as opposed to the traditional focus on past politics.³ It makes possible something towards a reconstruction of everyday provincial life in its totality. Moreover, privileging geographical space effectively subverts the narrow constraints of political units, which shackled most history before Fernand Braudel's *La Méditerranée et le Monde Méditerranéen à l'Époque de Philippe II* (1949) to the nation state.⁴

However, Peter Jones comments that the *Annales* historians have tended to assume an excessively narrow focus, transfixed on local agrarian conditions – 'harvest data, prices series and demography' – to the detriment of due consideration of institutional factors, which he thinks 'played a significant role in determining economic outcomes'.⁵ The local focus, he argues, has also meant that Ernest Labrousse, Fernand Braudel and other *Annales* historians have visualised France as composed of self-contained local markets, when 'there existed, in

¹ Grafe, *Distant Tyranny*, p. 197.

² *Ibid.*, pp. 198-200.

³ P. Burke, *The French Historical Revolution* (Cambridge, 1990), p. 2.

⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 41.

⁵ P.M. Jones, *Reform and Revolution in France, 1774-1791* (Cambridge, 1995), p. 83.

reality, a complex hierarchy of markets ranging from nationwide circuits for the production and distribution of high-quality textiles, to intensely local entrepôts for the satisfaction of day-to-day needs'.¹ This meant that, while in some respects the isolation and autonomy which characterised local subsistence in Labrousse's account may have been a reality, in other respects many communities were indeed exposed to the increasingly global trade of the period, especially when they bought non-subsistence items.²

Globalisation was an important issue for the common consumers of the eighteenth century. On the one hand, it allowed them to enjoy commodities from the Atlantic and beyond, from *bacalao* to tobacco, as histories of consumerism attest.³ However, globalisation also had the potential to transform domestic economies and could bring with it worrisome side effects. It too, therefore, became an important intellectual context for the period. On a local level, specialisation could stifle the economic diversity of regional economies, causing decline and dislocation. On a national level, it was feared that global trade could precipitate the fall of empires.

Anxiety over global trade therefore entered contemporary debates particularly in terms of how far nations should try to regulate their own economies. Issues such as wage rates and protectionism became matters of international politics, in a struggle for supremacy. According to Istvan Hont, it was the vision of commercial states competing in a global marketplace that led thinkers, still informed by Hobbes' depiction of the gladiatorial posture of international relations, to politicise the economy and subjugate commerce to reason of state.⁴ However, the logic of 'jealousy of trade' was not to be entirely squared

¹ Ibid, p. 88. According to Jones, James Thomson is of the same persuasion in J.K.J. Thomson, *Clermont-de-Lodève* (Cambridge, 1982). Regina Grafe's work fits into the same pattern.

² Cf. E. Labrousse, *Esquisse du Mouvement des Prix et des Revenus en France* (Paris, 1933), I, p. 119.

³ M. Berg, *Luxury and Pleasure in Eighteenth-Century Britain* (Oxford, 2005), pp. 7-8.

⁴ I. Hont, *Jealousy of Trade*, pp. 4-6.

with the civic humanism of republican thought, for it could be seen to strain the ideal of self-preservation beyond credible limits towards 'economic aggrandizement' through overseas empire and luxury consumption.¹ Hobbesian republican-humanism was helped along here by Grotius' natural jurisprudence, which codified arguments of reason of state by elevating the concept to a basic right.² The civic-humanist notion of the patriotic citizen was therefore facing an extravagant makeover.

What emerged was the idea that nations were now competing through commerce for the resources to defend themselves in (or to wage) war, and it was not necessarily a comforting prospect. Though generally avoiding the questionable term 'mercantilism' itself, Hont therefore deals with the intellectual context of many of the policies which once seemed to form a system under that label.³ Since its first incarnation, mercantilism has been revisited, rethought and reimagined, but has never retreated too far from the consciousness of historians who have to deal with political economy in the early modern period and beyond.⁴

Since mercantilism was originally identified by its inventor, Gustav Schmoller, as an integral part of the process of state-building, it has obvious relevance as a context and frame of analysis for this thesis.⁵ Since this initial conceptualisation, however, this term has had an interesting history of its own. Coined in the 1880s the term was adopted by William Cunningham, who argued that the financial pressure of war 'forced statesmen to interest themselves in the development of national resources, the extension of commerce and the

¹ Ibid, p. 17.

² Ibid, p. 15.

³ L. Magnusson, *The Political Economy of Mercantilism* (London & New York, 2015), p. 46.

⁴ D.C. Coleman, 'Mercantilism Revisited', *HJ*, 23:4 (1980), p. 773; S. Pincus, 'Rethinking Mercantilism', *William and Mary Quarterly*, 69:1 (2012), p. 1; P.J. Stern and C. Wennerlind, 'Introduction' in idem (eds.), *Mercantilism Reimagined* (New York, 2014), p. 3.

⁵ G. Schmoller, *The Mercantile System and its Historical Significance* (New York, 1896), p. 50.

prosperity of industry'.¹ Matters of a commercial or economic nature were, according to Cunningham, subordinated to the political needs of the state at home and abroad.² Eli Heckscher tended to agree. His two massive volumes, simply entitled *Mercantilism*, were for a time the definitive work on the subject. Still now they represent the epitome of that viewpoint which takes mercantilism to be a coherent policy driver of the past, which was purely political and in no way related to contemporary economic realities.³

Criticism and adjustment ensued. Jacob Viner, for example, argued that mercantilism was not simply a matter of power. He maintained that generating wealth in its own right was a deliberate intension of mercantilist writers. However, their endeavors were misguided, due to their unenlightened condition and limited understanding of economics. Mercantilism, therefore, was a flawed policy designed to nurture the dual intentions of national power and plenty.⁴ John Maynard Keynes, however, attempted to correct the assumption that mercantilist theory was unsound. He argued that mercantilist policies could make sense in primitive growth economies, where the government lacked the wherewithal to invest directly, and foreign direct investment or loans from abroad were not a plausible alternative. Ultimately he took mercantilist writers for intellectual predecessors of his own interventionist views.⁵

D.C. Coleman headed a new charge against mercantilism. He discounted the role played by ideology in the actions of politicians, who acted 'in particular contexts with particular problems'.⁶ What had seemed a

¹ W. Cunningham, *The Growth of English Industry and Commerce in Modern Times. Part 1: The Mercantile System* [1907] (Bristol, 2001), p. 4.

² J. Viner, 'Power Versus Plenty as Objectives of Foreign Policy in the Seventeenth and Eighteenth Centuries', *World Politics*, 1:1 (1948), p. 3.

³ Coleman, 'Mercantilism revisited', p. 773; E. Heckscher, *Mercantilism* (London, 1955), II, p. 347.

⁴ Viner, 'Power Versus Plenty', p. 29.

⁵ J.M. Keynes to R.F. Harrod, 27th August 1935 in *The Collected Writings, XIII: The General Theory and After. Part 1: Preparation*, ed. D. Moggridge (London, 1973), p. 552.

⁶ D.C. Coleman, 'Eli Heckscher and the Idea of Mercantilism', *Scandinavian Economic History Review*, 5:1 (1957), p. 25.

coherent system was, he claimed, nothing more than one of the many 'inventions of scholars, [which] are designed to simplify the infinite complexity of the past'.¹ He warned against the oversimplification that this could engender, pointing out that the economic policy of the past was subject to a multiplicity of influences, from the threat of public disorder in the face of food shortage, through the power of urban guilds, to the squabbles of the men who formed government.

Meanwhile, A.V. Judges had famously declared that 'mercantilism never had a creed; nor was there a priesthood dedicated to its service'.² Mercantilism did not live up to the criteria of a true 'ism' because the body of protectionist laws, which seemed to reflect a coherent system, were actually forged haphazardly out of simple 'vested interests' or rent-seeking.³ Later Steve Pincus added that Judges and even Coleman had fallen short of contributing a substitute narrative for the role of mercantilism in guiding policy. He himself, therefore, sought to develop one from party politics and their influence on economic policy in this period.⁴

Following Judges and Coleman, it was not long before a whole volley of fire began to rain down on Heckscher's 'anti-determinist citadel', from those who saw economic forces at play.⁵ Separating mercantilist writing and pamphleteering from actual policy pursued by the government, Barry Supple argued that what had been dubbed a *mercantile system* was actually nothing more than a series of reactive measures on the part of a government coping with repetitive short-term economic fluctuations, which could threaten the stability of the government through public disorder. Mercantilism for Supple was often simply the 'economics of crisis'.⁶

¹ D.C. Coleman, 'Editor's Introduction' in idem (ed.), *Revisions in Mercantilism* (London, 1969), p. 1.

² A.V. Judges, 'The Idea of a Mercantile State' in Coleman (ed.), *Revisions*, p. 35.

³ Ibid, p. 41.

⁴ Pincus, 'Rethinking Mercantilism', p. 9.

⁵ D.C. Coleman, 'Mercantilism Revisited', p. 774.

⁶ B.E. Supple, *Commercial Crisis and Change in England* (Cambridge, 1964), pp. 197-8.

Lars Magnusson, however, has gone some way to restoring coherence to mercantilist thought. He argues that the term can denote a specific discourse, which allowed contemporaries to engage with economic subjects in new and interesting ways. This provided a framework for modern economic thought.¹ Therefore Magnusson accuses Supple and also Joyce Oldham Appleby of ignoring the dynamism of economic discourse in the period.² Critical as he may be, Magnusson's argument bears certain similarities to Appleby's, for both identified a new characteristic in the work of writers such as Thomas Mun, which she describes as 'the beginning of an effort to isolate economic activity for purposes of analysis'.³ Early forays into 'purely economic factors' were an intellectual response to the deep depression of the early seventeenth century.⁴

The concept, therefore, has tended to make sporadic comebacks, and evidently proves a useful way of framing the past in the light of the present. For example, it is clear that the context of the Great Depression coloured Keynes's interpretation of past economic thought. Philip Stern and Carl Wennerlind have suggested that the origins of the concept also lay in the contemporary context of its German authors, who were 'arguably drawn to seventeenth-century views on the relationship between the economy and the state as a foil for discussing how Europe would negotiate liberalism, socialism, and capitalism at a moment when international conflicts ran high'.⁵ Likewise, Philipp Rössner suggests that we have the global economic crisis to thank (or to blame) for the fact that mercantilist and *dirigiste* schemes of political economy seem to have come back into fashion in current historical research.⁶

¹ L. Magnusson, *Mercantilism: the Shaping of an Economic Language* (London, 1994), p. 8.

² *Ibid.*, pp. 210-11.

³ J.O. Appleby, *Economic Thought and Ideology in Seventeenth-Century England* (Princeton, 1978), p. 47.

⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 37.

⁵ Stern and Wennerlind, 'Introduction', p. 5.

⁶ P.R. Rössner, 'Heckscher Reloaded? Mercantilism, the State, and Europe's Transition to Industrialization, 1600-1900', *HJ*, 58:2 (2015), p. 664.

Nevertheless, although more recent historiography therefore generally demurs at understanding mercantilism as inspired by a 'unified theory and an internally closed paradigm', the term can still be usefully interpreted as a common mode of expression for dealing with an established set of questions, in turn used to discuss and direct economic development in the domestic and international sphere.¹ According to David Todd, mercantilism 'thus corresponds to a key moment of the construction of the state in Europe and of the military-commercial expansion of European states into America, Africa and Asia between 1500 and 1800'.² Apart from its historiographical use, where it often serves as shorthand for categorising and labelling political economists, the term mercantilism can therefore also represent a very specific and practical process of thought and action.

Within the domestic sphere, however, Hoppit has reflected more than once on the importance of regional and national variation, especially in a composite state such as Britain, when it comes to state initiatives to protect or promote industry and agriculture.³ Mercantilism, understood in the sense of economic nationalism, therefore, has multiple levels of complexity. On a practical level, this thesis looks at regional responses to the nation-centric view which was inherent in the often mercantilist outlook of central states. Though Philippe Minard has shown that Colbertist tenants gripped the French trade inspectors who were deployed in manufacturing centres scattered across France from the seventeenth to the mid-eighteenth century,⁴ in chapters 1 and 2, this thesis suggests that, in France, mercantilist 'terminology'⁵ had still not come to dominate other modes of communication between the centre and the periphery in economic issues, as it seems to have done in Britain. Meanwhile, chapter 3 looks at the effects of apparently

¹ Rössner, 'Heckscher Reloaded?', p. 681; Magnusson, *Mercantilism*, pp. 14-15.

² D. Todd, *L'Identité Économique de la France* (Paris, 2008), pp. 21-2.

³ J. Hoppit, 'The Nation, the State, and the First Industrial Revolution', *Journal of British Studies*, 50:2 (2011), pp. 309-10.

⁴ P. Minard, *La Fortune du Colbertisme* (Paris, 1998), pp. 331-5.

⁵ Magnusson, *Mercantilism*, p. 15.

mercantilist policies from a colonial perspective also. Here it finds that, similarly to Morieux's argument, economic interests regularly defeated both British and French national political and economic programmes.

However, this thesis also confronts the chequered career of mercantilism in relation to economic theory, and uses the concept to engage with economic thought in favour of and against free trade. The idea of the 'mercantile system' was of course invented in the eighteenth century, though its meaning was quite distinct and far removed from how mercantilism is understood today. For, as Coleman pointed out, the term has been used problematically to describe economics and economists in a time when neither had yet been invented.¹

Thus, an important element of the second part of this thesis, which deals generally with economic thought, is to historicise political economy, and understand the early inklings of a new science of economics in their proper context. It is especially concerned with the general ambivalence that characterised contemporary attitudes towards the idea of economic systems. In this sense, chapter 4 particularly seeks to refine Magnusson's claim that mercantilist discourse contributed to the development of the notion of the economy as an autonomous system.²

Part two of the thesis spends some time on the role that political context and other ideas played in otherwise economic debates. It therefore draws on the work of Emma Rothschild, especially in terms of the practical politically inspired elements of Turgot's and Adam Smith's economics as they pertained to the grain trade. Rothschild argues that Turgot in particular appreciated the need to compromise freedom in some markets in order to champion free market liberalism in the grain trade.³ In this way, and also by looking at the practical responses of

¹ Coleman, 'Editor's Introduction', p. 17.

² Magnusson, *Mercantilism*, p. 11.

³ E. Rothschild, 'Commerce and the State: Turgot, Condorcet and Smith', *The Economic Journal*, 102:414 (1992), p. 1197.

even more humble officials and businessmen, Rothschild, along with others such as Gareth Stedman Jones, has forged a 'new history of economic thought'.¹

This new history seeks out the threads between the 'high' thought of theorists; the 'middle' thought of local authorities and businessmen; and the 'low' thought of day-to-day existence.² This thesis might also be located in this tradition, as it attempts to go further and understand political economy from the bottom up. Ultimately, it seeks to link fruitful recent trends in historiography, such as the new approach to economic intellectual history and revisions of the nation state, with the rich older traditions of E.P. Thompson's social history and the intensely local studies of the *Annales* historians. It thus aims to intensify and enliven Hont's account of the gradual intellectual depreciation of the system of 'jealousy of trade', providing a greater context for his explanation of how lofty theorists such as David Hume and ultimately Adam Smith emerged on the other side of conflicts like the Seven Years' War, still able to speculate on the civilising and ultimately pacifying qualities of trade.³

Not that the perceived threat of globalisation exactly abated. According to David Todd, the dangers later posed by 'modern globalisation' (as opposed to the 'archaic globalisation' of the early modern period) informed nineteenth-century protectionist ideology in France. Protectionism gradually became part of a French national economic identity which established itself in opposition to the perceived character of British political economy. This was thought to be underscored by a callous free trade, unsympathetic towards the negative social effects of the unencumbered competition of a global economy.⁴ It is interesting that the term 'protectionist' became

¹ M. J. Daunton, 'The Future Direction of British History', *History Workshop Journal*, 72:1 (2011), p. 222.

² Ibid; E. Rothschild, 'Political Economy' in G. Stedman Jones and G. Claeys (eds.), *The Cambridge History of Nineteenth-Century Political Thought* (Cambridge, 2011), p. 749.

³ Hont, *Jealousy of Trade*, p. 37.

⁴ D. Todd, *Free Trade and its Enemies in France, 1814-1851* (Cambridge, 2015), p. 1.

prevalent in Britain during the Corn Law debates of the 1840s, and remained a pejorative term until the end of the century, for even in the nineteenth century, debates about the fate of the grain trade encapsulated far broader concerns about a nation's character and the extent of its participation in global trade.¹

Magnusson argues that mercantilism only existed in Britain as such, because he understands the term as referring to the economic discourse that developed in that specific context. However, even he has to admit that basic 'unit ideas' were shared, though the context of another nation could allow for the development of a discourse quite different from British mercantilism.² This is the result of a very strict definition of the term. However, Stern and Wennerlind have suggested that, rather than trying to define mercantilism itself, it can be more productive to study its 'reflections' in contemporary discourse sometimes seemingly unrelated to economics.³

Thus, though discussing free trade and protectionism, Todd's account seems to fit in with this guiding principal in approaching political economy in and around the eighteenth century. For it helps to understand the economic thought of that time as inextricably linked with other areas of thought or concern, such as poverty or national identity.⁴ In this light, it therefore does make sense to talk about and compare mercantilism in the French and the British contexts, because the various comparable issues in which it was raised can reflect back on our understanding of the term itself and the apparently economic ideas to which it refers.

Comparative History

In spite of the inherent transnationalism of ideas to which Todd's work especially can attest, this thesis focuses primarily on an international

¹ Ibid, p. 4.

² Magnusson, *Mercantilism*, p. 174.

³ Stern and Wennerlind, 'Introduction', p. 4.

⁴ Ibid.

comparison of the grain trade in Britain and France, rather than providing a transnational account *per se*. Clearly it has to appreciate that national identities and national communities in general cannot be understood or even imagined in isolation, as the work of Colley and Todd show. Indeed, J.H. Elliott points out that due attention to the *histoire croisée*, which lingers in a background of emulation, exchange and cultural transfer between nations, can help to free comparative history from its propensity to assume 'a point of view external to the objects which are compared'.¹ Thus, while acknowledging the importance of the traffic of ideas, sentiments, commodities, and people themselves across borders, this thesis, in comparison with highly transnational work such as that of Morieux, is, with the exception of chapter 3, generally about comparable encounters within the limits of Britain and France.

As we now know, the nation is not necessarily the useful or even stable unit of comparison which it had seemed. Besides this, it is necessary to delve a bit deeper to understand responses to nationalism. For these reasons, this thesis works in the first instance from regional case-studies, adding material from other regions where a greater context is needed. Thus in the opening chapters, two case studies of the grain trade and its regulation in the county of Norfolk in the British, and the *généralité* of Tours in the French case allow for a close examination of the sinews of the community and nation in each country. In general, the thesis relies on an amalgamation of export figures from port books as well as weather and productivity data to establish a picture of the health and vigour of the trade in the aforementioned regions, before turning to the documents of local authorities pertaining to national and local market regulation; contraventions thereof and the justification or condemnation of transgressors; and instances of rioting or other popular demonstrations in relation to the grain trade. To these are

¹ J.H. Elliott, *History in the Making* (New Haven & London, 2012), p. 182.

added the published works of contemporary political economists on the subject.

The overall structure of the thesis again evokes the work of Kwass, for it places its analysis of the practical or institutional sources in the first section, ahead of the economic theory and published literature about the grain trade, which is examined in the second part. Often history books deal with the theory first, and then show how it was implemented in practice. For Kwass, however, 'determining the incidence of new forms of taxation is merely a preliminary step toward a broader examination of the politics of taxation'.¹ It is only after establishing the practical facts of taxation, followed by the examination of patterns of its contestation, that the 'cultural space' or context of these two practical elements should be added. It is in this way that Kwass seeks to illuminate the 'cultural field between state and society'.² He places the discussion of practice ahead of the theoretical or literary component because his focus is politics, and not tax rituals.

Likewise, though the subject matter of this thesis is the grain trade, its analytical focus is levelled more on a cultural field – citizenship and national belonging in the context of globalisation – than on the cornfields themselves. It explores practical and theoretical attempts by French and British writers, legislators and people to assert their interpretation of economic identity and to design an economic destiny for their nation or region.

Nevertheless, the thesis is loosely arranged around a narrative, set at a time when population growth was placing increasing pressure on old frameworks of provisioning in Britain and France. For during the mid-eighteenth century, subsistence crises shifted from being an intermittent torment to a structural problem. Though perhaps not entirely abreast with the factual realities of the predicament, after 1750

¹ Kwass, *Privilege*, p. 15.

² *Ibid*, p. 16.

the people and authorities were nevertheless forced to confront this new situation. The stress is evident in the frequent riots and forthright debate of the period. The narrative which this thesis follows then, is that of the debates and regulatory changes which took place in Britain and France from 1750.

In Britain, 1750 marked the beginning of new debates on the wisdom of corn bounties and other rules which regulated the production of grain in Britain.¹ In France, the 1750s saw the origins of the physiocratic movement, epitomised in the publication of Francois Quesnay's *Tableau Économique* in 1759.² However, the 1760s were fraught with shortage and uncertainty in the grain trade, which had a corresponding effect on both debate and regulation. The deregulation experiment in France, begun in 1763, was blighted by shortage, and by the end of 1770 the grain trade was restricted anew.³ A second deregulation project was attempted between 1774 and 1776, its termination coinciding ironically with the publication of Adam Smith's *Inquiry into the Nature and Causes of the Wealth of Nations*.

Meanwhile, in Britain, the 1760s saw a succession of provisional laws which temporarily banned exportation. Only in 1773 did the House of Commons manage to pass a permanent law that used price levels to determine when importation or exportation of grain should be forbidden. However, this had to be modified in 1781 and beyond, as it was open to manipulation.⁴ Managing interests clearly remained a complicated problem for the legislature. However, Britain was by this time becoming a consistent net-importer of grain, changing the stakes for everyone involved in the debate.⁵ This thesis contextualises these legislative developments in the events and literature of the period.

¹ D.G. Barnes, *A History of the English Corn Laws, 1660-1846* (London, 1930), p. 23.

² L. Vardi, *The Physiocrats and the World of the Enlightenment* (Cambridge, 2012), p. 47.

³ S.L. Kaplan, *Bread, Politics and Political Economy* (The Hague, 1976), II, pp. 532-9.

⁴ Barnes, *English Corn Laws*, p. 50.

⁵ B.R. Mitchell, *British Historical Statistics* (Cambridge, 1988), p. 221.

Part one (chapters 1-3) is concerned with the success or failure of programmes of economic integration and nationalism which were sometimes deliberately pursued through changes to grain regulation. Chapter 1 concentrates on the county of Norfolk, and engages with the efforts of its people to cope with the economic stagnation of their region by examining their practical relationship with grain. Ultimately it contradicts the notion that mercantilist language necessarily constituted or represented nationalism. Instead it argues that the mercantilist conception of the nation and national good was used as a pretext to defend local economic diversity, which was at stake in the face of globalisation and specialisation. Local elites, as well as the people, seem to have been equally committed to the local cause. For they were not prepared to see their own interests fade, and negotiated with the central powers in order to protect their localised perception of the economy.

Chapter 2 shows that, similarly, the autonomy of Tours was directly challenged – in terms of administration and justice, and also to an extent, fiscal matters – by a national programme of deregulating, or ‘liberating’, the grain trade. However, ultimately, the community seems to have been insufficiently awash with national patriotism to respond to a system which removed local controls over grain grown within and passing through the region. In comparison with Norfolk, the people and authorities of Tours did not comment on these challenges in the language of mercantilism, but tended to embrace the rhetoric of humanitarianism and altruism.

In each case, popular demonstrations reflected commitment to the idea of a moral economy; traditional market practices and regulations; and limited participation in a regional economy. The people generally did not respond to appeals on the grounds of patriotism or shared citizenship on a national level. Nor indeed did traders in and around the British and French colonies in North America and the Caribbean, which is the focus of chapter 3. In this highly politicised arena, private or even

community interests again did not necessarily align with mercantilist measures which favoured the respective metropolises in the guise of the *national* interest. Illicit trade marked the point where official national policies and private interest diverged. This chapter tracks attempts to justify and legalise contraband trade, which often also took on the pretext of the national good. There were concerns about who actually belonged to the nation, and what rights citizenship ought to confer upon them. The relaxation of rules governing British and French colonial trade, it is argued, reflected renewed understandings of the role of the metropole and colonies in global trade. Moreover, the new economic identities which were developing particularly in the British metropole helped to open a rift between centre and colonies, which could potentially cast members of the empire outside the community of the nation.

Part two, meanwhile, deals with the contemporary conceptualisation, within the 'literary sphere', of the practical issues raised in the first three chapters. Chapter 4 picks up particularly on the focus of chapters 1 and 2, namely the implications for the state of a national market, in the work of James Steuart and Jacques Necker. Both authors wrote in support of regulating the grain trade and remained wary of competing private and 'class' interests. In many ways, they also preferred classical and feudal idylls where they imagined that labourers were sheltered from the reckless depravity of the market.

In tracing the evolution of society, they accepted, however, that a market economy was part of the process of establishing a coherent nation. Both identified the source of social cohesion in commercial exchange. They believed that it was important to limit the exportation of grain due to its fundamental role in this exchange. Thus it is argued that, in dealing with the transition from a feudal to a wage economy, Steuart and Necker were attempting to articulate a programme of nation-building, wherein they imagined that the void left by traditional patron-client relations or the moral economy could only be filled by an

omniscient and interventionist central state, which cared for the diverse interests of every class and member.

Chapters 5 and 6, meanwhile, look at arguments which were in favour of free trade. Chapter 5 examines the work of Charles Townshend, Josiah Tucker and Anne-Robert-Jacques Turgot, which dealt with the ideas of national interest and the global market which came through most strongly in chapter 3. The opinions of these authors as to which members of society were qualified to study political economy fed into their notion that it was the interests of the landed class which most closely aligned with that of the nation at large. This line of thought had implications for their ideas about citizenship and rights, and the ideal system of government in their own countries. It led Tucker and Turgot especially to make international comparisons of their own. Both shared positive views of naturalisation, and so their ideas about national belonging were fluid, and depended upon unity of interest far more so than considerations such as birthplace. Nevertheless, the divergence of interest which Tucker identified between Britain and its colonies led him to the conclusion that the colonists no longer belonged to what he considered the British nation, and Turgot similarly looked forward to the secession of the French and the British colonies.

Finally, chapter 6 homes in on Adam Smith's *The Wealth of Nations* and develops the idea of national identities in a global economy in this work. In Smith's work the link between interest and national identity began to crystallise. For where Tucker and Turgot had sought the alignment of interests into a national ideal, Smith analysed systems of political economy which he perceived as already constructed from the economic orientations and interests of economic participants. Though misguided, the combination of interests formed a national character to which globalisation posed the final threat.

From the perspective of modern economic theory, national integration of markets is good, because it allows for the more efficient allocation of

resources.¹ However, national economic consolidation was a contentious issue for many individuals and groups in the eighteenth century, who were therefore not unconscious of the compromises which membership of a nation state demanded. Though self-interest could now be seen as a useful stimulus on an individual level, it did not emerge as a unifying force, with even proponents of free trade concerned about its limits. This was because self-interest was often seen to contend with the desired path of a national interest, which in turn was supposed to be defined by national identity and membership. Nor did the language of nationalism help to square this circle. For, as the negotiations of manufacturers and merchants in Norfolk and the Caribbean show, patriotism, or even anxieties about the cross-Channel foe, failed to unite the nation in important economic ways. This meant that a system of economic nationalism, though it could technically act as an inclusive category for national belonging, could also have the effect of putting up tall fences between those whose vision of the ideal economy diverged.

¹ Root, *Fountain of Privilege*, p. xi.

Chapter 1: Norfolk's People and Produce in the National Economy

Introduction

Laws still regulated many aspects of the British corn trade in the eighteenth century. Rules guided how middlemen could speculate or make a profit on grain, placed standards on the measurement of loose grain and baked loaves, and forbade or allowed, and sometimes even encouraged, exportation and importation of grain beyond British borders. The purpose of this chapter is to make a case study of just one county, Norfolk, using the interactions of its various people with the grain laws to examine the way the county's economic identity coexisted with a national economic ideal. That ideal was one where markets were integrated, regions were specialised, and commercial conditions and property terms were fixed and uniform across the nation.¹

The county of Norfolk has a strong presence and identity in the historiography as an agrarian region. It is usually depicted as a centre for corn production and the seat of the agricultural revolution. However, the importance of Norfolk's manufacturing efforts is sometimes overlooked. The county's non-agricultural industry, though in decline by the latter half of the eighteenth century, needs to be incorporated into our understanding of the county's economic identity, as it played an important part in contemporary understandings.

Therefore, the focus of the first section of this chapter is the prevalence of the grain trade and other industries in Norfolk. This is explored in terms of actual volumes of exports as well as perceived importance. With this in place, section two will begin to look at the contemporary

¹ R. Grafe, *Distant Tyranny* (Princeton, 2012), p. 2.

vision of the grain trade and the county's role therein, from the perspective of the poorer inhabitants of Norfolk and of large landowners, city-dwelling administrators, and owners of the county's manufacturing initiatives, all by looking at the way they interacted with ancient grain legislation. The final section tackles interaction with later legislation, which generally dealt with the international scene, either blocking exportation or, at the other extreme, paying bounties on exports.

In the eighteenth century, the legislative efforts of local administration in Norfolk generally tended to the protection of the manufacturing industry, which was fiercely guarded on the basis of the most mercantilist of rationales. This, in retrospect, makes for a complicated insight into the national identity of Norfolk's inhabitants. On a surface level, it would seem that merchants and manufacturers were engaging with patriotic values and participating in a national anxiety about the propensity of foreigners to undercut British sales in a global marketplace. In the higher social circles of Norwich administration and business, national wealth was actually seen as a local matter.

However, the life of this industry was seen to depend upon the availability of supplies in the neighbourhood, to the possible detriment of other regions. In this sense, elite views overlapped with those of the common textile workers, who were also concerned with the food situation within their communities and condemned interference in the communal food supply, be it from profiteering middlemen or international dealers. As sincere as commitments to the national good might have been, it will be argued that this vocal patriotism served as a rejoinder to an economic process which would see the national economy grow more integrated and streamlined: specialisation. In light of this process, even the central state was expected to serve local and not simply national concerns.



Source: E. Bowen, An Accurate Map of the County of Norfolk Divided into Hundreds and Drawn from Surveys (1749). gallica.bnf.fr / Bibliothèque Nationale de France.

Norfolk as a Corn County

In 1757 a concerned inhabitant referred to Norfolk as 'a county esteemed by far the greatest corn county, for its bigness, in the kingdom'.¹ He wished to persuade the gentlemen readers of the *London Magazine* to alert their local MP to the dangers threatened by the expiration of a parliamentary act forbidding the exportation of corn overseas. This letter to the editor thus demonstrates the seeming importance of its writer's county to the food supply of an entire kingdom, as well as its role in supplying overseas nations with life-sustaining commodities.

Similarly, Joan Thirsk has emphasised Norfolk's early rise to prominence as a supplier of grain both nationally, though primarily to London, and internationally, to Scotland, the Netherlands and the Baltic.² The county must have participated heartily in trade, as its ports attracted strict observation from a central government which jealously oversaw maritime commerce. For the quarter ending in April 1780, of almost £10,000 spent on customs officers in England and Wales, Blakeney and Cley were responsible for £62 of this cost, Wells for £87, King's Lynn for £252 and Yarmouth for £531. Though dwarfed by spending on customs officers for Bristol, this puts Yarmouth into the top ten most lavished upon ports in a list of seventy. Indeed, Yarmouth's customs officer salaries at this time almost matched Dover's, which came in at £547 and actually had approximately only 47 officers, to Yarmouth's 57. King's Lynn had around 37.³

Norfolk ports were well watched, and yet customs figures show that they contributed little to net income. T.S. Willan tells us that, for the

¹ Anon, 'To the Author, &c.', *The London Magazine, or, Gentleman's Monthly Intelligencer*, XXVI (1757), p. 567.

² J. Thirsk, 'The Farming Regions of England' in idem (ed.), *The Agrarian History of England and Wales*, IV (Cambridge, 1967), pp. 40-41.

³ Cambridge University Library Add Mss 5237: Customs Establishment. Quarterly Establishment Books of the Customs, London, Out-ports, etc. Quarter ending 5th April 1780.

seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries at least, Yarmouth was the key water connection for Norwich, and hence was the port concerned with the principal out-bound shipping of Norwich's manufactures. However, the port was subject to unfavourable weather and tidal conditions, meaning it required regular maintenance. This was to be financed, according to multiple parliamentary acts, from its own customs revenue.¹ Any gain from Yarmouth customs and duties was, therefore, siphoned off by the burdensome upkeep required by its unfortunate exposure to nature's forces. More important, perhaps, is the fact that bounties awarded to merchants for exporting grain abroad were to be paid out of the gross customs collections of the port they left. If a lot of grain did go abroad through one port then it could even be left with a deficit. This is exactly what did happen to Yarmouth and King's Lynn as well as many other ports in 1753.² The two Norfolk ports were especially in the red.

According to bounties data from the customs office for the period between Christmas 1751 and Christmas 1752, the four recorded Norfolk ports laid out 40% of all bounties in England and Wales. In that year a fifth of recorded English and Welsh wheat exports left Norfolk outports.³ This one-off piece of data, then, would suggest that Norfolk's corn exports were unusually high in relation to the rest of Britain.

Certainly much of this profusion of grain exports should be attributed to agricultural success. However, it is also important to note that the Norfolk coastline was well connected via navigable rivers to the backcountry where the production of corn took place. The county also has a long coastline jutting into the North Sea economic area of activity.⁴ Bounties were, of course, only paid on international

¹ T.S. Willan, *The English Coasting Trade* (Manchester, 1938), p. 129.

² TNA T1/351/47: Papers Concerning the Bounty on Exported Corn, 26th February 1753.

³ TNA Cust 24/19: Abstracts of Exports under Ports. Corn Exports and Bounty Statistics, 25th December 1734- 17th February 1753.

⁴ P.J. Corfield, 'East Anglia' in P. Clark (ed.), *The Cambridge History of Urban Britain*, II (Cambridge, 2000), pp. 39-40.

shipments, and so this data indicates that Norfolk was especially important in the external grain trade.

A good indication of all the legal trade entering and exiting Norfolk ports, together with its origin or destination, can be gleaned from the county's port books. Neither the treasury's customs receipts, nor the locally generated port books, which are fairly complete, can be relied upon for a perfectly accurate reading of the quantities of any goods moving in, out, or around the island. This is because, firstly, smuggled goods and fraud distorted calculations of the volume of external trade. This distortion is important in regard to the international grain trade, as merchants and smugglers were thought to sometimes re-land shipments of grain, or commit other frauds in order to claim bounty payments multiple times or in excess of the shipment's actual value.¹ Secondly, the books might offer an underestimate of internal trade also, because within the coastal bounds of the island, road transport was sometimes a more viable option. Turkeys for instance, a famous product of Norfolk, marched their journey to London markets, as they were an impracticable water-going cargo.² Apart from that, the books themselves are sometimes damaged and often hard to read. They are occasionally incomplete which means, as we see below, direct comparisons between certain periods are not always possible.

Grain was nevertheless, by its very nature, easy maritime merchandise³ and the port books, scruffy as they sometimes are, can offer a good insight (which customs documents cannot) into the volume of trade generally, and grain in particular, sent coastwise as compared to that which went abroad. This ratio, as figures 2, 3 and 4 show, depended heavily on legislation.

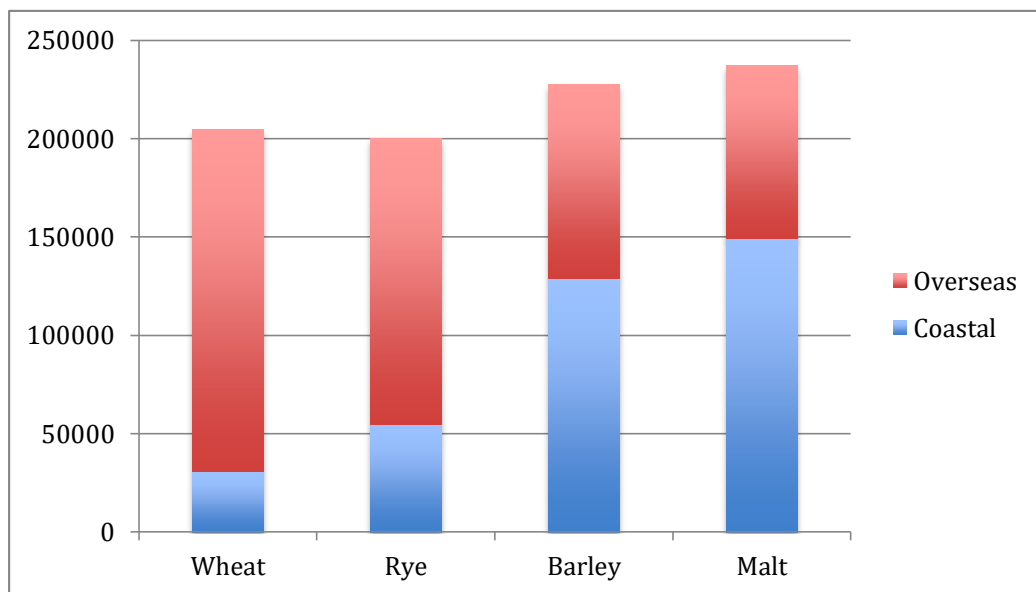
¹ D.G. Barnes, *A History of the English Corn Laws* (London, 1930), p. 26.

² B.A. Holderness, 'East Anglia and the Fens' in J. Thirsk (ed.), *The Agrarian History of England and Wales*, V, Part 1 (Cambridge, 1984), p. 237.

³ P. J. Corfield, *The Impact of English Towns 1700-1800* (Oxford, 1982), p. 41.

These charts present the total volume of each type of grain shipped in each given period, broken down into that which went overseas and that which was shipped along the coast to British destinations. The first two periods, which more or less represent *normal* years (years apart from 1756-7, 1766-7 and 1770-74 known for their hardship and riotousness¹) show foreign exports of wheat and rye exceeded the amount travelling coastwise, whilst for barley and malt the reverse was true. This was because the highest bounty was payable on wheat and rye. Meanwhile, although oats were sent all round Britain and were eligible for a small bounty upon exportation, they were rarely, if ever, dispatched abroad from King’s Lynn or Yarmouth.

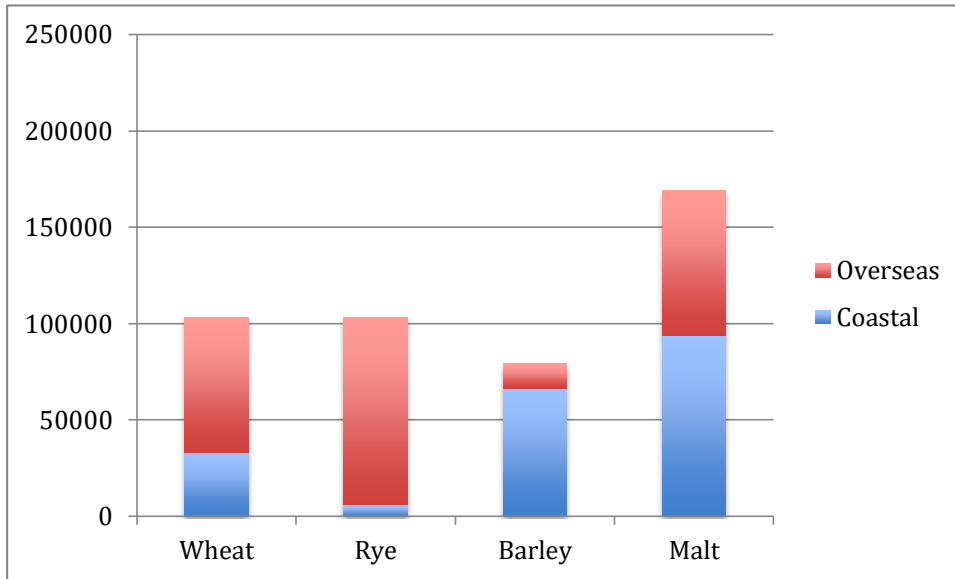
Figure 2: Bushels of Main Grains shipped Overseas and Coastally from King’s Lynn between Christmas 1751 and Midsummer 1752



Source: TNA E 190/457/7, Port of King’s Lynn, Customer and Controller Coastal, xmas 1751-midsummer 1752 and TNA E 190/457/5 Port of King’s Lynn, Searcher Overseas, xmas 1751-midsummer 1752.

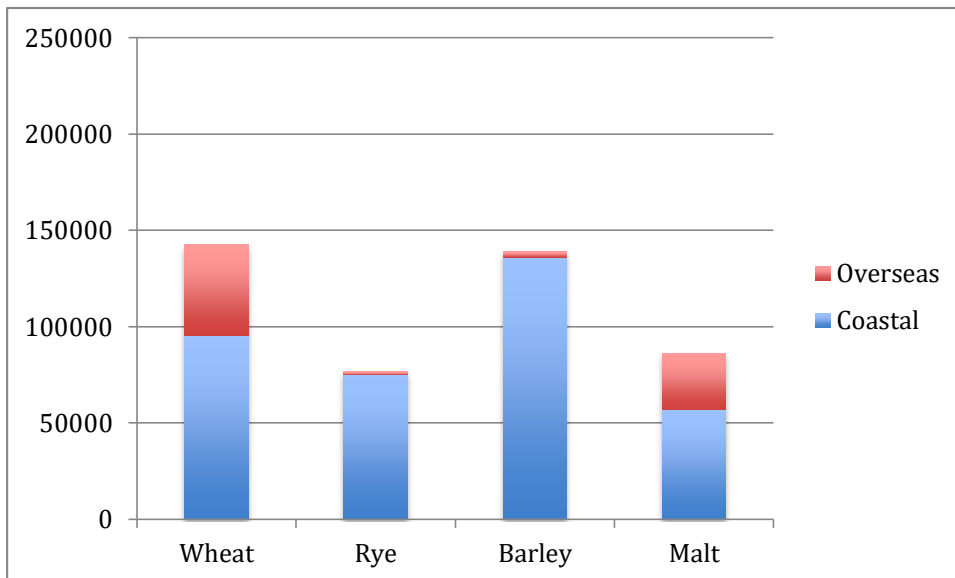
¹ Barnes, *English Corn Laws*, p. 31; E.P. Thompson, ‘The Moral Economy of the English Crowd in the Eighteenth Century’, *P&P*, 50 (1971), p. 79.

Figure 3: Bushels of Main Grains shipped Overseas and Coastally from King's Lynn between Christmas 1759 and Midsummer 1760



Source: TNA E 190/459/11, Port of King's Lynn, Customer and Controller Coastal, xmas 1751-midsummer 1752 and TNA E 190/459/9, Port of King's Lynn, Searcher Overseas, xmas 1751-midsummer 1752.

Figure 4: Bushels of Main Grains shipped Overseas and Coastally from King's Lynn between Midsummer and Christmas 1769



Source: TNA E 190/462/10, Port of King's Lynn, Customer and Controller Coastal, midsummer-xmas 1769 and TNA E 190/462/12, Port of King's Lynn, Controller Overseas, midsummer-xmas 1769.

Norfolk farmers and merchants, therefore, were predominantly interested in the big pay-outs. No doubt they were struck hard when harvests failed and the customary ban on exports and bounties was deployed afresh, for example, in certain months of 1768, 1769 and 1770.¹ This prohibition explains why, on the final chart, coastal trade so far outstrips overseas trade. The port books for this period simply reflect the fact that Norfolk's above-board international exports of grain were effectively stemmed by emergency methods on the part of central government. When the ban was in place and no grain was travelling abroad from King's Lynn, very few shipments of any sort of merchandise were made. In the year from January 1770 to January 1771, there were just four overseas shipments from King's Lynn.² Norfolk's international trade outwards from King's Lynn, therefore, very much depended on grain.

The bounty payments made on grain in times of plenty made it a lucrative industry especially within such a well-connected county. Here, then, was an incentive for increased agricultural output. Norfolk has been praised as the seat of the agricultural revolution, with Coke of Norfolk as its champion, although R.A.C. Parker has treated that notion with some scepticism.³ If Coke of Norfolk was not exactly the hero of the agricultural revolution that has traditionally been portrayed, he does at least serve as an example of a man who believed in unlocking Norfolk's productive capacities, and if something of a self-promoter and a braggart, his Norfolk holdings did yield good wheat and barley harvests.⁴

Coke and, in particular, his tenants were successful in their development, or improvement, of parts of Norfolk. However, the myth

¹ Great Britain. Customs Establishment, *Customs Tariffs of the United Kingdom from 1800 to 1897* (London, 1897), pp. 250-252.

² TNA E 190/462/12: 'Port of King's Lynn, Controller Overseas', 6th January 1770 - 5th January 1771; TNA E 190/462/13: 'Port of King's Lynn, Searcher Overseas', 6th January 1770 - 5th January 1771.

³ R.A.C. Parker, *Coke of Norfolk* (Oxford, 1975), p. 124.

⁴ *Ibid.*, pp. 124-5.

of Coke's success not only serves to portray the man as a miracle worker, but also portrays the whole county in a slightly stilted fashion. The myth goes that Coke transformed quite intractable land into bountiful fields golden with wheat,¹ with the implication being that the same was possible of anywhere. Actually, the myth served to disguise the fact that Norfolk was far from uniform in its soil types and productive capacities. Coke personally farmed a relatively small section of his holdings. Tenants worked the rest of his land, which was mostly situated in the north west of Norfolk, an area known for its variability of soil condition.² In fact, much of Norfolk's soil was much less useful than Coke's, with extensive patches of soggy clay, marshes and fenland. If Norfolk's soil is by no means homogenous,³ to imagine that the livelihoods of its people should be, even in the later eighteenth century, is perhaps a little simplistic.

It is perhaps this legend of agricultural improvement in tandem with a lack of comparable industrial progress, which has led to Norwich's portrayal as an urban centre in decline in the eighteenth century. At one time its worsted production had made the city a titan of manufacturing, second only to London.⁴ By the middle of the eighteenth century, however, other cities had risen to challenge it, and, through comparatively advanced industrialisation and population surges, to dwarf it.⁵ In terms of countywide population statistics, Tony Wrigley has rendered Norfolk's relative stagnation indisputable.⁶ However, this has all too quickly been taken as evidence of the decline of the county's industry, where, in fact, what it can only really represent is continuity. Wrigley admits that Norfolk's population, probably buoyed by the woollens industry, did continue to grow, though only by increments and

¹ J.V. Beckett, 'Coke, Thomas William, First Earl of Leicester of Holkham (1754–1842)', *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography* (Oxford, 2004). [<http://www.oxforddnb.com/view/article/5831>, accessed 19 July 2013].

² Parker, *Coke of Norfolk*, p. 83.

³ P. Wade-Martins (ed.), *Historical Atlas of Norfolk* (Norwich, 1994), p. 18.

⁴ Holderness, 'East Anglia and the Fens', p. 199.

⁵ Corfield, 'East Anglia', p. 41.

⁶ E.A. Wrigley, 'Rickman Revisited', *EHR*, 62:3 (2009), p. 727.

not at the phenomenal rate of other counties.¹ So although the urban population was not burgeoning, in Norfolk it was not declining.

It is this difference in growth rate which Wrigley uses to distinguish the regions of industrial importance from those he somewhat crudely labels 'agricultural counties'.² Yet whilst other regions were perhaps experiencing the early stages of an industrial revolution, the Norfolk region was not de-industrialising. If the county's agricultural productivity did increase, this, Arthur H. John shows, was likely a function of a greater area of land falling under cultivation together with increased efficiencies, which meant that more agricultural labourers were not necessarily enlisted.³ Perhaps then, Norfolk's corn-bounty hunters were a profit-seeking minority. In a sense it boils down to whether a county or any region should be characterised quantitatively and in economic terms by the content of its exports or by the livelihoods of its people. Though within the grand scheme of things, Norfolk was an agrarian region, Norwich town-dwellers and weavers by their trade might have been possessed of quite a different perspective.

Within Britain it seems that the port of King's Lynn was more than just a grain outport, playing a secondary role as a key inward connection from mainland Europe. In fact, the customs receipts data shows that at the start of each decade between 1750 and 1780, both Yarmouth and Lynn ranked in the top ten ports by gross receipt.⁴ Thus, while a very large amount of grain was being channelled out of Norfolk via its outports, other goods, on which customs were payable, were also part of the story.

¹ Ibid, p. 722.

² Ibid, p. 734.

³ A.H. John, 'English Agricultural Improvement and Grain Exports, 1660-1765' in A.H. John and D.C. Coleman (eds.), *Trade, Government and Economy in Pre-Industrial England* (London, 1976), p. 60.

⁴ BL Add Mss 8133a: 'The Gross and Neat Produce of Customs, at the Several Ports in England and Wales'.

According to the port books, one of the chief imports into King's Lynn was alcohol: port and Spanish wine, as well as brandy and rum. These beverages were mostly re-exported by the gallon to London, Hull, Boston, Liverpool, Leith and others, so that King's Lynn served as something of an entrepôt for foreign liquors.¹ This perhaps explains the attention that Norfolk's ports drew from the customs and revenues division. The King's Lynn port books also show that linen, cloth, earthenware and pipe staves were exported coastwise. Meanwhile, the port books of Yarmouth testify to a steady flow of worsteds and Norwich stuffs heading to the Netherlands, Norway, Sweden and Portugal even as late as 1779.² Norfolk manufacture was perhaps not entirely dead in the water.

The inhabitants of the county themselves were defensive about their key manufacture: woollens. Even in 1751, owners of the textile industry in the county claimed that, thanks to their trade a 'great Part of the Poor are employed, not only in the said city [Norwich], but in all the adjacent Countries, to the great benefit and advantage of this Nation in general'.³ The aim of the petition was to ban the use of certain tars in marking sheep, a local agricultural *improvement* that actually diminished the quality and hence value of their final products, which they claimed made an important contribution to national exports. The petitioners of 1751 wanted to remind parliament that Norfolk contributed to the nation in more ways than just by providing grain.

According to contemporary notions, therefore, Norfolk, if not necessarily urbanised, was at least home to many textile workers. Indeed, the population figures of the county may be a bit misleading. Wrigley admits that hundredal data provides a more sensitive sketch of

¹ TNA E 190/462/12: Port of King's Lynn, Controller Overseas, 6th January 1770- 5th January 1771.

² TNA E 190/584/12: Port of Yarmouth, Searcher Overseas, 6th January 1770- 5th January 1780.

³ *Journals of the House of Commons*, XXVI (17th January 1750- 6th April 1754), p. 329, 17th December 1751.

England's population distribution.¹ In Norfolk there was still an urban dwelling population, for Corfield claims that about a quarter of Norfolk's population lived in towns (although she admits a fairly low threshold as to what might constitute a town).²

The products of this county naturally included grain, but it was also famous for its textiles and, so those who invest in the legend of Coke of Norfolk would agree, knowledge. Parker has pointed out that Coke's own agricultural work was not really a profit-making activity. He tended to use whatever capital (financial and political) he gained from his estates to engage heavily in the battles for county representation.³ What concerned Coke the most was not, in fact, producing vendible commodities but promoting his apparent successes and cultivating celebrity status.

Coke himself was of interest to forward-looking and influential noblemen from across the country (Parker tells us that Whigs and radicals in particular were drawn to the home farm).⁴ He became a darling of the agricultural revolution not because he was the man to approach for corn, but because he seemed to be the man to approach for the secrets to successful agriculture in unpromising conditions. Norfolk shone in contemporary imaginations as an example of modern technique, whose immediate products could be shared, but more importantly, whose success could be replicated elsewhere.

This, however, raises questions about contemporary notions: was Norfolk acknowledged as a breadbasket from outside? Was it seen in the same way from the inside? These are big questions, which we can begin to look at with the operation of the corn laws and instances of rioting in Norfolk as tangible entry points. These two points of reference, leaving their traces in the archives, can provide insight into

¹ E.A. Wrigley, 'English County Populations in the Later Eighteenth Century', *EHR*, 60:1 (2007), p. 53.

² Corfield, 'East Anglia', p. 36.

³ Parker, *Coke of Norfolk*, see esp. chapter 9.

⁴ *Ibid.*, pp. 114-118.

the attitudes of both common people and their social superiors towards the movement of grain around and away from the county and the possible treatment of Norfolk as some kind of national (and international) silo.

Norfolk and the Corn Laws

In spite of their presence on the statute book until 1772,¹ the ancient corn laws prove almost undetectable in the court records of Norfolk. Prosecutions for regrating, forestalling and engrossing were almost unheard of at the manor courts and quarter sessions.² However, there are multiple ways to interpret this. It might be that the farmers, dealers and merchants of Norfolk were remarkably respectful of the law. On the other hand, perhaps law-enforcers tended to turn a blind eye to illegal market activity.

Douglas Hay and Nicholas Rogers paint prosecutions of middlemen in this period as nearly always concessions to the rioting poor, suggesting that market regulations were only enforced when times were hard. The laws, they imply, were not only ancient, but also a kind of archaic ritual, performed for a mob whose rudimentary comprehension of the economics of food supply required a scapegoat.³ Even in years of difficulty, however, the Norfolk quarter sessions did not turn up or deal with a single kidder, lader, brogger or badger.⁴

Only in Yarmouth was there discernible action in 1757 when three separate incidents of forestalling of fish can be found to have taken

¹ D. Hay and N. Rogers, *Eighteenth-Century English Society* (Oxford, 1997), p. 98. D.G. Barnes notes that in spite of Parliamentary repeal, the laws remained indictable by common law: local authorities could still punish such activities as crimes. Barnes, *English Corn Laws*, p. 41.

² NRO C/S 1/1: Norfolk Quarter Sessions: Sessions Books, 1752-1774 and NRO C/S 1/2: Session Books, 1774-1790.

³ Hay and Rogers, *Eighteenth-Century English Society*, p. 94.

⁴ NRO C/S 1/1: Sessions Books, 1752-1774; NRO C/S 1/2: Session Books, 1774-1790.

place.¹ Forestalling was the action of getting in between supply and the market, these days, fairly normal commercial activity.² The next year saw one prosecution for regrating, which normally meant speculatively stockpiling supplies,³ on the part of a butcher.⁴ At Yarmouth these market misdemeanours, and they were treated as such with relatively small repercussions, were presented at the Court Leet. Yarmouth was unusual in the sense that its manor court dealt with serious crimes, such as theft, rape and the occasional murder. In this way it was more like Manchester's Court Leet, which remained active and powerful long into the eighteenth century and beyond because the city lacked borough-level administration.⁵

Yarmouth is also special because it had its own market inquest, sworn to bring offending merchants and victuallers to justice.⁶ This mostly meant that they confiscated false weights and measures and prosecuted vendors whose produce was deemed unwholesome or putrid. However, as we have seen, there was the occasional presentment of forestalling and regrating. The years immediately after 1755 are well known as years of a national shortage of corn, yet the prosecutions suggest possibly that the troubles strained other trades. Great Yarmouth was primarily a fish market at this time,⁷ and abuses of trade in that commodity were evidentially heeded at certain times.

Meanwhile in Norwich there were no similar prosecutions. Not even after rioting struck the city in 1766 was there a prosecution against middlemen. This does not seem merely to be question of ineffective implementation, for where Yarmouth had its own market inquest, the

¹ NRO Y/S 3/60: Great Yarmouth Borough Archives: Sessions of the Peace: Sessions Files, 14th September 1757.

² R.B. Westerfield, *Middlemen in English Business* (New Haven, 1915), p. 138.

³ *Ibid.*, p. 139.

⁴ NRO Y/S 3/61: Great Yarmouth Borough Archives: Sessions of the Peace: Sessions Files, 20th September 1758.

⁵ B. Waddell, 'Governing England through the Manor Courts', *HJ*, 55:2 (2012), p. 299.

⁶ NRO Y/C 14/2: Great Yarmouth Borough Archives, Town Clerk's Department pre-1835: Leet Book, June 1769- September 1797. There is a full list of 'articles to be inquired of by the market inquest' on the first page. Articles for the court leet to handle appear on the last pages. Leet books for 1735-1769 are missing.

⁷ Wade-Martins (ed.), *Historical Atlas*, p. 131.

Norwich Mayor's Court Book alluded to a market committee. In one instance this committee brought in and had punished a certain Mr Barker, whose crime unfortunately goes unrecorded.¹

Contrary to what Hay and Rogers have surmised, the Norwich procedure was to place notices in the local papers. These ordered that the marketplace be regulated by the use of a bell, which signified the beginning and end of trading times, so that officials could supervise sales and purchases. Edible supplies were only to be purchased for private consumption. Resale for profit was strictly forbidden.² The notices threatened harsh penalties, but the measures were also explained: they were designed to avert the excessive inflation of food prices.

Ostensibly, these notices were aimed at the merchants, but to follow Hay and Rogers' logic, they would also be there to appease the common folk. Judging by the sort of advertisements which surrounded the official notifications in the *Norwich Mercury*, this was a paper directed at people of every social standing. On one hand there are notices advertising evening entertainments to 'all persons of quality, Gentlemen and Ladies'.³ On the other hand, however, there are adverts seeking tradesmen. One apothecary even posted an advert seeking 'a youth of small fortunes' as an apprentice.⁴ Probably these advertisements were designed to work in conjunction with word of mouth, but this still means that the paper was at least intended to reach all sections of society in the city and beyond.

The usefulness of such serials in the commercial exploits of the eighteenth-century merchant has already been explored.⁵ The *Norwich*

¹ NRO, NCR Case 16a/31: 'Mayor's Court Book and Papers, 1746-1758', 15th March 1755.

² Ibid, 13th December 1755.

³ *Norwich Mercury*, 29th December 1750.

⁴ Ibid, 11th September 1756.

⁵ J.R. Raven, 'Serial Advertisement in Eighteenth-Century Britain and Ireland' in R. Myers and M Harris (eds.), *Serials and their Readers, 1620-1914* (Winchester, 1993), p. 103.

Mercury was no exception to the trend, providing valuable information on shipping and prices as well as other marketplace intelligence. Thus merchants too were being warned in this instance. Yet perhaps most telling is the fact that the notice itself offered, upon the conviction of a so-called 'fogger', a reward of twenty shillings to the reader who had informed the authorities.¹ Common market-goers were being offered the opportunity to punish market-place criminals and earn a cash-reward in the process. Yet nobody was convicted.

Lofty proclamations reiterating the corn laws were not peculiar to Norfolk. In fact, the central government made the same gesture in the late summer of 1766, a time of unexpected shortage in the southern regions of the country. Donald Barnes calls this a 'folly', as it grated with the increasingly modernised food supply chain in a newly commercialised society. Its only effect, according to Barnes, was to justify the actions of the rioting poor.² Dale E. Williams, perhaps more charitably, suggests that the Chatham government was distracted by its own internal squabbles and managed only to re-issue these laws before dissolving.³

For Williams, then, the proclamation was the last word of an incapacitated government facing a situation which was near impossible to control.⁴ Likewise, there was little that the Norwich mayoral court could do when faced with shortage, and so it rolled out the favoured response in 1755: a notice in the papers, restricting marketplace activity. The court repeated the notice word for word in May 1771.⁵

The repeated response to multiple shortages in Norwich indicates that there was something like a routine procedure which the local authorities followed when faced with dearth and the resultant high

¹ NRO, NCR Case 16a/32: Mayor's Court Book and Papers, 13th December 1755.

² Barnes, *English Corn Laws*, p. 39.

³ D.E. Williams, '1766' in A. Charlesworth (ed.), *An Atlas of Rural Protest in Britain, 1548-1900* (London, 1983), p. 89.

⁴ *Ibid.*, pp. 88-92.

⁵ NRO, NCR Case 16a/33: Mayor's Court Book and Papers, 1767-1776, 25th May 1771.

prices. Whenever times were hard, one part of the local authority's policy in dealing with shortage was to remind merchants and consumers alike that profiteering was antisocial. Barnes has shown that blaming middlemen for high prices was not only popular among commoners, but also played an important role in pamphlet literature.¹ Perhaps it was popular because it did seem to ring true; it was a basic and perennial economic logic that the activities of middlemen caused prices to rise.

This then is how the authorities seemed to evaluate the market laws, but what of the people at large? As E.P. Thompson has shown, riots can often give insight into the mental world of those underrepresented in written sources.² In 1766 rioting broke out in Norwich. Unfortunately, the best reports of the riots still extant today come from the magistrates' papers, in particular the briefs that were prepared prior to prosecutions. These papers, concerned as they are with crime and punishment, focus on particular individuals and those actions for which they could be prosecuted. Therefore it is the property damage and the looting that receive greatest attention, so that group protest and the political implications of the situation fade into background noise.

The events, as the magistrates pieced them together, spanned two days, Saturday 27th and Sunday 28th of September, beginning with a seemingly spontaneous outburst at about lunchtime in the marketplace. Here a mob of at least twenty people, with another report putting the figure at thirty, began to assemble and attack the temporary stalls of peripatetic traders. Those selling butter were the subject of special ire and their produce was thrown around the market, with one pad of butter thrown directly at the sword-bearer, who was attempting to contain the situation.³

¹ Barnes, *English Corn Laws*, pp. 32-3.

² Thompson, 'The Moral Economy', pp. 78-9.

³ NRO, NCR Case 6h/6/12-13: Papers Relating to Riots in Norwich. Statement of Case, Comprising Narrative of Events of 26th and 27th September 1766.

In the aftermath of the riots, the magistrates identified several ringleaders, and gathered statements about these men from eyewitnesses. So it was that certain exclamations on the part of the rioters were recorded. Robert Royce, for instance, as he proceeded to destroy stalls and wreck the marketplace, was reported as saying 'we will down with them all'.¹ Another alleged ringleader, Cornelius Brown, was quoted by the same witness as proclaiming 'Damn them [the stall owners] I have an order from the Gentleman to secure them all alike and make no exceptions of none'. It was then that, having dispensed with these temporary stalls, the mob moved on to the permanent stalls owned by citizens of Norwich itself.² The mob, it seems, had started on the vagrant marketeers, thinking them a safer target, but, with this proclamation, Brown had challenged the immunity of Norwich's local traders, and the mob responded by attacking them too.

The target of popular anger, therefore, was anybody selling provisions at prices considered unfair by the crowd. A few weeks later, an anonymous letter was posted under the door of a grocer, James Poole, threatening arson and worse if traders did not 'sell thair corn... at a reasonable price as they do at other Markets'.³ There was clearly a sense that Norwich prices were unjustly inflated.⁴ The writers obviously suspected that the corn from their backcountry was on sale elsewhere, but that Norwich shopkeepers were conspiring to keep prices high.

Unreasonable prices and the transgressions of corn merchants was the theme of the first day of rioting, at least. When the mob was finished in the marketplace it moved to the New Mills. It seems that, as they were attacking the mills, they were subjected to the mayor's reading of the proclamation against rioting. Having put a premature end to the

¹ Ibid.

² Ibid.

³ NRO, NCR Case 6h/9/6: Riots. Minute of Mayor's Court re Anonymous Letter threatening to set Fire to James Poole's Shop, dated 15th October 1766.

⁴ Thompson, 'The Moral Economy', p. 112.

reading by throwing stones, however, the rioters then moved on to the shops and homes of various bakers in the city. Windows were broken, buildings partly demolished and beer demanded. This first day of violence ended with the rioters sacking an alehouse, the White Horse. Here they destroyed furniture and spoiled the liquor.¹

These first day's events smacked of exasperation and spontaneity. The second day, however, was tainted with organisation. The rioters reconvened on the second day, a Sunday, now bearing horns and handkerchiefs on sticks. They proceeded straight to the mills at Trowse. There the miller 'by fair speeches and dealing out liquor in plenty, got rid of them'.² Either the crowd believed in the innocence of this individual, or they were simply sated with the alcohol he offered. Because of the drinking that took place, the rioters did fall victim to the accusations of loutishness.³ Seizing and consuming alcohol clearly played an important part in the events of the two days. In a sense, however, these actions were congruent with the overall initiative. After all, the liquor that the rioters drank or destroyed was brewed or distilled from the grains whose prices they were protesting.

Having made their way to Trowse, the rioters were now out of town, so they went onwards to attack the house of Mr Money. Here they committed their worst acts of private property damage, ransacking the house, looting it and then attempting to burn it down. It was this incident that drew the greatest attention of the magistrates and prosecution, and of all the events it appeared most prominently in the official indictments. For it seems that here the rioters really crossed a line, stealing cash and scaring Money's spinster sister.

This brutal attack on the Money family is not inexplicable. Simon Renton reveals that William Money came under fire on account of his

¹ NRO, NCR Case 6h/6/12: Riots. Statement of Case comprising Narrative of Events of 26th and 27th September 1766; NCR Case and 6h/6/14: Riots. List of Incidents divided into 5 Heads for Each Day (undated).

² NRO, NCR Case 6h/6/12: Riots. Statement of Case.

³ NRO, NCR Case 6h/2: Riots: Depositions of Witnesses (Fair copies, 1767).

reputation as a grasping landlord, who would not allow his tenants their ancient gleaning rights.¹ Money represented a regime which was increasingly cracking down on the ancient rights of commoners, investing instead in the strict private property rights symbolised by enclosure. Therefore, having seen the best part of the harvest carried away, the labourers had then suffered the indignity of being turned away from the fields where they would traditionally have collected the last pickings to supplement their diet. These injustices, seemingly of the countryside, were now avenged by a crowd composed of town-dwelling weavers and the like, as well as farm labourers. This heterogeneous community resorted to forcibly collecting its dues in cash and punishing the gentleman who had offended a moral system evidently still pertinent, in spite of increasing urbanisation and capitalisation.

Having finished with the Money estate, the mob began to make its way back towards Norwich, but paused to destroy a granary on the riverbank where grain for export was stored. Nearby a boat was lying ready to carry its load of grain away. The rioters came onboard and threw its cargo into the river. They destroyed one more malt house, that of John Clover, and made their way back to Norwich. Here they returned to attacking bakers' houses until overwhelmed by the mayor's forces, with about thirty taken prisoner.²

Food riots in the eighteenth century could take several different forms, such as preventing exports, setting the price for seized goods, or attacking millers or dealers.³ The rioting poor, therefore, were sensitive to alternative possibilities as to the cause of their distress and reacted accordingly. The crowd action of Norfolk in 1766 included a number of separate initiatives. Perceived criminals, such as the notorious Mr Money and the peripatetic traders, were punished for breaching the tacit laws of a moral economy. Middlemen were under fire: first

¹ S. Renton, 'The Moral Economy of the English Middling Sort: The Case of Norwich in 1766 and 1767' in A. Randall and A. Charlesworth (eds.), *Markets, Market Culture and Popular Protest* (Liverpool, 1996), p. 123.

² NRO, NCR Case 6h/9/3: Riots. Draft of Petition to King (undated).

³ J.N. Caple, '1756-7' in Charlesworth (ed.), *An Atlas of Rural Protest*, p. 86.

marketplace vendors and then bakers were attacked owing to outrage at their prices, and millers were confronted too. Finally, pubs and malt houses were clearly held in some opprobrium, and subjected to the destructive force of the crowd.

Notably absent, however, are reports of price-setting by the rioters. This suggests that the rioters did not believe in a genuine shortage of commodities like butter and grain, which they threw around the marketplace; burnt; spoiled; drank in the form of liquor; or dumped in the river. Since they did not take the goods to consume themselves, they must have thought that there was plenty piled up in the storehouses of the badgers and kidders. Their actions were punitive only, as they merely enacted a confiscation (of a sort), which was the legal punishment for forestalling threatened in the mayor's own formal notices.¹

Andrew Charlesworth has shown that food-riots had become almost an exclusively urban feature in Britain. Rioting was actually the result of industrialisation and the changing urban scene, developments which 'cut across old established patterns of internal trade'.² As the mayor's court book has shown, traditional marketing structures in Norwich meant decreeing strict trading hours and allowing purchasing only in small quantities for private consumption. Corn factors and millers, however, were thought to be interfering with this procedure, storing grain and flour and moving the product on to more distant markets. In Norwich they were certainly attacked. However, another of the Norwich crowd's initiatives was to attack the granaries storing grain for export. Likewise a boat for taking grain to the head-port was attacked in the same way. The malt-house where grain was being prepared for lucrative distilling, potentially in Dutch stills, was also attacked. These great stores of grain could only have seemed to confirm rioters' suspicions that their countryside remained bountiful, but that they

¹ NRO, NCR Case 16a/33: Mayor's Court Book, 13th December 1755.

² A. Charlesworth, 'The Geography of Food Riots, 1585-1847' in idem (ed.), *Atlas of Rural Protest*, p. 64.

themselves were cheated of the plentiful produce, on which the merchants grew fat.

In the aftermath of the riots, magistrates and principal citizens apparently took this sense of urban price inflation seriously, forming a committee to examine the supply of the city's markets and to address the causes of high prices.¹ They also released a notice to traders assuring them that it was now safe to return to market, and sell their wares at 'reasonable prices'. Traders were again warned that buying provisions *en route* to market and selling for a mark-up was strictly forbidden.² There was evident sympathy with the rioters, which again implies that forestalling and marketplace crimes were still treated seriously as misdemeanours with grave ramifications for keeping the peace. Community bonds endured, even against the increasing tide of capitalism.

Exports

This rejection of the notion of true shortage (one caused by domestic crop failure as opposed to an artificial shortage which was created by faulty distribution)³ is not a sentiment restricted to common rioters. Historians have acknowledged that to some extent the grain shortage of 1766 was indeed artificially exacerbated by a combination of factors reaching back as far as the previous year. 1765 had itself been troublesome, and so a new prohibition on grain exports was put in place early in 1766 in an attempt by Parliament to stabilise the nation's grain supply. Norwich officials, and officials and inhabitants of other cities and counties, had petitioned for this measure, and most seemed to think it sensible.⁴

¹ NRO, NCR Case 6h/9/7: Riots. Draft Notice of Order re Provisions (undated).

² NRO, NCR Case 6h/9/8: Riots. Three Printed Notices Issued by Court of Mayoralty (undated).

³ R. Sheldon, 'Practical Economics in Eighteenth Century England: Charles Smith on the Grain Trade and the Corn Laws, 1756-72', *Historical Research*, 81:214 (2008), p. 646.

⁴ *Journals of the House of Commons*, XXX (10th January 1765- 16th September 1766), p. 465, 20th January 1766.

Unfortunately this prohibition was allowed to lapse in August 1766.¹ It was not until Parliament reconvened in November that it could be officially renewed, although an emergency embargo arranged by the Privy Council at the end of September stemmed the supposed outward flow of grain in the autumn.² Dale Williams has suggested that, therefore, the incompetence of Parliament, which allowed for the expiration of the ban on grain exports, was in part responsible for shortages which led to rioting all over the country. He argues that when suddenly merchants were allowed again in August to ship grain abroad, they did so *en masse*, taking advantage of shortages in the rest of southern Europe which made for high prices.³

The Norwich riots, of course, took place in September, and began a day after the Privy Council had placed its emergency embargo. As has been shown, forestallers, engrossers and regraters were acknowledged amongst Norwich authorities as a local cause of price hikes. However, it also seems that they were, by this time, not thought the primary cause. Allocating blame in an attempt to remedy the situation, the chief inhabitants of Norwich petitioned central government for a law which they thought could help soothe the crisis: the renewal of the ban on grain exports. In mid-October a petition from Norwich's mayor to Parliament (then in recess) duly followed. It was hoped that these measures would help 'to secure us the little remainder of our own corn, before our stock be exhausted, by the Exorbitant exportation'.⁴ When Parliament reconvened on November 11th 1766, it began to consider reapplying the ban on grain exports.⁵ Foreign exports were therefore blamed nationally and locally as a factor which could deepen and perhaps even cause shortage.

¹ Williams, '1766', p. 88.

² *Journals of the House of Commons*, XXXI (11th November 1766- 10th March 1768), p. 6, 11th November 1766.

³ Williams, '1766', pp. 88-9.

⁴ *Norwich Mercury*, 18th October 1766.

⁵ *Journals of the House of Commons*, XXXI (11th November 1766- 10th March 1768), p. 6, 11th November 1766.

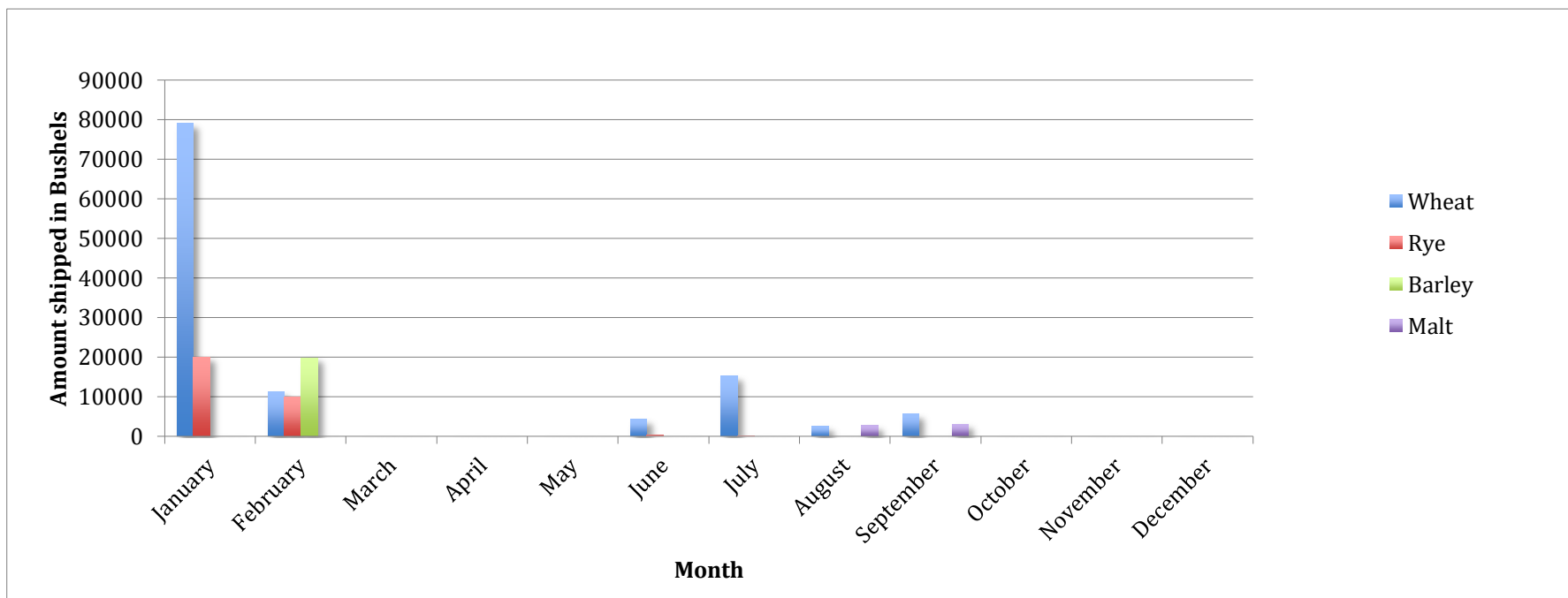
However, according to the King's Lynn port books from the late summer of 1766 (see figure 5), merchants were barely taking advantage of the lapse of the laws after all. In January they must have caught wind of the impending renewal of the prohibition, and exported as much as possible while they could. In June, July and August, they were allowed to export to Ireland. However, there is no spike in September akin to that of January. This suggests that the demand for grain either within Norfolk alone or around Britain generally was high, and the shortage a real one, so that there was no need to sell abroad.

Unfortunately, the port book recording Lynn's outbound coastal trade and Great Yarmouth's exports at this time are lost, so it is difficult to know just how much grain was being shipped coastwise from Norfolk. It seems, nevertheless, that, in petitioning against foreign exportation, Norwich's well-to-do movers and shakers were not necessarily reacting to actual point of fact.

Perhaps they were treating the problem from a long-term perspective. This is certainly the impression that comes from the mayor's address to his MPs. Though prepared in the aftermath of the rioting, that episode is not the mainstay of the address. Nor are the immediate effects of food shortage- starvation and disease. Instead the mayor emphasised the longer-term implications of routine grain exports: higher food prices and the resultant higher wages.¹ This explains why the signatories of the multiple petitions originating in Norwich and demanding action on the high prices of grain usually included manufacturers and principal citizens. High food prices were bad for business, specifically the woollens business, and it was woollens that the local government

¹ NRO, NCR Case 6h/9/4: Riots. Drafts of Petitions to Norwich MPs (undated).

Figure 5: Monthly Exports of Principal Grains from King's Lynn, 1766



Source: TNA E 190/461/11: The Port of King's Lynn. Searcher Overseas. 6th January 1766- 5th January 1767

prioritised. Grain merchants, they argued, could not be trusted to behave with paternalistic altruism (the kind of altruism which led to cheap industrial labour).

A few years later, when grain was again in short supply, the court of the mayoralty came into direct opposition to certain landholders, ship-owners, maltsters and malt merchants. This interesting alliance of old and new money therefore petitioned parliament in the twilight of the 1769 ban on grain exportation. They requested the exemption of malt if the legislation were renewed.¹ The malt was destined for Dutch distilleries, the supply of this trade having long been seen as a financial crutch for the landed interest.² The mayor, magistrates and principal inhabitants of Norwich, now minus the merchants who had put their pens to the January petition, expressed concern about the effect this measure would have on the price of food.³ The actions of the rioters in attacking pubs and malt houses earlier in the decade suggest that the people probably agreed.

Interestingly, the mayor and principal inhabitants of Norwich had not resisted this kind of measure when grain shortages had struck the nation before, though these shortages had affected Norfolk less seriously. During the shortages of 1757, Bristol was suffering, and duly petitioned Parliament in complaint against high food prices.⁴ Yet Norfolk was able to sit tight with the mayoral court's only response being the notice about forestalling. In fact it saw its Justices of the

¹ *Journals of the House of Commons*, XXXII (10th May 1768- 25th September 1770), p. 463, 10th January 1770.

² M.D. George, *London Life in the XVIIIth Century* (London, 1925), pp. 29-30.

³ *Journals of the House of Commons*, XXXII (10th May 1768- 25th September 1770), pp. 463-4, 10th January 1770.

⁴ *Journals of the House of Commons*, XXVII (31st May 1754- 15th November 1757), p. 625, 12th January 1757.

Peace, assembled for the assize in 1759, actually petition parliament to allow local merchants to export their great superfluity of malt abroad.¹

Counterbalancing the subsistence imperative with the demand for grain from the distilling and brewing industries was no easy task. It was a conflict of interests which fermented throughout the course of the century. Harris points to the issue of the prohibition of distilling in the 1750s as one of the few to divide landed and manufacturing interests. He considers Parliament's willingness to compromise, in spite of being made up largely of a landed political elite, as evidence of their receptiveness to lobbying and their appreciation of the importance of commerce (although he seems to ignore the fact that sale of the grain that went into the stills was beneficial to many landowners). In the 1750s the matter was settled for the time being by lifting the outright ban on distilling, while inflicting higher duties on spirituous liquors.²

However, later shortages, as we have seen, took a greater toll on the Norfolk region.³ In such desperate conditions the mayor and his allies attempted to protect their region's manufacturing interests to the detriment of those involved in the malt trade. This was because they thought that foreign demand for grain in general was now biting into their domestic food supply. They were therefore unsympathetic to the argument of the maltsters, who claimed that their business, which they stressed was valuable to the kingdom as a whole, would collapse unless they were allowed to sell abroad and receive their bounty.

Meanwhile, the mayor, on behalf of the manufactures of Norfolk, and especially Norwich, used exactly the same defence. With the signatures of the magistrates; clergy; and principal inhabitants, the mayor addressed Norwich MPs, Harbord Harbord and Edward Bacon, exposing the high price of corn as:

¹ *Journals of the House of Commons*, XXVIII (1st December 1757- 19th March 1761), p. 397, 2nd February 1759.

² B. Harris, *Politics and the Nation* (Oxford, 2002), p. 276.

³ Renton, 'The Moral Economy of the English Middling Sort', p. 120.

an evil which must not only be highly prejudicial to the kingdom in general, but absolutely fatal to the woollen manufacture- a branch of trade of the utmost importance as a national concern, on which the welfare and prosperity of this City so materially depend.¹

Overall, this group demanded that government prioritise manufacturing over agriculture, and commercial interests over landed, by regulating agricultural exports on one hand, whilst allowing manufactured goods to be sent abroad unencumbered.

This issue demonstrates again in the 1760s the old enmity between landed and moneyed interests which Harris emphasised in his example. Crudely speaking, manufacturers were pitted against landowners who reaped their own revenue directly or indirectly from agricultural production.² Faced with the choice, the mayor opted to preserve the interests of the city, formerly the second in the nation, even against the interests of landowners and the countryside.

Both petitions were referred to the Parliamentary committee which had already been assembled to consider the renewal of the expiring act. In the end the commons enacted the prohibition without the exemption of malt.³ Parliament was probably equally wrought with the tensions between the two manners of life and income. The ultimate victory of the manufacturing cause can probably in part be put down to a central government that was not prepared to make a nation-wide exception in favour of one group of petitioners, together with the fact that the malt was destined for the distillery, an unsavoury use of resources in the imaginations of the 1750s.⁴ What is important, however, is that both

¹ NRO, NCR Case 6h/9/5: Riots. Draft Petition to Norwich MPs (undated).

² Harris, *Politics and the Nation*, p. 276.

³ *Journals of the House of Commons*, XXXII (10th May 1768- 25th September 1770), p. 610, 16th January 1770.

⁴ The supposed evils of cheaply available spiritous liquors are made manifest in C. Townshend, *National Thoughts* (London, 1751), p. 9.

sides had communicated their case in the language of national commercial survival, and that, therefore, Parliament was seen to arbitrate between interests, prioritising textile manufactures over refined agricultural products.

Perhaps the influence of the MP, Edward Bacon (?1712-86), also had something to do with it. He was known for his hard work on the part of his constituency and had served as recorder for the city from 1752 to 1783. He also had a seat on the Board of Trade.¹ No doubt he was sympathetic to the city's cause, having personally distributed cheap corn in the marketplace. Directly after the riots, Renton has shown that the gentry indulged in multiple similar acts of altruism.² Even before this particular act of generosity, the 'principal inhabitants' had agreed in October 1766 not to allow turkeys or other fowl to leave the city. This pact was received locally, so the papers reported, with 'general satisfaction'.³ Turkeys were not exactly an everyday commodity, but this gentlemen's agreement was an effort to restrict the flow of commodities even within the nation. London was specially mentioned in the agreement, betraying an enduring anxiety about the size and voracity of that city.

Careful analysis of population statistics has revealed that the uncanny growth of London had a profound effect upon the economic configuration of the entire nation.⁴ Even in the eighteenth century the capital city had long been thought an unwholesome 'demographic sink', with a near insatiable hunger for resources.⁵ Clearly these Norwich gentlemen were sensitive to the demand for Norfolk's foodstuffs and were prepared to hoard them for themselves, in the same way as the

¹ L. Namier and J. Brooke, *The House of Commons 1754-1790* (London, 1964), pp. 36-7.

² Renton, 'The Moral Economy of the English Middling Sort', p. 127.

³ *St James's Chronicle or the British Evening Post* (London), Issue 882, 25th-28th October 1766; also reported upon in *Gazetteer and New Daily Advertiser* (London), Issue 11746, 28th October 1766.

⁴ E.A. Wrigley, 'A Simple Model of London's Importance in Changing English Society and Economy 1650-1750', *P&P*, 37 (1967), p. 63.

⁵ Quote from J. Ellis, *The Georgian Town 1680-1840* (Basingstoke, 2001), p. 29; Corfield, *Impact of English Towns*, p. 70.

rioting poor were determined to prevent their corn from leaving. Rosemary Sweet has shown that urban histories of provincial towns often betray a sense of competition with London. The provincial middling sort, she argues, saw their own towns as fruitful alternatives to the great cesspit.¹ This interpretation ties-in with the efforts of the principal inhabitants of Norwich to preserve their city and protect its industry from collapse.

The mayor of Norwich had charged MPs Bacon and Harbord personally with persuading parliament to ban exports until 1768 and, if this failed, to attack the bounties which encouraged merchants to feed foreigners and 'leave our poor to starve'.² This was a controversial matter, which Charles Townshend touched upon in 1751. Townshend was a large Norfolk landowner and the son of the agricultural improver, Charles 'Turnip' Townshend, yet he disregarded that particular interest when he opposed the corn bounty.³ He decided that exporting an unmanufactured good, such as corn, was harmful to the economy because the chance to employ domestic labour on its manufacture, or rather, preparation, was lost. Bounties were counterproductive to national wealth because they caused this loss to the nation.⁴ Thus, when Townshend dealt with the subject of bounties he indeed considered the issue in national terms.

However, even members of his great farming family had interests 'deeply rooted' in Norfolk industry. Townshend's uncle, for example, headed a company of merchants.⁵ If Townshend was worried about the decline of national manufacturing, it is possible that he took his

¹ R. Sweet, *The Writing of Urban Histories in Eighteenth-Century England* (Oxford, 1997), pp. 238-41.

² NRO, NCR Case 6h/9/4: Riots. Draft Petition to Norwich MPs (undated).

³ L. Frey and M. Frey, 'Townshend, Charles, Second Viscount Townshend (1674–1738)', *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography* (Oxford, 2004). [<http://www.oxforddnb.com/view/article/27617>, accessed 2 Sept 2015]. The biography of our Charles Townshend, the Third Viscount, is to be found under his father's.

⁴ Townshend, *National Thoughts*, p. 27.

⁵ J.R. Raven, 'Viscount Townshend and the Cambridge Prize for Trade Theory, 1754–1756', *HJ*, 28:3 (1985), p. 543.

inspiration from the state of industry that he could observe within his own county. Though great families like the Townshends and Walpoles had apparently turned their gaze in the direction of London and the national situation, local issues perhaps still imposed upon their peripheral vision.¹

The staunch patrons of Norwich, certainly, were not prepared to let go of the city as a manufacturing entity, and to settle for the role of corn county. They were prepared to convince their MPs to request a ban on corn exports and to demand an end to the bounties which they too decided had outlived their use, and now served only to skew their local economy.² If it was not enough to design their MPs' agenda, the patrons of Norwich also petitioned the commons directly, hammering home the danger that corn exports posed to their manufacturing sector. They claimed that

the cost and worth of the labour from the Floore to Shipping by far exceeds the value of materials. To obtain this labour upon such terms as not to be undersold at foreign markets is a point that your petitioners hope will clearly exhibit the dearness or cheapness of the necessaries [of life]... Upon the cheapness or dearness, plenty or scarcity of the necessaries of life doth depend your petitioners ability to carry the product of British labour to foreign markets upon equal terms with... other nations.³

Here the food supply was being likened to the raw material costs of the manufacturing process. But for the price of corn and its effects on the cost of labour, the industry would be highly profitable. As a result, Norwich's welfare was, the petitioners argued, an indicator of the price of food. Ultimately, Norwich, they suggested, was on the frontline of the commercial war with other nations. They repeatedly stressed the

¹ J.M. Rosenheim, *Townshend of Raynham* (Middletown, CT, 1989), p. 191.

² NRO, NCR Case 6h/9/4: Riots. Draft Petition to Norwich MPs (undated).

³ NRO, NCR Case 6h/9/3: Riots. Draft Petition to King (undated).

'national loss' that would be suffered should Norwich's manufactured woollens trade collapse.¹

The petitioners were keen to demonstrate that they understood and shared the goals of the wider whole, but they did not even begin to imagine that these goals should not be played out on a local level. In their minds Norwich was still of commercial value on a world stage. In achieving this end the local economy was mixed. Its labourers were engaged in everything from the hands-on manufacture of worsteds, to shipyard labour and international commercial pursuits. They wholeheartedly believed that Norfolk's role in the British economy was more than that of a food source. The corollary was that, in fact, the county needed the corn that grew in its fields to power its own manufacturing initiative. They especially could not allow this grain to be sent abroad as a subsidy to foreign manufacturing efforts.

Mercantilist principals were as much at work here as they were in the writing of Townshend. Nevertheless, the petitioners felt the need to reassure their Members of Parliament that Norwich priorities and Norwich progress were not 'incompatible with national welfare'.² In fact they suggested that other industrial towns, amongst which they counted themselves, would do well to adopt the same course. The combined product of these cities would secure national commercial competitiveness. Thus Norfolk was envisioned by its local authorities as a unit within a whole, yet it was still thought to retain its economic self-sufficiency. This self-sufficiency was not to be sacrificed due to demand for its raw materials from without. The principal inhabitants of the urbanised sections of the region, at least, were not prepared to see their entire county turned to corn production and refinement just yet. The rhetoric they used was national, but their cause was local. That cause was the continued preservation of Norwich's struggling industry.

¹ NRO, NCR Case 6h/9/4: Riots. Draft Petition to Norwich MPs' (undated).

² Ibid.

This struggle for continuity sheds an interesting light back onto the riots themselves, which, as mentioned before, were not rebellions of the belly, but rebellions of the purse. Weavers and textile workers in the city were seemingly bound together by their class-like socio-economic experience, as Charlesworth has suggested. They would later have to be discouraged from assembling 'in large bodies unlawfully parading about this City and begging'.¹ Clearly these unemployed weavers were not merely begging: they had formed into something like a pressure group based on the framework of their shared occupational hardships. The point is that, like J.G. Rule's Cornish miners (whose rapidly growing industry burdened Cornish farmers, who in turn had in fact become accustomed to sending their agricultural surplus away via large corn factors, instead of allowing for local private purchase first), Norfolk weavers were in a position to begin to resent and even try to resist the outside demand for the produce of their own back-country.² Even within Britain, specialised industrial zones were in competition with one another for resources such as food. The Norwich authorities and the owners of Norwich manufactories were also pointedly aware of this fact, because it showed up on the bottom line. However, to return to the workers, their indignation was bound within the limits of Norwich, or Norfolk at the most, and their protest still figured along the lines of a moral economy, for this was not yet a matter of class struggle.

Most interesting is that, when faced with the conundrum of how to pay for food, they did not lash out at their employers in pursuit of a living wage. They attacked the dealers of food, striving for a *just price*. This surely was an assertion of their own entitlement to possess food at a price which they could pay, with their wages as a perceived non-variable in the equation. This sense of entitlement, then, came from the localised mind-set of the pre-agrarian capitalist world which saw each locality feed its own. After all, many of the official structures which

¹ NRO, NCR Case 16a/33: Mayor's Court Books and Papers, 1767-1776, 11th November 1775.

² J.G. Rule, 'Some Social Aspects of the Cornish Industrial Revolution' in R. Burt (ed.), *Industry and Society in the South-West* (Exeter, 1970), pp. 81-7.

might apply to any of the rioters should they fall even further into difficulties – poor laws; vagrancy laws and the laws which forbade bastardy and abandoning of wives and children as a charge on the local authority – were based on the same attitude of self-sufficiency and delimited interdependence within an immobile community. At the most simple level they were asking for cheap food. However, what this entailed was protection from dealers, not only in the traditional sense which meant cracking down on badgers, kidders and other malefactors, but also on the factors and dealers who shifted grain away from the land where it was produced and the community which dwelled there.

Conclusion

As a county, Norfolk produced grain, but it was also thought to be home to an important industrial centre. Inhabitants of Norfolk, rich and poor, clearly felt the pinch of a shared demand for resources, and were not prepared to quietly accept the increasingly capitalised and seemingly free-market state of the agricultural sector in their own backyard. At least not when grain was in short supply. The city-dwelling population of Norfolk was not prepared to dissolve into an agricultural community which served as a grain production centre for more up-and-coming industrial zones. This can be seen in the riots of the poor and the defence of industry in parliamentary petitions.

Certainly private interest was at stake here. However, it seems that there was an overlap of interests at play. The official response to the riots was mild, and a member of the Society for the Encouragement of Arts, Manufactures and Commerce even stated of the Norfolk riots that ‘could the mob act with Distinction, and take only from such Engrossers, I think they would do no great harm’.¹ Though the popular reaction was deemed disorderly and extreme, the grievances of the rioting poor were evidently seen as justifiable.

¹ Henry Baker, quoted by Harris, *Politics and the Nation*, p. 270.
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Apparently the moral economy was reformulating itself in a commercial context, where low grain prices were now in the interest of more than the lowest ranks of society. However, without the strong notion of classes or any great geographical mobility of the labouring poor, the bonds of interest maintained the strongly community-based air of the moral economy. There was a rationality for both the urban elites and the poor to campaign for the preservation of their society as it stood against the ultimately overwhelming forces of economic integration and specialisation. Their evocation of the nation in this case, therefore, stood in opposition to one force of national cohesion.

The rhetoric of the elite section of Norfolk society makes for a curious overlap of localist and nationalist sentiment, as mercantilist ideas and language were strongly present in their underlying case for local protectionism. E.S. Furniss argues that employment of the masses was understood and guided by the principles of a nationalist system, so that the work of common labourers was not recognised as an economic activity on behalf of themselves, but rather as an economic duty to their nation.¹ This is exactly the way in which Norwich's mayor stated his case for the protection of local industry. For this man and his co-signers, many of whom were the owners of manufacturing initiatives in the city, mercantilism, with its seemingly remote notions of balance of trade and zero sum game, was realistic business logic. It seemed perfectly applicable to the local case as much as it applied to national prosperity and power.

When dealing with Parliament, the interest groups of Norfolk seem to have expressed themselves in overtly nationalist terms in a way reminiscent of the French and Spanish border village communities analysed by Peter Sahlins. Here also 'the evocation of national identities... was grounded in local economic interests, and in a local

¹ E. S. Furniss, *The Position of the Labourer in a System of Nationalism* (New York, 1965), p. 199.

sense of place'.¹ However, Sahlins thinks that it is too simple to see national identity as mask applied only for the purposes of fawning to the centre. Instead he argues for a coexistence of identities, which could serve local interests by, in words he borrows from Ernst Gellner, 'keeping options and connections open'.² This being so, these connections were still largely being exploited in order to protect the interests and economic ecosystem of local communities. If politically they could assume a national or local identity, economically the community of Norfolk had rejected at least some features of nationhood.

Meanwhile Parliament, as a representative body, was left with the task of arbitrating between interests. Even when disputes were taken to the Parliament at Westminster in national terms, they were clearly not necessarily national in intent. As Julian Hoppit has shown from the evidence of the myriad of specific legislation pertaining to economic matters and arbitrated by the Westminster and other Parliaments, legislation was multifaceted and varied from nation to nation.³ Meanwhile, general legislation could be employed to favour certain areas, equalise imbalances of other measures, and sometimes be selectively applied.⁴ In a similar way, legislation that banned the export of grain, for example, appeared national in intent and purpose. However, it served the interests of at least one discrete community which had campaigned for it. Even if it also served other discrete communities elsewhere, a campaign in favour of national legislation and participation in national politics does not necessarily confer a national economic identity. A community could evidently remain economically parochial and adverse to certain economic forms of external intervention and integration, even while appealing politically to a central authority for help.

¹ P. Sahlins, *Boundaries* (Berkeley & Oxford, 1989), p. 165.

² As quoted by Sahlins, *Boundaries*, p. 165.

³ J. Hoppit, 'The Nation, the State, and the First Industrial Revolution', *Journal of British Studies*, 50:2 (2011), p. 308.

⁴ *Ibid*, pp. 325-6.

Chapter 2: Experiencing the French Deregulation Experiment in Tours, 1763-1775

Introduction

A developed and integrated economy could help make the nation state a possibility, by providing a fiscal base for the state, and also generating an 'awareness of belonging to a nation'.¹ Historians are therefore drawn to the issue of economic integration, exploring it in various ways. Ernest Labrousse, for instance, compared the price of commodities in disparate French markets, coming to the conclusion that, due probably to the high cost of transportation, grain circulated little on a national basis, and prices corresponded to local conditions rather than to a national market.² Likewise Bernard Lepetit evaluated the extent of road-building and tried to quantify the volume of inter-provincial traffic, arguing that here the circulation of produce on a national basis was difficult even as late as the 1840s.³

These accounts have generally emphasised the infrastructural difficulties which compromised fledgling national markets. Regina Grafe has complained that the historiography of the Spanish economy has been distracted by geographical determinism, overlooking a richer institutional history of jurisdictional fragmentation, which can nevertheless be approached through sensitive economic analysis.⁴ According to Grafe, the Spanish monarchy struggled to wrest control

¹ G. Ardent, 'Financial Policy and Economic Infrastructure of Modern States and Nations' in C. Tilly (ed.), *The Formation of National States in Western Europe* (Princeton, 1975), p. 169.

² E. Labrousse, *Esquisse du Mouvement des Prix et des Revenus en France* (Paris, 1933), I, pp. 124-5.

³ B. Lepetit, *Chemins de Terre et Voies d'Eau* (Paris, 1984), pp. 67-71.

⁴ R. Grafe, *Distant Tyranny* (Princeton, 2012), pp. ix; 115.

over economic matters from the historical territories, which together constituted the would-be nation state. This led to disintegrated markets and 'allocative inefficiency', as local authorities sought to introduce slack into regional markets for important commodities. For, although inefficient, this action could prevent regional shortage later on.¹ Such behaviour betrays an intensely local outlook.

Grafe rejected grain as the subject of her analysis because it was the only commodity in eighteenth-century Spain which was subject to national and not regional regulation.² Not so in France. Here until 1763 local authorities had a high degree of control over grain in their jurisdictions. It was well within the powers of local officials and courts to prevent grain from leaving their region. This slackened the economy, perhaps minimising the risk of shortage on a local basis, but causing inefficiencies and preventing market growth on a larger scale.³ It could be argued that the deregulation of the grain trade, which took place in 1763 and 1764, was synonymous with an attempt to integrate this aspect of the economy.

In terms of economic integration, the testimony of ordinary contemporary witnesses is sometimes ignored. Grafe's work deals cursorily with the moral economy, but offers local conditions and issues as a rationalisation for parochialism amongst elites.⁴ It is the local social perspective which this chapter seeks to reintegrate into existing knowledge about French economic integration, by looking at how the deregulation of the grain trade was construed by ordinary people and local authorities. For this reason, this chapter, like the previous one, is a local case study. It relies particularly on the reports of local officers, and the testimonies of rioters and critics that they collected. In order to ascertain an idea of the harvest conditions, it also examines price and climate data. Moreover, to get a sense of the wider applicability of the

¹ Ibid, p. 197.

² Ibid, p. 42.

³ H.L. Root, *The Fountain of Privilege* (Berkeley, 1994), p. 70.

⁴ Grafe, *Distant Tyranny*, p. 200.

findings of the case study, it looks at reports of riots which were received from all over the country at Paris. Finally, it carefully examines the regulations, mandates and reprimands which returned from central government and guided the regulation of the economy on a local basis.

During the eighteenth century there were many ways in which central government was attempting to exert a more centralised control over France. Michael Kwass, for example, has shown that the parlements, the highest law courts in the land, resisted a new taxation scheme as an infringement on their jurisdiction.¹ Meanwhile, Arnault Skornicki demonstrates that eighteenth-century French liberalism was the creation of the monarchical agenda of undermining alternative sources of authority and power.² In each case, economic matters became the battleground for a violent political campaign by the centre. It is argued that the same was true of the grain regulation question in France after 1763.

The first section of this chapter, then, introduces the shift that French grain law underwent in the early 1760s, from a body of comprehensive regulations, which gave discretion to local authorities, to a system that was free, and also national. The emphasis of this section is on the state-building elements of the free grain trade in France. Thus, the section deals with the nation as a whole, and it is not until the second section that the focus shifts onto Tours. This region serves as the subject of a case study and as a point of comparison with the examination of Norfolk presented in the first chapter. The second section analyses the responses of authorities to rioting and takes special notice of the factors and causes on which they blamed outbreaks of social unrest.

Section three continues the story of official opposition to deregulation, briefly outlining the rebellion of the parlements and the shift in the Controller Generalship, which ultimately led to the reinstatement of

¹ M. Kwass, *Privilege and the Politics of Taxation* (Cambridge, 2000), pp. 156-7.

² A. Skornicki, *L'Économiste, la Cour et la Patrie* (Paris, 2011), pp. 26-7.

grain regulation in France. Returning to Tours, it then deals with the most severe riot in that region during the period. This, so the argument goes, was the result of continued exports of grain which by-passed Tours. It was a manifestation of the anxiety on the part of the people who would not accept the maritime economy of Nantes, which represented economic integration, as a part of their own economic system.

Overall it is argued that resistance to the dismantlement of the old parochial system was of a similar kind to the institutional resistance to the centre that Grafe has identified in the historical territories of Spain.¹ For the fallout from the deregulation of the grain trade not only reveals a state of economic disintegration in France, but it could be argued that the attempt itself aggravated a national discord of interests in other senses.² Benedict Anderson has claimed that a national economy in one commodity, print literature, could help unite a people.³ By comparison, it is argued that in France in the late eighteenth-century, one commodity, grain, could only emphasise a lack of economic cohesion. The tensions of economic disunity strained the political oneness of the nation, as national policy, which took little account of economic variation, forced common people, bureaucrats and peacekeepers into conflict with the national government.

Grain Laws, Deregulation and State-Building

The grain laws of France stemmed back at least to the end of the seventeenth century. However, when the laws were discussed and challenged in the middle of the eighteenth century, more often than not, it was with reference to the antiquated laws passed under Charles VI, Charles IX and Henri III in the fourteenth and sixteenth centuries

¹ Grafe, *Distant Tyranny*, p. 243.

² *Ibid*, p. 422.

³ B. Anderson, *Imagined Communities* (London, 2006), p. 44.

together with the more recent laws of 1622, 1632 and 1661.¹ These seventeenth-century incarnations also tied in with the legislation which established the police machinery in Paris and ultimately the rest of the nation.

The term *police* in the old regime sense does not equate to the modern conception of a police service.² It described the intangible strategy and procedures of governance, which stemmed from the monarch. Its jurisdiction encompassed many of the same local concerns over which the traditional English manor courts presided. However, whilst in the eighteenth century the dominion of the English manor court was shifting away from judicial issues towards more policy-making concerns,³ in France the police was flourishing and gaining in competencies, both in terms of control over social issues, such as prostitution, and in terms of regulation of commercial activity, for instance, monitoring the tobacco trade.⁴

The officers who represented the *police* purchased their positions. For example, in the *présidial*, or judiciary, of the town of Tours, these ranged (excluding the most junior offices) from the relatively affordable role of *Conseiller*, which was sold for 500 *livres* in 1775, to the title of *Lieutenant Général*, which fetched 100,000 *livres* a year later.⁵ With fluctuating prices, it was possible to speculate on this market, as offices could usually be resold at the incumbent's leisure.⁶ However, the market for judicial roles in Tours was generally depressed during this period, because too many offices had been created, and a taste for the rigours of the judiciary was apparently lacking in the region.⁷ William

¹ For instance, each of these laws is recounted in a 1775 reissue and clarification of the declaration of November 1774. AN O/1/361: 'Déclaration du Roi', dated 5th February 1775.

² D. Gordon, *Citizens without Sovereignty* (Princeton, 1994), p. 21.

³ B. Waddell, 'Governing England through the Manor Courts', *HJ*, 55:2 (2012), p. 309.

⁴ H. Gerbaud and M. Bimbenet-Privat, *Châtelet de Paris* (Paris, 1993), p. 15.

⁵ J.A. Tournerie, *Recherches sur la Crise Judiciaire en Province à la Fin de l'Ancien Régime* (Tours, 1975), p. 16.

⁶ W. Doyle, *Venality* (Oxford, 1996), p. 3.

⁷ Tournerie, *Recherches*, p. 8.

Doyle has pointed out that, in comparison with the lucrative financial offices in which wealthy Frenchman could invest, judicial offices, such as the police roles just mentioned, were not that profitable.

Nevertheless, whenever the monarchy required an influx of ready cash, more and more were created, and each with its own little perks. These could include the abstract benefits of respect or social prestige.

However, there were often also material rewards including modest interest or wages; a range of important fiscal privileges exempting the holder from various taxes; and sometimes fees.¹

In Tours it seems that fees were indeed charged by the police for obligatory market place activities. In spite of the legal upheaval that this chapter describes, the right to collect an average of 600 *livres* per year in fees for official operations pertaining to the grain trade at Mamers au Maine, was preserved at least until 1778. By this time, however, it was the Duchess of Beauvilliers who collected the dues, the right having evidently been merged into a tax farm and sold on.² The vendible privileges of administrative roles served as the means by which the monarchy 'lured tens of thousands of individuals into state service', who bought and sold them like any other stock.³

However, as more and more individuals were drawn into service, maintaining control over them became increasingly difficult. In the short-term the sale of offices raised revenue for the monarchy. However, ultimately venality limited the power of the monarch, as it alienated important state functions. As much as officers imposed the rule of central government, it seems that, using their own judicial authority, they could also oppose and detract from its ministerial authority in matters where their own interests diverged from those of the centre.⁴ Moreover, trying to recoup state functions and powers was

¹ Doyle, *Venality*, p. 5.

² AD I&L C248: 'Etat des Différents Droits de Péage qui se perçoivent tant par Eau que par Terre dans l'Étendue de la Généralité de Tours'. (1778)

³ Kwass, *Privilege*, p. 30.

⁴ P.M. Jones, *Reform and Revolution in France* (Cambridge, 1995), p. 65.

not easy. In the face of eighteenth-century attacks by the central government, venal office holding became something of a 'bulwark of public liberty' against the arbitrary transgressions of a despotic central government.¹ The obedience of the officers of the police, therefore, could not be taken for granted.

Until the deregulation, French grain laws resembled those in place in Britain. Generally, they ruled that all trade in grain was to take place at the market and during specific hours, under the supervision of officers.² This removed middlemen, as producers were obliged to bring their own wares to market and interact directly with consumers, and only thereafter with commercial buyers. It also prevented, in the same way, potential monopolists from purchasing and hoarding all supplies. Finally this measure helped to implement quality control and ensure the validity of weights and measures. If implemented strictly, officers would weigh each purchase made.³ It was here that some officers enjoyed the privilege of charging a fee. Only registered grain merchants were to participate in a trade which was more or less under the control of the local authorities. The latter had the power to halt the export of grain and usher hoarded supplies into the market-place, as well as to fiddle with bakers' profits.⁴

In many ways, however, this was also machinery for making the passage of food provisions at all times 'legible'.⁵ The police of the marketplace represented an attempt to transform the chaos of national provisioning into neat rows of figures. Thanks to the rules of the market, local officers all over the country could produce and submit reports to the Controller General, who, technically speaking, could have

¹ Doyle, *Venality*, p. 151.

² L.A. Tilly, 'The Food Riot as a Form of Political Conflict in France', *Journal of Interdisciplinary History*, 2:1 (1971), p.27.

³ J. Miller, *Mastering the Market* (Cambridge, 1999), p. 32.

⁴ *Ibid.*

⁵ J.C. Scott, *Seeing like a State* (London, 1998), p. 262.

a handle on exactly how much grain was for sale and at what price anywhere in the land.

This was possible, but unlikely. For Skornicki has pointed out that the problem of subsistence exposed the limits of the supposedly absolute government, which in fact had little control over the production and distribution of grain.¹ Nevertheless, the Paris Procurer General, Joly de Fleury, did take a personal interest in the prices and availability of grain in the region around Paris until deregulation took hold, receiving weekly reports from subordinates.²

Similarly, a little later, the Controller General, De L'Averdy, had the local deputies or *subdélégués* of the Tours region (and probably elsewhere) complete forms relating the quality of the harvest each year.³ The apparatus betrays an ambition to bring the entire nation under wraps. Indeed, Louise Tilly, influenced by Gustav Schmoller and Lionel Rothkrug, has suggested that the establishment of the police framework was part of the 'centralising political trend of the seventeenth century', adding that by placing an intendant in each region, the royal administration was implementing a policy of state-building.⁴

Whatever the motives and ambitions of the central law-makers during the seventeenth century, by the eighteenth century the actual grain laws in France had grown idiosyncratic. Central policy and the rules which governed Paris were important, but tensions regarding sovereignty and the challenges posed by regional parlements and independent-minded intendants also took their toll, not to mention the grass-roots level battles for jurisdiction and influence.⁵ Though the sun

¹ Skornicki, *L'Économiste*, p. 302.

² BNF, JdF, 1112: The Reports of Missonnet.

³ Copies of these reports for most localities within the Tours administrative zone for the years 1762-1765 can be found in AD I&L C82 and C83.

⁴ Tilly, 'The Food Riot', p.28; G. Schmoller, *The Mercantile System and its Historical Significance* (New York, 1896), 50; L. Rothkrug, *Opposition to Louis XIV* (Princeton, 1965), p. 21.

⁵ S.L. Kaplan, *Bread, Politics and Political Economy in the Reign of Louis XV* (The Hague, 1976), I, p.29.

was at Versailles, the French political universe was littered with other stars exerting their own forces and the realisation of absolutist and monolithic administration was hampered by the many different centres of gravity at work in the kingdom.

In reality, law making was not top down and certainly it did not seem to be perceived that way in the provinces. Often magistrates submitted suggestions to the Procurer General for new law adjustments based on the situation and coping mechanisms in their own locale.¹ One local officer wrote ‘we request your approval in passing a similar law [to that of 1740 which established a sort of ration] in the two provinces of Touraine and Anjou, if not for the entire kingdom’.² Thanks to this organic process, in reality, the law of the trade could vary from town to town, so that legally, France’s markets were not necessarily cohesive.

Enforcement was another source of variation. Every law creates a crime, and every institution, or bundle of laws in this case, casts a shadow.³ Yet the shadow cast by the French grain laws was rather faint, simply because of the application of discretion by the grain police.⁴ This discretion was actively encouraged in Dean of Police, Nicolas Delamare’s treatment on the subject, which, first published in 1720, was to become the handbook of policing grain.⁵ Judith Miller picks up on this feature of the grain laws, arguing that when finally they were removed, nothing really changed, because, thanks to the blind-eye which officials had turned to the issue, the trade had effectively been free all along.⁶

¹ N. Bourguinat, ‘L’État et L’Information Économique pendant les Crises Frumentaires’ in D. Margairaz and P. Minard (eds.), *L’Information Économique XVIe-XIXe Siècle* (Paris, 2008), p. 255.

² BNF, JdF, 1129, f. 45: Letter to the Procurer General, undated.

³ S. Ogilvie, “‘Whatever is, is Right’? Economic Institutions in pre-Industrial Europe’, *EHR*, 60:4 (2007), p. 674.

⁴ Miller, *Mastering the Market*, p. 40.

⁵ Kaplan, *Bread*, I, p. 63 n. 23.

⁶ Miller, *Mastering the Market*, p. 43.

Merchants were continually pushing the boundaries. The Lieutenant General was obliged to inform another local officer that the laws forbidding sales of grain off-market need not be executed with too much 'rigour' and that the laws were meant for dire circumstances only. He implied that grain merchants could be left to their own resources for the rest of the time.¹ At the same time, however, there were clearly some officers who fretted about implementing the rules enough to warrant a letter to their ultimate superior. There are sufficient examples like this to suggest that officers took their roles very seriously, intervening where they saw fit, according to the most local of conditions.

The irksome laws opposed national economic integration in two more important ways. Firstly, foreign exports were illegal, though in times of exceptional plenty some state sanctioned shipments were made. This was similar, and yet opposite, to the British law which rendered export legal, unless shortages took hold.² Secondly, in France, the internal circulation of grain was often highly restricted. Local market police issued commercially bought grain with a passport, which allowed for its resale at one stipulated destination.³ Higher up the scale, it was the prerogative of the intendant of a region to place an embargo on grain leaving his territory, and when exportation of this sort was allowed, it was usually only between neighbouring provinces. This legal (as opposed to infrastructural) disruption of internal circulation seems to have been based in an often rehearsed maxim, most clearly put by Delamare, who insisted that 'it is just to safeguard our own preservation before thinking about that of our neighbour'.⁴

¹ BNF, JdF, 1107, f. 7: Letter to P. Piscal from the Procurer General, dated 23rd October 1757.

² Great Britain. Customs Establishment, *Customs Tariffs of the United Kingdom from 1800 to 1897* (London, 1897), pp. 250-252.

³ Kaplan, *Bread*, I, p. 69.

⁴ N. Delamare, *Traité de la Police* (Amsterdam & Paris, 2nd edn. 1729), II, p. 726.

There still remained, however, the issue of the enforcement of these two laws, in spite of their centralised origins and apparent national applicability. Though the north of the country – the region which surrounded Paris – was kept under tight wraps, southern and border regions tended to enjoy a little more leeway. At the discretion of their intendants, the bountiful Upper Languedoc defied official national law and carried on a commercial and international export trade in grain.¹ Likewise, in the lowlands of Provence, grain was customarily imported from Italy and North Africa, as the region thrived on its international wine trade.²

The watershed came in 1763, however, when the grain trade was set free. This meant that anybody could participate in the trade (apart from officers of the police), stockpiling grain as they pleased, since authorities lost the power to force grain onto the market. Regional authorities could no longer prevent the circulation of grain, which no longer needed papers or permits to travel within France. In fact, officers were no longer in a position, necessarily, to observe sales, as the trade could now carry on away from the marketplace and in private. All intervention was forbidden and the movement and price of grain was now at the mercy of ‘a free and absolute competition’,³ with the exception of Paris and its vicinity, which was simply too delicate to expose to free trade.

Deregulation diminished the role of the police in the marketplace, and meant that they lost any fees which they had formerly collected. Moreover, the officers of the police were not alone in losing revenue, for keepers of tollgates were now no longer to charge for the passage of

¹ C. Tilly, *The Contentious French* (London, 1986), p.167.

² R. Baehrel, *Une Croissance. La Basse-Provence Rurale, Fin XVIe Siècle-1789* (Paris, 1961), p.78.

³ ‘Déclaration du Roy, portant Permission de faire circuler les Grains’, 25th May 1763 in F.-A. Isambert et al. (eds.), *Recueil Général des Anciennes Lois Françaises, depuis l’An 420 jusqu’à la Révolution de 1789* (Paris, 1833), XXII, p.393. Available online at <http://gallica.bnf.fr/ark:/12148/bpt6k51708x.r=isambert+lois.langEN> [accessed 7 August 2014].

grain. In 1761, the Seigneur de Chateauneuf-sur-Sarthe, a member of the well-to-do Amelot de Chaillou family, for example, had been charging 10 *deniers* for every 12 *septiers* of grain which passed through the *portes marinières*, or barge gates, on his estate. This was, however, dwarfed by the sum of 45 *sols* he charged for each shipment of salt that passed.¹ An officer explained in an accompanying *mémoire* that the lord defended this tariff on the grounds that the barge gates (a precursor to the modern lock) required a great deal of expensive maintenance and made the river navigable.²

However, it seems that even before important changes were made to grain regulation, road and waterway tolls were under threat in Tours. For example, in 1752 several rights of tollage were revoked.³ In fact the recurring suppression of internal customs on roads and waterways was part of a long-term campaign to consolidate the nation within a single French territorial boundary.⁴ It could be argued that the deregulation of the grain trade, meanwhile, was another form taken by the same process of establishing a single boundary for the entire nation.

Having freed the internal grain trade, the French government waited a year before making the exportation of grain abroad legally permissible also. The edict of 1764 did not offer merchants absolute liberty in their business affairs, as a maximum price value at which grain could be exported abroad was put in place. In its form, this supposed failsafe against national shortage echoed the British laws.⁵ Though Britain was an enemy and a competitor, its 'precocious improvement of agriculture' and thriving grain trade was something of a point of envy.⁶ The example of the British grain trade was raised at the assembly of the

¹ AD I&L C248 f.49, 'Pancarte du Peage par Eau de Chateauneuf' undated, but accompanied by a note dating it to 15th June 1761.

² AD I&L C248 f. 45, *Mémoire*, 15th June 1761.

³ AD I&L C248 f.85, 'Etat des Seigneurs Péagers dont les Péages ont été supprimés en 1752'.

⁴ P. Sahlins, *Boundaries* (Berkeley & Oxford, 1989), p. 93.

⁵ Great Britain, *Customs Tariffs*, pp. 250-252.

⁶ F. Crouzet, *Britain Ascendant* (Cambridge, 1990), p. 146.

Paris Police (which met in 1768) by the Advocate General himself,¹ and was the subject of research and an essay by the French ambassador, the Comte de Guerchy, while he was serving in Britain.² Still, in its logic, this limitation to free-trade seemed to stem from Delamare's preaching, that a region should feed itself before allowing grain to move on. In some ways, after the deregulation, the same logic was in place, only now the confines of the unit were enlarged to national level and the neighbours in question were foreigners, not other French provinces.

These sweeping national declarations certainly tidied up the formally confused and regionally varying state of the laws, but Eli Heckscher has gone so far as to describe the changes as deliberate economic state-building, conscious acts of unification, and hence a manifestation of his conception of *mercantilism*.³ Although Steven Kaplan scoffs that deregulation was far more subtle than clumsy mercantilism,⁴ in depicting *laissez-faire* as compatible with a mercantilist outlook, Heckscher had a point. Freeing the grain trade was undoubtedly a rejection of Colbertism, which tended to favour manufacture above all else. Yet the adoption of *laissez-faire* in the grain trade did not constitute any great challenge to the mercantilist rationale which had spawned Colbertism.

Having allowed free exports, law-makers, inspired by the Physiocrats, expected France to begin to corner a certain share of the trade in grain, which was supposed overall to be fixed. With grain passing outwards and hard cash inwards, it was thought that France would begin to wrestle a greater share of international wealth out of British hands especially. The debates over deregulation were also conducted in mercantilist language. For example, the parlement of Dauphiné complained that without the freedom to export 'we move the wealth

¹ AN K1022: Minutes of the General Assembly of Police, November 25th 1768.

² BNF Mss Fr 14296: Letter to the Duc de Praslin from the Comte de Guerchy, 29th March 1764.

³ Heckscher, *Mercantilism* (London, 1955), II, p. 215.

⁴ Kaplan, *Bread*, II, p. 689.

from province to province, but do not augment the amount of money within the state'.¹ French grain exports, moreover, were only to be carried on French ships, thus protecting this segment of the important carrying trade from the likes of the Dutch and the British who would steal it away, as well as supposedly encouraging the generation of French ships and crews.² A brazenly mercantilist caveat.

Physiocratic doctrine was not adverse to the enrichment and empowerment of the state. In fact, their ideas were influential precisely because they tended to dovetail neatly with the spirit and anxieties of the times. John Shovlin has emphasised the context of patriotism in the development of the French political economy, arguing that defeat in war was a direct spur to the physiocratic cause.³ Deregulation was meant to enrich the nation more evenly than had Colbert's manufacturing initiatives.⁴ These had supposedly only served to concentrate wealth in the unwholesome and extravagant cities, lining the pockets of a few unscrupulous individuals. Thanks to the deregulation of the grain trade, virtuous and manly French agriculture was to be regenerated, and with it the population which had supposedly gone into decline.⁵

However, according to Skornicki, physiocratic doctrine did not really derive its esteem for landowners from the civic humanist moral of love for one's *patria*. Actually, the emphasis on developing a worthy country gentry stemmed from a commitment to the monarchical constitution which could raise revenue most easily from fixed property.⁶ Meanwhile, a republic of virtuous citizens was considered an unrealistic prospect for a large nation like France.⁷ François Quesnay himself envisaged no great role in government for the landed aristocracy, but emphasised

¹ BNF, JdF, 1138 f. 122: Petition of the Parlement of Dauphiné, 12th July 1768.

² BNF, JdF, 1138, f. 38: Ruling of the King's Council, 1764.

³ J. Shovlin, *The Political Economy of Virtue* (Ithaca, 2006), pp. 49-50.

⁴ I. Hont, *Jealousy of Trade* (Cambridge, MA & London, 2005), p. 192.

⁵ Shovlin, *Political Economy of Virtue*, pp. 55-6.

⁶ Skornicki, *L'Économiste*, pp. 200-1.

⁷ R. Whatmore, *Republicanism and the French Revolution* (Oxford, 2000), pp. 23-4.

their economic role in empowering France. He advocated a single national tax on land to fund the absolute monarch's regime.¹

No doubt in this era of recurrent warfare in France, a fiscal boost was a welcome outcome. Charles Tilly has shown how, in the Languedoc, a commercial grain trade, with the revenues it could offer the king, was just one part of an overall consolidation, political, religious and economic, on the part of a succession of intendants loyal to Versailles.² With the deregulation of the trade, apparently grain was finally subsumed into the economic infrastructure which a modern nation-state demanded.³ Similarly, Judith Miller argues that the monarchy, represented by Vincent Gournay, sought financial independence through the revenue which free trade could offer.⁴

However, this was not merely a matter of finance. Miller contextualises the issue in the 'incendiary battles' between the monarchical centre and the provincial parlements,⁵ and Skornicki agrees with this strongly constitutional element. *Laissez-faire* was, according to Skornicki, a 'government technology', and the only one which could undermine the power of parlements and courtiers alike.⁶ A free grain trade was designed to move this important element of the economy out of the judicial sphere, and leave it subject to centralised ministerial power only.⁷

The seemingly civic humanist strand of physiocracy was therefore counterbalanced by a jurisprudential emphasis on individual rights and the uninhibited freedom to enjoy property. The *libéralisation* of the

¹ L. Vardi, *The Physiocrats and the World of the Enlightenment* (Cambridge, 2012), p. 150; Shovlin, *Political Economy of Virtue*, p. 103.

² Tilly, *Contentious French*, p. 167.

³ G. Ardent, 'Financial Policy and Economic Infrastructure of Modern States and Nations' in C. Tilly (ed.), *The Formation of National States in Western Europe* (Princeton, 1975), pp. 209-10.

⁴ J. Miller, *Mastering the Market* (Cambridge, 1999), p. 60.

⁵ Ibid.

⁶ Skornicki, *L'Économiste*, p. 28.

⁷ Jones, *Reform and Revolution*, p. 65.

grain trade subverted the traditional privileged status of corn and it became an ordinary commodity subject to normal property laws. These protected the rights of the producers and owners of grain against consumers. The latter, meanwhile, were no longer seen as entitled to subsistence, but they were offered instead property rights over their own labour. In this sense, the deregulation was also supposed to eradicate the final vestiges of feudal servitude and afford peasants access to markets previously unavailable to them due to insurmountable opportunity costs, which were the result of privilege and monopoly.¹

Therefore, the physiocratic free trade doctrine which informed the *libéralisation* project still relied on a 'crypto-republican language', but also advanced jurisprudential ideas of property rights. It was implied that the members of the French nation were useful and virtuous citizens, who needed no higher authority to engage in reciprocal and unifying activities such as trade.² It also undermined pre-capitalist power centres and social relationships, which could compromise the authority of the central state. Inherent in all these notions, was a single and cohesive French nation, which, as we shall see, was in many ways a problematic, unrealistic and even unpopular vision.

The *Généralité* of Tours and the First Years of Deregulation

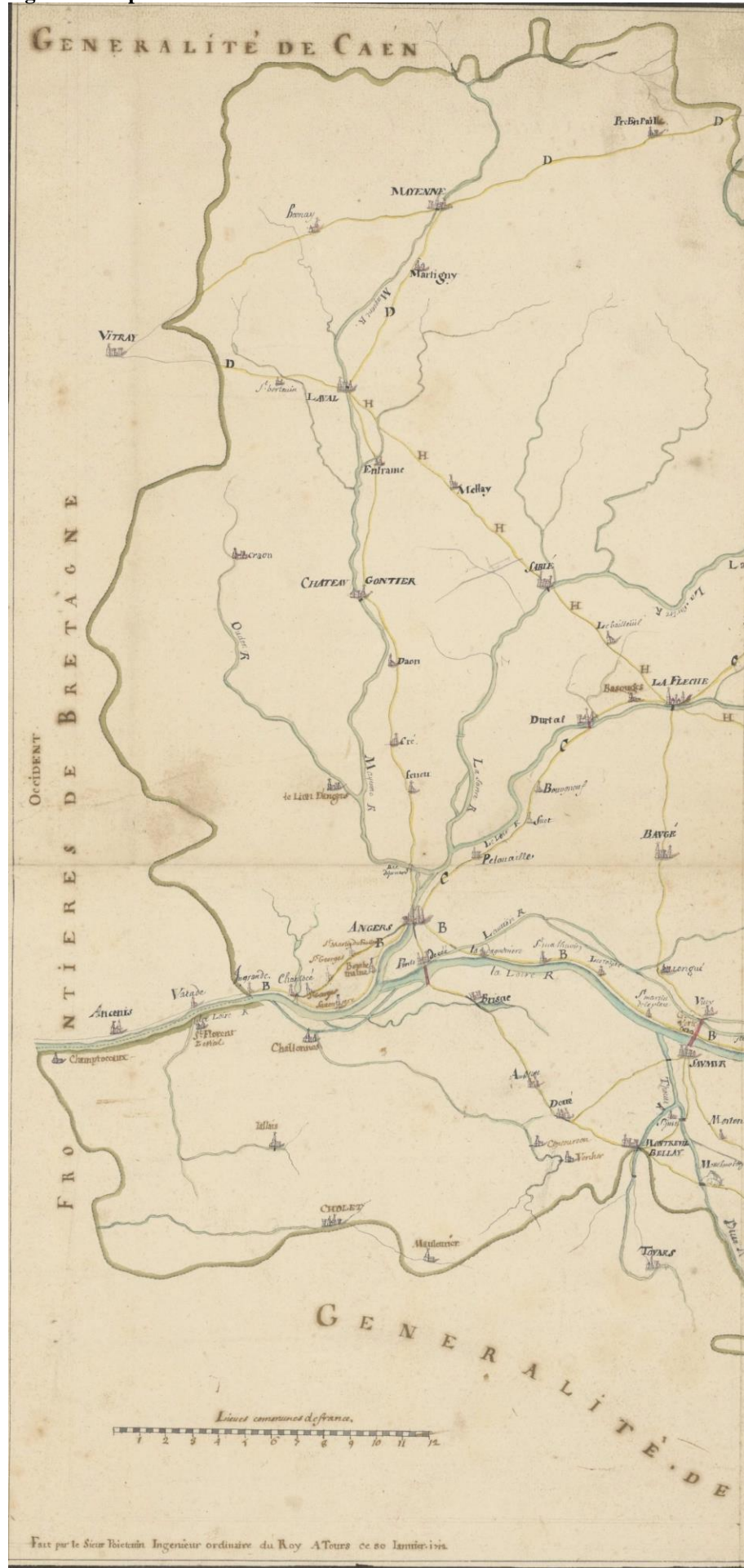
Not all citizens agreed with the official line on the grain trade pursued after 1763. Though riots were by no means unheard of before, in comparison to the first half of the century, the number of food riots in France doubled in the period after 1763 and up until the revolution.³

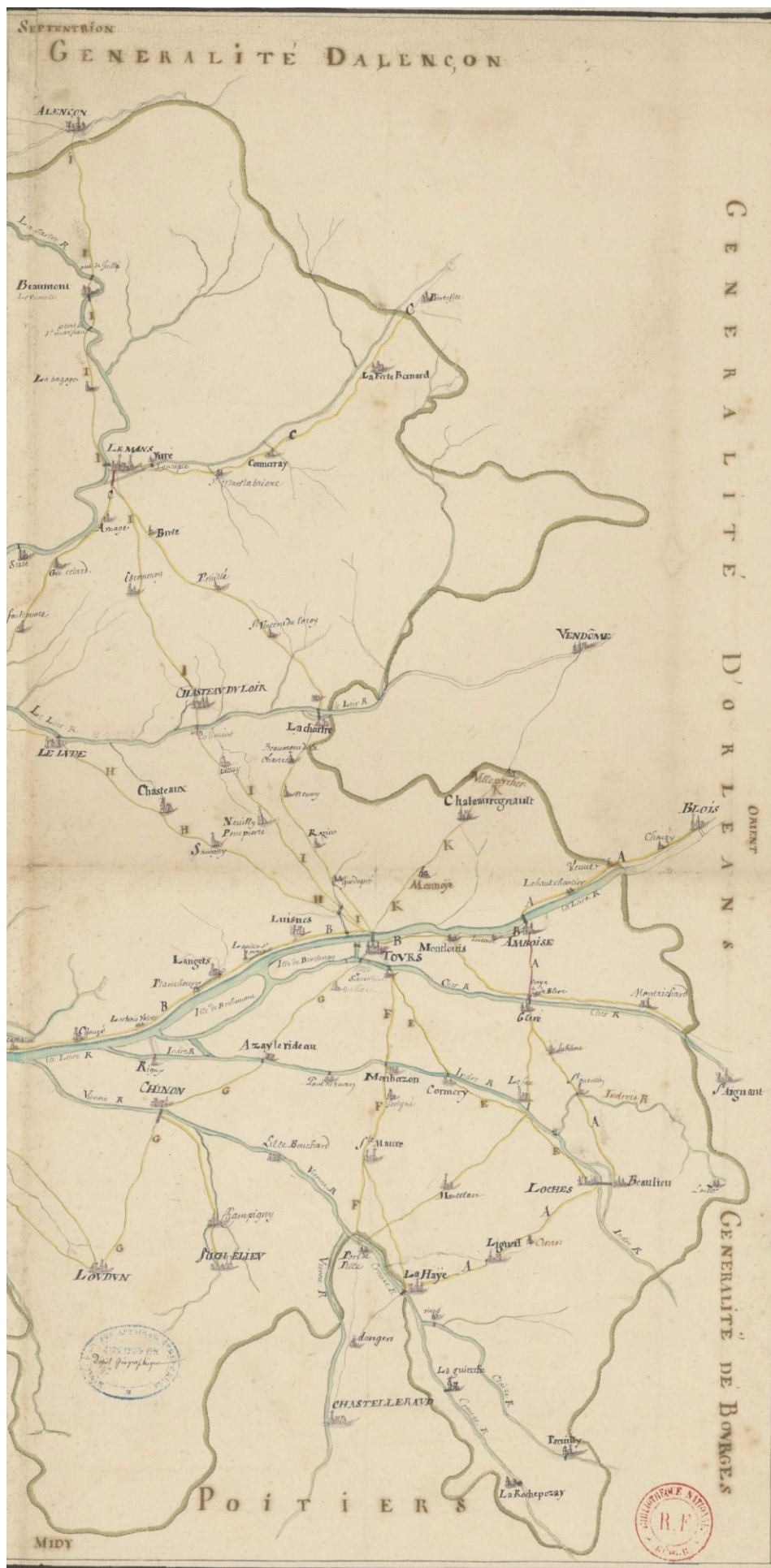
¹ Root, *The Fountain of Privilege*, pp. 69-71.

² Skornicki, *L'Économiste*, p. 30.

³ C. Bouton, 'Les Mouvements de Subsistance et le Problème de l'Économie Morale sous l'Ancien Régime et la Révolution Française', *Annales Historiques de la Révolution Française*, 319 (2000), p. 6.

Figure 6: Map of the *Généralité* of Tours





Source: N. Poictevin, Carte des Grandes Routes Royales qui passent dans la Généralité de Tours et qui conduisent depuis Paris dans d'Autres Provinces (1712). gallica.bnf.fr / Bibliothèque Nationale de France
 Daisy Gibbs

The *généralité* of Tours in northwest France serves as a neat microcosm of the national situation: from the beginning the period in question, 1750, and until 1765 no riots occurred. During the following fifteen years there were more than forty.¹

Généralités were the fiscal districts of the *ancien régime*, and that of Tours was a paradigm of the administrative system before the revolution.² It encompassed parts of the ancient Provinces of Touraine, Anjou and Maine.³ As a *pays d'élection*, Tours was subject to no parlement (unlike the *pays d'état*), and was under the ultimate jurisdiction of an intendant.⁴ Unlike most of those serving in an administrative capacity at this time, the intendant did not purchase his office. In fact, intendants were supposed to be the crown's antidote to venality, and were expected to monitor local office holders in order to keep provincial government in step with central directives.⁵

Unlike Norfolk, Tours was no paradigm of large-scale commercial grain production. Sometimes the region could not even feed its own population,⁶ which, according to François Dumas, numbered around 1,270,873 in 1761.⁷ This is not to say that the region was not luscious, it had long been known as the '*jardin de la France*'⁸ and had a strong viticulture.⁹ Crudely categorised, the agriculture of Tours belonged to the *bocages* of the West,¹⁰ which generally saw smallish plots

¹ These can be found throughout AD I&L, C94 and C97, whilst 175 B78 is a file dedicated to the riot of February 1774. Counting up social disturbances is beset with difficulties, including the fact that normally only that which is labelled a riot by authorities, and hence a crime, is ever recorded, and that multiple outbreaks might be classed either as one or several riots. C. Tilly, *Regimes and Repertoires* (Chicago, 2006), pp. 45-6.

² J. Boutier, *Atlas de l'Histoire de France* (Paris, 2006), p. 41.

³ F. Dumas, *La Généralité de Tours au XVIIIe Siècle* (Tours, 1894), p. 4.

⁴ Schmoller, *Mercantile System*, p. 56, n. 1.

⁵ Doyle, *Venality*, p. 15.

⁶ Dumas, *Tours*, p. 6.

⁷ *Ibid*, p. 4.

⁸ B. Maillard, *Paysans de Touraine au XVIIIe Siècle* (La Crèche, 2006), p. 5.

⁹ R. Dion, *Le Val de Loire* (Tours, 1934), pp. 635-640.

¹⁰ P. Goubert, 'Les Campagnes Françaises' in F. Braudel, E. Labrousse, et al. (eds.), *Histoire Économique et Sociale de la France* (Paris, 1970), II, p. 108.

interspersed with trees and some forest. This land was worked mostly by poor peasant farmers with oxen. The peasants operated a biennial crop rotation, true to the tradition of *petite culture*, which was the thing that the Physiocrats frowned upon most of all.¹ They preferred *grande culture*, a system that entailed intensive farming courtesy of the triennial crop rotation system and the use of horses.²

However, *improvement* was not thought out of the question for the region, at least not by the physiocrat, Charles Richard de Butré, who was one of the key mathematical minds behind Quesnay's theories, and a member of the agricultural society at Orléans.³ De Butré bought a tract of land in Tours, comprised of five parts vineyard, two pasture and three arable farmland, intending to invest in and improve his new holdings.⁴ He wrote copious notes about how to implement the desired changes and achieve the ideal of *grand culture* in a region like Tours.⁵

Moreover, as agriculturally backward as the region may seem, it was perhaps not extraordinary in the French context. The absence of an agricultural revolution in France during the eighteenth century to match the changes across the Channel has been blamed on the social and cultural differences between the two nations, including a lack of individualism in France and the propensity of rich French landowners to invest in the city rather than their rural holdings.⁶ However, the railway age has been seen by historians such as Xavier de Planhol as the game-changer for the French agricultural economy, as it allowed for specialisation, that is, the more appropriate use of the varying natural environment.⁷ Fernand Braudel has pointed out that there was already

¹ Dion, *Val de Loire*, p. 459.

² *Ibid.*, p. 458.

³ L. Charles and C. Théré, 'The Economist as Surveyor: Physiocracy in the Fields', *History of Political Economy*, 44: Supplement (2012), p. 83.

⁴ AD I&L E 176: 'Contrat de Vente de la Closerie de Chevalette', June 1762.

⁵ AD I&L C101: 'Notes et Mémoires sur l'Agriculture, provenant des Papiers du Sieur Richard de Butré', undated.

⁶ R. Forster, 'Obstacles to Agricultural Growth in Eighteenth-Century France', *American Historical Review*, 75:6 (1970), p. 1612.

⁷ X. de Planhol, *An Historical Geography of France* (Cambridge, 1994), p. 347.

a high volume of traffic within the provinces in the early nineteenth century, especially on a local level.¹ However, when the highways of the eighteenth century were built, they tended only to link provincial capitals with Paris, doing little to connect the buzzing local lattices, and hence denying early opportunities for national economic integration.²

Situated relatively near the coast, and served by the river Loire and its tributaries including the Cher and the Vienne, as well as the river Sarthe, the Tours *généralité*, however, was quite well connected to the coast at Nantes and to Paris. Whilst 80 per cent of the population of the Touraine region lived in the countryside, this is not to say that the region was purely concerned with agriculture and viticulture.³ For, as Hugh Clout has put it, in eighteenth century France 'industrial scenes were rural'.⁴ Indeed, in 1766 the combined non-agricultural product of the *généralité* was worth 15,000,000 *livres*. Each of the three provinces specialised in a branch of the textile industry: in Anjou it was handkerchiefs, hemp-cloth and dyed cloths; it was flax, hemp-cloth and woollens in Maine; and finally, Touraine was known for its drapery, tannery and its silk.⁵

Tours was in fact France's second silk producing city after Lyons.⁶ By 1800 the population of Tours had grown to over 20,000 inhabitants, making it a fairly important provincial city by French standards.⁷ During the mid-eighteenth century however, faced with competition from silk imported by the French east-indies company and from more fashionably demur fabrics such as cotton from across the Channel, the silk trade in both French cities encountered difficulties.⁸ The industry was also at the mercy of the weather, as the production of raw silk can

¹ F. Braudel, *The Identity of France* (London, 1990), II, p. 464.

² *Ibid*, p. 467.

³ Maillard, *Paysans*, p. 6.

⁴ H. Clout, 'Industrial Development in the Eighteenth and Nineteenth Centuries' in *idem* (ed.), *Themes in the Historical Geography of France* (London, 1977), p. 451.

⁵ Dumas, *Tours*, p. 7.

⁶ J. Feltwell, *The Story of Silk* (Stroud, 1990), p. 88.

⁷ Boutier, *Atlas*, p. 40.

⁸ J. Godart, *L'Ouvrier en Soie* (Geneva, 1976), p. 208.

be harmed by late frosts which ravage the white mulberry trees and their incumbent silk worms.¹ In spite of these dangers, during this period the Tours silk production zone, located south-east of the main city at Loches, suffered during 1772 only.²

According to contemporary observations, the winter of 1771-1772 saw slightly lower minimum temperatures than the preceding five years at Paris at least.³ That spring saw two riots, first in Chinon, to the southwest of Tours during April, and then in La Haye, south of Tours in mid-June. Neither town, however, had much to do with silk production. Nevertheless, the towns share an important characteristic, which is that they are each situated on the banks of a river, the former on the Loire and the latter on the Vienne. Of the thirty identified riot locations within the *généralité* and the period, nineteen were situated on a waterway.

Though strictly speaking these riots were *rural*,⁴ they often took place either at ports or market towns- places where grain was visibly on the move. There are about three broad categories of riot for this period, though one disturbance could include elements of multiple sorts. These were: the *entrave*, which meant intercepting and abducting grain convoys; the *taxation populaire* or price setting riot; and violence in the marketplace or on farms which usually involved physical attacks on vendors, farmers or sometimes even local political figures.⁵ Of all three types, the *entrave*, the interception of grain exports, was the most prevalent in Tours. This was typical of France in this period, and

¹ Feltwell, *The Story of Silk*, p. 89.

² Ibid.

³ A. Roux and P.L. Cotte, 'Daily Weather Observations', *Journal de Médecine, Chirurgie, Pharmacie, etc*, issues 12-46 (Every November and May 1760-1776), <http://www.biusante.parisdescartes.fr/histoire/medica/resultats/?fille=o&cotemere=90145> [accessed 17 May 2014]

⁴ According to Maillard's definition that is. Another historian such as Corfield might class them differently given the very low threshold she used to define urban-living in Norfolk. Maillard, *Paysans*, p. 6; P.J. Corfield, 'East Anglia' in P. Clark (ed.) *The Cambridge History of Urban Britain*, II (Cambridge, 2000), p. 36.

⁵ L.A. Tilly, 'The Food Riot', pp.23-4; J. Nicolas, *La Rébellion Française* (Paris, 2002), pp. 336-7.

outbreaks were concentrated especially in the rural north, where the pressure of supplying the great northern cities of Paris, Lyons, Rouen and others, together with a social structure which saw many poor and landless labourers dependent on wage labour buying grain from wealthy farmers, made for conditions especially conducive to rioting.¹

Each of around 40 riots in the *généralité* within the period saw the attempted and sometimes successful *pillage* of grain. In no instances that I have found was grain destroyed as in the riot of 1766 at Norwich. Indeed, there are some indications that the people who seized grain in Tours were in dire need of it. For instance, the local authorities of the towns of Angers, Chateaugontier, Le Mans and even of Tours itself expressed their concern for the welfare of their communities in times of high prices in letters to the intendant.² In these and other contemporary commentaries it was often the rain that was blamed for crop failure and ultimately high prices. Figure 7 does indeed testify to a coincidence of frequent rainfall and the outbreak of riots in 1768 and 1774.³

Yet there had been ample rainfall before unaccompanied by riots in the early 1760s, and in most parts of the *généralité* the harvest reports of 1762 blamed rain for a mediocre harvest.⁴ These claims are substantiated by the productivity figures which were gathered for the election of Le Mans by an apparently scientifically minded officer, as shown below in figure 8. In spite of following on from a harvest apparently only half as productive as an average year,⁵ 1763 saw no rioting and, according to the price data accumulated for Tours by

¹ O. Hufton, 'Social Conflict and the Grain Supply in Eighteenth-Century France' in R.I. Rotberg and T.K. Rabb (eds.), *Hunger and History* (Cambridge, 1985), pp. 108-109.

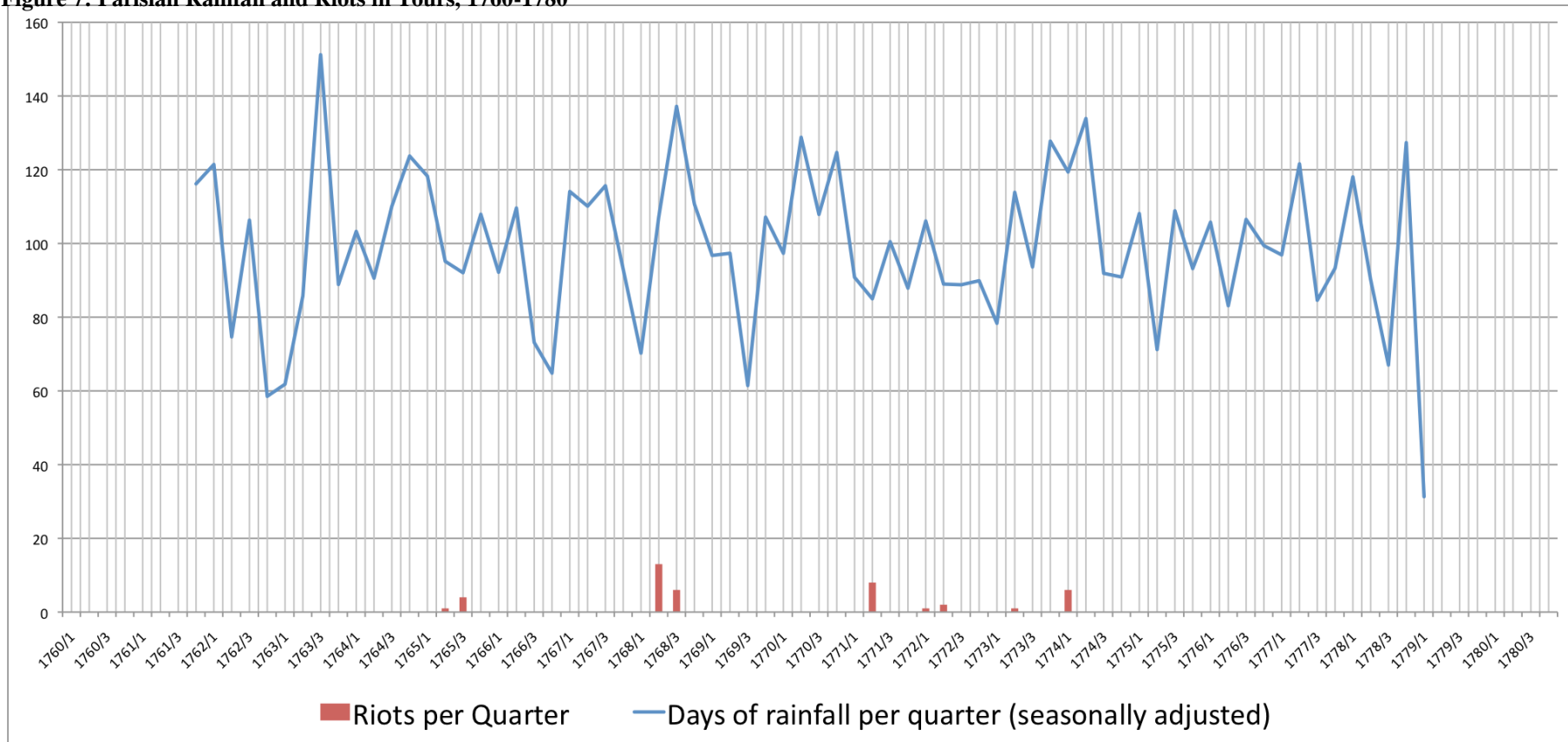
² For Angers: AD I&L C96, Letter from the Mayor, Councillors and Principal Citizens of Angers, dated 26th August 1769; for Chateaugontier: *ibid*, Letter from the Mayor and Councillors of Chateaugontier, dated 28th February 1769; for Le Mans: *ibid*, Letter from the Mayor and Aldermen of Le Mans, dated 9th September 1769 and for Tours: AD I&L C94, Letter from the Mayor and Aldermen of Tours, dated 6th October 1768.

³ It has to be admitted that the data used here was collected in Paris and only provides the number of days of rainfall per month; it has nothing to say about the intensity and hence the quantity rain.

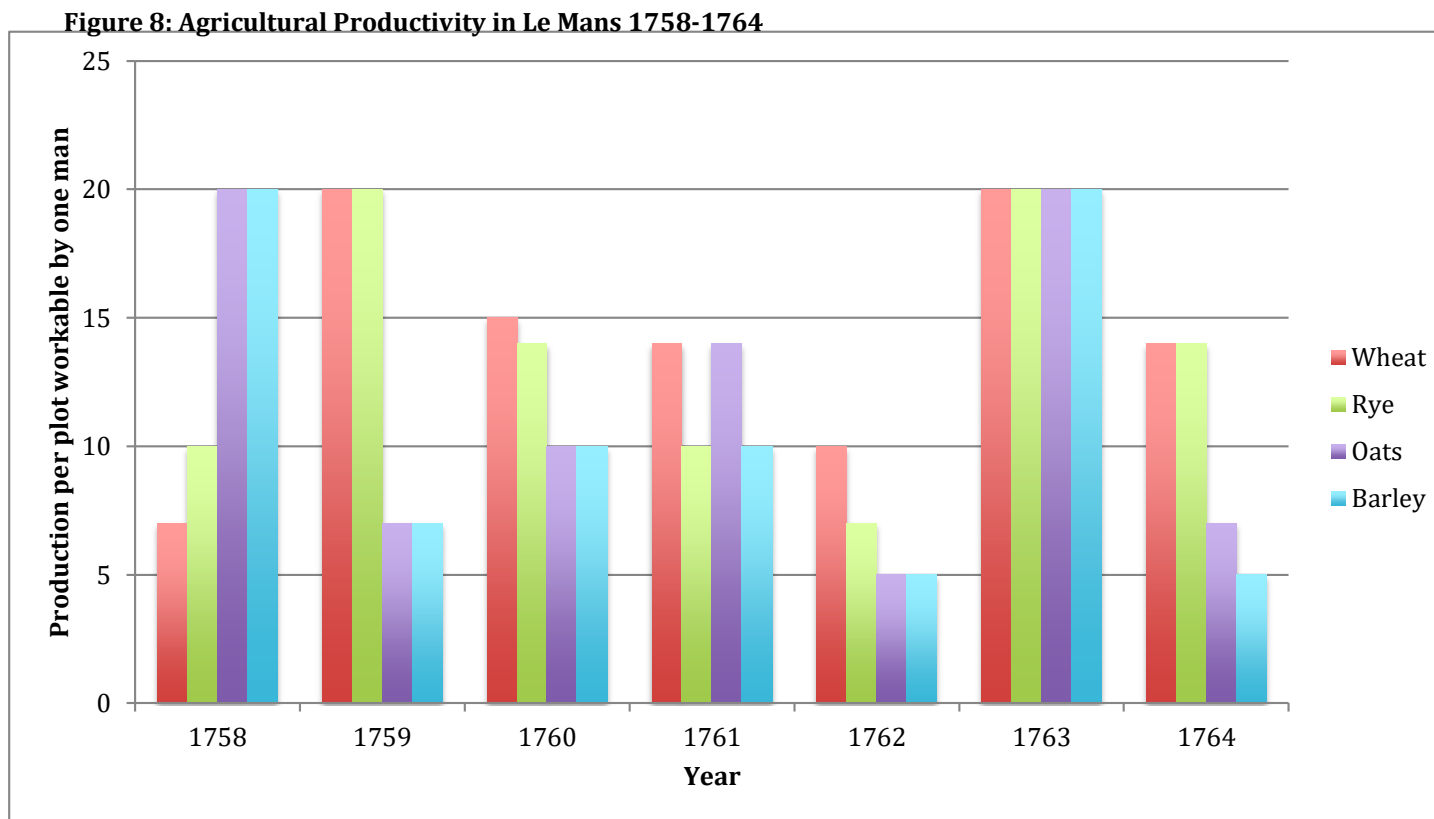
⁴ All of these reports are to be found together though not in sequence in AD I&L C82 and C83.

⁵ AD I&L C83: 'Produit des Récoltes des cinq derniers Années antérieures a 1763'.

Figure 7: Parisian Rainfall and Riots in Tours, 1760-1780



Source: M.E. Renou, 'Études sur le Climat de Paris', *Annales du Bureau Central Météorologique de France* (Paris, 1885), I, p. 272. I have seasonally adjusted this data according to the method described by C.H. Feinstein and M. Thomas in *Making History Count* (Cambridge, 2002), pp. 28-30.



Source: AD I&L C83: 'Produit des Récoltes des cinq Derniers Années Antérieures à 1763' and 'Produit des Récoltes des cinq Derniers Années Antérieures à 1765'.

central administration after the revolution and reproduced by Labrousse,¹ it saw little in the way of price rise. By contrast, 1765 saw both, even though the preceding harvest was better than that of 1762. This begins to suggest that the rioters of Tours had more to grieve than the mere unfortunate concurrence of exogenous climatic and socio-economic factors, or that they perceived it this way.

In fact, even the central authorities of the time tended to identify a political dimension to the tumults which disrupted the free-trade of official policy, advocating the severest punishment for rioters acting out of 'prejudice'. Controller General De L'Averdy, for instance, wrote to the intendant of Tours warning him

how important it is to prevent the people giving themselves up to prejudice or to preventions of such a useful law and I would invite you firstly not to neglect to acquaint them with all of its advantages... and secondly, principally to remove in its entirety that which could spoil dispositions towards liberty.²

After a riot, therefore, the best way to exonerate participants was to emphasise their political innocence. Thus in one case a clergyman interceded on the part of rioters at Sens claiming they acted only out of genuine hunger.³ The local officer affirmed that high prices were to blame, and not 'the ancient prejudices which have long existed against the liberalisation of the grain trade'.⁴ Where physiocrats and the administrators who invested in their ideas strived apparently for a new and scientific liberty,⁵ popular complaints were treated either as a

¹ AN F20 105: 'Prix Commun du Froment dans les 32 Généralités et la Ville de Paris', reproduced in Labrousse, *Esquisse*, I, pp. 106-113. See also p. 16, n 31.

² AD I&L, C94, f. 68: Letter to Intendant L'Escalopier from De L'Averdy, dated 7th July 1764.

³ BNF, JdF, 1132, f. 4: Letter to the Lieutenant General from the Clergy at Sens, dated 22nd September 1766.

⁴ *Ibid*, f. 12, Letter to the Lieutenant General, dated 22nd September 1766.

⁵ C. Larrère, *L'Invention de l'Économie au XVIIIe Siècle* (Paris, 1992), p. 222.

simple reaction to hunger (classic 'crass economic reductionism'¹), in which case hanging might be averted, or else they were the expression of plebeian backwardness and stubborn resistance to improvement. Where there was a certain begrudging tolerance for the idea that starving people were in fact entitled to food, resistance to policy changes was less forgivable.

Initially, unlike the clergyman and deputy at Sens, the line taken by most officers of the *généralité* of Tours was the hard one, and it seems rare in the first few years of deregulation that excuses were made for rioters. Instead officers reported the fact that rioters were determined in their assault on the supposedly inviolable rights of property lately accorded to the merchants, which the officers themselves protected. Often they would add in their reports that the liberty of the grain trade had been restored. One officer even took the time in his *procès-verbal* to explain the dangers which rioting – in this case at the river port-town of Cormery – could pose by scaring away the itinerant merchants who furnished the local and national market with grain.² Some, therefore, seemed to be convinced of the judiciousness of the new laws.

Others, however, made no comment on the wisdom of the laws, and probably were merely keeping the peace and upholding the law, as was their purpose. Free-circulation had been proclaimed by royal edict, so that compromising the freedom of the trade compromised also the authority of the king. This attitude on the part of officers is sometimes made evident in the terms they applied to the disturbances which they were charged with putting down. Where *émeute* or perhaps even more sympathetically, *émotion populaire*, are the normal French words for a riot, they used the term *sédition* or even *rébellion*. They also routinely reminded rioters of the laws which rendered their behaviour, and not that of the middlemen or exporters, illegal. The Procurer Fiscal of the

¹ E.P. Thompson, 'The Moral Economy of the English Crowd in the Eighteenth Century', *P&P*, 50 (1971), p. 78.

² AD I&L C94, f. 224: *Procès-Verbal* by the Lieutenant of the Maréchaussée at Tours, dated 24th April 1768.

Bailiff's Office of Sable, for instance, reported that he had informed the crowd 'that the king had permitted the exportation of grain and that this sort of *émotion populaire* was a *rébellion* against his orders, that this was a capital offence'.¹

The rereading of the laws was normally an educational activity or an attempt to bring the people round to the reason which guided the enlightened lawmakers.² However, in this case it was clearly also a threat and a reiteration of the monarchical authority behind the disputed changes. The crowd was having none of it and pelted him with stones until he was forced to retreat, in a manner reminiscent of the Norfolk rioters in 1766.³ In both cases the crowd seems to have been rejecting the idea that their behaviour was treasonous or even inappropriate. However, in emphasising the shift from *émotion populaire* to full blown rebellion, the officer was implying that suddenly, rioting, which perhaps used to constitute a sort of dialogue on a local level, could be interpreted as a political affront to the king and state on a more general level.

However, as time wore on and conditions deteriorated, alarm bells began to sound amongst various authorities. The local authorities of various towns mentioned above began to raise their concerns to the higher powers. At Angers they asked for the Procurer General's aid to provision the provincial markets, likewise at Le Mans. At Chateaugontier the mayor and aldermen wished to establish a bureau of charity.⁴ The mayor and aldermen of Tours, however, took a more upfront approach. In October 1768, some months after a spate of riots that spring, but at a time when prices were probably at a peak, they

¹ Ibid, f. 87: *Procès-Verbal* by Procurer Fiscal of the *Bailliage* of Sable, dated 10th August 1765. Emphasis added.

² Larrère, *L'Invention*, p. 227.

³ AD I&L C94, f. 87: *Procès-Verbal* by Procurer Fiscal of the *Baillage* of Sable, dated 10th August 1765.

⁴ For Angers: AD I&L C96: Letter from the Mayor, Councillors and Principal Citizens of Angers, dated 26th August 1769; for Chateaugontier: *ibid*, Letter from the Mayor and Councillors of Chateaugontier, dated 28th February 1769; for Le Mans: *ibid*, Letter from the Mayor and Aldermen of Le Mans, dated 9th September 1769.

wrote to the Controller General himself, begging his permission to assemble public magazines and to halt the export of grain from the region. Though they claimed to understand and appreciate the shrewdness of a free grain trade, they explicitly blamed the foreign export of grain via Nantes for the excessive price of vital supplies.¹

They were not the only ones in a position of authority to think so either. As early as 1765, an officer of the police at Richelieu, south-west of Tours, had written to the intendant asking him to put a stop to exportation.² Then, by 1770, Controller General Joseph Marie Terray was obliged to write to the Intendant, François-Pierre Du Cluzel, censoring the conduct of some judges at Tours. The judges had ordered two boats conveying flour to Nantes to be unloaded and for this flour to be sold to the local people at a fixed price. They needed to be made aware, Terray wrote, of 'the utter irregularity and the dangers of their conduct, which must be more moderate in the future, they must not stop a single boat or wagon of grain'.³

It is possible, of course, that the judges also had their own interests in mind, and regretted the loss of various fees and tolls chargeable on the grain proceeding downriver towards Nantes. However, generally, local authorities had initially tended to support the deregulation. It was only later, when times grew difficult, that they began to interfere. Either way, these judges were wresting back local control from an unregulated but national market, but also from a central authority, since earlier, with their general intolerance of rioting, they themselves had shown that to oppose the laws was to come into direct dispute with the central French government.

¹ AD I&L C94: Letter from the Mayor and Aldermen of Tours, dated 6th October 1768 and accompanying 'Report of the Mayor and Aldermen of the City of Tours on the Subject of the High Price of Grain'.

² AD I&L C83: Letter from an Officer at Richelieu to the Intendant, dated 16th July 1765.

³ AD I&L C96: Letter from Terray, dated 15th May 1770.

Usually these authorities gave explanations for their interference that were framed in terms of altruism and their duty to ensure the subsistence of the people under their authority. Unlike the Norwich authorities, they made no mention of the economic role of the people they intended to support, even in the city of Tours. In Norwich the mayor seems to have been in league with the manufacturers, which was not the case in Tours. On one occasion, however, a group of manufacturers from the *généralité* made an appeal on their own part. In September 1769 a group of the owners of eight separate manufacturing initiatives at Cholet addressed a letter to Du Cluzel, to inform him of the rarity and high prices of grain and the stagnation of their trade,¹ which was probably handkerchiefs, hemp-cloth or dyed cloths, given that these were the key products of their province, Anjou.² All together, they implored, circumstances had reduced the poor textile workers to the 'last misery',³ which had driven the owners to appeal for an emergency shipment of grain from Nantes or Chalonne.

This they could not afford on their own account due to the excessive cost of haulage and also multiple bankruptcies, but they could, with the assistance of the state 'relieve as far as possible their poor fellow citizens'.⁴ In spite of their obvious interest in manufacturing, however, the interest group made no explicit reference to any relation between food prices and wages, as had the mayor and manufacturers of Norwich. Nor did they set their plight within the wider context of nationalistic efforts in a mercantilist vein. They too only emphasised the humanitarian cause and the notion of co-citizenship with the people who must have worked for them in a cottage-industry setting. There was no strong vision, as in Norwich, of the role which the region might play in the national economy.

¹ AD I&L C96, 'Humble Supplication to the Intendant from the Inhabitants of the Parish of Notre-Dame de Cholet', dated 8th September 1769.

² Dumas, *Tours*, p. 7.

³ AD I&L C96: 'Humble Supplication', dated 8th September 1769.

⁴ *Ibid.*

Meanwhile, by the end of the 1760s, France was facing a general subsistence crisis. Tours was not the only place where the people, and the authorities too, were undermining the liberty of the trade. Miller has shown how in Normandy many officers attempted to reinstitute the essence of the former laws, usually by manipulating the *tarif*, which dictated bakers' profit margins. In this way they clandestinely subsidised food prices for the poor, whilst ostensibly supporting the official policy of free trade.¹ There were nevertheless enthusiasts for the new laws, such as the young Anne-Robert-Jacques Turgot, then the intendant of the barren *généralité* of Limousin, who found ways of alleviating the plight of the hungry, without intervening in the grain market.² Others, however, would not stand for legislation which they considered damaging and dangerous, and soon several of the parlements were to come out in flagrant mutiny.

The End of Deregulation and Continued Unrest at Tours

The parlement of Rouen, which presided over the three *généralités* of Caen, Alençon and Rouen, was rocked by violent rioting and hostility to deregulation which materialised in Normandy in the spring and summer of 1768.³ The court soon decided to reinstate police supervision of purchases within its jurisdiction, and to allow officers to force hoarded grain onto Norman markets.⁴ Central government responded by issuing a reiteration of the legislation of 1763 and 1764, politely ignoring the parlement's glaring defiance.⁵ Kaplan suggests that the government hoped to avoid excessively authoritarian gestures, which would probably only strengthen the resolve of the Rouennais.

¹ Miller, *Mastering the Market*, p. 103.

² J.-P. Poirier, *Turgot* (Paris, 1999), p. 126; E. Rothschild, 'Commerce and the State: Turgot, Condorcet and Smith', *The Economic Journal*, 102:414 (1992), p. 1203.

³ Kwass, *Privilege*, p. 156.

⁴ AD SM, 1B 286: Grand Chambre (Registres Secrets), 'Abus aux Halles et Marchés', 15th April 1768.

⁵ AD SM, C103, f. 11: 'Arrest du Conseil d'État du Roi', 20th June 1768.

However, a lengthy battle ensued, which saw the parlement of Rouen address, and illicitly publish, letters of remonstrance to the king.¹

These letters were normally phrased in ostensibly humble yet quietly insistent terms, and tended to appeal to the king's paternal function, as had those from Tours. For example, in May the parlement pointed out that 'there is no difference between a father and a king'. The letter highlighted the suffering of the industrial labourers of the town of Rouen in particular.² Moreover, like the authorities at Tours, the parlement seems to have made no reference to the marketability of the goods which these workers produced or to commerce in general.

The court did, however, challenge the deregulation on the grounds of their original promise of national prosperity:

[Misery] will be the only result of an exportation which, far from drawing the wealth of nations [*les richesses des nations*] into France, only generates monopoly, only produces famine and the emigration of our workers.³

Rather than lingering on the implications of emigration, however, the letters dwelled on the mercantile abuses which free trade apparently allowed. The court complained, in fact, that the laws of 1763 and 1764 had only established an 'illusory' liberty. Initially the parlement had supported the deregulation of the grain trade. It understood the benefits of a system which could 'give everybody the right to prevail according to their fortune and designs'.⁴ However, the parlement argued that this literal meaning of the law had not taken hold in practice, because consumers were left vulnerable to predatory businessmen with inexhaustible credit. In this way, the court continued,

¹ Kaplan, *Bread*, II, pp. 415-6.

² AD SM, 1B 286: Grand Chambre (Registres Secrets), 'Très Humbles et Très Respectueuses Représentations que présentent au Roi notre Souveraine Seigneur les Gens tenants sa Cour du Parlement', 6th May 1768.

³ AD SM, 1B 286: Grand Chambre (Registres Secrets), 'Très Humbles et Très Respectueuses Supplications que présentent au Roi notre très Honoré et Souveraine Seigneur les Gens tenants sa Cour du Parlement en Vacations', 19th October 1768.

⁴ *Ibid.*

laws intending liberty gave rise to the opposite: monopoly.¹ Therefore the parlement of Rouen did not condemn liberty *per se*. For though the court had lost its confidence in the idea of an autonomous and beneficent economic system, it maintained that liberty was a constitutional ideal.

Kwass has also charted the changing use of terms such as 'despotism' and 'liberty' in the language and arguments of the Rouen parlement. In particular, he observed how the terms were transferred from the religious sphere, where they were used to assert the right of Catholics to take communion, to fiscal matters, where they were deployed against general taxation. Thus the term liberty 'came to stand for the general principal of judicial consent to legislation.'² Evidently this had to do with preserving the Rouen parlement's right to exercise authority over its own jurisdiction. However, the parlement also articulated these matters in relation to individual citizens' rights to property that was not automatically subject to state intervention.³ In this sense, the idea of liberty was not necessarily placed in opposition to absolutism, but it was seen to be in disagreement with arbitrary interventionism. It had much to do with the parlement's own ability and right to administer justice – and hence also manage issues such as the grain trade fairly – in the Normandy region.

Meanwhile, the Parisian parlement had also grown gradually sceptical of liberalisation, and became increasingly vocal in its criticism, as prices, unrest and rumour escalated in the capital. By the end of 1768, the parlement had arranged a General Assembly of Police, where representatives from the police of Paris, but also other institutions such as the city's guilds, were invited to express their views on the causes of and possible solutions for the critically high prices of provisions in the capital.⁴

¹ Ibid.

² Kwass, *Privilege*, pp. 157; 169-170. Quote from p. 170.

³ Ibid, p. 201.

⁴ AN K1022: Minutes of the General Assembly of Police, November 25th 1768.

As in Rouen, members of this assembly were not necessarily ideologically opposed to the liberalisation of the grain trade or to the exportation of grain from France. Kaplan has identified the fact that at Paris, as well as in Rouen, authorities tended to attribute the high price of grain not to liberalisation itself, as much as to the abuse of that freedom on the part of monopolists, thus avoiding criticism of the liberal legislation on theoretical grounds.¹ Overall, the idea of liberty itself was not on trial in France's sovereign courts.

However, at the Parisian assembly there were also criticisms beyond monopoly levelled at the legislation, or rather its implementation. One of the key faults which the Advocate General, Antoine-Louis Segurier, found with the liberal system was that it treated France as a homogenous block. He argued, however, that 'the interior of the kingdom cannot be governed by the same system as the maritime provinces'.²

This assessment has much in common with the conclusions of historians of French geography and the economy, such as Braudel, Clout and Planhol: infrastructure was wanting. For the Advocate went on to compare the continental situation of France with the island nation of Britain, where apparently, 'the cultivation of grain... is the sole occupation of the country people. The transport which carries it outwards is a sensitive use of the nation's navy'.³ Evidently, the ease of exchange in Britain and coastal France, which allowed for economic specialisation and integration, was not mirrored in the French interior, where local economies and self-sufficiency were more appropriate. In fact, trying to govern these regions in the same way, given their poor

¹ Kaplan, *Bread*, II, p. 422.

² AN K1022: Minutes.

³ *Ibid.*

communications systems, led to distribution problems, and this was obvious to some observers of the time.¹

More subtly, however, the Advocate General was also criticising the anglomania of the 1760s. He appreciated British policy only insofar as it seemed to suit the island characteristics of the nation.² He argued that French policy needed to be tailored to the nation's specific characteristics, rather than merely borrowed from a successful rival. He even suggested that, for France, liquors might be a more suitable national agricultural product.³ The French nation and its people, he was saying, had their own distinct characteristics which had to be taken into account when designing political economy. This was a problem which he thought the parliament at Westminster did not face. Perhaps he did not know that wheat production, which was rewarded with bounties, was heavily concentrated in the southeast of England and that there were less productive regions, such as those in Scotland which barely participated in this trade.⁴ Either way, this was a rejection of the notion of an English panacea, for nothing so universal could remedy France, which, in his imagination, was defined by its variability.

In the end, the assembly concluded that some of the powers of the grain police needed to be reinstated and other parlements tended to agree.⁵ By January 1770, the Bordeaux parlement, long sceptical of the deregulation project, had forced all available grain within its jurisdiction onto the market and banned sales anywhere except the marketplace. By the end of that year the parlements of Dombes, Alsace, Lorraine and Metz had forbidden grain from leaving their jurisdictions,

¹ L.A. Tilly, 'Food Entitlement, Famine, and Conflict', *Journal of Interdisciplinary History*, 14:2 (1983), pp. 342-3.

² Crouzet, *Britain Ascendant*, p. 133.

³ AN K1022: Minutes.

⁴ J. Hoppit, 'Bounties, the Economy and the State in Britain, 1689-1800' in P. Gauci (ed.), *Regulating the British Economy, 1660-1850* (Farnham, 2011), p. 146.

⁵ AN K1022: Minutes.

with other parlements taking similar, though less radical, courses to try to control the subsistence situation.¹

On his appointment as Controller General, Terray initially made it his mission to crack down on these acts of legislative rebellion, just as he rebuked the Tours judges who would interrupt free trade to furnish a local market.² However, mutiny and rioting continued and in December 1770 Terray rescinded the freedom of the grain trade, returning almost to the *status quo ante*. He preserved only the liberty of internal trade.³ In Tours upon the receipt of the new laws, the officers duly went about registering dealers in grain.⁴

The reinstatement of the laws did not spell the end of the troubles in Tours. There was rioting again throughout the autumn and winter of 1771-2 and a small outburst in spring 1773. However, the worst of the rioting in Tours was still to come. This broke out on Saturday 19th February 1774, lasting four days until Tuesday 22nd February. Notwithstanding its urban setting and participants, this riot did not, nevertheless, break with the pattern which had been established in the *généralité* over the past decade: most of the events took place at various points on the riverbank.⁵ It all started at Vallières, some distance to the south-east of the city of Tours. Here, according to the police commissioner who did not arrive on the scene until late the next day, a mob of 1200 people had descended with 'considerable prejudice' on the port, pillaging three boats loaded with grain. The officer was informed that the boats had been forced to moor the night before by a crowd armed with sticks and pistols.⁶

¹ Kaplan, *Bread*, II, p. 493; W. Doyle, *The Parlement of Bordeaux and the End of the Old Regime 1771-1790* (London & Tonbridge, 1974), p. 204.

² Kaplan, *Bread*, II, p. 494.

³ *Ibid*, p. 532.

⁴ AD I&L C95: Declaration of Grain and Flour, February 1771.

⁵ AD I&L 175B 78: Letter to the *Procureur du Roi* from the *Prévôt Général* of the General Constabulary of Touraine, Anjou and Maine regarding the Riots, dated 22nd February 1774.

⁶ *Ibid*: *Procès-Verbal* by the Commissioner of Police at Tours, dated 20th February 1774.

News was slow to arrive at the city, but it met with 'excitement', especially, in the more populous districts in the south where the silk-workers lived.¹ Thus, on his way down river to Nantes, as late as 9 or 10pm the haulier, Pierre Touchet, complained that he was menaced by a large crowd of men and women on the left bank near the levee by St Cyr to the west of the city centre. At the nearby church of Saint-Anne, the bells sounded.² A woman told the officer, when he arrived, that they had not intended to pillage the grain on this boat, but that the rioters 'could not bear to see it ferried any further'.³ They had, she implied, been forced to commit a crime to prevent a travesty. Ultimately the officers, blaming a lack of reinforcements (though they had arrived with three brigades) were forced to retreat under a hail of stones thrown by the now 2000 strong crowd.⁴ The next day, Monday 21st February, the grain was spirited away to the port of l'Ecouerie, where it was illicitly sold to the crowd.⁵

Some of the women from Saint-Anne made their way over the bridge towards St Avertin on the river Cher to the south of the city. Here again the bells began to toll, bringing people from their homes to join the mob. Two more boats were completely pillaged, but one man was arrested whilst making-off with a sack of grain.⁶ Meanwhile, the attacks on boats continued throughout the next day, with a largely male crowd attacking the two boats of René le Duc and taking 82 barrels of flour and some wine.⁷ Likewise Phillipe Marchau lost 60 barrels at St Symphorien on the right bank⁸ and Andres Badiu lost 100 barrels of Orléans flour, whilst the rest of his merchandise, including a shipment of glass, suffered heavy damage.⁹

¹ Ibid: Letter to the *Procureur du Roi* from the *Prévôt Général*, dated 22nd February 1774; B. Maillard, 'Une Émeute de Subsistances à Tours au XVIIIe Siècle', *Annales de Bretagne et des Pays de l'Ouest*, 92:1 (1985), p. 29.

² AD I&L 175B 78: Letter to the *Procureur du Roi* from the *Prévôt Général*.

³ Ibid: Testimony of Pierre Touchet, dated 20th February 1774.

⁴ Ibid: Letter to the *Procureur du Roi* from the *Prévôt Général*.

⁵ Ibid: Second Testimony of Pierre Touchet.

⁶ Ibid: Letter to the *Procureur du Roi* from the *Prévôt Général*.

⁷ Ibid: Testimony of René le Duc, dated 21st February 1774.

⁸ Ibid: Testimony of Phillipe Marchau, dated 21st February 1774.

⁹ Ibid: Testimony of Andres Badiu, dated 21st February 1774.

These hauliers were in a state of distress because the goods that they were shipping were not theirs to lose, and were expected down-river at Nantes. One company of merchants from Orléans who did actually own the merchandise wrote angrily to inform the Provost General at Tours that the lost grain had been purchased both legally and publicly at the markets of Orléans and Beaugeny and were destined to feed lower Brittany via the entrepôt at Nantes.¹ In other words, the merchants were declaring that they had behaved legally and morally, and that the crowd from Tours and the surrounding country could claim little legitimacy in its actions.

Many of the people, however, seemed to be convinced of the legitimacy of their own actions, as, on the morning of Tuesday 22nd February, a very large crowd of around 3000 armed with sticks and stones amassed at the prison of the *maréchaussée*, or constabulary, intending to free one of their number who had been arrested. The mob forced the church door and once again the bells rang out.² It was the boldness of this assault on authority, and not the frustrated attacks on the boats, which finally induced the officers to quash the riot, rather than merely to intervene.³ 30 sword-bearing chevaliers on horseback dispersed the crowd by firing four rounds of blanks, making 21 arrests.⁴

The majority of these arrests were of men, and of these six were artisans; six worked on vineyards; two were day labourers; one was a mariner and one was himself in the haulage business. For the five women, no occupations were given, but we know that one was married to an absent sailor; one was the wife of one of the aforementioned artisans; two lived with their widowed mothers and one lived with her grandmother.⁵ Two of the women were released without sentencing,

¹ Ibid: Letter to the *Prévôt Général* at Tours from Charles Lassailly & Son, undated.

² Ibid: Letter to the *Procureur du Roi* from the *Prévôt Général*.

³ Maillard, 'Une Émeute', p. 30.

⁴ AD I&L 175B 78: Letter to the *Procureur du Roi* from the *Prévôt Général*.

⁵ Ibid: Interrogations, 24th-28th February 1774.

which took place soon after the riot, on 1st March 1774. The others were variously sentenced: to death; to life on the galleys; to flogging and an hour in the stocks plus three years banishment; just to an hour in the stocks; and to public admonition.¹ The women were handed the lighter sentences. However, Brigitte Maillard has shown that after further questioning, many of the sentences were reduced owing to a sort of plea-bargaining. In the end, three ringleaders were hanged and two sent to the galleys for nine years.² This implies that the authorities, rather than wishing to make a big example, were simply keen to be rid of supposed troublemakers. In fact, they also offered an amnesty to rioters who were hiding out in the woods.³ Overall, the authorities seem to have approached the matter of dealing with the riots with some ambivalence.

Nevertheless, the people of Tours were on the receiving end of some censure. In this unusual case, the merchants themselves (mostly from Tours, but with several also from Orléans), convinced as they were that they were in the right, were not prepared to cut their losses. They sued central government through the Provost-General, the head officer of the *maréchaussée* at Tours, for compensation to the value of the goods they had lost. This the government granted. After a few weeks the supreme court, known as the *Conseil d'État*, issued a printed ruling. The officials of Tours, who had already apparently recovered some of the stolen supplies and *liquidated* them, were to share the 7000 *livres* which these sales had raised between the merchants.⁴

This, however, only constituted about 18 per cent of the total damages, leaving the merchants short of over 33,000 *livres*. This, the court ruled, stood to be paid to the merchants by the all inhabitants of Tours and several of the surrounding parishes in equal parts regardless of status. This was to take place over the course of the next two years, with

¹ Ibid: Condemnations, 1st March 1774.

² Maillard, 'Une Émeute', pp. 31-2.

³ Ibid.

⁴ AD I&L 175B 78: 'Extract from the Registers of the *Conseil d'État*', 23rd March 1774.

interest payable at eight *deniers per livre*.¹ The merchants were, ironically, helped by the recently reinstated regulation of the market, as each shipment had its own certificate detailing the exact amount of grain and other goods that it was carrying. Hence they could prove exactly the value which needed to be extracted from the community in reparations. The intendant, Du Cluzel, was left with the task of orchestrating the collection of the money.²

Evidence of reparations paid to merchants as victims of riots is very rare, and it would seem that it hardly ever happened in this period, in Britain as well as France. A notable exception is the Gordon Riots, where some £63,269, 6s. 1d. was granted to private individuals whose property was damaged, and where the rioting was construed in part as a failure of policing.³ It seems that in the Tours case the merchants garnered sympathy for their cause from both the senior authorities at the constabulary and central government, which formally approved their conduct and censured that of the crowd. These merchants, the ruling pointed out, were in the right, because they ‘conducted the grain trade in the manner permitted by the law of 23rd December 1770 and the Letters Patent modifying it’.⁴

At the same time, however, the fact that junior officers were seizing back what supplies they could, and then ‘liquidating’ them within Tours suggests sympathy for the crowd’s plight and for their initiative to stop those supplies from going any further than Tours. Meanwhile, it seems that unofficial sales, or *taxations populaires* were also taking place, as local priests recorded the anonymous return of sums of money – as well, however, as pouches of flour – from members of the community in response to the merchants’ demands for compensation.⁵

¹ Ibid.

² AD I&L C98, f. 40: Letter from Terray to Du Cluzel, dated 21st June 1774.

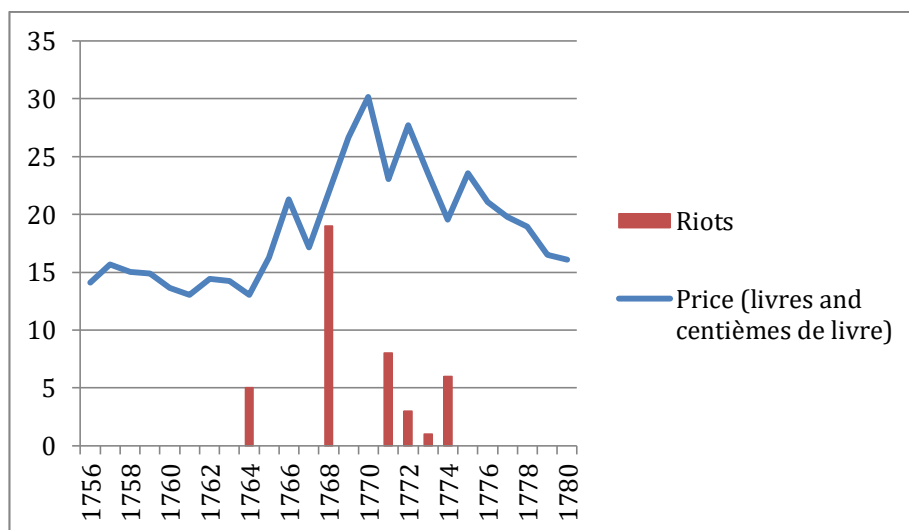
³ G. Rudé, ‘The Gordon Riots’, *Transactions of the Royal Historical Society* (Fifth Series), 6 (1956), p.100.

⁴ AD I&L 175B 78: ‘Extract from the Registers of the *Conseil d’État*’, 23rd March 1774.

⁵ Ibid: Undated Letter addressed to the *Prévôt Général*.

From the sheer value of the compensation payments, it is clear that significant quantities of grain were being transported through the city of Tours. Figure 9 below shows that after deregulation in 1764 the average price of grain was growing more and more unpredictable from year to year, surely rendering life more unstable for anybody reliant thereon. However, rioting was not merely a function of high price, because riots did not necessarily occur in peak-price years. It was, in Tours as in France generally, a function of demand from outside the community.¹ For those struggling to pay the high prices demanded at their local market, the rate of the movement of this grain was clearly perceived of as unsustainable.

Figure 9: Wheat Prices and Riots in the *Généralité* of Tours, 1756-1780



Source: AN F20 105: 'Prix Commun du Froment dans les 32 Généralités et la Ville de Paris', reproduced in E. Labrousse, *Esquisse*, I, pp.106-113 ; AD I&L C82 & C83.

As mentioned above, the merchants, Charles Lassailly & Son, were very keen to point out that their grain was destined for another struggling French region.² They wanted to justify their actions in the face of the angry populace of Tours, by drawing on the notion of patriotism, or at least of shared suffering. During the period of deregulation others had

¹ Tilly, 'The Food Riot', p. 26.

² AD I&L 175B 78: Letter to the *Prévôt Général* at Tours from Charles Lassailly & Son, undated.

taken recourse to the same notion, distinguishing foreign from domestic demand for grain. One officer had written indignantly of the riotous poor under his jurisdiction, whose antics suggested to him that 'the populace is not interested in the general good of the state, because they go ahead and interrupt the course of trade, as well as the liberty and the safety of the great roads'.¹ His sentiments are similar to some of those expressed at the police assembly of 1768, where, for example, the Councillor of the First Chamber claimed that 'no good citizen would be vexed to eat bread at a slightly higher price in circumstances where this little price increase... will prevent another province peopled with [fellow] citizens from languishing in the horrors of famine'.²

The people of Tours, however, were not especially concerned with the 'general good of the state' or of their compatriots. Their only concern was the security of their own locale. It seems that the spectre of Nantes loomed large, because it represented that integrated maritime economy, in which the people of Tours were only willing to partake within tight limits when the going was good. Their vision of the appropriate extent of the economy was limited, and, judging by the ambivalence which characterised the responses of the authorities, this was not a popular perception only.

Conclusion

The 1760s saw an attempt on the part of central government to unify the French economy by freeing the grain trade. The trade was freed with a perhaps inflated confidence in the productive capacity and the infrastructural capabilities of France. The territory was now expected to behave, economically speaking, like a unilateral nation, rather than a bundle of regions with the capacity for their own trade restrictions and tolls. With this move towards economic freedom, the French

¹ BNF, JdF, 1134, f. 99: Letter to the Lieutenant General from an officer at Soissons, dated 20th July 1766.

² AN K1022: Minutes of the General Assembly of Police, November 25th 1768.

government seemed to promote more economically nationalistic, or at least patriotic, behaviour.

Thus the French government's relationship with mercantilism, especially in regard to its changing grain policy, is somewhat complicated. France was expected to make gains in a trade thought to be unjustly dominated by France's economic arch-rival, Britain. Participation in an international grain trade was supposed to unlock the French nation's potential for enrichment. As the declaration itself trumpeted, the central government was at pains to indulge 'the cultivation of the land, the produce of which is the most authentic and the most certain source of the wealth of a state'.¹ Even when preparing to allow the export of a raw material of absolute necessity for its own people and essentially instigating *laissez-faire* in that commodity, the French government was still considering the ultimate outcome in mercantilist terms, which would see the British deprived of a share of an important market and all the riches it brought.

In Tours, the measures were resisted by the common people, who intervened in the shipping of grain downriver towards Nantes. Owners of manufacturing enterprises also eventually campaigned to bring supplies back upriver to support the people who would fashion their wares. Later local authorities likewise blamed the changes for shortage and suffering. In several cases, these authorities simply decided to defy them. Their grounds for this action were much the same as those of the crowds who pillaged the boats: concern for the survival of a local system of subsistence and perhaps privilege.

Jean Nicolas warns against overstating the notion that local authorities and consumers were strongly united. Their cooperation, he continues, only lasted as long as their interests corresponded, otherwise cracks quickly appeared in this apparently united front. The most he will allow

¹ 'Edit concernant la Liberté de la Sortie et de l'Entrée des Grains', dated 27th July 1764 in Isambert et al. (eds.), *Recueil*, XXII, p. 403.

was that subsistence problems gave consumers an opportunity to participate in policy.¹ However, local privilege and subsistence, as Grafe has also shown, were generally not incompatible. Though the economic costs of a reluctance to participate in a national economy are evident now, at the time the apparent mutual benefits of a locally regulated economy, replete with fees and levies for local authorities, probably seemed quite alluring, not to mention comfortably traditional.² Moreover, the evidence seemed to prove the point that subsistence was too complex to be left to chance, and had to be regulated according to a local and not a national rationale.³

This was the flaw that the Rouen parlement also identified in the system of free trade. Although the court maintained that liberty was desirable, it was argued that deregulation had failed to achieve it. Thanks to marketplace abuses, consumers could not exercise their rights in the conditions provided by the laws of 1763 and 1764. The court implied that, when it came to eliminating monopoly, which was the ultimate enemy of liberty, a carefully regulated economy was actually more adept than deregulation. Therefore in this instance parochial judicial authority apparently trounced centralised ministerial authority again. Regulation of the grain trade was duly added to a growing list of parochial competencies.

This was not a new condition, but it had to be restated anew in the light of the failed liberalisation project. The failure of this project thus gave consumers and local authorities another arena in which to state their case together against a menacing central government. The benefits of a free trade in grain for France as a nation would have to be shelved, because the policy disrupted the smooth operation of society on a much more local basis.

¹ Nicolas, *La Rébellion Française*, p. 422.

² Grafe, *Distant Tyranny*, p. 201.

³ Skornicki, *L'Économiste*, p. 321.

Besides this, the people of Tours did not relate their agricultural and industrial efforts to the overall economic situation of France. Even the manufacturers did not seem to contextualise their enterprises within a national mission for economic dominance, as the Norwich manufacturers had. Nor did the parlement of Rouen discuss at length the commercial repercussions of high grain prices. Indeed, the Norwich manufacturers had been remarkably attuned to the nationalistic mercantilist message, in a way that, from the French government's perspective, many of its people at this time, it seems, were not.

Though a tendency towards the teachings of mercantilism informed policy-making at the highest levels in France, it had not insinuated itself into the dialogue between central authority and petitioners at a local level as it had in the British case. In France, local authorities were more inclined to articulate the economic dislocation caused by a free-market grain trade through the language of welfare and the moral value of state – and especially monarchical – responsibility for the deserving poor, rather than the economic value which the labouring poor could offer the nation.

For local authorities and the people they served, the laws which had been removed in 1763 represented justice not parochialism. In crisis situations, the unhesitating knee-jerk reaction of the people and the local administration was to reinstate former regulation in a vigilante fashion because they did not trust the market, such as it was, to provide for their needs. Repeated attacks on grain shipments suggest that they suspected the merchants of greedily and immorally depriving them of their due share. All things told, they were not prepared to withstand price increases for the good of the nation at large, perhaps due to a deep mistrust of grain merchants, who, for their part, seem to have been at pains to absolve themselves from guilt.

The liberalisation of the grain trade in France had been heralded as an initiative of great national importance. French policy-makers,

influenced by mercantilist ideas and considering the issue only on a national level, tried to force an ultimately inappropriate policy on an immature economy by using patriotic rhetoric and chauvinistic deterrents. In the end, the failure of a free grain trade in France at this time was probably due to real structural economic factors. The French economy was unfortunately not that coherent, its inter-regional infrastructure being inadequate. It could be argued that these factors were not merely underlying, but that they were picked up on and understood by the people, and then expressed in the way that they knew: food riots which aimed to prevent export, local scarcity and ultimately punitively high food prices. However, it was the way in which the changes had been politicised which made this resistance into a feat of anti-patriotism, or localism, where perhaps otherwise it could only have been construed as anti-capitalism.

Chapter 3: Economic Regulation and Identity in the Colonies of Britain and France

Introduction

This chapter examines the grain trade and other commercial pursuits of Britain and France in their Atlantic context. While the Atlantic was understood as 'a series of national and competitive spheres of activity',¹ J.H. Elliott has pointed out that international boundaries in this arena were, by their nature, fluid. This was above all a maritime space, where shared experiences and interests, helped by geographical determinants, could spill over the official barriers of nationality and language.² This chapter, then, explores the dynamic between the lines drawn in the sand by official policy, and the tides of interest and pragmatism which often washed over them.

It does this by focussing on the competing forces that acted upon the metropole when it came to colonial law-making and regulation. It explores how trading regulations often sought to enshrine national values by generating and protecting unilateral shipping ties and the ways in which this was sometimes challenged by the realities of profit-making and economic rationality. By examining contemporary approaches to globalisation and the division of labour through complicated systems of protectionism on the part of both Britain and France, the chapter attempts to further understand the issue of economic identity in each nation.

¹ J.P. Greene and P.D. Morgan, 'Introduction' in idem (eds.), *Atlantic History: a Critical Appraisal* (Oxford, 2009), p. 22.

² J.H. Elliott, 'Afterword: Atlantic History: A Circumnavigation' in D. Armitage and M.J. Braddick (eds.), *The British Atlantic World, 1500-1800* (Basingstoke, 2002), pp. 245-6.

As far as the traditional story of British imperial policy goes, the first British Empire, characterised by a system of commercial regulation, is understood to have come into being with the Navigation Acts of 1651.¹ Between 1675 and 1700, the settlers of the North American and West Indian colonies were purposefully made conscious of their new 'more circumscribed role' within the empire.² This meant breaking the autonomy of the ruling factions which had established themselves overseas, and constructing a new Anglo-American political system.³ However, it seems that the initiative was short-lived, and the colonies were left to their own devices for much of the eighteenth century. Hence, James Henretta's use of the label 'salutary neglect', which he borrowed from Edmund Burke, to describe the period from 1688 to 1752.⁴

Henretta's work explored the reasons for a relative lack of colonial legislation in the first half of the eighteenth century. However, a slightly critical review suggests that rather than neglect *per se*, the period evidences the 'low priority' of colonial affairs in London.⁵ Though politicians were distracted by their own private ambitions and by a wider political struggle between crown and Parliament after 1688, the mercantile system continued to be calibrated, for example by the Hat Act of 1732. This act is explained by Henretta as passing in a rare phase of active parliamentary engagement with the colonies. The Parliamentary debate of this act, relating to an attempt to amend the bill upon its third reading, was apparently a 'first tentative effort to

¹ P.J. Marshall, 'The First British Empire' in R.W. Winks (ed.), *The Oxford History of the British Empire*, V (Oxford, 1999), p. 47.

² R.M. Brown, 'The Anglo-American Political System, 1675-1775: A Behavioral Analysis' in A.G. Olson and R.M. Brown (eds.), *Anglo-American Political Relations, 1675-1775* (New Brunswick, NJ, 1970), p. 15.

³ *Ibid*, p. 17.

⁴ A.D.M. Beaumont, *Colonial America and the Earl of Halifax, 1748-1761* (Oxford, 2014), p. 42.

⁵ W.J. Gates, 'Review: "Salutary Neglect". Colonial Administration under the Duke of Newcastle', *Pennsylvania History*, 41:1 (1974), p. 98.

come to grips with the realities of a mature colonial system', an issue that, in the 1730s at least, was otherwise generally ignored.¹

Henretta locates the close of his period of neglect in the 1750s, when military and fiscal needs demanded greater command of the colonies from the centre, particularly under the influence of the Earl of Halifax.² In spite of Halifax's efforts the metropole grew complacent and reversed his careful reforms, allowing the colonies to revert to their former flawed systems of governance. Then, in the post-war scramble to recoup the financial demands of mobilisation, it drove the wedge between the centre and the fledgling political entities.³ This shift from mercantilism to outright imperialism apparently grated on the colonial institutions which had been enjoying an autonomy seemingly consistent with the supposedly British ideal of freedom.⁴ For this reason, rebellion ensued, and the First British Empire fell apart.

The Second Empire issued from British interests in the East, with a very different ideology. However, in two hefty tomes, Vincent Harlow contended that this change predated American independence by about thirty years, as the thrust of British colonial policy was already changing. A preoccupation with trade and not dominion had already drawn the gaze of the British legislature away from the Atlantic and towards the East, and thus justified the supposedly generous terms of the secession of the American colonies.⁵

Harlow's argument has also found its own critics, for it assumes a confidence in British industrial prowess, which was not yet necessarily all pervading. The argument takes for granted that businessmen and manufacturers were now sufficiently confident to relinquish the crutch

¹ J.A. Henretta, *'Salutary Neglect'. Colonial Administration under the Duke of Newcastle* (Princeton, 1972), p. 102.

² *Ibid*, p. 347.

³ Beaumont, *The Earl of Halifax*, p. 227.

⁴ Marshall, 'The First British Empire', p. 48.

⁵ V.T. Harlow, *The Founding of the Second British Empire, 1763-1793* (London & New York, 1952), I, pp. 5-6.

of protective regulation.¹ There have also been doubts about the exact timing of the 'swing to the East', since Harlow did not overly concern himself with trade statistics. These in fact show that the Atlantic trade area had yet to be economically displaced by the East even at the close of the eighteenth century.²

At the same time, Harlow has been praised for his focus on the continuity of thought of policy-makers across the traditional historiographical divide between the first and second British Empire. Since he focused on the centre, Harlow therefore tended to treat the empire as a whole, shedding light on how understandings of empire and imperialism developed.³ This thread of his work has been picked up by more recent historians, such as Anthony Pagden, who also documents a change in mentality towards empire in the middle of the eighteenth century.⁴ It is on this historiographical thread that this chapter builds, identifying a shifting sense of Britain's role and potential in the wider world.

The political economy of the French Atlantic has a strong traditional historiography also. Again, accounts centre on mercantilism, particularly that of Jean-Baptiste Colbert, and the eventual establishment of what is now known as *l'Exclusif*. This was a bundle of economic regulations dating from 1717 and 1727, which can be neatly summed up as 'France's answer to England's Navigation Acts'.⁵ On this subject, Jean Tarrade remains the undisputed authority, and depicts a strongly mercantilist system of trade, which was nevertheless challenged from its very inception by smugglers, who quickly established a profitable contraband trade, or *interlope*.⁶ In this sense,

¹ R. Pares, 'Review: *The Founding of the Second British Empire, 1763-1793*', *English Historical Review*, 68:267 (1953), p. 284.

² P.J. Marshall, 'Britain without America- a Second Empire?' in idem (ed.), *The Oxford History of the British Empire*, II (Oxford, 1998), p. 577.

³ W.R. Louis, 'Introduction' in R.W. Winks (ed.), *The Oxford History of the British Empire*, V, p. 36.

⁴ A. R. Pagden, *Lords of all the Worlds* (New Haven, 1995), p. 179-80.

⁵ P. Cheney, *Revolutionary Commerce* (Cambridge, MA, 2010), p. 168.

⁶ J. Tarrade, *Le Commerce Colonial de la France à la Fin de l'Ancien Régime* (Paris, 1972), I, p. 96.

the criticism levelled by Peter Linebaugh and Marcus Rediker that French historiography has remained a prisoner of *l'Exclusif* and the flawed though apparently 'unquestioned' framework of the nation-state is unfair.¹ For Tarrade explores in some depth the clandestine Atlantic economy which developed in opposition to official French trade, and argues that it ultimately had a role to play in the eventual relaxation of French commercial legislation.² *L'exclusif* was also, of course, undermined by physiocratic free-trade fervour.³

Merchant disapprobation of the trading restriction has, however, been questioned in more recent historiography. Initially, at least, private merchants campaigned in favour of the regulation, highlighting the complex interplay of interests which informed colonial political economy in particular. It is well to remember that, in spite of free trade sentiment, enthusiasm for mercantilist regulation, or even a mixture of the two apparently conflicting ideas, existed simultaneously.⁴ Paul Cheney also highlights metropolitan merchant opposition to the relaxation of trade regulation. This generally centred on the protection of the French '*commerce national*'.⁵ Again, the issue of where the national interest lay became a point of debate on which arguments for and against changes to political economy rested.

Cheney however, chimes in with Tarrade's narrative when it comes to opposition to *l'exclusif*, which he also argues was endogenous to the restrictive regime.⁶ The Seven Years' War, and the lack of resistance to British occupation displayed by the French inhabitants of some West Indian islands is seen by Tarrade and Cheney as the turning point in the

¹ P. Linebaugh and M. Rediker, *The Many-Headed Hydra* (London, 2000), p. 7; C.L. Miller, *The French Atlantic Triangle* (Durham, NC, 2008), pp. 31-2.

² Tarrade, *Le Commerce Colonial*, I, pp. 331-2.

³ P. Røge, 'A Natural Order of Empire: The Physiocratic Vision of Colonial France after the Seven Years' War' in S.A. Reinert and P. Røge (eds.), *The Political Economy of Empire in the Early Modern World* (Basingstoke, 2013), pp. 46-7.

⁴ J. Howes Webster, 'The Concerns of Bordeaux's Merchants and the Formation of Royal Commercial Policy for the West Indies', *Proceedings of the Western Society for French History*, 2 (1974), p. 12.

⁵ Cheney, *Revolutionary Commerce*, p. 170.

⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 169.

attitude of the French government. For the apparent defection of colonials caused alarm in the metropole.¹ As with the Channel Islands in this period, island allegiances had the disturbing potential to ‘oscillate’ as their own interests demanded.² This chapter carefully examines some of the particulars of the relaxation of French economic regulation after 1763. It concludes that the attitudinal shift on the part of the French government was, however, limited by its own faith in French production and commercial capacities.

Overall, the chapter argues that national sentiments in the colonies had long been compromised by stringent economic regulation that stifled local economic interests. However, in both the British and the French case, local authorities attempted to articulate the problem in patriotic terms, as Renaud Morieux has shown was also the norm in the context of the Channel Islands and Dunkirk.³ Often they repeated mercantilist claims about the national good, but also referred to the indispensability of free trade when it came to the survival of overseas territories. Still implicit was the importance of the colonial contribution to the national good. Meanwhile, the attitudes of the two metropolises were not always sympathetic, particularly in wartime.

It is argued that in Britain, however, a shift was taking place, as confidence in the national capacity to produce and sell its wares abroad increased, in policy-making circles at least. In this sense, the chapter agrees with Harlow’s timing of the founding of the second empire. Meanwhile, although the French legislature was also relaxing economic regulation after the Seven Years’ War, it seemed to place its confidence in quite different competencies. The French ministry was particularly unwilling to admit potential limits to its capacity to produce a sufficient supply of grain for the metropole, the colonies and beyond. Therefore,

¹ Ibid, p. 178.

² R. Morieux, *Une Mer pour deux Royaumes* (Rennes, 2008), p. 245.

³ Ibid, p. 252.

the regulatory changes documented in this chapter offer an insight into the changing perceptions of the economic identity of the two nations.

In order to understand the colonial predicament, the first section outlines the productive capacity of the West Indies, and the dependence of white populations in particular on food imports, especially flour. It sketches the plight of the French West Indies, which were unable for practical reasons to depend on a grain trade with the French mainland colonies, and for legal reasons on British trade. They often turned to smuggling, which is the focus of the second section. Having considered some of the key influences on the French legislature in the first section, it is the sway and preferences of various interest groups on the British side that are explored in the second. This section develops the idea of economic freedom in relation to obedience to the centre, and the dilemma which colonials faced when their rational interests failed to align with national allegiance. The final section considers arguments in favour of and against deregulation and free ports in the British and French colonies after the Seven Years' War, particularly in terms of the limits of the so-called national good. Therefore, the chapter develops the idea of interest and national cohesion discussed in the previous two chapters, and begins to explore how these issues could inform ideas of national identity and inclusion (or exclusion).

The Sugar Island Situation

By the mid-eighteenth century the Caribbean island colonies of both Britain and France found themselves in much the same predicament: they were unable to produce their own livestock, meat, wheat flour, or lumber.¹ The islands enjoyed a tropical climate, which was unsuitable for the production of European staple crops. However, because of this hot and humid weather, the French and British West Indies could

¹ C.P. Gould, 'Trade Between the Windward Islands and the Continental Colonies of the French Empire, 1683-1763', *The Mississippi Valley Historical Review*, 25:4 (1939), p. 473.

produce tropical goods, often sugar cane, but sometimes indigo, cotton, cocoa or coffee.¹ The islands could achieve a level of productivity out of proportion to their size and population thanks to the exploitation of slave labour, and the fact that the islands were generally given over to monocultural production of cash crops.²

This meant, therefore, that the food of the slaves and of the plantation owners or managers mostly had to be imported. Generally, however, planters also gave a little of the least productive land over to the cultivation of tropical food crops. These included yams; peas; plantains; and cassava, also known, especially in French, as manioc.³ Provision grounds were especially prevalent on large islands with hilly terrain unsuited to sugarcane cultivation, such as Jamaica.⁴ Food crops were grown to supplement slave diets, which otherwise mainly consisted of imported rice or corn, plus salted meat or low-quality fish provisions for their protein value.⁵

The white population, by comparison, was dependent upon on flour, fresh meat and other higher-quality foodstuffs, which had to be imported onto the islands. They depended also on imports for manufactured goods, clothing and plantation equipment.⁶ This predicament was, as Clarence Gould has shown, easily solved in the case of the British West Indies, thanks to the establishment of stable colonies on the American mainland.⁷ The port books of Jamaica and Barbados attest to the healthy exchange between the islands and the

¹ Tarrade, *Commerce Colonial*, I, pp. 26-28.

² B.F. Tobin, "'And there raise Yams": Slaves' Gardens in the Writings of West Indian Plantocrats', *Eighteenth-Century Life*, 23:2 (1999), pp. 164-5.

³ M. Mulcahy, *Hurricanes and Society in the British Greater Caribbean, 1624-1783* (Baltimore, 2006), p. 104; B. Mandelblatt, 'A Transatlantic Commodity: Irish Salt Beef in the French Atlantic World', *History Workshop Journal*, 63:1 (2007), p. 20.

⁴ A.J. O'Shaughnessy, *An Empire Divided* (Philadelphia, 2000), p. 59.

⁵ R. Bean, 'Food Imports into the British West Indies: 1680-1845' in V. Rubin and A. Tuden (eds.), *Comparative Perspectives on Slavery in New World Plantation Societies* (New York, 1977), p. 587.

⁶ Tarrade, *Commerce Colonial*, I, p. 29.

⁷ Gould, 'Trade Between the Windward Islands and Continental Colonies', p. 473.

mainland, which saw copious supplies of flour and other provisions ferried to the islands especially from Philadelphia and New York.¹

However, the French island planters could not rely on a similar relationship with French colonies in Canada and elsewhere. This was because powerful lobbying by the merchants of the French Atlantic ports had pressurised the French government into discouraging Canadian exportation of any product that France could supply.² Besides this obstruction, however, it seems that a long-term subsistence trade between Canada and the island colonies was unprofitable for the islands. It was unbalanced as, collectively, plantation owners struggled to offset their own massive demand for foodstuffs against the relatively small Canadian demand for West Indian products such as molasses and rum.³

Moreover, although Canada had once been regarded by the French metropole as a potential recourse for the island colonies in times of emergency and shortage,⁴ Canada's own agricultural economy was not that stable. In 1752 Canada's French settlers were obliged to import approximately 6,728 barrels together with 11,000 quintals of flour from Bordeaux for their own consumption.⁵ Canada was never able to fulfil the role in the French imperial economy that the Thirteen Colonies offered to the British by supplying the Caribbean islands.

Legally, however, the French planters of the West Indies were not supposed to turn to foreigners to supply their subsistence needs either. Under the supervision of Colbert as *Ministre de la Marine* (essentially the secretary of state for naval and colonial affairs), laws of 1670 and

¹ In 1763, for example, New York and Philadelphia officially shipped over 18,000 barrels of flour and 4000 barrels of bread to Jamaica. TNA CO 142/18: Shipping Returns, Jamaica, 1762-5.

² Gould, 'Trade Between the Windward Islands and Continental Colonies', p. 478.

³ B. Mandelblatt, 'How Feeding the Slaves shaped the French Atlantic' in Reinert and Røge (eds.), *The Political Economy of Empire*, p. 205.

⁴ D. Miquelon, 'Canada's Place in the French Imperial Economy', *French Historical Studies*, 15:3 (1988), p. 436.

⁵ 'Annexe E' in L. Dechêne, *Le Partage des Subsistances au Canada sous le Régime Français* (Montreal, 1994), p. 203.

1671 rendered direct trade between the French colonies and foreigners illegal.¹ Seeing commerce as 'war by other means', Colbert aimed to ensure that France dominated colonial trade, depriving competitors, such as the Dutch, of their share in this supposedly fixed and sugary cake.²

Regulations such as these also stemmed from an approach to empire which determined that the main role of the colonies was to enrich and empower the metropole. Supporters of the restriction of colonial trade could always fall back on the writings of Montesquieu, who had alluded to this justification for trade restrictions placed on the colonies.³ In *The Spirit of the Laws*, he argued that, in spite of the ancient mode of settlement, contemporary European colonies were designed for one purpose:

...trade under better conditions than could be had with neighbouring peoples, with whom all advantages are reciprocal. It is established that the metropole alone may trade with its colonies; and this is with good reason, because the aim of their establishment was the enlargement of trade, and not the foundation of a town or a new empire.⁴

The benefits, however, were apparently not all one-sided. In exchange, the centre offered protection, patronage, and survival to the colonies:

the disadvantage of the colonies, which lose freedom of trade [*la liberté du commerce*], is visibly compensated for by the protection of the metropole, which defends them with its weapons, or maintains them with its laws.⁵

¹ Mandelblatt, 'How Feeding the Slaves shaped the French Atlantic', p. 198.

² K.J. Banks, *Chasing Empire across the Sea* (Montreal, 2002), p. 24;

³ This was a false interpretation according to Tarrade, *Commerce Colonial*, I, p. 87; Cheney, *Revolutionary Commerce*, p. 181.

⁴ C.-L. de Secondat, Baron de Montesquieu, *De l'Esprit des Lois* [1748], ed. R. Derathé (Paris, 1973), II, p. 60.

⁵ *Ibid*, II, p. 60.

According to Montesquieu, European colonies were little more than trading posts, which owed their establishment and survival to their usefulness to the metropole. This attitude had clear iterations in practice and was rehearsed in the correspondence between the centre and colonies.¹

This position was elaborated upon even in the *Encyclopédie*, the 'opus of the Enlightenment', by François Véron de Forbonnais.² Here he argued that the American colonies had been established only for the benefit of the metropole. It followed, he argued, that the founders were entitled to the profits of the colonies. These comprised of the fruits of colonial consumption of metropolitan goods and of the profits generated in their freight, together with all useful colonial products and all surplus generated by the exportation of these.³ The metropole therefore required exclusive trading rights in the colonies, which also had to remain directly dependent upon it and under its protection. This was because he thought that

colonies would no longer be useful if they could survive without the metropole. Thus, it is a law inherent in the nature of the thing that the arts and cultivation in a colony must be limited to such and such objects, according to the convenience of the governing country.⁴

Maintaining a metropolitan monopoly of the French Caribbean flour trade conformed precisely to this principle. The colonies were only useful in as far as they were obliged to make returns to the metropole, and without essential connections like that established by the exportation of French flour, this obligation was in danger of being forfeited.

¹ ANOM, FM F2b 8, f. 75: Controller General to Montaran, dated 17th April 1765.

² Røge, 'A Natural Order of Empire', p. 46.

³ F.V. de Forbonnais, 'COLONIES' in *Encyclopédie, ou Dictionnaire Raisoné des Sciences, des Arts et des Métiers, par une Société de Gens de Lettres* [1753], III (Geneva, 1772), p. 650.

⁴ *Ibid.*

Forbonnais reasoned further that to exchange colonial goods with anyone but the metropole, or to otherwise allow the wealth that they could generate to fall into the hands of foreigners constituted 'theft from the metropole'.¹ He moved the argument on slightly from Montesquieu's simple explanation of the purpose of colonies. Distant as they were, in this discourse the West Indian sugar islands constituted French territory in a very real way; the product of the islands was French in as much as was the produce of Bordeaux or Picardy. This was borne out in practice by the relatively relaxed colonial tax regime² and by grain regulation too. For although French grain law forbade the exportation of grain in any form to foreign nations until 1764, it implicitly allowed for the shipment of grain to the colonies to support the French people who lived there. In this sense, the national belonging of transatlantic subjects was confirmed in their entitlement to a share of this precious commodity from the metropole. The colonies, as a composite part of the nation, therefore, had to work in its interest. This meant sending valuable goods back to the metropole and not to rival nations.

In his article on colonies, Forbonnais did not so much as refer to the slaves who were responsible for French plantation production.³ He simply failed to take the enslaved inhabitants of the sugar islands into account when he considered colonial population. Elsewhere, however, he referred to them as 'unfortunate Africans', and 'another sort of population' on the plantation islands.⁴ He agreed that slaves played a pivotal role in the productive capacity of the islands. He even admitted that they boosted the metropolitan economy by consuming French goods.⁵ However, it was becoming more and more important to justify their condition, and so he claimed that it was the law of African

¹ Ibid.

² P. Butel, *Histoire des Antilles Françaises* (Paris, 2002), p. 125.

³ M. Dobie, *Trading places: Colonization and Slavery in Eighteenth-Century French Culture* (Ithaca, 2010), p. 212.

⁴ F.V. de Forbonnais, *Éléments du Commerce* (Leyde, 1754), II, pp. 32-3.

⁵ Ibid, II, p. 33.

societies which gave 'commerce the right to put a price on liberty'.¹ The assumption was that civilised Europeans could not be enslaved and sold. The slaves, therefore, could not be French in spite of their contribution to the colonial system, which even Forbonnais acknowledged.

These attitudes towards empire, together with Colbert's laws formed the pattern for *l'exclusif*. This anachronistic term, which in fact has negative connotations similar to Adam Smith's use of the term *Mercantile System*,² has come to represent France's system of colonial trading policy, enacted by letters patent of 1717 and 1727. This new legislation established a number of privileged French ports, the *villes maritimes*, from where trade with the French colonies was to be conducted exclusively and on a linear basis.³ Even supplies of Irish salt beef, on which the slave populations of the French sugar islands largely subsisted, had to be shipped via France in French ships.⁴

This, coinciding with the termination of the monopoly rights of the French West India Company, suited the merchant communities who resided in the *villes maritimes*. These merchants made nothing of the apparent paradox between their disdain for the monopoly of the preceding system and their enthusiasm for regulations that restricted colonial commerce more or less to their own ships. In fact they liaised with the state through the 'plunder' of privileged companies in order to develop colonial commercial ties, which could never have been entirely privately funded.⁵ According to Charles Woolsey Cole, contemporary forays into free trade could only exist within a 'mercantilist matrix'.⁶ Private traders advocated whatever mix of freedom and protection might foster their enterprises the most effectively. This same paradox

¹ Ibid.

² Tarrade, *Commerce Colonial*, I, pp. 85-6.

³ Cheney, *Revolutionary Commerce*, p. 168.

⁴ Mandelblatt, 'How Feeding the Slaves shaped the French Atlantic', p. 202.

⁵ P.H. Boulle, 'French Mercantilism, Commercial Companies and Colonial Profitability' in L. Blussé and F. Gaastra (eds.), *Companies and Trade* (Leiden, 1981), p. 116.

⁶ C.W. Cole, *French Mercantilism, 1683-1700* (New York, 1943), pp. 236-7.

seemed to characterise the relationship between entrepreneurialism and the state in other areas of the French economy, as Philippe Minard has shown in the case of French textile guilds.¹

When it came to shaping policy, the French merchants who served the West Indies had certain advantages. The value of their connections was made obvious by the wealth they derived from them. Trading links stimulated their personal enrichment and that of the privileged ports from where they conducted their operations. For example, Bordeaux, which played an important role in the triangular traffic that supplied the West Indies with provisions and slaves and returned to France loaded with sugar and other colonial articles, grew at an astonishing rate: where in 1700 the population stood at 45,000, by the end of the Old Regime it had grown to 110,000.² The West Indies were especially prized amongst colonial possessions, on the part of the British metropole as well, simply because of the value of their products on the European continent. Here demand for goods such as sugar could only increase.³ In both cases the state, therefore, tended to be highly concerned with their prosperity.

Unlike their colonial counterparts, the French merchants were in a position to form a powerful lobby, which played an important part in influencing French policy. Through local committees, known as the Chambers of Commerce, prominent merchants could reach the ear of the king himself, and the eighteenth century saw an increase in such communications, especially those pertaining to colonial matters.⁴ Gould's example of the merchant lobby's success in thwarting the very possibility of a subsistence trade with Canada after 1708 reveals their strength and influence at the French centre.⁵

¹ P. Minard, *La Fortune du Colbertisme* (Paris, 1998), p. 294.

² Butel, *Histoire des Antilles*, p. 118.

³ Ibid; J.A. Henretta and G.H. Nobles, *Evolution and Revolution* (Lexington, 1987), p. 76.

⁴ H.L. Root, *The Fountain of Privilege* (Berkeley, 1994), p. 27.

⁵ Gould, 'Trade Between the Windward Islands and Continental Colonies', p. 490.

The right to export French sugar was not coveted on the basis of the value of the product alone. Trade for valuable colonial goods needed to be two-way, or else it would see French ships travelling outwards in ballast, rendering the entire trip less profitable. *L'exclusif* echoed the British Navigation Acts, in the sense that it demanded that French goods be carried in French ships. It has been shown that the key characteristic of the goods enumerated under the British Acts was their bulk and value, so that this regulation had more to do with the domination and monetisation of the shipping aspect of trade than of trade itself.¹ Likewise, an important initial impetus for Colbert's legislation in the area, after all, had been to exclude the Dutch from the carrying trade between Europe and the West Indies.

In the immediate aftermath of the implementation of the new restrictions, faced with a shortage of food and diminished options for the sale of their own goods due to a lack of French shipping, however, the planters of Martinique could be heard to cry 'long live the Dutch!'² Violent uprisings broke out on other islands in reaction to the restrictive legislation, which ultimately pushed up the price of subsistence on the islands, whilst depressing French sugar prices.³ Resistance also manifested itself in more subtle ways, such as contraband trade. The French government and metropolitan merchants therefore faced strong opposition from the West India planters in their efforts to command transatlantic trade.

However, the exclusive reliance of the colonies on France for their entire legal food supply could sometimes elicit opposition in the metropole, where colonial buyers were not always welcome. Even in years of abundant or normal supply, just the rumour that colonial grain acquisitions were to be made in a French region could cause disquiet. Thus when reports of colonial purchases at local markets began to

¹ L.A. Harper, *The English Navigation Laws* (New York, 1939), p. 54.

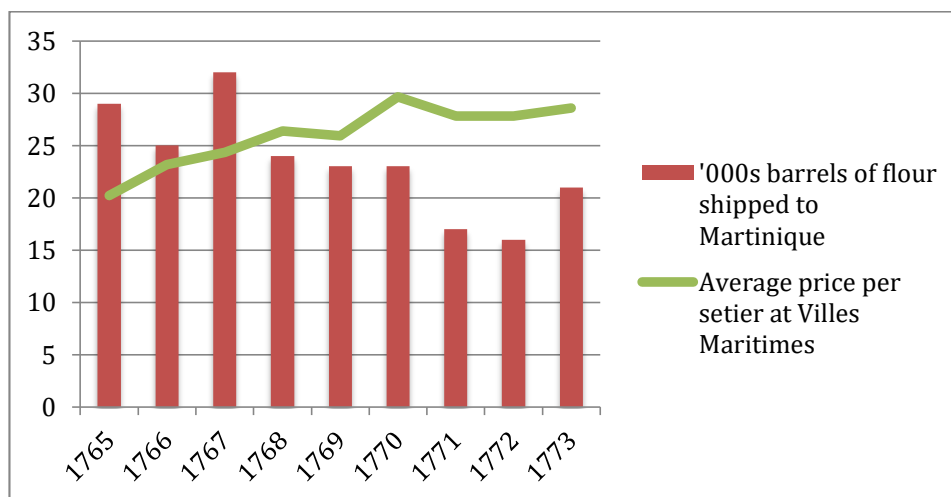
² Butel, *Histoire des Antilles*, p. 53.

³ Mandelblatt, 'How Feeding the Slaves shaped the French Atlantic', p. 203; Cheney, *Revolutionary Commerce*, p. 169.

circulate in Anjou in 1751, the Attorney General was forced to intervene. Confusion amongst different departments of state seemed to reign, and an administrator serving under the *Ministre de la Marine* had to explain that no commissions had been made for the colonies. He supposed that the colonial merchants were speculating on their own accounts, based on rumours of potential shortage.¹

Tensions already ran high when harvest failure merely appeared imminent. There were obvious fears that a scramble for resources might ensue. Nevertheless, throughout the very real subsistence crisis of the mid- to late-1760s, the records reveal continuing shipments of flour to Martinique, though there was some reaction to price shocks after 1766 as figure 10 below shows.

Figure 10: Flour imported Legally at Martinique, 1765-1773.



Source: ANOM FM C/8B/21 for 1765; C/8B/12 for 1766 and C/8B/18 for the years 1767-1773. Grain Prices from AN F20 105: 'Prix Commun du Froment dans les 32 Généralités et la Ville de Paris'.

This stands in stark contrast to the British case, where in times of dearth official export ceased and the encouragement provided by the bounty (which could be redeemed on grain shipped to British overseas possessions) was stopped.² Clearly the French commitment to

¹ BNF, JdF, 1129: Letter from Bouille to the *Procureur Général*, dated 14th August 1751.

² BL Add Mss 38387, ff. 33-52: 'Account of the Quantity of the Different Species of Corn exported, 1743-1763'.

provisioning its colonies was serious enough for it to continue even when the nation struggled to feed itself. However, these efforts were insufficient, and could not meet the needs of the plantations. The task of provisioning the colonies had become an important profit-making enterprise for merchants, which put them into conflict with colonials who would benefit profoundly from foreign intervention and competition in the market. These in turn sought other clandestine modes of supply.

Colonial Synergies

Forsaking French commerce, French planters found that they could supply their needs through a clandestine trade with the British, Dutch and other European traders who roamed the Caribbean in small ships.¹ Comparatively cheap sugar, the French found, was especially attractive to the British North Americans, whose surpluses of European-style agricultural staples were vast and growing.² By the mid-eighteenth century, Paul Clemens has shown that the former tobacco planters of Maryland were beginning to diversify into grain, particularly wheat, production. This, he argues, can be accounted for by the stimulus of a growing demand for grain. This demand remained steady, where tobacco prices were often subject to worrisome fluctuation.³

Clemens also discovered a large discrepancy between surplus grain production in the region and export figures from ports.⁴ Evidently, though some of the grain was perhaps travelling overland to other British settlements, some was probably being dealt clandestinely to the French. By the middle of the Seven Years' War, the Maryland assembly felt the need to raise a petition outlining the 'hardships' which

¹ C.C. Goslinga, *The Dutch in the Caribbean and in the Guianas, 1680-1791* (Assen, 1985), p. 190.

² T.M. Truxes, *Defying Empire* (New Haven, 2008), p. 3.

³ P.G.E. Clemens, *The Atlantic Economy and Colonial Maryland's Eastern Shore* (Ithaca, 1980), pp. 169; 175.

⁴ *Ibid*, p. 173.

apparently resulted from rigid prohibitions placed by the Flour Act on the provisions trade with the French.¹ The Board of Trade referred the matter to the Privy Council, which permitted provisions to be exported from Maryland to Madeira and to the territories of British allies, though crucially not to the French.²

Generally, therefore, the British mainland colonies of North America, unlike the French equivalent, were able to supply the British West Indian islands with the grain supplies required to support the free and slave populations, and still have a surplus to carry on the so-called *interlope* trade with the French.³ Moreover, it seems that they were all too happy to oblige, given that there was no restriction on selling grain to foreigners before the Seven Years' War.⁴ For, though grain was enumerated on the list of restricted European products (so that its import into Britain was restricted), it did not appear on the colonial list.⁵

Nevertheless, trouble did arise when North American traders received French sugar and rum in exchange for these provisions. In a reversal of the French situation, where it was the merchants of the *villes maritimes* who played an active role in policy making, it seems that the interests of the British West Indian planters were those best represented in the British legislature. Their influence resided with absentee planters and those with commercial interests in the islands; the professional agents of colonial governments; and commission agents or London based merchants.⁶

¹ Great Britain: Board of Trade, *Journal of the Commissioners for Trade and Plantations* (London, 1933), 1754-1758, p. 414. The Flour Act was imposed under 30 Geo II, c 9.

² Great Britain, *Acts of the Privy Council of England: Colonial Series* (Hereford, 1908), IV, p. 387.

³ D. Watts, *The West Indies* (Cambridge, 1987), p. 275.

⁴ Banks, *Chasing Empire*, p. 35; G.L. Beer, *British Colonial Policy, 1754-1765* (New York, 1933), pp. 83-4.

⁵ N. Zahedieh, 'Economy' in D. Armitage and M. J. Braddick (eds.), *The British Atlantic World, 1500-1800* (Basingstoke, 2002), p. 53.

⁶ A.J. O'Shaughnessy, 'The Formation of a Commercial Lobby', *HJ*, 40:1 (1997), p. 72.

All of these were in a position to seek political influence through governmental back channels and early forms of lobbying. The sugar merchants of London, for instance, charged the representative of the West Indian planter interest, John Sharpe, with handing a 'Memorial of the Sugar Planters, Merchants and Others interested in and trading to the Sugar Colonies, relating to the Illicit Trade carried on from the Northern Colonies to the French and Other Foreign Sugar Colonies' directly to the Board of Trade for its consideration in 1750.¹

Merchant interests in the metropole were not always united with those of the planters however. Although commission merchants were a powerful force on the side of the planters, Sheridan reveals that by 1713 many other metropolitan middlemen also were embroiled in contraband trade with France. This was because the growing demand for sugar in Britain outpaced the production efforts of British plantations, which also trailed behind the rapidly expanding productivity of the French sugar islands. Metropolitan sugar merchants therefore encouraged their agents to smuggle cheap foreign-produced sugar onto the British islands in exchange for manufactures and plantation supplies. The foreign sugar was then imported into Britain under the false auspices of having been produced on the islands from where it was shipped.² As more planters turned to commission agents to make their overseas sales for them, however, the number of independent metropolitan sugar merchants with an interest in contraband declined, especially in London.³

Nevertheless, it was noted by a West Indian representative that illicit French trade was 'prejudicial to our own sugar colonies', simply due to the competition the enemy islands posed.⁴ It was for this reason that the planters petitioned for an outright ban on French sugar, which

¹ Great Britain. Board of Trade, *Journal of the Commissioners for Trade and Plantations* (London, 1932), 1749-1753, p. 103.

² R.B. Sheridan, 'The Molasses Act and the Market Strategy of the British Sugar Planters', *The Journal of Economic History*, 17:1 (1957), p. 65.

³ *Ibid*, p. 79.

⁴ Great Britain, *Journal of the Commissioners*, p. 131.

would go further than the Molasses Act of 1733. This act had placed duties on foreign sugar imported into the North American colonies. Although the consumption of British sugar increased as a result of the Molasses Act, it was feared that this market continued to be undermined by smuggling.¹

According to John Sharpe, the trade between the American colonies and the French sugar islands was prejudicial to Britain in more than one way. It not only saw duties avoided, but also meant that the mainland colonies were exposed to sailcloth; linens; silk; spices; China; and other goods carried by French and Dutch, and not British, trade.² Daniel Moore, an eyewitness to the illegal traffic at Saint Eustatius, suggested that it would only take four smallish vessels to strangulate the illicit trade carried on from Rhode Island and New England.³ Sharpe agreed that it would be relatively simple to clamp down on contraband trade, so long as the navy were empowered to make invasive searches of merchant vessels, and customs officials were steered by stricter controls and more enticing rewards.⁴

However, it seems that the Lords of Trade took seriously their task of arbitrating between the varied colonial interests, inviting representatives of the northern colonies to make their case also. The agent of Massachusetts Bay, William Bollan, argued that the planters' proposals 'tended to the destruction of all North American trade, whether legal or illegal'.⁵ Meanwhile the agents for North Carolina and New York looked upon a ban on trade with the French as a 'monopoly prejudicial to Great Britain and destructive of the birth right of the people of North America'.⁶ Generally, the North American agents were in agreement that the Molasses Act as it then stood was sufficient

¹ Sheridan, 'The Molasses Act', pp 78-9.

² Great Britain, *Journal of the Commissioners*, p. 134.

³ *Ibid*, p. 133.

⁴ TNA CO 323/13: O. no. 87: 'Proposals received through John Sharpe', dated 10th January 1751.

⁵ Great Britain, *Journal of the Commissioners*, p. 138.

⁶ *Ibid*, p. 138.

regulation of the trade, so long as it was properly enforced. They mostly played down assertions of the level of smuggling in the region.¹

In general the West Indian interest drew on patriotic rhetoric, emphasising the French threat in the West Indies, and depicting smugglers of French sugar as traitors or 'an enemy to his country... unworthy to be a member of civil society'.² The losses incurred in Britain directly, by the evasion of tax, and, indirectly, through foreign penetration of a captive market for British goods, were exaggerated. The North Americans, on the other hand, tried to exonerate themselves from commercial malpractice, whilst emphasising the commercial needs of their own colonies and the dangers of monopoly there. Ultimately in this case, the board opted not to supersede the Molasses Act with even more restrictive regulation. The West Indian influence on the Board of Trade, therefore, was not invincible.

In fact, the precise strength of formal West Indian representation within Parliament itself is also subject to debate. Estimates depend on how West Indians in Parliament can be defined; those at the lower end have tended to limit the category to those who had been born or spent time on the islands.³ Sheridan, however, included any member with a link to the islands, such as absentee owners or London based merchants who dealt with the islands. He estimates therefore that the interest was represented by some seventy MPs between 1730 and 1775.⁴ Likewise, contemporary opinion, though subject to some possible exaggeration, tended to agree with less conservative estimates such as this. A Massachusetts Bay agent complained that the West India group could 'turn the balance on which side they please'.⁵ The punitive

¹ Ibid, p. 139.

² Quoted by R.B. Sheridan, *Sugar and Slavery* (Barbados, 1994), p. 57.

³ B.W. Higman, 'The West India "Interest" in Parliament, 1807-1833', *Historical Studies*, 13:49 (1967), p. 4.

⁴ Sheridan, *Sugar and Slavery*, p. 60.

⁵ Quoted in L.M. Penson, *The Colonial Agents of the British West Indies* (London, 1924), p. 228.

Molasses Act, which was passed in 1733 largely at their behest, can be seen as a proof of their influence.¹

The merchant interest, however, was treated as somewhat suspect. Merchants were thought to consider solely their own commercial motives, where MPs, by comparison, were expected to be naturally more concerned with the good of the nation. Daeryoon Kim goes on to suggest that the idea of self-interest also informed Thomas Pownall's understanding of a 'general commercial interest' which he supposed spawned the transnational market synergies of the New World.² Clearly there were contemporary concerns that the loyalties of merchants and colonials could well be tested by their exposure to potentially free markets and trumped by their innate entrepreneurialism or greed.

Pownall, for his part, contended that power over the colonies had to be found in linking the forces of patronage with executive power over colonial affairs.³ At the time of his writing, colonial patronage was a right which the Board of Trade – now deprived of its erstwhile leader, the Earl of Halifax – had lately lost. This, Pownall lamented, and Arthur Herbert Basye agrees, signalled the end of the board's brief spell of influence and autonomy.⁴ Likewise, on the French side, Kenneth Banks seems to be in agreement that colonial administrators exchanged their services for patronage and deferred to the king. In the French case, the power to appoint and dismiss governors and intendants, as well as the various clerks and officers of the colonial administration, resided permanently with the *Ministre de la Marine*. His ministry also designed policy for the colonies, and was essentially a model of the integrated colonial executive, similar to how Halifax had striven to refashion the Board of Trade.⁵

¹ Sheridan, *Sugar and Slavery*, p. 68.

² D. Kim, 'Political Convention and the Merchant in the Later Eighteenth Century' in P. Gauci (ed.), *Regulating the British Economy, 1660-1850* (Farnham, 2011), p. 126; T. Pownall, *The Administration of the Colonies* (London, 3rd edn. 1766), p. 8.

³ Pownall, *Administration*, p. 16.

⁴ A.H. Basye, *The Lords Commissioners of Trade and Plantations* (New Haven, 1925), p. 83.

⁵ Banks, *Chasing Empire*, p. 187.

Nevertheless, this structure did not necessarily ensure obedience. Adherence to colonial policy depended upon the appeal of the metropolitan reward structure, which bound colonial officials to the homeland, and upon their alienation from the colony where they served. Initially Colbert had tried to ensure that the metropolitan representatives on the islands had no private interests there. If their interests grew homogenous with those of the *créole* population, then their loyalty to France could be questionable. There were evident qualms about the mutability of national sentiment, which apparently was not necessarily fixed at birth, but could eventually be shaken off or overawed by private interest.¹

Paul Butel suggests that the entanglement of colonial governors in the network of clandestine trade was part of that exact process of *créolisation* which Colbert had sought to avoid.² Governors or intendants of the French islands occasionally attempted to make explicit exceptions to trading restrictions, by issuing so-called *permissions*. These allowed the entry of certain foreign goods in exchange for syrup and other colonial goods. In order for these documents to be ultimately approved, colonial authorities needed to convince the metropolitan government that they faced severe shortage and emergency.

It seems, however, that these were still usually treated with suspicion in the metropole. In one instance, the governor of Guadeloupe, Nolivos, begged permission to import New England salted goods to address a critical shortage on the island. The central response, clearly suspecting fraud, was an inquiry into the reasons for the high price of salted beef in the first place, and the suggestion that, if beef was to be imported at all, it should at least be from Spanish territories.³ Later, a devastating

¹ Morieux, *Une Mer pour deux Royaumes*, p. 256.

² Butel, *Histoire*, p. 133.

³ ANOM, FM C7a27, f. 172: Letter to *Minstre de la Marine* Praslin from the Governor and Intendant of Guadeloupe, Nolivos and Moissac, dated 20th September 1766.

hurricane on Martinique would be used as a pretext for free trade in the French West Indies.¹ The basic survival of the colonies was their key justification.

Nevertheless, the governors and intendants of the French islands who did make certain exceptions to the rules seem to have been careful to restrict the practice to certain goods. Thus in 1750 Guadeloupe's governor and intendant excused themselves for issuing permissions to import wood and other building materials from New England. They were sure to add, however, that they had known better than to permit salt-beef from the British colonies to land on the islands, and had taken special precautions to avoid this.² Meanwhile, the syrup which they had offered in exchange was relatively useless in France, as its use in the production of liquor was banned in order to protect the brandy industry there.³ Evidently, though local authorities were trying hard to institute exceptions to *l'exclusif* even before the Seven Years' War, this was only with regards to goods in which they believed the metropole had no special interest. Overall, it seems that there was greater emphasis in mercantile rhetoric and in the legislative reality on some commodities than others, and flour numbered with salted beef amongst those cherished by French protectionist political economy.

Even contraband trade took place with the complicity of local government or customs officials, through the falsification of official paperwork. For example, French colonials could hide contraband trade through the use of loopholes in the legislation which established *l'exclusif*. Banks has shown that, after the laws were imposed, there was a marked increase in the number of apparently storm-damaged foreign ships seeking emergency refuge in the French West Indian island ports. Landing for repairs was permitted on a technicality under *l'exclusif*. In

¹ Tarrade, *Commerce*, I, p. 306.

² ANOM, FM C9a 83: Letter from Conflans and Maillart to the *Ministre de la Marine*, dated 6th July 1750.

³ A-P. Blérald, *Histoire Économique de la Guadeloupe et de la Martinique* (Paris, 1986), p. 18.

spite of apparent outward compliance with the rules, such as the commissioning of new frigates to patrol the shores,¹ island officials were obviously conspiring to falsify the records and usher in clandestine trade.² Likewise the books were also sometimes manipulated to allow French ships to trade on the neutral Dutch entrepôt islands of St Eustatius and Curacao, which served as cosmopolitan meeting points for traders of all European settlements in the region.³

All of this smuggling was much to the chagrin of the legally authorised French merchants. They advanced petitions and letters of complaint to the *Ministre de la Marine*, usually calling for tighter controls of the region. In 1754, one of these complained that at Guadeloupe

large and small ships, English and Dutch, come directly to the island, and load up with raw sugar, syrups, tafias, coffee and ginger in exchange for rejected slaves, poor quality cod for the slaves, salted mackerel, beef, butter and flour.⁴

The petition emphasised not only the lost trade, but also the types of ships involved. As Klooster has put it, 'it takes two to smuggle',⁵ and in this case, the contraband trade, so the merchants argued, was not the preserve of small boats conducting covert operations. Large British and Dutch ships were directly approaching the coastline, apparently unopposed. The islanders, they implied, were so embroiled in the affair that they hardly bothered to keep it clandestine.

¹ ANOM, FM C9a 83: Letter from Maillart to the *Ministre de la Marine*, dated 6th July 1750.

² Banks, *Chasing Empire*, p. 177.

³ K.J. Banks, 'Official Duplicity. The Illicit Slave Trade of Martinique' in P.A. Coclanis (ed.), *The Atlantic Economy during the Seventeenth and Eighteenth Centuries* (Columbia, SC, 2005), p. 236.

⁴ ANOM, FM C7a 17, f. 106: 'Mémoire sur le Commerce Prohibé de la Guadeloupe', dated 1754.

⁵ W. Klooster, 'Inter-Imperial Smuggling in the Americas, 1600-1800' in B. Bailyn and P. Denault (eds.), *Soundings in Atlantic History* (Cambridge, MA, 2009), p. 141.

This interloper trade was carried on, the merchants continued, 'in beef and flour to the detriment of French commerce'.¹ Clearly there were personal gains at stake here. For example, a French merchant pined over the indigo bounty payments that he had lost as a result of the clandestine trade in that commodity.² However this particular *mémoire* was addressed to a fellow merchant in Dunkirk, and had only come unexpectedly into the hands of the minister. In official papers, merchants generally chose their words carefully. In the Guadeloupe case they played on the losses sustained by the French metropolitan economy when its colonies, which they thought ought to have been captive markets, chose to purchase goods from rival nations.

The international shipping trade, by virtue of simple engineering and the laws of physics, had to be a two-way street and the merchants' concerns had to do with that element of commerce in general. The interloper trade was not only potentially injurious to the specified French trades, but to the entirety of their operations, as they needed products which they could exchange with the island planters for valuable colonial produce. They seem also, therefore, to have been insinuating that France's commercial infrastructure, that is, French shipping itself, was at risk.

Hence the merchants were also perhaps appealing to the notion of naval dominance. For the French saw the efforts of their merchants and their fishermen at sea (as did the British) as the foundation of a cheaply maintained yet strong and easily accessible naval force.³ With the islanders trading their own coveted produce with the Dutch and British in exchange for flour, the merchants of the *Villes Maritimes* clearly feared that they would soon be cut out of a very profitable loop.

¹ANOM, FM C7a 17, f. 106: 'Mémoire sur le Commerce Prohibé de la Guadeloupe', dated 1754.

² ANOM, FM F2b 2: 'Memoire au Sujet du Commerce Illicite que font les Navires Anglais et Hollandais aux Colonies Français', dated 5th November 1749.

³ J.-F. Brière, *La Pêche Française en Amérique du Nord au XVIIIe Siècle* (Montreal, 1990), p. 247; I. Land, *War, Nationalism, and the British Sailor, 1750-1850* (New York, 2009), p. 84.

Nevertheless, they framed the issue as a national one, which threatened certain specific French outbound trades and its power particularly in wartime, and not one that concerned their private interests alone.

When it came to wartime, the clandestine trade in flour and grain between British and French colonials became politicised in new ways. New York and other northern colonies, such as Massachusetts Bay and Rhode Island, had grown notorious for their smuggling.¹ By 1756 the governors of the colonies were formally instructed by the Board of Trade to prevent provisions from leaving North America for French territories, a measure which many of the colonies ostensibly supported.² For example, in 1755, the new governor of New York, Charles Hardy, was ordered to stifle the trade between 'His Majesty's subjects in the province of New York... and the French settlements in America'.³ Hardy was a military man, but even his immediate predecessor had been taking steps to suppress the trade.⁴ Anti-French sentiment, therefore, ruled in the top echelons of colonial authority.

Over the course of the war, French shipping was driven off the seas, and the British aimed to push home the advantage by cutting off the French sugar islands from all lifelines. The French therefore resorted to neutral shipping,⁵ and it was here that one of the key weaknesses in the British enforcement of trade regulation was to be found. French planters now had no choice but to purchase their provisions at neutral entrepôts, such as the Dutch island of Saint Eustatius, which were supplied by North American merchants.⁶ The Board of Trade responded in 1757 with an embargo, known as the Flour Act, on trade in provisions between British colonies and these islands. Colonial merchants had to pay exorbitant bonds to guarantee their arrival at British ports.⁷ The

¹ Klooster, 'Inter-Imperial Smuggling', pp.142-4.

² Beer, *British Colonial Policy*, pp. 76-81.

³ TNA CO 5/1128: 'Instructions to Sir Charles Hardy as Governor of the Province of New York', dated 3rd April 1755, instruction no. 85.

⁴ Truxes, *Defying Empire*, p. 48.

⁵ M. Schumann and K.W. Schweizer, *The Seven Years War* (London, 2008), p. 105.

⁶ Truxes, *Defying Empire*, p. 59.

⁷ *Ibid*, p. 73.

thrust of this new body of legislation, all of it carrying heavy penalties, was to 'answer his Majesty's intension of distressing the enemy'.¹

Merchants and corrupt customs officers, however, found ways of falsifying the official documents. Hardy, on his departure from the colony and his return to naval service, could only recommend that navy vessels be used to patrol the shores in order to catch their own countrymen in violation of the embargoes.² The problem persisted under the strict Lieutenant-Governorship of Cadwallader Colden, who enthusiastically dealt with those traders who supplied the enemy because, he claimed, they 'consider nothing but their private profit'.³

It was only after 1760, when a significant number of ships could be spared, that the Royal Navy, as Hardy had suggested, began to be able to stem the problem.⁴ The emphasis of British attempts to control international trade in the region had shifted from restricting competition to compromising the very survival of the French colonies. Legislative attention had been redirected from sugars under the Molasses Act before the war, to grain under the Flour Act during the conflict, while justifications for the regulation of trade between British and French settlements became more concerned with tactical and political issues, in place of economics.

Metropolitan Compromise

With the conclusion of the Seven Years' War, the British government and traders of the British colonies again began to anticipate the expiration of the Molasses Act of 1733, due in 1764.⁵ This offered the

¹ 'Lords of Trade to the Governors in America', dated 9th October 1756 in E.B. O'Callaghan (ed.), *Documents Relative to the Colonial History of the State of New York* (Albany, NY & New York, 1856), VII, p. 162.

² 'Sir Charles Hardy to the Lords of Trade', dated 10th July 1757 in O'Callaghan (ed.), *Documents*, VII, p. 272.

³ Lieutenant-Governor Colden to the Lords of Trade, dated 11th May 1762 in O'Callaghan (ed.), *Documents*, VII, p. 499.

⁴ R. Middlekauff, *The Glorious Cause* (Oxford, 1982), p. 60.

⁵ J.C. Miller, *Origins of the American Revolution* (Stanford, 1959), p. 99.

opportunity for North Americans to state their case in favour of a freer trade with foreign colonies. Thus Stephen Hopkins, governor of the Rhode Island and Providence plantations, duly petitioned the Board of Trade not to renew the act. This would allow the free importation of French molasses in exchange for British provisions and manufactures. The mainstay of his argument concerned the survival of the Rhode Island colony. Rhode Island, he argued, produced no staple exports, but, by virtue of the 'goodness of its harbour and its convenient position for trade agreeing with the spirit of industry of the people hath in some measure supplied to the deficiency of its natural produce'.¹

Hopkins reasoned that a trade with the French for molasses could do no harm to either the trade of the British West Indies, nor of Britain itself. This was because, firstly, the colony received very little in the way of molasses from the British islands. Citing the Newport Customs House books for the previous year, Hopkins showed that only about 18 per cent of molasses imported came from British plantations. This was not a sufficient quantity to keep Rhode Island afloat in its vital exchanges with other colonies.² Besides this, he contended that the French were not permitted by their own government to sell sugar, the main product of the British islands, to the British. The molasses trade therefore complemented, and did not compete with, British West Indian sugar production.³

Secondly, he argued, these exchanges were generally favourable for British trade. This was because a significant proportion of the molasses imported into Rhode Island was traded with other British colonies for products manufactured in the metropole. The rest of the molasses was distilled into rum, and this was traded in Africa for slaves. He argued that here the Rhode Island rum had in fact supplanted a market for French brandy. Meanwhile, the slaves who were brought back to the

¹ TNA CO 5/1276, f. 349: Governor Stephen Hopkins to the Board of Trade, 3rd February 1764.

² Ibid, f. 350.

³ Ibid, f. 354.

Caribbean were often worth more than the molasses which the foreign islands could supply, which meant that the Dutch in particular were forced to offer Bills of Exchange, a 'means of drawing from that Republic so much cash yearly into Great Britain as their bills amount to'.¹

Hopkins added that the colony was labouring under a massive debt as a result of its contribution to the war, 'in which they manifested a spirit and loyalty far exceeding their ability'.² The colony required a buoyant entrepôt trade in order to survive and to pay off the debts it had incurred in service to the centre. He concluded that without French molasses and the valuable rum it yielded, Rhode Island merchants would go bankrupt, and 'a nursery of seamen at this time consisting of two thousand, two hundred in this colony only will be in a manner destroyed'.³ Meanwhile, the French had no metropolitan outlet for their molasses and the rum distilled from it, as it was banned in France in order to protect the brandy trade. However they could trade it with the Native Americans, thereby establishing stronger alliances and a tactical advantage there. Likewise, the fish which the French received in exchange for their molasses also checked any concerted effort on their part to develop fisheries that could serve as naval nurseries.⁴

Hopkins' appeal to patriotic and military values was unveiled. However, in his depiction of the Rhode Island colony as an entrepôt, he was also alluding to a different kind of economic activity and even identity to the one epitomised in the Molasses Act. Thomas Pownall was also aware of a disjuncture between what he called the 'natural state' and the 'artificial or political state' of the American and West Indian colonies of Britain, France and others.⁵ In spite of their efforts, Pownall argued, the metropolitan governments could not restrain the natural state of the

¹ Ibid, f. 351.

² Ibid, f. 352.

³ Ibid, f. 352.

⁴ Ibid, f. 354.

⁵ Pownall, *Administration*, p. 7.

colonies, which would see them engaged in trade because of their inherently interconnected needs and interests. This was a force which compelled merchants to disobey their national governments, who in turn would in fact do best to

...profit of, to possess, and to take the lead of it already formed and arising fast into dominion; it is our duty so to interweave those nascent powers into, and combine their influence with, the same interests which actuate our own government.¹

Ever the mercantilist, Pownall's concern was for which European power would, essentially, be flexible enough to dominate and reap the benefits of what was basically already a *de facto* free trade situation.² His personal solution was to extend Britain into a 'grand maritime dominion ... united into one Empire, in one centre, where the seat of government is'.³ According to Pownall, colonies were no longer to play a subsidiary role, but ought to be placed on equal footing with the metropole, which was to extend full citizenship to colonials.

This view had its echoes in his attitude to the regulation of the British grain trade. It was Pownall who, on 15th April 1772, brought the 'Bill to Regulate the Importation and Exportation of Grain' before the House of Commons on the part of a committee which had been considering the prolonged shortage of grain.⁴ A key point in the parliamentary agenda generally at this time was to put an end to the uncertainty of the current system of annually reviewed acts.⁵ Pownall himself strongly encouraged the simplification of the legislation regarding the grain trade and bounties, in order to reduce confusion and the opportunity

¹ Ibid, pp. 8-9.

² Ibid, p. 9.

³ Ibid, pp. 9-10.

⁴ Great Britain Parliament, *The Parliamentary History of England from the Earliest Period to the Year 1803* (London, 1813), XVII, p. 475. The bill became law under 13 Geo III ch. 43.

⁵ D.G. Barnes, *A History of the English Corn Laws 1660-1846* (London, 1930), p. 41.

for fraud.¹ However, in Parliament he also argued that the prevailing shortage of grain was in fact due to an increase in consumption. This was caused by growth in the manufacturing, retail and service sectors of the economy. Evidently he envisioned the metropole as a burgeoning tertiary economy, and one which could amply supply its colonies with manufactures.²

However, he also argued in favour of encouraging the agricultural sector in order to continue to supply both the domestic market and the European market with grain. Although he recognised that the importation of grain had a role to play in the stabilisation and growth of the British economy, he was keen that these imports should not 'interfere with our own corn'.³ In fact, it was very important to Pownall that 'British markets' were established on as many foreign shores as possible, and he extended this ambition of market penetration to colonial trade. As far as he was concerned, the colonies could easily 'become an occasion of establishing that British market in foreign countries'.⁴ He therefore encouraged colonial trade with foreigners on a *laissez-faire* basis, as long as proper duties were paid. For this he vaguely advocated the establishment of a 'British House', a sort of trading post cum customs house, installed on foreign shores, through which colonial and British trade would be channelled.

The ultimate expression of mercantilist projections for colonial free trade, however, manifested itself in schemes for free ports. Pownall did not mention them, but in a propaganda piece justifying the recent Caribbean acquisitions after the Treaty of Paris of 1763, John Campbell briefly considered the issue.⁵ His analysis addressed the Dutch example. He suggested tentatively that the free port system was useful

¹ T. Pownall, 'Memoir drawn up and laid before the Lords Commissioners of the Treasury' in A. Young, *Political Arithmetic* (London, 1774), p. 311.

² Great Britain, *Parliamentary History*, pp. 475-6.

³ Pownall, 'Memoir', p. 311.

⁴ Pownall, *Administration*, p. 185.

⁵ F. Espinasse, 'Campbell, John (1708-1775)', *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography* (Oxford, 2004) [<http://www.oxforddnb.com/view/article/4514>, accessed 8 Jan 2015]

in the context of Dutch trading patterns and commercial economy, but that for an industrious and production oriented economy like that of the British, the system may not be suitable. 'The *Dutch*' he argued 'are gainers by their commerce, we by our plantations. They thrive by the labour of other nations, we are become rich and potent, by the industry of our own'.¹ Evidently Campbell preferred to err on the side of caution, and the side of the West-Indies plantation owners, who would tend to argue that the freedom of commerce exemplified in a free port was a dangerous prospect.

However, the Dutch model was also the basis for Campbell Dalrymple's free port scheme. As Governor of Guadeloupe during the British occupation, he was inspired by the commercial activity which he observed on the Dutch entrepôt island of Saint Eustatius. The island had apparently 'imported more sugars into Europe during the last six years, tho a barren rock, than the most fertile colony'.² This was because of the desperation of the French planters, who sold their produce illegally there. As another projector put it, they were 'bred to smuggle' and the officials on French islands could be easily induced to 'relax in their duty, they being mostly the neighbours & relations of these Adventurers [i.e. smugglers], & are themselves planters'.³ Such a description, which emphasises the uprooted and discarded nationalism of participants in contraband trade, echoes justifications of dealings with British smugglers on the French coast documented by Morieux.⁴ The fact that the French were subverting and even betraying their own government seems to have helped to moderate their status as enemies.

However, the point of the free ports was to allow not just the French, but traders and ships of any nationality free entry to the market. Here foreign sugars were expected to be exchanged for British manufactures

¹ J. Campbell, *Candid and Impartial Considerations on the Nature of the Sugar Trade* (London, 1763), p. 150.

² Add Mss 38200, f. 260: Dalrymple to the Earl of Bute, 27th February 1763.

³ Add Mss 33030, f. 253: 'Thoughts on the Expediency of opening the Ports of Dominique, by a Person who resided some Years at St Eustatius'.

⁴ Morieux, *Une Mer pour deux Royaumes*, p. 255.

and North American provisions and lumber. The sugar would then be exported to Europe in British ships, paying a duty, by which Dalrymple expected the British to 'reap all the advantages of their islands without conquering them'.¹ In the aftermath of the burdensome Seven Years' War, it was Dalrymple's intension to advance useful applications for the relatively undesirable islands which Britain had retained at the expense of returning the bountiful islands of Martinique and Guadeloupe to the French. The West Indian islands had proven expensive to conquer and defend, but Dalrymple proposed to enjoy the benefits of the more productive islands without the setbacks of defence. He emphasised also the tactical advantages of providing the French islands with their sole lifeline for vital supplies.² Apparently he overlooked the difficulties with which British authorities in the North American colonies were met when they had tried to cut off the subsistence trade during the war.

The idea met with little success under the Bute ministry, but fared better under Rockingham. Frances Armytage suggests that this can perhaps be explained by the willingness of government under that ministry to properly consult merchants for the first time. This was certainly, she explains, the reasoning offered by Edmund Burke.³ The merchants of the North American colonies, and those with interests there, also linked up their own concerns with those of British manufacturing interests in Bristol, Liverpool, Lancaster, Manchester and London, who submitted their own petitions.⁴

Though the free port scheme seems to have been genuinely popular with merchants,⁵ this strategy in fact resembled one employed by West Indian merchants when tackling the monopolies of chartered

¹ Add Mss 38200, f. 261: Dalrymple to the Earl of Bute.

² Ibid.

³ L.F. Armytage, *The Free Port System in the British West Indies* (London, 1953), p. 28.

⁴ L.S. Sutherland, 'Edmund Burke and the First Rockingham Ministry', *English Historical Review*, 47:185 (1932), pp. 67-8.

⁵ Add Mss 32976, ff. 490-497: 'Addresses from various Boroughs to Charles Watson-Wentworth, Second Marquess of Rockingham, on retiring from Office, with Replies, 1766'. Walpole commented that Pitt's hostility to the idea had an adverse effect on his popularity, 'the scheme being grateful to the city'. H. Walpole, *Memoirs of the Reign of King George the Third*, ed. G.F.R Barker (London, 1894), II, p. 224.

companies almost a century before. In this case the lobbying group resorted to linking up with independent British petitioners and insisting, essentially, on every free British person's right to be productive and profitable, associating free trade with the rights of a subject in a non-absolutist constitution.¹ Interestingly the French merchants who had challenged the monopoly of the *Compagnie de la Guinée* and the *Compagnie de l'Occident* at the beginning of the century had also tended to align themselves with public liberty and gain, even within an apparently absolutist setting.² In both cases, freedom to participate in trade and self-interest were depicted as new and emerging approaches to securing the public good of the metropole in a now established colonial situation.

Pownall's new allegiance to free trade, in particular, has been counted by Anthony Pagden as part of an intellectual trend of the Enlightenment which transformed inclinations towards colonial subjugation into a preference for a federal relationship.³ As Paul Cheney has also shown, as the wealth generated by the colonies grew ever more important to the metropole, the exclusive rights of the centre became harder and harder to justify.⁴ Soon the right to gain was repeated by the British North Americans, who considered themselves entitled to the same, and by French colonials and physiocrats alike. François Quesnay, for instance, under the nom de plume of M. de l'Isle, envisioned an unrestricted trading zone within a 'monarchical empire' where all subjects could enjoy equal economic privileges.⁵ In these accounts, therefore, the national good shifted beyond metropolitan concern and was encapsulated in the right of all subjects everywhere to profit.

¹ W.A. Pettigrew, *Freedom's Debt* (Chapel Hill, 2013), pp. 73; 87-9.

² Cheney, *Revolutionary Commerce*, p. 172.

³ Pagden, *Lords of all the Worlds*, p. 155.

⁴ *Ibid*, p. 184.

⁵ 'Lettre de M. de L'Isle et Remarques sur l'Opinion de l'Auteur de *l'Esprit des Lois* concernant les Colonies' in A. Oncken (ed.), *Oeuvres Économiques et Philosophiques de F. Quesnay* (Frankfurt, 1888), p. 433.

According to Pagden, ideas of freedom, commerce and federation all quickly became very closely connected. Commerce and productivity were seen to be best encouraged by personal freedom within a republic, which itself had to be free to engage properly in commerce.¹ Sallust and Machiavelli had long ago established this link maintaining that, without a jealous king to sustain, citizens were free to pursue the common good.² Unfortunately, this salutary effect was soon overwhelmed by the pursuit of personal gain and glory, which ended in a renewed tyranny of the individual. This was particularly manifest in the example of Lucius Sulla, whose oversized army, afforded by and drunk on the proceeds of foreign conquest, returned to subjugate Rome.³ Freedom and empire were not altogether, therefore, a stable coupling. As imperial domination crumbled, the links between centre and periphery had to be based instead on 'loyalties sustained by a common cultural identity and a common purpose'.⁴

However, though British schemes for free ports would seem to have embraced these principles, they nevertheless continued to rely on a certain assumption of the primacy of the metropolitan economy. The most important scheme for a free port system in the Caribbean was that penned by John Huske, formally a Boston merchant and the MP who eventually brought the bill.⁵ Here he echoed the notion already put forward by Stephen Hopkins that the North American colonies required access to foreign colonial sugar markets in order to pay for their basic dependence on British goods. In fact, he argued,

there is not a period since the establishment of the Northern Colonies in which they would not have demanded much more [British goods] than they have done, could they have found out ways to have paid for such demand.⁶

¹ Pagden, *Lords of all the Worlds*, p. 191.

² Q. Skinner, *Liberty before Liberalism* (Cambridge, 1998), p. 62.

³ *Ibid*, pp. 64-5.

⁴ Pagden, *Lords of all the Worlds*, p. 191.

⁵ Armytage, *The Free Port System*, 37; Basye, *The Lords Commissioners*, p. 153.

⁶ Add Mss 33030, f. 318: 'Mr Huske's Scheme for Free Ports in America', undated.

This was also an acceptance of the economic system as described by Pownall, where the production oriented metropole sold goods to a captive market, which funded this more or less one-way consumption through independent economic activity within its own sphere of operations: the Caribbean. The key point was that the 'Interest of England & Her Colonies [were] one'.¹ However, this was because the wealth generated by essentially independent colonial interests was supposedly transferred back to the centre in exchange for manufactures. It was the expected returns that made a system of two or more separate economic identities and interests within one empire an acceptable prospect to the metropole, and which justified free trade.

Later, for Josiah Tucker it was not even essential that the metropole and colonies should remain connected by their 'imaginary Tie of an Identity of Government'.² He argued that an independent America could remain a market for British goods, 'because it is evident, that the Colonies could not purchase Goods at a cheaper rate at any other *European Market*'.³ Thanks to smuggling, Tucker argued, the American colonies enjoyed a free trade already.⁴ It was only Britain's prowess in manufacture and navigation that granted the centre a market in its colonies at all. Tucker conceived of an independent America where, nevertheless, a colonial situation – one where the metropole exploited the enterprise of its dependents – would persist even under a free trade arrangement.

The act was rushed through Parliament in the dying days of the Rockingham ministry, though much deliberation took place outside Parliament. In fact a preliminary agreement between North American and West Indian merchant groups had been signed in the King's Arms

¹ D. de Berdt (London agent of the Massachusetts House of Representatives, from November 1765 to April 1770) to William Smith, dated March 1766 in *Publications of the Colonial Society of Massachusetts*, 13 (1912), p. 314.

² J. Tucker, 'Four Tracts, Together with two Sermons, on Political and Commercial Subjects' [1774] in *The Collected Works of Josiah Tucker* (London, 1993), II, p. 209.

³ *Ibid*, pp. 198-9.

⁴ *Ibid*, p. 200.

Tavern on March 10th 1766.¹ The West Indian interest agreed to the free port compromise, as the planters themselves were eager to allow Spanish vessels loaded with bullion into West Indian ports.² Even then the agreement read that 'the Freeport at Dominica for Goods of foreign American Growth etc.' was 'to be proposed for consideration but not absolutely determined whether to pass it or not this Session'.³ Free trade, self-interest and the stability of the colonies were apparently not the irresistible forces of nature that pamphleteers and others tried to portray, and the West Indian planters remained uncertain about surrendering their claim to monopoly.

Colonial freedom to trade with foreigners was also increasingly an issue for the French metropole. Cheney has highlighted in particular the commercial freedom under British rule which some French West Indians, particularly the planters of Guadeloupe under Dalrymple, enjoyed during the Seven Years' War. Not only had the planters experienced freer trade, but they had also witnessed the failure of the centre to provide protection from the enemy.⁴ This spell of British rule and the new and cherished trading links which accompanied it, was apparently a period of 'treason or benevolent neutrality' on the part of the planters.⁵ After the war, the commercial or economic bodies on the islands, which had taken on new importance during the occupation, were reproached for their collaboration with the enemy and some were dissolved.⁶

The economic independence of the islands was clearly a matter of concern for the metropole. After the war even the cultivation of manioc crops on the part of slaves in Guadeloupe came in for official censure.⁷

¹ Armytage, *The Free Port System*, p. 42.

² Ibid, pp. 31-2.

³ Add Mss 33030, f. 243: 'Agreement of the West Indian Committee. Endorsed by House of Commons, May 8th 1766'. This noncommittal appendage was, however, omitted in the fair copy, Add Mss 33030, f. 245.

⁴ Cheney, *Revolutionary Commerce*, p. 177.

⁵ S.L. Stein, *The French Slave Trade in the Eighteenth Century* (Madison, 1979), p. 31.

⁶ Banks, *Chasing Empire*, pp. 207-8.

⁷ ANOM, FM C7a27: 'M. Moissac rend Compte a Monsieur par sa Lettre du 28. Mai dernier de la Tournée qu'il a faite dans toute la Colonie', dated 8th August 1766.

The *Ministre de la Marine* condemned the practice of giving slaves time on Saturdays away from sugar production for this purpose on the grounds that it might lead to slave-rebellion. Evidently the link between self-sufficiency and rebellion was not lost on the metropolitan authority.

French colonials, including governors, however, often looked upon and portrayed foreign trade as something of a vital lifeline. The controversial *créole* observer, Hilliard d'Auberteuil, even claimed that the survival and war effort of the island of Saint-Domingue, which was not occupied by British forces during the war, had depended on contraband grain. For 'it was on the flour landed by Dutch and English ships that the soldiers were fed as long as the war lasted'.¹ In this way, d'Auberteuil implied that grain could be secured from other sources apart from France, without compromising the loyalty of the island population.

Financially, the crown's commitment to colonial subjects was also evidently less than credible. In the course of the Seven Years' War, the crown failed to honour over half of its debt issued in Canadian bills of exchange, ultimately paying only 37,607,000 *livres* of the 90 million it owed. The costs of warfare in the region had spiralled out of control. Not only had the government to pay for the troops and their costs, but this was also compounded by the increasing costs of shipping in wartime conditions and inflation of the bills due to the crown's less than perfect track record of redeeming them. However, Jean-Francis Boshier shows that the authoritarian apparatus of state was employed to discredit both the creditors and the debt itself, as prominent Canadian officials were accused and condemned for corruption.²

¹ H. d'Auberteuil, *Considérations sur l'État Présent de la Colonie Française de Saint-Domingue* (Paris, 1776), I, p. 285.

² J. F. Boshier, 'The French Government's Motives in the Affaire du Canada, 1761-1763', *English Historical Review*, 96:378 (1981), pp. 73-8.

With the final loss of Canada, the French subjects of the West Indies had more of a case than ever before against the notion that French and inter-colonial trade alone could provide for their every need. This was especially plain to see when it came to cod. Cod had long been a controversial commodity, and after the Seven Years' War, foreign cod had briefly been allowed into the colonies.¹ The post-war Intendant of Guadeloupe, Jean-Louis-Honoré d'Hesmivy, baron de Moissac, commented on the trade returns, observing pointedly in March 1766 that 'the French merchants have not sent a single quintal of cod in the last three months, and yet the English have shipped 6,557 quintals here'.² Throughout the period there were initiatives to protect the cod trade, which was seen as a source of French wealth, but also as a way of nurturing the French navy. However, the French cod trade, like the grain trade, was somewhat out of its depth when it came to providing for the colonies in the Antilles. In spite of a bounty scheme, France simply did not have the resources available in that region to feed the growing demand for cod there.³

Moreover, this was not the only commodity for which the colonies wanted. In his letters, Moissac also urgently requested more shipments of salt beef and flour, apparently without much success, and later he complained that

the commerce of France has almost entirely abandoned the colony, vital supplies are entirely lacking; flour and salted beef are at excessive prices; foreign cod is very rare and the bakeries are closing... if some French ships do not arrive soon we will be obliged to turn to foreigners.⁴

¹ Tarrade, *Commerce Colonial*, I, p. 288.

² ANOM, FM C7a27: 'Extrait de la Lettre écrit à Monsieur par M. de Moissac', dated 8th March, 1766.

³ J.-F. Brière, *La Pêche Française*, pp. 247-259.

⁴ ANOM, FM C7a27, f. 115: 'Extrait de la Lettre écrit à Monsieur par M. de Moissac' dated 7th March, 1766; ANOM, FM C7a27: 'M. Moissac rend Compte', dated 8th August 1766.

In spite of this, it seems that after the war the French metropole had been making renewed efforts to supply its colonies specifically with flour. The post-war period apparently saw an increase in French exports of wheat flour to the colonies: where in 1750 flour had made up just 5.7 per cent of the value of French cargoes, in 1765 this figure reached 12.1 per cent and hovered around this level for the next three years, in spite of metropolitan shortage at that time.¹ In addition, more precautions were taken to provide stocks of flour for the King's cache on Guadeloupe and to improve their shelf life by tarring the barrels or mixing their contents with salt.² These supplies were supposed to support colonial resistance in wartime, removing the need for the colonists to resort to foreign grain.

Meanwhile, shortly after the war and the loss of Canada, the then Minister of Foreign affairs, César Gabriel de Choiseul, duc de Praslin, orchestrated a new attempt to form a colony at Guiana. This ended in disaster, with the loss of more than fourteen thousand lives and almost thirty million *livres*.³ This failure proved all the more injurious when further catastrophe, in the form of a severe hurricane, struck the colony of Martinique. This time, with no viable alternative, the authorities of the island were forced to seek foreign assistance, particularly for supplies of flour and biscuit.⁴ When relief was not forthcoming from France, the island authorities spared no criticism in their letters:

¹ ANOM, FM C7a16: 'État des Bâtiments Marchands arrivés de France à la Guadeloupe pendant l'Année 1750 et des Marchandises et Denrées qu'ils y ont apportés'; ANOM, FM C7a25: 'État Général du Commerce de la Guadeloupe pendant l'Année 1765'; ANOM, FM C7a27: 'État Général du Commerce de la Guadeloupe pendant l'Année 1766'; ANOM, FM C7a28: 'État Général du Commerce de la Guadeloupe pendant l'Année 1767'; ANOM, FM C7a29: 'Etat Général du Commerce à la Guadeloupe pendant l'Année 1768'.

² ANOM, FM C7a27, f. 138: 'Extrait de la Lettre écrit à Monsieur par M. de Moissac', dated 20th February 1766.

³ J.R. Hyles, *Guiana and the Shadows of Empire* (Lanham, 2014), p. 57.

⁴ ANOM, FM C8a 68, f. 57: 'Ordonnance de MM. d'Ennery et de Peynier portant Permission, à la Suite de l'Ouragan du 13 Août, d'Introduire à la Martinique de la Farine et des Biscuits d'origine Étrangère'.

Four months passed, after the writing of our last letter, without a single French ship landing here; those which later arrived in succession had so little flour in their cargoes, that the colony could not feel the benefit of it.¹

Tarrade points out that this lack of support was hardly exceptional, and argues that it was the genuine needs of the colonists which led to something of a turning point in metropolitan policy.² However, when in the Summer of 1767 the *exclusif mitigé* came into being under Praslin, it was essentially a compromise, which allowed the colonies to import certain foreign goods in exchange for rum, syrups and imported French manufactures. In fact, trade was still highly restricted and had to be conducted at the two newly established French entrepôts of Caréage on Sainte-Lucie and Môle Saint-Nicolas on Saint-Domingue.

Though these ports now bore some resemblance to the Dutch and British free ports, they were not known by the equivalent French term, the *port franc*. In fact, Montesquieu had indicated that though free ports could work for republics, in extravagant monarchical societies like France they were 'opposite to reason; for they could have no other effect than to free [the enjoyment of] luxury from the weight of taxes'.³ Duties and regulations remained the order of the day.

The new law was accompanied by two further pieces of legislation, one which removed several of the privileges of the *Compagnie des Indes*, and another which encouraged the French Atlantic cod trade. Where the first law which established the free-ports and the new system of *l'exclusif mitigé* had been a concession to the colonies, these two other laws passed on the same day were strongly in the favour of the metropole.⁴ The periphery therefore still did not gain an equal footing

¹ANOM, FM C8a 68, f. 286: Letter from Ennery and Peynier, Governor and Intendant of the Windward Iles to Praslin, dated 8th May 1766.

² Tarrade, *Commerce Colonial*, I, p. 310.

³ Montesquieu, *Esprit des Lois*, II, p. 10.

⁴ Tarrade, *Commerce Colonial*, I, pp. 320-2.

with the centre, and the 'rights of the colonies to prosperity'¹ were far from absolute.

At its base, *l'exclusif mitigé*, rather than a declaration of colonial rights, was an acknowledgement of French shortcomings. The wording of the preamble to the new regulation is interesting, because it explicitly admitted to the incapacity of the French metropole to provide everything its colonies could need. Thus it read:

The French islands and colonies form the most important branch of the commerce of the kingdom; but they cannot be truly useful except by the prohibition of foreign trade and shipping on the aforementioned islands and colonies... it has nevertheless become indispensable to procure for these colonies the means of having certain merchandise of the first necessity, which the commerce of France cannot provide for them; and to open up several commodities which are useless to that same commerce.²

However, the catalogue of merchandise which the French commerce could not provide, and which colonials were to procure from foreigners, was very limited. The new legislation restricted foreign purchases to livestock; skins; furs; leather; tar; and wood.³ Foreign grain and flour did not, therefore, number amongst the permissible goods. If the French government was prepared to admit that there were some items that it could not supply for its colonies, it was nevertheless implicitly upholding its exclusive right and reasserting its alleged capacity to supply all other commodities. This legislation placed grain together with cod, salt-beef and slaves within the metropole's sphere of competence, revealing the metropolitan vision of the role of France's economy within a global system.

¹ G. Chaussinand-Nogaret, *Choiseul (1719-1785)* (Paris, 1998), pp. 212-3.

² Reprinted in M.L.E. Moreau De Saint Méry, *Loix et Constitutions des Colonies Françaises de l'Amérique sous le Vent* (Paris, 1784), V, p. 121.

³ *Ibid*, p. 122.

Conclusion

This period apparently saw the gradual relaxation of economic and commercial regulation of the British and French colonies. In the British case, the economic role of the colonies was indeed somewhat redefined. Here the shift from the Molasses Act of 1733 to the Free Port legislation enacted in 1766 would seem to represent the extension of British rights to the colonies and the inclusion of North America within that sphere of economic freedom.

However, contemporary depictions actually portrayed the new freedom as a redefinition and separation of the economic roles and identity within the empire. Where previously colonies were basically expected to channel all of their resources directly to the metropole, now they were offered some independence to engage in their own transactions, so long as they ultimately relayed the wealth generated in this way back to Britain. The common cause that united them, the republican commitment to the increase of the commonwealth, was left more flimsy by the realisation of individual rights and the resultant divergence of their perceived economic culture.

The relaxation of the rules regarding trade particularly between the North American colonies and the French Caribbean was the result of a new importance placed on relations with the thirteen colonies in the face of the first inklings of rebellion, together with agreements between the warring merchant factions of North America and the West Indies. However, an altered conception of the role of the metropole in colonial and global trade generally was also coming into play. This conception saw the centre as a strong and competent manufacturing hub, which was supported by economically independent cash-generating satellites. Representatives of the colonies had argued that their survival depended on an exchange based economy. Where a production and manufacturing based economy could maintain the British metropole, participating exclusively in the same could only serve to drain

plantations like Rhode Island. In the British metropole, it was finally decided to leave the colonies to their 'natural state',¹ which, in a sense, was understood as being more like that of the commercial Dutch than the industrious British.

Meanwhile, the home market and the carrying trade remained protected from foreign importers, as, no matter its origins or destination, molasses still had to be imported into Britain on British ships, paying the appropriate duties. Likewise, merchants were obliged only to offer certain goods, especially British manufactures, in exchange for foreign rum and molasses.² Free trade in some markets and industries was therefore underpinned by a confidence in the restriction of others. These restrictions tended still to protect the chosen competencies of the centre.

The French seem to have feared even more the notion of free trade for the colonies than the British. The loyalty of the islands of Guadeloupe and Martinique had been tested in the Seven Years' War, and the results were not altogether encouraging to the metropole, which thereafter made efforts to preserve restrictions. Throughout this period colonials had treated certain goods, particularly flour, cod and salted meats, with special trepidation, indicating the perceived importance of such items to the metropole. Ultimately the French government insisted on being the sole supplier of these things, in spite of relaxing restrictions on other commodities. This highlights again the notion that the economic regulation of the colonies strongly reflected the imagined strengths and therefore identity of the metropolitan economies. In the French case, there was evidently less faith in the national manufacturing capacity, but a strong belief in France's agricultural and cod-fishing competence.

The law-makers of Britain and France, therefore, were compiling detailed estimations of the economic strengths and weaknesses of their

¹ Pownall, *Administration*, p. 7.

² Armytage, *The Free Port System*, p. 2.

respective nations. These tended to tie in with the old economic stereotypes of a commercial Dutch, industrious British and agricultural French national character. However, in the British case, room for specialisation was developing, so that various economic characteristics and identities within the empire existed in different spheres of activity, without necessarily challenging fellowship of the nation overall. Nevertheless, the accustomed prioritisation of the metropole remained intact, and it was the good of the centre in both the British and the French case which seemed to constitute the 'national good'. This was an ideal towards which colonial subjects were expected to work, even when they were released from some traditional economic constraints. The national good, therefore, did not seem to reside in parts of these empires or their people, but in metropolitan gain. What this could perhaps ultimately engender was the exclusion of external and diverging enterprises from a redefinition of national belonging.

Chapter 4: Subjects, Mercantilist Morality and the Case for Regulation

Introduction

The challenge which national consolidation posed to old frameworks, particularly in times of crisis, was not always welcome. Consolidation could interfere with alternative coping systems and cause conflicts of *interest*, a term which was developing new meanings in the eighteenth century. Economic writers were left to cope intellectually with an institutional shift from a paternal system of social relations to a capitalist one, as well as with a conceptual shift wherein ambition for private economic gain began to be admired over the older values of individual honour and virtue.¹

Sometimes the course of economic thought in this period is presented as a smooth and unhindered transition into modernity. Historians of economics have tended to elevate certain authors from their context, placing them into an intellectual procession.² Alternative strands of thought meanwhile, are disinherited. Therefore Jean-Claude Perrot suggests that though the efforts of J.J. Spengler and J.A. Schumpeter purport to be '*history*' they only amount to a '*genealogy of recent analyses*'.³ Intellectual history is supposed to include context as well as lineage.

Some of the disinherited have been accommodated under the all-embracing title of mercantilism. However, part of the problem with the term, as we shall see, is that it can serve to merge economic thinkers

¹ A.O. Hirschman, *The Passions and the Interests* (Princeton, 1977), p. 42; J.G.A. Pocock, *Virtue, Commerce, and History* (Cambridge, 1985), p. 69.

² E. Rothschild, *Economic Sentiments* (Cambridge, MA and London, 2001), p. 41.

³ J.-C. Perrot, *Une Histoire Intellectuelle de l'Économie Politique* (Paris, 1992), p. 8.

into schools or priesthoods, in a way that they themselves would have considered sacrilegious.¹ This chapter considers two such authors, Sir James Steuart (1713-1780) and Jacques Necker (1732-1804), and their ambivalence towards the idea of *liberty* in the grain trade and otherwise.

Both ultimately rejected the idea of a free grain trade, arguing instead that national limitations be imposed. This chapter explores their thoughts about the role of the state in the nation, and their appraisal of the value of civic freedom in respect of the supposed security of subjugation. It is especially concerned with their attempts to find a way to balance and even control the private interests of individuals, in order to establish and promote a national interest.

The first section takes on the idea of *mercantilism* directly, and aims to locate Steuart and Necker within the various interpretations of the term. It disputes the applicability of the concept, given the two authors' strong views on systems of thought. Both Necker and Steuart disapproved of and criticised the idea of excessively systematic thought in relation to their subject, political economy. This is important because, as outsiders and foreigners in the countries in which they came to reside, they argued that every nation had to be treated as an individual case.

This led to policy suggestions with interesting implications for the idea of national belonging, which are explored in the second section. At the same time, this section begins to open up the idea of the nation and the definitions of the national good which Steuart and Necker offered. It examines the role of the statesman that they outlined in securing it. The final section further develops the character of this statesman, by examining the depictions rendered by Steuart, Necker and a third author, Simon-Nicolas Henri Linguet (1736-1794), of the social changes

¹ A.V. Judges, 'The Idea of a Mercantile State', in D.C. Coleman (ed.), *Revisions in Mercantilism* (London, 1969), p. 35.

which followed the decline of classical slavery and feudalism. Both Steuart and Necker exhibited some nostalgia for the old system of feudal jurisdiction, even while they warranted – and, in Necker’s case, participated in – the dismantling of old structures in favour of an integrated nation. This meant that they had to cope with the decline of old parochial systems of social relations and welfare. Their endeavours to amalgamate the dislocated poor into a centralised state led them to discuss ideas of liberty, citizenship and subjecthood.

The chapter concludes that the ideas of Steuart and Necker about state intervention in the grain trade were owing to the reciprocal bonds which they perceived in society. For Steuart, these bonds were basically economic, and to be found in the self-interest of luxury as well as essential consumption. Meanwhile, for Necker, they were forged in the political relationship between king and subject. However, in both cases, the statesman was responsible for maintaining economic and hence political stability. For this reason, the nation had to have its limits, and so too did the autonomy of those who depended upon the state for their survival.

Though the two authors considered in this chapter certainly shared attitudes and some influences, particularly the likes of Cantillon and Montesquieu, and clearly were writing in opposition to some of the same contemporary trends in economic thought, they do not seem to have been profoundly influenced by one another. Though Steuart’s *Inquiry into the Principles of Political Œconomy* was originally published in 1767, its journey across the Channel was somewhat laboured, and the work was not properly ‘discovered’ in France until the Revolution.¹ Of course, Necker may have perused its pages in English, as his friend and antagonist, Morellet, apparently did.²

¹ M. Albertone, ‘Steuart’s Difficult Reception in France’ in R. Tortajada (ed.), *The Economics of James Steuart* (London, 1999), p. 4.

² H.C. Clark, *Compass of Society* (London, 2007), p. 318.

By comparison, Necker's *Sur la Législation et le Commerce des Grains*, was promptly translated into English in 1776 just a year after original publication.¹ However, its appearance in English was accompanied the same year by Adam Smith's *Wealth of Nations*, and by 1777, a disaffected Steuart was turning from political economy.² Perhaps the two authors knew of one another, but it was in keeping with their alleged convictions that they tried, ostensibly at least, to keep their work their own.

The Mercantile and other Systems in Economic Thought

According to Gustav Schmoller, who coined the new term, *mercantilism* means 'state making – not state making in a narrow sense, but state making and national-economy making at the same time'.³ Tariffs and protectionist laws were merely the practical forms that the subjugation of economic issues to a political vision took.⁴ The vision in question was that of the nation state. This required a recalibration of the economy, which would transform commercial activity from a local to a national enterprise. The vision was not without opposition from towns, districts, various estates, corporations, and others, and therefore mercantilism took the form of a conscious programme of state building.

The process therefore had to do with building national sentiment, recalibrating the meaning as well as the apparatus of the economy. Schmoller emphasised the importance of the idea of a 'national interest', braced against foreign competition, in his system. 'General postulates', he suggested, functioned as 'rallying points' for public opinion, and served to furnish a sense of 'collective interests'.⁵ Ultimately, he argued, 'the feeling and recognition of economic

¹ J. Necker, *On the Legislation and the Commerce of Corn* (London, 1776).

² A. Skinner, 'Introduction: Biographical' in J. Steuart, *An Inquiry into the Principles of Political Economy*, ed. A. Skinner (Edinburgh, 1998), I, p. lxii.

³ G. Schmoller, *The Mercantile System and its Historical Significance* (New York, 1896), p. 50.

⁴ *Ibid*, p. 51.

⁵ *Ibid*, p. 59.

solidarity, in regard alike to those within and those without, necessarily created at the same time a corporate egoism'.¹ Part of the task of Schmoller's mercantilism, therefore, was creating an economic solidarity of interests on a national level.

However, since Schmoller, the term *mercantilism* has developed a negative reputation and new meanings. The idea of mercantilism as coherent and calculated procedure on the part of statesmen has now been all but entirely discredited. Joyce Oldham Appleby, Charles Wilson and Barry Supple all imply that what is now known as mercantilism was by no means systematic in its day, when actually it was a string of separate but conventional beliefs or reactions to a spate of individual but similar problems.² Thus Supple wrote that 'if these men had their faults then they are largely those of any group desperately involved in an economic crisis. The whole tenor of what has come to be known as mercantilist literature owes not a little to this involvement'.³ According to this train of thought, mercantilism is a fallacy and an anachronism: the semblance of a coordinated system is only perceivable in hindsight, even if contemporary approaches were dictated by convention. Mercantilism itself became little more than the economics of depression.⁴

To this day the term remains in use, only now it can be used to signify anything from a strict ideology; to a prominent *Weltanschauung* of the early modern period; to something which never really existed and is simply part of the historian's 'equipment' for categorising and handling features of the past.⁵ It can even sometimes be used in periodization to denote an era of close international competition, especially in

¹ Ibid, p. 77.

² D.C. Coleman, 'Mercantilism Revisited', *HJ*, 23:4 (1980), pp. 773-4; J.O. Appleby, *Economic Thought and Ideology in Seventeenth-Century England* (Princeton, 1978), pp. 5-6; C. Wilson, *England's Apprenticeship, 1603-1763* (London, 1965), p. 57.

³ B.E. Supple, *Commercial Crisis and Change in England* (Cambridge, 1959), p. 221.

⁴ D. Vickers, *Studies in the Theory of Money, 1690-1776* (Philadelphia, 1959), p. 311.

⁵ A. Finkelstein, *Harmony and the Balance* (Michigan, 2000), p. 251; quote from Judges, 'The Idea of a Mercantile State', p. 55.

commerce and supported by government policies.¹ Though the term has been exposed as ‘an incoherent frame of analysis’ it still lives on as a way of describing the intellectual milieu of the early period in the field that became economics.² It is so vague, and yet versatile, that it seemingly cannot be killed, at least not permanently.

The opportunity to revise the concept has led to an impulse on the part of some historians to rescue their pet early-modern economic writers from being counted among this elusive ‘priesthood’.³ For instance, several historians have sought to redefine the economics of Necker, who had formerly been accused of being a mercantilist. Already in 1847, in a reprint of Necker’s *Sur la Législation et le Commerce de Grains*, editors Gustave de Molinari and Eugène Daire typified the overall intellectual persuasion of the work as ‘nothing other than the mercantile system’, though they did qualify this charitably enough by adding ‘with some variations’. However, they pressed home the point that the ‘protection of manufactures was the obligatory corollary of the system’, which apparently made Necker a mercantilist.⁴

Later, Henri Grange reassigned Necker far more innocuously as a primitive socialist and intellectual predecessor of Marx, drawing on his apparent attention to class struggle and appreciation for the predicament of the worker.⁵ Likewise Joseph Spengler opted to describe both Necker and the French writer, Linguet, as pre-Marxist, because of their attitudes to property. However, he ignored or avoided the other term, despite the fact that both of these French writers have been characterised as *mercantilists* in the Colbertian tradition.⁶ Meanwhile, Robert Harris came to the conclusion that Necker cannot be properly accommodated under the denomination of either mercantilist

¹ D. Ormrod, *The Rise of Commercial Empires* (Cambridge, 2003), p. 6.

² P.J. Stern and C. Wennerlind, ‘Introduction’ in idem (eds.), *Mercantilism Reimagined* (New York, 2014), p. 3.

³ Judges, ‘The Idea of a Mercantile State’, p. 35.

⁴ G. de Molinari and E. Daire (eds.), *Mélanges d’Économie Politique* (Paris, 1847), p. 225, n. 1.

⁵ R.D. Harris, *Necker: Reform Statesman of the Ancien Régime* (London, 1979), p. 55.

⁶ J.J. Spengler, *French Predecessors of Malthus* (New York, 1965), p. 323.

or proto-socialist. Instead, he elected to consider Necker as a pragmatist whose most important influence was the economics of the physiocrats, which he took such extensive pains to challenge.¹

The practice of reclassifying the author persists even in more recent literature and in light of further revisions or rehabilitations of the term mercantilism. Thus Léonard Burnand basically justifies Necker's interventionist stance on grain, arguing that it did not stem from a mercantilist emphasis on national power or grandeur, but from a humanitarian concern for assuring the basic needs of the French population.² Many of the policies that Necker endorsed and implemented might be characterised as mercantilist because of their protectionist slant. However, in Burnand's analysis, Necker's apparent humanitarian goals save the man himself from this supposed slur.

Certainly all of this has to do with dismantling a term which has in many ways become too vague as to serve a useful purpose. Such lumping can result in an oversimplification that deprives our sense of the past of the detail it deserves. This is why Nancy Koehn complains that the deep economic understanding demonstrated by another key subject of this chapter, James Steuart, and others, has been overlooked by historians too keen to 'label all of Adam Smith's predecessors as mercantilists'.³

As with Necker, Steuart's work has undergone multiple reappraisals. Initially typified as a mercantilist, Steuart was later re-categorised in the light of the Keynesian Revolution as something like a classical liberal.⁴ This rediscovery particularly after 1936 saw Steuart's writings, which had formerly been described as 'unfortunate',⁵ taken seriously for perhaps the first time since Adam Smith somewhat cruelly chose to

¹ Harris, *Necker*, p. 56.

² L. Burnand, *Les Pamphlets contre Necker* (Paris, 2009), p. 28.

³ N.F. Koehn, *The Power of Commerce* (Ithaca, 1994), p. 73.

⁴ G.M. Anderson and R.D. Tollison, 'Sir James Steuart as the Apotheosis of Mercantilism', *Southern Economic Journal*, 51:2 (1984), p. 456.

⁵ J.K. Ingram, *History of Political Economy* (Edinburgh, 1888), p. 86.

ignore them entirely in *Wealth of Nations*.¹ John Maynard Keynes stated outright that he wished to 'do justice to schools of thought which the classicals have treated as imbecile for the last hundred years'.² Still looking upon mercantilism as a school, Keynes restored the possibility of rationality in the works of the authors who fell under the title, and, in a way, added himself to their ranks as a long-lost heir to the tradition. Unlike Necker therefore, Steuart remained typified as a mercantilist, only the system to which he belonged was no longer necessarily flawed.

Whether Steuart is diagnosed with it or not, evidently mercantilism had also therefore become synonymous with being wrong or backward in respect to economics, in just the way that Adam Smith originally envisioned this supposedly counterproductive system. Even Eli Heckscher wrote of his subject that 'there are no grounds whatsoever for supposing that the mercantilist writers constructed their system... out of any knowledge of reality however derived'.³ Correction and replacement of misguided doctrine, it has been suggested, was in fact an important element of the genesis of *systems* and *isms* as rhetorical devices and of the etymology of *ism* especially.⁴ In this sense, the term has become more scandalous libel than analytical label.

The Keynesian revolution went some way amongst economists to take the sting out of the term. However, Ronald Meek has suggested that these sorts of reinterpretations tend to take place '*ex post* rather than *ex ante*', and that the rehabilitation acts almost as a sort of justification or corroboration of a new theory *post factum*.⁵ His article exposes the possible flaw with such rehabilitations, in the sense that they are prone to take certain authors out of context and backdate *progress* in economic thought, making the whole process seem a teleological

¹ D. Winch, 'Scottish Political Economy' in M. Goldie and R. Wokler (eds.), *The Cambridge History of Eighteenth-Century Political Thought* (Cambridge, 2006), p. 445.

² J.M. Keynes to R.F. Harrod, 27th August 1935 in *The Collected Writings, XIII: The General Theory and After. Part 1: Preparation*, ed. D. Moggridge (London, 1973), p. 552.

³ E. Heckscher, *Mercantilism* (London, 1955), II, p. 347.

⁴ H.M. Hopfl, 'Isms', *British Journal of Political Science*, 13:1 (1983), p. 8.

⁵ R.L. Meek, 'The Rehabilitation of Sir James Steuart' in D. Mair (ed.), *The Scottish Contribution to Modern Economic Thought* (Aberdeen, 1990), p. 221.

procession towards enlightenment.¹ Again, therefore, mercantilism was in danger of becoming a misrepresentative and even more anachronistic term, without even having lost the vague and lumping quality which makes it a blunt and clumsy tool eternally to hand, but never that helpful.

Reinterpretations of the one author and school, meanwhile, may also have the knock-on effect of inspiring a reassessment of whatever came before or followed. At the same time as Steuart made his comeback, Smith's work also underwent a reappraisal. This was suddenly portrayed as less than ground breaking, and it was Steuart who was now the real stick in the mud. For example, in Meek's account, Smith's theory merely 'corresponded better with the *zeitgeist* of his time'. By comparison, Steuart's mercantilist approach had 'had its day'.² Both Steuart and Smith therefore are portrayed here as belonging to and defining one of two consecutive movements or schools.

All of this is highly ironic, given the fact that the two *mercantilists* in question considered their own work relatively original and free of systematic thought. Necker, for example, was extremely critical of those whom he believed would approach the issue of political economy by espousing general rules. These 'charlatans', ignorant of the finer points of political economy, offered one or the other of 'the two extremes, sustained prohibition & liberty [*prohibition & liberté constantes*]'.³ This was at best lazy administration, on the part of those who were unable or unwilling to intercede with the constant attention and intervention which the economy really needed.⁴ Necker used a medical analogy here, probably aimed at Quesnay, a physician by training, but which was echoed in remarkably similar terms by Adam Smith: if the economic

¹ Ibid, p. 228.

² Ibid, p. 223.

³ J. Necker, *Sur la Législation et le Commerce des Grains* (Paris, 1775), II, p. 83.

⁴ Ibid, pp. 81-3.

woes of the nation were a range of maladies attacking that body, then a simple cure-all was unlikely to help.¹

Necker applied the term 'system' to both approaches for managing the grain trade, and pointed out that when each was implemented to the extreme, it failed. 'Each party', he wrote, 'can easily gather anecdotes amenable to the system which they support, or at least contrary to the one they are attacking'.² He used terms such as 'liberty' and 'prohibition' to describe systems of policy, but not for the 'parties' or factions who proposed them. This was not unusual. As far as David Todd could discover, the earliest use of the term *protectionniste* was by Frédéric Bastiat in reference to the British Anti-Corn Law League in 1845. He points out that, even by the nineteenth century, advocates of regulation still avoided the term 'protectionist'.³ It remained, therefore, the system rather than its advocates that carried the label. In keeping with this convention, Necker used the idea of *system* in the Smithian manner, to describe a set of policies.

Therefore, Necker's depiction of systems as almost tangible frameworks of legislation differed slightly from that of Jean-François Melon, who had defined them as 'the assembly of several propositions bound together, of which the consequences tend to establish a truth or opinion'.⁴ This interpretation bore greater resemblance to a doctrinal approach, rather than, as Necker had it, the results of doctrine or belief in the form of concrete policy. Yet at the same time, Necker actually attributed adherence to these systems to an undue faith in their basis in systemic assumptions of how the world functioned. In other words, to an excessive and perhaps uncritical reliance on ideas apparently deduced from logic and not based on experience. Arnault Skornicki has even gone as far as to suggest that Necker considered his physiocrat

¹ Cf. A. Smith, *An Inquiry into the Nature and Causes of the Wealth of Nations*, ed. R.H. Campbell, A.S. Skinner, and W.B. Todd (Oxford, 1976), IV.ix.38.

² Necker, *Sur la Législation*, I, pp. 228-9.

³ D. Todd, *Free Trade and its Enemies in France* (Cambridge, 2015), p. 4.

⁴ J.F. Melon, *Essai Politique sur le Commerce* [1734], (Bordeaux, 1736 edn.), p. 358.

opponents as 'prisoners of the model of rational economic interest'.¹ Necker reproached them for ignoring the vital role which he continued to assume that passion played in economic behaviour, particularly that of the crowd.

Necker's *Sur la Législation et le Commerce des Grains* was first published in the spring of 1775. Its publication coincided with the spate of riots in France known from that time onwards as the *Guerre des Farines*. The chaos which ensued ended both Anne-Robert-Jacques Turgot's policy of a free grain trade between 1774 and 1775, and his career as Minister of Finance. In general, the book accused Turgot, and those of the physiocratic persuasion, of applying an overly simplistic and systematic solution to what Necker saw as the constantly shifting terrain of the grain trade.²

Generally Necker's approach to the physiocrats and their doctrine was relatively respectful. He claimed deferentially that 'it is on principles absolutely contrary to those which I advance, which the famous calculations of net product, so famous in the works of the *économistes* are founded... [however] we cannot applaud enough the pure and well-known zeal of those infinitely honest people, who distinguish themselves by their attachment to those opinions'.³ Though he admired the effort that was put into the theories, what Necker opposed was a tendency to place faith in ideas which did not come from observation and experience, but stemmed from principles which only seemed logical.

Physiocratic systems, usually based on Quesnay's celebrated *Tableau Économique*, ingenious as they seemed, relied, he thought, on certain miscalculations and fallacious deductive reasoning. The *Tableau* was an illustration of the net product theory, that all surplus came from

¹ A. Skornicki, *L'Économiste, la Cour et la Patrie* (Paris, 2011), p. 334.

² Harris, *Necker*, p. 67.

³ Necker, *Sur la Législation*, II, p. 103.

agriculture alone, and from there was merely manipulated by artisans, merchants and others.¹ Necker argued, however, that this was just so much misdirection. He complained that the 'internal arithmetic, which makes high prices equate to wealth, is, of all measures the most false and the most deceitful'.²

Véron de Forbonnais, had also criticized the *Tableau Économique* more explicitly, yet in a similar way, for he too used the imagery of deceit to suggest that the system was bogus. He argued that the *Tableau* was itself merely an elaborate construction designed to perpetuate an underlying falsehood.³ Voltaire, Grimm and Mably had also reproached the physiocrats for their unscientific ways.⁴ As Skornicki points out, the frivolous and fictive order posed by physiocratic reasoning could, for a while, be effectively dismissed as simple 'enthusiasm' by proponents of Galilean experimental philosophy. This was the particular standpoint of yet another expat commentator, the Neapolitan, Fernandino Galiani.⁵

Because of their adherence to doctrine, physiocratic writers have been consolidated into a sect or a school, although Loïc Charles and Christine Théré have challenged this notion. Evidently physiocracy is another term which historians have begun to see as in need of unpicking, in order to do justice to the individual thinkers involved.⁶ However, at the time, critical contemporaries of the physiocrats used the theoretical and systematic or derived aspects of their doctrine to detract from their arguments and policies.

¹ H.S. Banzhaf, 'Productive Nature and the Net Product', *History of Political Economy*, 32:3 (2000), p. 547.

² Necker, *Sur la Législation*, II, p. 106.

³ L. Charles, 'The Tableau Économique as Rational Recreation', *History of Political Economy*, 36:3 (2004), p. 456.

⁴ Burnand, *Les Pamphlets*, p. 25.

⁵ Skornicki, *L'Économiste*, pp. 319-20. However, Skornicki adds that authors like Turgot would in turn challenge this assault with a new type of economic thought which was 'not fundamentally a science of observation, but of action and prescription'. *Ibid*, p. 322.

⁶ L. Charles and C. Théré, 'From Versailles to Paris: The Creative Communities of the Physiocratic Movement', *History of Political Economy*, 43:1 (2011), p. 26.

Similarly, in *An Inquiry into the Principals of Political Economy*, James Steuart attacked theories of political economy which he specifically referred to as systems. Using the term in a very similar sense to Melon,¹ and admitting to having assimilated the term from the French, the well-travelled Scotsman wrote that:

These are no more than a chain of contingent consequences, drawn from a few fundamental maxims, adopted, perhaps, rashly. Such systems are mere conceits; they mislead the understanding, and efface the path to truth. An induction is formed, from whence a conclusion, called a principle, is drawn; but this is no sooner done, than the author extends its influence far beyond the limits of the ideas present to his understanding, when he made his deduction.²

Steuart hoped to assemble a series of economic principles, but to avoid falling into what he considered the trap of rushing into oversimplified assumptions or general rules. He also deplored irrelevant arguments caused ultimately, he supposed, only by confusion of terminology.³ Most of all, he maintained that arguments ought not to be believed on the basis of the presumed authority of their progenitor, but rather on the basis of personal experience or evidence.⁴ Therefore, although Steuart aimed to systematise his work so that it formed a coherent body, or a 'regular science', he placed great emphasis, in scientific fashion, on observation and experience.⁵

This meticulous method has been blamed for the convoluted style of the overall work, which seems all the more cumbersome beside Adam

¹ Skinner pointed out the link with Melon's 1736 work in J. Steuart, *An Inquiry into the Principles of Political Economy*, ed. A. Skinner (Edinburgh, 1998 edn.), I, p. 9, n. 8.

² Ibid, p. 9.

³ Ibid.

⁴ Ibid, p. 10.

⁵ Ibid, p. 3; N. Kobayashi, 'On the Method of Sir James Steuart's *Principles of Political Economy*' in R. Tortajada (ed.), *The Economics of James Steuart* (London, 1999), p. 103.

Smith's sleeker model.¹ Yet Steuart's suspicion of systems possibly precluded his investment in such a model. In spite of his labours, ultimately Steuart shied away from presuming to have created a *system* in its entirety. His mission, he claimed, was actually only to reveal a number of evident truths, or 'a succession of principles',² upon which perhaps a system might be developed. Steuart himself was not prepared to make the leap from his supposedly empirical principles to the conjectural models to which he had taken exception. Though he seemed to accept that political economy could be dissected and examined piece by piece to produce something like an anatomy, and that a cure could be offered for certain maladies, like Necker, he did not claim to have concocted an infallible panacea for the ailments of the political and economic system.³

Each author therefore claimed that his work was, as much as possible, free from systematic – or perhaps deductive or conjectural – thought and generalisations, and from a seemingly oversimplified approach to government. As foreigners and onlookers, both were inclined to present observed particulars in preference to the general similarities of human society which others were keen to pronounce.⁴ In this sense, their approach was Baconian in its preference for experience and rejection of axioms and cold Cartesian reason that supposedly guided French political economists in particular.⁵

Each of the books under consideration contained a certain amount of political arithmetic or similar. Necker, for instance, calculated that the annual exports of French grain in the period after 1764 when exportation was permitted amounted roughly to the subsistence of 250,000 people for that year.⁶ Meanwhile, Steuart regularly attempted

¹ A. Skinner, 'Sir James Steuart, *Principles of Political Oeconomy*' in A. Dow and S. Dow (eds.), *A History of Scottish Economic Thought* (London, 2006), p. 79; T. Hutchison, *On Revolutions and Progress in Economic Knowledge* (Cambridge, 1978), p. 143.

² Steuart, *Principles*, I, p. 24.

³ Hopfl, 'Isms', p. 10.

⁴ M. Poovey, *A History of the Modern Fact* (Chicago & London, 1998), p. 225.

⁵ Ibid, p. 98; Rothschild, *Economic Sentiments*, p. 195.

⁶ Necker, *Sur la Législation*, I, p.58.

to explore his topic, especially the demographical elements, by using statistical data, unreliable as it might have been.¹ Sometimes he used quite scanty evidence to make calculations, but he always prioritised it over his own assumptions. For example, in a later edition of his work Steuart used data from Charles Smith's reputable pamphlet to correct an earlier calculation, in which he had used figures from the London papers. He defended the original decision to use the untrustworthy evidence because 'though I felt very strongly the consequences of my own reasoning, I was so far overawed by the force of popular opinion, that I durst not venture to rate either the surplus or the deficiency otherwise than found in the text [of the London papers]'.²

Beyond political arithmetic, the two authors were concerned with information and the way it was gathered and deployed. Steuart, for instance, maintained that merchants were in a position to monopolise useful information and knowledge, but that it was the statesman's role to become equally informed in order to redress the imbalance of knowledge between consumer and supplier.³ Likewise Necker believed that the statesman had to take charge of the market because the social system, with its uneven distribution of property and hence opportunity for study and information, forever precluded the enlightenment of the masses.⁴ In each case, knowledge was an unfair advantage garnered by merchants in the course of their dealings, while the lower classes of people remained in the dark. For these reasons, part of the role of the idealised statesmen, according to both Steuart and Necker, was to intervene on behalf of the uninformed masses. In each depiction, the market could not possibly be a fair and beneficent place, simply because consumers were so vulnerable to exploitation at the hands of merchants possessed of useful commercial knowledge.

¹ J. Hoppit, 'Political Arithmetic in Eighteenth-Century England', *EHR*, 49:3 (1996), p. 520.

² Steuart, *Principles*, I, p. 130, n.

³ H. Clark, 'Grain Trade Information: Economic Conflict and Political Culture under Terray, 1770–1774', *Journal of Modern History*, 76:4 (2004), p. 799.

⁴ Necker, *Sur la Législation*, I, pp. 2–3.

The approach of the two authors to the grain trade, and to political economy generally, was perhaps influenced by certain background characteristics that they shared. Both were foreigners in the nations for which they wrote. As a former Jacobite exile, Steuart encountered some disapprobation regarding his chequered (or plaid?) past and 'Continental notions'.¹ He had begun his studies of political economy while exiled in France. Later he moved his family to Frankfurt am Main, and from there to Tübingen. It was here that he began to write his great *Inquiry into the Principles of Political Œconomy*.² According to Deborah Redman, he became deeply immersed in the intellectual life of the German university town, and his thought was ultimately heavily influenced by Cameralism in addition to French *économie politique*.³

It was only in 1771 that the perceived misdemeanours of Steuart's youth were officially pardoned and he could return permanently to Britain.⁴ Steuart's extensive travels furnished him with a wealth of experience, which manifested itself in a multiplicity of foreign case studies.⁵ He himself, perhaps drawing on Montesquieu, maintained that the experience which he gained on his travels attested to the impartiality of his thought.⁶ Steuart was possibly also influenced by that 'citizen of the world', David Hume, for he too placed emphasis on the manners and customs of a people, in relation to their propensity to spend or save financial resources as a nation.⁷

Necker's path, meanwhile, was somewhat easier, and though he was an expat, he was less of a traveller than Steuart. A commoner and a

¹ D. Winch, 'Adam Smith's enduring Particular Result' in I. Hont and M. Ignatieff (eds.), *Wealth and Virtue* (Cambridge, 1983), p. 268.

² A. Skinner, 'Steuart, Sir James, of Coltness and Westshield, third baronet (1713–1780)', *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography* (Oxford, 2004) [<http://www.oxforddnb.com/view/article/7478>, accessed 21 Sept 2015]

³ D. Redman, 'Sir James Steuart's Statesman Revisited in Light of the Continental Influence', *Scottish Journal of Political Economy*, 43:1 (1996), pp. 50; 59.

⁴ Skinner, 'Steuart, Sir James' [<http://www.oxforddnb.com/view/article/7478>, accessed 5 Nov 2014]

⁵ Skinner, 'Introduction', p. lxvi.

⁶ Redman, 'Steuart's Statesman', p. 49.

⁷ J. Steuart, *An Inquiry into the Principles of Political Œconomy*, ed. A. Skinner (Edinburgh, 1966 edn.), p. 470, n. 1.

Protestant hailing from Geneva, but with Prussian ancestry, Necker's success in the French court was somewhat usual. However, it came only after a long career in banking and a spell in diplomacy.¹ Though he reached high office in 1776, having usurped Turgot through the possibly strategic publication of *Sur la Législation et le Commerce des Grains* in 1775, certain marks of his origins remained. As a Protestant, his presence at the French royal council was officially forbidden, and he was offered the new title of *directeur-général*, though he performed the role normally known as *contrôleur-général*.² Deprived of the authority of this office, he initially found his power checked when his direct subordinates, the Intendants of Finances, ignored his orders. His answer was a programme of consolidation. This included the complete abolition of the venal office of Intendant of Finance, eliminating the uncooperative incumbents.³

Necker's critics, however, also latched onto his obvious status as an outsider, which led them to question his motives. They insisted that, as his inspiration could not have been the patriotic love of the homeland that supposedly drove native statesmen, it had, therefore to be greed and the pursuit of personal enrichment or glory that inspired him.⁴ Although Necker shared his faith with the illustrious former Minister of Finances, Maximilien de Béthune, Duc de Sully, it was Colbert whom he chose to eulogise a few years before taking office, perhaps in an effort to prove his allegiances.⁵

A shared foreign status perhaps explains the preoccupation with national variation in the work of Steuart and Necker. They believed that good political economy had to be tailored to national character. For as we shall see, Steuart concluded that opening ports to allow grain imports could be beneficial in England where agriculture was strong,

¹ L. Burnand, *Necker*, pp. 15-16.

² M. Rapport, *Nationality and Citizenship in Revolutionary France* (Oxford, 2000), p. 32.

³ W. Doyle, *Venality* (Oxford, 1996), p. 137.

⁴ J. Shovlin, *The Political Economy of Virtue* (Ithaca, 2006), p. 147.

⁵ F. Venturi, *The End of the Old Regime in Europe, 1776-1789* (Princeton, NJ & Oxford, 1991), I, p. 342.

but that the same policy could ruin Scotland.¹ Meanwhile Necker concluded exportation was ‘incompatible with the population of France, with its wealth, with its government and with its customs’.²

Labourers and Morality in a System of Nationalism

Before he tackled regulation, Steuart was careful to note that the agricultural surplus of a nation was not simply the combination of individual farmers’ commercial harvest. Actually it was the grain that exceeded the subsistence needs of the entire nation, and ought to be exported if possible. A statesman, he argued, who confounded the agricultural surplus with crops needed for national subsistence could well deprive his citizens of the food they needed to survive.³ However, so long as the distinction was understood, and only that which surpassed the needs of the entire national community left the country, exporting grain could be a useful and profitable enterprise.

On this fundamental point, Necker disagreed. This kind of a surplus, he argued, was symptomatic of an imperfect population.⁴ Like Steuart eight years earlier, and Adam Smith just a year later, Necker took a stadial approach to economic development and growth. Grain exports were normal and desirable in underdeveloped agricultural economies which needed to kick-start their foreign trade.⁵ Even the characteristics of Britain and the Netherlands rendered an entirely free grain trade acceptable, because, he supposed, their coasts were extensive and their populations relatively small.⁶ However, he argued that in a matured economy with an uneven distribution of property like France, the demand caused by concentrated industrial labour, together with the

¹ J. Steuart, ‘Considerations on the Interest of the County of Lanark in Scotland’ [1769] in *The Works Political, Metaphysical & Chronological of Sir James Steuart* [1805] (New York, 1967), V, p. 298.

² Necker, *Sur la Législation*, II, p. 84.

³ J. Steuart, ‘A Dissertation on the Policy of Grain’ [1759] in *The Works Political, Metaphysical & Chronological*, V, p. 354.

⁴ Spengler, *French Predecessors*, p. 332.

⁵ Necker, *Sur la Législation*, I, p. 36.

⁶ *Ibid*, pp. 219-20.

desire on the part of proprietors for new luxury goods, prompted investment and stimulated agriculture without recourse to grain exportation.¹ Increasing the agricultural surplus encouraged industry, which in turn stimulated agriculture, as the two facets of the economy grew interdependent.

Steuart's views on agricultural stimuli were similar: in certain nations, society had moved from a state of simplicity (or subsistence farming) to a state of luxury, as farmers' preference for manufactured goods over leisure drove them to increase productivity.² In an economy where surplus food production was possible, increasing manufacturing was 'the only method (in a free state) of procuring additional food, and of distributing it through the society'.³ It was the reciprocity which desirable manufactured goods ingrained on society that bound it and made it stable. Material interdependencies made for an organised population which could function as a cohesive community.⁴ Like Necker, Steuart proposed that population growth was the cause, and not the result of increased agricultural productivity.⁵ Necker and Steuart therefore remained in agreement that a large and comfortable population was desirable.⁶

Both certainly praised at one time or another the population theory of Colbert.⁷ In fact their approaches to population exhibit strong tendencies towards the nationalistic causes examined by E.S. Furniss. According to Furniss, labourers were seen as profoundly important, because their efforts allowed nations to derive wealth from participating in and dominating international trade. The individual labourer's efforts were a force to be harnessed for a greater good, but

¹ Spengler, *French Predecessors*, p. 39.

² A. Brewer, 'The concept of Growth in Eighteenth-Century Economics', *History of Political Economy*, 27:4 (1995), p. 626.

³ Steuart, *Principles*, I, p. 46.

⁴ *Ibid*, p. 101.

⁵ *Ibid*, p. 134.

⁶ Brewer, 'The Concept of Growth', p. 611; Spengler, *French Predecessors*, p. 324.

⁷ Steuart, *Principles*, I, p. 85; J. Necker, *Éloge de Jean-Baptiste Colbert* (Paris, 1773), p. 21.

individual motives and interests were ignored.¹ Therefore, the exaltation of the role of the labourer did not necessarily translate into calls for remuneration parallel to their apparent national value. However, it did inform a certain ‘mercantilist morality’, which urged that workers should at least be entitled to a basic subsistence.² This explains the distinction between labouring and idle poor in the work of Steuart, Necker and even the ‘pre-Marxian’ Linguet.³

There are, however, some difficulties as to what might constitute national goals. In this brief account of Furniss’ argument, national goals come across as simple jingoism, though in the writing of Steuart and Necker, the issue is far more complex. Necker tended to evoke a social contract type arrangement, where understandings of happiness, unique to each group of peoples, had drawn them together in the need to protect their own peculiar happiness and hence unite for mutual self-preservation. Happiness, ultimately became the state’s *raison d’être*:

the formation of multiple societies, disunited in their interests and affection, soon obliged each of them to add to the care of their happiness, the concern necessary to preserve it... The desire of happiness had only required simple notions of order, justice, and equity; the need for strength gave birth to all political combinations, and the functions of the sovereign increased; the production of riches, labour, commerce and industry, which in connection to happiness had appertained to nothing but the caprice of self-interest [*intérêt personnel*], became, through their connection to public strength, the object of meditation, and of watchfulness for the government.⁴

Happiness was a complex preoccupation for economic writers of the seventeenth century particularly, and Necker was not unusual in

¹ Rothschild, *Economic Sentiments*, p. 37.

² T.J. Hochstrasser, ‘Physiocracy and the Politics of Laissez-Faire’ in Goldie and Wokler (eds.), *The Cambridge History*, p. 425.

³ Spengler, *French Predecessors*, p. 323.

⁴ Necker, *Sur la Législation*, I, p. 13-4.

connecting it with constitutional ideas. Although the chivalric standard of the honourableness of humankind had been left in brightly coloured tatters, human initiative was soon justified in new ways.¹ In the French Jansenist tradition, Pierre Nicole argued in the 1670s that the '*amour propre*' (self-love) which guided individuals to seek '*bonheur*' (the French term for happiness which Necker also used) was not an irredeemable selfish passion, because it led to social behaviour.² In this he therefore pre-empted Necker by about a hundred years.

For Necker, the nation's need for wealth and power issued in the first place from a need to protect the singular characteristics (the peculiar interpretation of happiness) of its people. These characteristics in turn lent prosperity to a nation which grew increasingly complex and competitive amongst its rivals. As Joanna Innes has argued of Anglophone ideas of happiness, therefore, membership of a powerful political entity protected and promoted happiness in Necker's account also.³ However, he remained insistent on the point that happiness was as important as power to the state, and that the two were separate and yet interdependent matters.⁴ Because of these links, it seems that it was next to impossible to state the national case without stating a humanitarian case. In reality the nation was a complex network of both interests and passions and it was the role of the statesman to balance and often order them by priority.⁵

Steuart seemed to agree, arguing that the ideal government should entertain an 'exact and impartial regard for the interest of every class'.⁶ The realisation of the interests of all classes was, therefore, the national goal. This was not as impossible as it sounded, for the pursuit of interest made the behaviour of individuals predictable and therefore

¹ Hirschman, *The Passions*, pp. 11-12.

² P. Slack, 'Material Progress and the Challenge of Affluence in Seventeenth-Century England', *EHR*, 62:3 (2009), p. 591.

³ J. Innes, *Inferior Politics* (Oxford, 2009), p. 111.

⁴ Spengler, *French Predecessors*, p. 324.

⁵ Skornicki, *L'Économiste*, p. 334.

⁶ Steuart, *Principles*, I, p. 25.

governable.¹ He made it his own mission, which he shared with Necker, to analyse the various interests within the nation. To this end, they both split society into two key classes. For Necker it was the proprietors and the propertyless, for Steuart, the farmers and the free hands.²

In each case, it came down to which interests were united, and which were counter-productive, or even mutually exclusive. Necker accepted that, if grain were to become superfluous within the closed borders of France, then 'convulsions would compromise the good of the people, and disturb the general harmony by aggravating every different class in society successively'.³ On the other hand, he maintained that stability did not necessarily require exportation, which was detrimental to national wealth if it starved the people and stemmed population growth. He therefore accused the physiocrats of pursuing doctrines, especially the net-product theory of the *Tableau Économique*, which favoured only the proprietor class to the detriment of society at large.⁴ This same charge was levelled by Linguet.⁵ There was a balance to strike.

Steuart identified a similar problem in Britain. For although the bounties served as the solution to the problem of excessively low grain prices, he maintained that there was still no real mechanism in place to protect consumers when grain prices spiralled. He believed that therefore 'something still remains to be done, in order to carry this branch of English policy to its full perfection'.⁶ Donald Winch has pointed out that, where Steuart preached intervention, Adam Smith would have a statesman step back, powerless as he was to properly understand and judge impartially the interests of every party based on

¹ Hirschman, *The Passions*, p. 50.

² Skinner points out that this theory bears a certain resemblance to a point made by Hume in 'Of Money', and also Turgot's thought in his *Reflexions* of 1766. A. Skinner, 'Analytical Introduction' in J. Steuart, *An Inquiry into the Principles of Political Economy*, ed. A. Skinner, (Edinburgh, 1966 edn.), p. lxix.

³ Necker, *Sur la Législation*, II, p. 87.

⁴ *Ibid*, p. 167.

⁵ D.G. Levy, *The Ideas and Careers of Simon-Nicolas-Henri Linguet* (Urbana, 1980), p. 90.

⁶ Steuart, 'Dissertation', p. 350.

his own imperfect information.¹ Apparently the problem with Steuart's version was his own decision not to engage with the realities of contemporary statecraft, which left the main body of his work inherently utopian.² This overlooks the fact, however, that in terms of the grain trade, Steuart developed two specific and pragmatic schemes, which moved beyond *Principles*, resolving the perceived problem in a concrete rather than theoretical way.

In *Considerations on the Interest of the County of Lanark*, Steuart tackled the issue of uneven development in Scotland. He explained that the rapid expansion of Glasgow had caused an agricultural boom in the surrounding country. This meant that, while the wages of agricultural labourers were high, so too was the price of subsistence. The relationship between these two, and its effect on the poor, was his concern.³ However, Steuart was careful in his definition of 'the poor', by which he meant 'the indigent only (who live by charity, forming a class still lower than any of the industrious)'.⁴

In spite of their indigence, Steuart maintained that the poor people of Scotland were not indolent. Scotland had poor laws dating from 1574, but they were not always enforced. Alternative institutions, such as Kirk sessions or traditional charitable arrangements, challenged the state, laying claim to the charge of the poor. This meant that the character of the Scottish poor laws was discretionary. By the eighteenth century, legal disputes over contributions gave landowners a sense of their own privilege to direct the funds collected by the church.⁵ Overall Scottish poor relief was less comprehensive than in England and Wales, which was in fact a point of envy south of the border. Stringent Scottish

¹ Winch, 'Scottish Political Economy', p. 450. Hume also maintained that it was the 'chief business' of philosophers and politicians to observe and understand the 'general course of things', while particular affairs and interests preoccupied everybody else. D. Hume, 'Of Commerce' in E.F. Miller (ed.), *David Hume* (Indianapolis, 1987), p. 254.

² W. Eltis, 'Sir James Steuart's Corporate State' in Mair (ed.), *The Scottish Contribution*, p. 215.

³ J. Steuart, 'Considerations', pp. 288-9.

⁴ *Ibid*, p. 303.

⁵ R. Mitchison, *The Old Poor Law in Scotland* (Edinburgh, 2000), pp. 8-9.

culture was congratulated for the industry and thrift that it supposedly impressed upon its poor.¹ Steuart agreed that the provisions of the Scottish version of poor law were sufficient. He emphasised the role of the pastor in remaining acquainted with the condition of the indigent poor in his parish, so that they neither slid too far into poverty, nor had the opportunity to grow idle.²

The problem for Steuart was not wages or poor-relief, but the cost of subsistence. For this reason, his projects should not be understood as charitable endeavours. For he also meant to benefit the farmers who, he believed, suffered when Britain was forced by harvest failure to open its ports to foreign grain.³ Even in normal conditions he admitted that he could 'not understand, why prices [of subsistence] should still be lower than the poorest Manufacturer can afford to pay'.⁴ A careful grain policy was a means of striking that elusive balance between not only the interests of the farmers and the poor, but also between the landed and manufacturing interests.

His answer was to close British borders, allowing for any potential Scottish surplus to be sold in England. Scotland, he argued, was not yet in a position to benefit from a granary scheme. This was because its consumption of grain still matched or even exceeded its productive capacity.⁵ Evidently he had formed a clear sense of the agricultural and general economic disparity between the two nations. Nevertheless, he now understood the edges of Britain as the final limits of the national economy, and added 'what a happy thing it is for Scotland to have so ready, and so plentiful a market as that of England to have recourse to!'⁶ Economically, Britain was a strongly composite nation in this portrayal, and, in spite of a possible hint of irony and resentment in the comment,

¹ Ibid, p. 67; J. Innes, 'The Distinctiveness of the English Poor Laws, 1750-1850' in D. Winch and P.K. O'Brien (eds.), *The Political Economy of British Historical Experience, 1688-1914* (Oxford, 2002), p. 387.

² Steuart, 'Considerations', pp. 303-4.

³ Ibid, p. 301.

⁴ Ibid, p. 309.

⁵ Ibid, p. 298, n.

⁶ Ibid.

Steuart seemed to think that a shared market offered the potential to redress the imbalance. Moreover, T.C. Smout contends that Steuart was right in emphasising the effects which uneven growth was having on agricultural development in Scotland, and the need to create a steady effective demand for the surpluses which would result.¹

For England, however, a detailed granary scheme was presented as the best cure for fluctuations in grain prices. Redman has suggested that Steuart was potentially not so well versed in English political economy.² In fact she argues that he was probably more heavily influenced by the Austro-German economic tradition of Cameralism. The general tenets thereof were attentive to the paternalist role of the state, as opposed to those of mercantilism which were supposedly preoccupied with the aggrandizement of the state itself.³ Granary schemes were highly recommended in cameralist thought. Johann Joachim Becher, Wilhelm Freiherr von Schröder, and Johann Heinrich Gottlob von Justi all agreed that a granary system was a viable state enterprise. Justi in particular argued that state granaries could serve to stabilise grain prices from season to season.⁴ Clearly this was an idea in which Steuart enthusiastically invested.

Nevertheless, Steuart maintained that he was sensitive to local conditions, and as we have seen, he did not suggest granary schemes haphazardly. An appraisal of the imports and exports of English grain led Steuart to judge that the granary policy was highly appropriate for England, though it would be pointless in Scotland for the time being.⁵ Evidently, Steuart responded to a range of influences, but also paid heed to what he thought of as demonstrable fact, particularly the statistics pertaining to the grain trade.

¹ T.C. Smout, 'Where had the Scottish Economy got to by the Third Quarter of the Century?' in Hont and Ignatieff (eds.), *Wealth and Virtue* (Cambridge, 1983), p. 72.

² Redman, 'Steuart's Statesman', p. 51.

³ Ibid, p. 59; T. Hutchison, *Before Adam Smith* (Oxford, 1988), p. 250.

⁴ L. Atorf, *Der König und das Korn* (Berlin, 1999), p. 45.

⁵ Steuart, 'Considerations', p. 298, n.

The national scheme for granaries, which he developed for England, relied heavily on existing English structures. According to his plan, an increase in the existing Land Tax of one penny in the pound was to pay for a whole series of public granaries. These were to make purchases and pay farmers whenever wheat prices fell below 40s per quarter.¹ Therefore, rather than banning exports, Steuart intended that British farmers should be offered the alternative of selling their abundant supplies to the government. The granaries would open their doors to consumers only when grain prices exceeded 48s per quarter, but would be forbidden from competing with grain merchants if the prices which the latter could offer were lower.² Consumers themselves were also to be carefully screened, for the granaries were in part designed to offer grain at low prices to the most needy. The screening process was also based on existing structures provided at hospital, corporation or individual business level, or else by villages, towns and cities.³

The English granary, and Scottish supply thereof, did not flatly contradict the principles of a free market and foreign exports. Like the bounty system, each aimed to stimulate agriculture by preventing grain prices from crashing, supposedly protecting the consumer from the opposite contingency all the while. Laurent Augier and Christine Théré have accordingly seen Steuart's granary scheme as a price stabilising mechanism in a trade that was intrinsically unstable.⁴ Even though the granary scheme especially placed a great deal of responsibility and power in the visible hand of the state, it was simultaneously a means of hijacking market impulses, whilst protecting the poor from the more supposedly damaging aspects thereof. It represented an appreciation of the possible communion of interests, yet a deep distrust of an unsupervised market.

¹ Steuart's proposal put the ideal price of grain between 40s and 48s, but noted that this was only an illustrative figure.

² Steuart, 'Dissertation', p. 357.

³ Ibid, pp. 355-6; 358.

⁴ L. Augier and C. Théré, 'James Steuart's Approach to Stability of Prices and Economic Policy: the Example of Grain Prices' in Tortajada, (ed.), *The Economics of James Steuart*, p. 166.

Necker agreed that a sound political economy needed to treat the grain trade as a unique case. Grain prices were not decided by a series of Newtonian forces alone, but also by speculation and anticipation on the part of merchants and crowds of consumers respectively. He argued that unfortunately 'the anxiety of the consumers... lends power to the merchants'.¹ This meant that the price of grain could not be relied upon to rise in proportion to an increase of demand, but was prone to escalate wildly due to consumer panic.² Though the eighteenth century had already seen some reflection on crowd behaviour, Necker was apparently the first to apply the new learning to economic analysis, realising that collective psychology could easily overawe individual rationality.³ Evidently the passions of greed and fear still had roles to play in his analysis when it came to the essential nature of the grain trade.

Necker argued that permanent laws regarding the grain trade were a danger, as they usually pandered to excessive freedom, which was open to abuse, or pedantic restriction, which penalised the useful services of merchants. Harris has argued that Necker's proposals received undue condemnation from the Physiocrats, given that his measures tended to preserve internal liberty and the property rights of merchants. This, Harris points out, was the conclusion of Morellet.⁴ Internal freedom was important to Necker, however, he recommended that exportation should only be permitted when grain prices were at or below twenty *livres per setier* at two consecutive markets in regions where exports were made. Even then, only flour was to be allowed to exit the land, meaning that French millers would be paid for performing a process that would otherwise have become the task of foreign labour.⁵

¹ Necker, *Sur la Législation*, I, p. 69.

² Ibid, p. 70; Skornicki, *L'Économiste*, p. 332.

³ Ibid, p. 330; Perrot, *Histoire Intellectuelle*, p. 283.

⁴ Harris, *Necker*, p. 62.

⁵ Necker, *Sur la Législation*, II, p. 88.

Necker also admitted that price was an uncertain proxy for surplus. Steuart had maintained that, by erecting granaries on a local basis with reference to special registers of the poor, and estimating annual consumption at eight bushels per person, the pre-exportation needs of the entire nation could be ascertained and provided for.¹ Though he did not mention them in his scheme, the lists furnished by the poor laws in England and even Scotland (where perhaps it was funds rather than information, which was lacking) may have inspired these registers.² Perhaps an aging Steuart was also influenced by the growing trend after the 1760s for compiling detailed local information.³ In any case, he certainly seems to have been far more optimistic than Necker about the competence of the state when it came to generating information.

Jacob Soll has shown that, although Necker was an avowed admirer of that information master, Colbert, he did not agree with his policies on secret information gathering on behalf of the state. Not only was it impractical, but it also undermined trust in the French state finances and took absolutist intervention into private affairs too far.⁴ Ultimately Necker maintained that calculating the definitive consumption needs of the French in relation to the actual grain production level was impossible. The price proxy would have to suffice.⁵

Nevertheless, Necker also outlined a sort of miniature public granary scheme. Perhaps he, the son of a Prussian, was also influenced by the German penchant for storing grain. Like Steuart's, the scheme tried to capitalise on existing local structures. It amounted to obliging French bakers to purchase and store flour during the harvest season in excess of, but in proportion to, their usual commercial needs. This, Necker continued, had the added benefit of keeping prices high during the part of the year when grain was cheapest, rendering permission to export

¹ Steuart, 'Dissertation', p. 356.

² Mitchison, *The Old Poor Law*, p. 209.

³ Innes, *Inferior Politics*, p. 146.

⁴ J. Soll, *The Information Master* (Ann Arbor, 2009), pp. 160-1.

⁵ Necker, *Sur la Législation*, II, p. 89.

grain less likely.¹ In this sense, it functioned much like Steuart's scheme. In June the bakers would be at liberty to dispose of the grain that they had been tasked with stockpiling, thus equalising prices during the pre-harvest months when traditionally they escalated.² In order to help the bakers recover their losses in purchasing grain above and beyond what was profitable, Necker indicated that the profit margins on bread, which were controlled by the police, might be permitted to increase.³

Both, therefore, identified limits to the freedom of the market, and designed state-sponsored frameworks to cope with local scarcity. National and even regional adaptation was clearly very important to both authors, but it was the central state which they imagined should ultimately administer the frameworks they designed. However, the give and take between state responsibility and individual rights therefore became an important concern for both authors. It meant that they needed to consider the idea of liberty very carefully.

Slaves, Servants, Subjects

In the work of Steuart, Necker and also Linguet, history and a perhaps idealised notion of the past play an important role, particularly in the justification of the interventionist policies which the three proposed. All three displayed some interest in the idea of labour relations, and the dilemmas of an essentially freelance labourer in post-feudal economies. These dilemmas challenged the apparently unmitigated good of *liberty*, which the physiocrats and others proposed as the optimum guiding principle of political economy. Each acknowledged that curtailing the civil liberties of the poor could offer a more secure existence. However, this could also challenge the success and even cohesion of the nation state. For this reason, they carefully pondered the power and

¹ Ibid, pp. 107-9.

² Ibid, p. 109.

³ Ibid, p. 111.

responsibility of the state in relation to a nation of subjects, as opposed to citizens.

The historiography has tended, broadly speaking, to identify at least two separate interpretations of the term *liberty* in eighteenth-century European thought: positive and negative liberty. The former was the classical republican sense: it meant freedom from tyranny. This sense was purely political, and required that all citizens be invested with *virtue*, the characteristic of self-government.¹ By the eighteenth century the idea of the republic was not meant literally, at least, not in large states. It was more of a metaphor for articulating a sense of remorse at the loss of the moral qualities that had supposedly characterised the citizens of ancient republics.² The latter was the jurisprudential definition of the term, the freedom to enjoy rights. In this sense, an individual could enjoy freedom, without necessarily participating in government. Where the rights of fellow citizens ended, the freedom of individual action ensued.³

Emma Rothschild suggests that, later, the issue was organised in terms of the political and economic sphere. In relation to politics, the idea of positive freedom was potentially the more subversive of the two. For instance, in Britain it challenged the notion of government by representatives and not delegates. Meanwhile, in the economic sphere, the terminology could be associated with the right to engage in trade and other innocuous and even useful activity.⁴ For according to John Pocock, the prelude to liberalism saw a struggle to reconcile the purely political ideal of *virtue* – which was inevitably corrupted by opulence – with commercial society. The result, he suggests, was *manners*, a new way for individuals to relate to one another in a social, and not purely political, sense.⁵ Overall, Pocock seeks to explain the moment when

¹ Q. Skinner, *Liberty before Liberalism* (Cambridge, 1998), p. 17; Pocock, *Virtue*, p. 40.

² R. Whatmore, *Republicanism and the French Revolution* (Oxford, 2000), p. 23.

³ Skinner, *Liberty*, p. 5; Pocock, *Virtue*, pp. 40-1.

⁴ Rothschild, *Economic Sentiments*, pp. 59-60; Hirschman, *The Passions*, p. 64.

⁵ Pocock, *Virtue*, pp. 48-50.

classical republicanism degenerated into a jurisprudential possessive individualism, which, he suggests, predated capitalism.¹

This moment had apparently already passed when the physiocrats, and later Adam Smith posed the notion of *liberty*, in its jurisprudential sense, based on natural law. As seen in chapter 2, the deregulation of the grain trade in France was understood in part as the triumph of the freedom of the individual to prosper.² However, the practical complications of liberalisation led Steuart, Necker and Linguet to entertain serious doubts about the benefits of freedom and to speculate on the role of the state.

Linguet is sometimes considered as a mercantilist, but more recently as a pre-Marxist. A failed engineer, he made his living as a propagandist, particularly for Terray and his reintroduction of regulation of the grain trade after 1774.³ Linguet had initially written in favour of deregulation of the grain trade, but changed tack after the scheme seemed to fail in practice. Soon enough, he also accused the physiocrats of a doctrinaire approach, which ignored the evidence. He argued that without the regulation, speculation on grain was immoral but unavoidable. For grain could easily be hoarded up in secret to play on the passions of the crowd, causing panic and price spikes.⁴ Like Necker, he suspected that individual rationality was easily lost in the frenzy of a crowd.⁵

Such market failures led Linguet to question the freedom of the labourer in a wage-economy. Seeing society, like Necker, as comprised of two classes, propertied and un-propertied, Linguet contended that the poor were held captive in a system of exploitation.⁶ The condition of the poor, Linguet continued, compared unfavourably with even the

¹ Ibid, p. 44.

² See above, pp. 94-5.

³ Levy, *Linguet*, pp. 84; 92-3.

⁴ Ibid, p. 35.

⁵ Perrot, *Histoire Intellectuelle*, p. 282.

⁶ Spengler, *French Predecessors*, pp. 334-5.

slavery of the past.¹ This could not be said, however, of the present condition of contemporary colonial slaves, who, Linguet admitted, were 'a thousand times more degraded' than European workers.² In fact, he used the example of contemporary West Indian slavery, which he considered the horrible result of philosophy and utility taken to their extremes, to illustrate that logical calculations of profit must always be tempered by the humanitarian criterion.³

Meanwhile, the condition of the free labouring poor in Europe was, according to Linguet's reasoning, inferior even to that of horses. The slaves of antiquity and the horses of the present never suffered from want of food. Servitude had been, he argued, 'the only way to assure, I cannot say happiness, but at least the subsistence of that part of mankind destined to earn, through quotidian manual labour, their daily nourishment.'⁴ Slavery had formerly counterbalanced the problems which he presumed were caused by uneven property distribution. Now, with the advent of a free and national labour market, this measure was lost.

This was no mere analogy. For Linguet, slavery was a historical reality, which preceded the contemporary situation. He stated explicitly that a certain right or entitlement emerged as a part of the shift to free labour:

I have already raised several of the reasons from where we derive this obligation... it is connected to the changes made to our customs and our constitution by the extinction of personal servitude.⁵

In promoting free markets, physiocratic reasoning avoided the issue of the potential distress of the poorest ranks of society by arguing that the labouring poor held property in the form of their own labour.⁶ This was

¹ S.N.H. Linguet, *Du Pain et du Bled* (London, 1774), p. 129.

² *Ibid.*, p. 131.

³ *Ibid.*, p. 132.

⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 130.

⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 207.

⁶ Levy, *Linguet*, p. 104.

a Lockean extension of the jurisprudential theory of natural law.¹ Linguet, however, emphasised that this put the labourer at the mercy of economic fluctuations, bearing all the risk inherent in economies subject to agricultural crises.² He established a basic 'entitlement' to subsistence, also rooted in the natural law tradition, which made the right to life the only natural property right, all other property rights coming from positive law.³ This, together with a mercantilist argument that rendered the common people of key importance, plus the fact of their inherent vulnerability to price fluctuation, led him to claim that 'the supposed proprietor [of grain] can be no more than its guardian: his prerogative... yields to a right even more sacred, the source or pitfall of all rights, necessity'.⁴

The lost relationship between property owners and poor labourers was also a theme in Necker's work. Like Linguet, he argued that the change from payment in kind in an idealised feudal setting to the wages paid to free labourers removed certain responsibilities on the part of the employer. Wages did not necessarily bear relation to the cost of living, whereas feudal exchanges apparently had:

The proprietors... who would have blushed to enjoy the continual labour of one of their fellow creatures without procuring him an honest subsistence, have been able, without remorse, to abandon themselves to their tyrannical greed, when this labour, valued in cash, has dispensed them from examining whether with this money the miserable labourer could provide for all his needs.⁵

Whereas Linguet had preferred feudalism or even slavery in place of the contemporary arrangement of wage-labour, Necker only used it to demonstrate the illusory effects of cash wages and taxes. He

¹ Pocock, *Virtue*, p. 45.

² Linguet, *Du Pain*, p. 211.

³ Levy, *Linguet*, pp. 104-106.

⁴ Linguet, *Du Pain*, p. 67.

⁵ Necker, *Sur la Législation*, I, pp. 80-1.

emphasised the idea that, in those supposedly simpler and more honest times, the labourer was less prone to exploitation. In some ways the former system had its benefits, according to Necker.

Yet slavery or restricted freedom came across as an uncouth arrangement in his work. For instance, he argued that behind some forms of liberty 'is placed the slavery of the multitude'.¹ Here he meant that freedom of the market, and the liberty of the merchants to sell or withhold goods at their leisure, could make slaves of the supposedly free labourers who were left to toil in permanent fear of want. The analogy was apt, for in classical thought *slavery* meant the condition of being *obnoxious*, that is 'perpetually subject or liable to harm or punishment'.² Market fluctuations, he supposed, left the poor permanently and arbitrarily vulnerable to harm in the form of starvation. Nevertheless, monetisation and the modernisation which it seemed to entail was not systemically problematic in Necker's work; it was the concurrent pitfalls of abuse and exploitation on the part of the proprietor class which he condemned.

Steuart echoed this notion, also acknowledging the decline of feudalism as a relatively recent historical development and part of a process of monetisation, industrialisation and ultimately also integration under a single national government.³ Within an explanation of the non-taxability of wages and exchanges made in kind, he depicted the feudal manors of the past as autonomous and hostile. The freedom which developing cities offered, he continued, drew away vassals and, with the discovery and settlement of a new continent, the production of manufactured goods began in earnest. Then, he continued, the feudal lords were drawn to the city, admiring the opulence of their prince's domain. City dwelling became the norm, leading the lords to demand

¹ Ibid, p. 186. Like Linguet, Necker abhorred contemporary slavery, later becoming an important member of the *Amis des Noirs*. D.Y. Kadish, 'Translation in Context' in D.Y. Kadish and F. Massardier-Kenney (eds.), *Translating Slavery* (Kent, OH, 2009), p. 46.

² Skinner, *Liberty*, p. 42.

³ Kobayashi, 'On the Method', p. 112.

cash to support their new luxurious lifestyles. This, according to Steuart, led them to sell the product of their land for profit, rather than to supply it in direct exchange for the services of their vassals.¹

Steuart emphasised that enslaved or feudal labourers were less productive than their free counterparts. Contemporary economic growth, he believed, could be put down to wage-labour and the self-interest on the part of workers which it prompted.² This analysis of the productivity of free labourers and tenant farmers released from feudal dues was not especially extraordinary, particularly when applied to the case of Steuart's homeland. After the union, would-be improvers of the Scottish situation associated the remnants of Scottish feudalism with an insecurity of ownership of profit, which in turn came to be blamed for an apparent divergence between the prosperity of England and that of Scotland.³ Parliamentary and pamphlet rhetoric around the abolition of heritable jurisdictions condemned this allegedly economically restraining characteristic of highland culture, blaming the near slavish conditions of Scottish tenancy for the relative underdevelopment of its economy.⁴ Even Andrew Fletcher criticised this supposed bastion of the free Scottish nobility and constitution, arguing that the institution entailed only the systemic entrenchment of poverty.⁵

Steuart however, depicted commercialisation in a wistful light as a fundamental change which put an end to the old manner of social relations. This exposed newly independent wage labourers to the new danger of starvation. In his concern for the wage labourer and nostalgia for the patriarchal and protective social relations of yore, Steuart belonged to an authoritarian strain of the civic republican tradition,

¹ Steuart, *Principles*, I, pp. 69-70.

² M. Guenther, 'A Peculiar Silence', *Atlantic Studies*, 8:4 (2011), p. 456.

³ Skinner suggests that Hume hinted at the same in his *History of Great Britain* (1754). Steuart, *Principles* (1966 edn.), p. 206, n.

⁴ J. Hoppit, 'Compulsion, Compensation and Property Rights in Britain, 1688-1833', *P&P*, 210:1 (2011), pp. 112-3.

⁵ C. Kidd, *Subverting Scotland's Past* (Cambridge, 1993), p. 35.

which also included the likes of Andrew Fletcher.¹ He also echoed cameralist misgivings about what Justi referred to as the 'plague of money'.²

Like many of the critics of the heritable jurisdictions in Scotland, Steuart considered feudal servitude as a condition similar to slavery.³ However, in his opinion, this was not necessarily an adverse condition, for he saw feudalism as a perpetuation of the beneficial principles of classical slavery. This was characterised by the exchange of subordination in return for dependence. Just as a slave of classical antiquity was unfree, but usually quite well cared for and protected by a master, so had feudal servants expected patronage from their lord.⁴ In his nostalgia for the old ways, Steuart departed from those who bitterly criticised the institutional hangovers of Scotland's old constitution. Feudal servants were at least saved from the exploitative temperament of the free market system. It was better for the poor to serve a human master as vassals, than to live as *obnoxii*, in constant fear of the arbitrary dangers of the economy.⁵

However, the legal reforms in Scotland were also part of a process of pacification and assimilation in the aftermath of the rebellion of 1745.⁶ Steuart likewise appreciated the decline of the old feudal system as a force for an increased integration on a national level. According to Steuart, feudal lords, faced with economic growth, grew instinctively pacified and unified, so that they 'no more appeared to one another as objects of jealousy, but of emulation'.⁷ No longer were the leaders of society at large isolated on their separate and independent estates. Rather, they, and their servants, were integrated into a system of

¹ M. Ignatieff, 'John Millar and Individualism' in Hont and Ignatieff (eds.), *Wealth and Virtue*, p. 325.

² Quoted by Hutchison, *Before Adam Smith*, p. 251.

³ Kidd, *Subverting*, p. 153.

⁴ Steuart, *Principles*, I, p. 255.

⁵ Skinner, *Liberty*, pp. 42-3.

⁶ Kidd, *Subverting*, p. 156.

⁷ Steuart, *Principles*, I, p. 70.

reciprocity on a national basis. This fitted neatly into Steuart's overall notion of reciprocal dependencies as society's glue.

Necker also personally oversaw a similar process of national consolidation, which sprung in some ways from his own status as an outsider. As we have seen, he began by abolishing the venal offices of the insubordinate Intendants of Finance. However, he soon extended the process of removing offices in favour of salaried positions to every level of administration.¹ Those who lost the offices they had purchased were offered refunds, not unlike a few former owners of heritable jurisdictions who were granted compensation.² Not only did Necker's systematic abolition of venal offices represent a more economical way of running the state, but it also drained some of the symbolic and patrimonial power of the court.³ The sale of offices was part of the complex system of privilege that entrenched the inequalities of feudalism, and attempted to keep elites invested in a monarchy that teetered atop a vast patrimonial pyramid. Feudalism still pervaded French society in all of these senses, and indeed the formal one: it was only when Necker himself authored an edict in 1779, that feudal serfdom in France was finally officially abolished.⁴

The decline of feudalism did not necessarily leave the poor at a loose end. Steuart observed that the vassals' bonds of subordination were transferred from the lord of the manor to the king or state.⁵ He had noted that the greater the degree of the dependence of an individual or class upon another, the greater the degree of subordination the former was obliged to offer to the latter.⁶ Dependence was after all a corruption of *virtue*, or the freedom of self-government.⁷ Free labourers

¹ Doyle, *Venality*, p. 137.

² Ibid; Hoppit, 'Compulsion, Compensation and Property Rights', p. 114. Only 48 per cent of these latter claimants were awarded compensation, constituting a trifling 26 per cent of the money demanded.

³ Doyle, *Venality*, p. 138.

⁴ J.Q.C. Mackrell, *The Attack on 'Feudalism' in Eighteenth-Century France* (London, 1973), pp. 128-9.

⁵ Steuart, *Principles*, I, pp. 257-8.

⁶ Ibid, p. 257.

⁷ Pocock, *Virtue*, p. 48.

now depended upon the king or state to protect them, and for that reason they obeyed their national government and integrated into a wider society. Steuart concluded that, in an economy where free labourers could depend upon their own industry to bring about their own subsistence, they lived relatively freely, owing limited subordination to the government, which offered them really only protection from external dangers.¹

A perfectly functioning economy, where labourers worked and fed themselves, was expected to tick over without the need for a statesman, except that, like a watch, the economy could be depended upon to go wrong at some point.² For this reason, free society was not necessarily to be distinguished from absolutist government, so long as an individual head of state was not allowed to make arbitrary changes to legislation according to their own will or the interests of one favoured individual or section of society. In the spirit of classical republicanism, all of the interests had to be represented, and the general good pursued.

However, following Montesquieu, Steuart observed that increasing wealth and commercialisation could challenge regimes, as individuals became ever more independent of government.³ For Steuart, this could even result in a sort of state of anarchy:

violent convulsions have been owing to the short-sightedness of the statesmen; who, inattentive to the consequences of growing wealth and industry, foolishly imagined that hereditary subordination was to subsist among classes, whose situation, with respect to each other, was entirely changed.⁴

This helps explain Steuart's use of the term, *liberalisation*, which he saw as part of a programme of economic growth, whereby the masses were

¹ Steuart, *Principles*, I, pp. 258-9.

² Hirschman, *The Passions*, p. 87.

³ Steuart, *Principles*, I, p. 255; Hirschman, *The Passions*, p. 85.

⁴ Steuart, *Principles*, I, p. 264.

unchained in order to unleash their latent productivity.¹ Evidently this could be a dangerous course of action for short-sighted governments. However, Steuart looked again to his system of mutual reciprocities to stabilise free society. Thus the consumerism and capitalism, which had played a role in the termination of the original feudal system of reciprocity came full circle to cement a new social reciprocity based on the diversification of wants.² This helps to explain Steuart's apparently rather mercantilist stance on luxury.

Luxury was a puzzling and controversial issue in the eighteenth century. Eastern luxury was supposed to have corrupted the *virtue* and brought about the downfall of the illustrious yet austere Roman Republic.³ However, in the light of a scientific approach, and in response to the application of Machiavellian principles of international relations to the individual, the idea of personal restraint began to crumble.⁴ New theories about how human behaviour could be managed began to spring up, often involving the state. One powerful solution in the eighteenth century was the 'principle of countervailing passions', which pitted the pernicious passions against innocuous interests.⁵

From here, the human propensity to pursue self-interest took on a civilising function. This point was most prominently put by Montesquieu, who argued that *doux commerce* refined and pacified people.⁶ It was also seen to encourage investment in moveable property, which allowed the sovereign to engage more effectively in fiscal measures. Yet it simultaneously served as a check on potentially tyrannical sovereign power. For, through the constant expression of the private interests of the entire society, it allowed the true interests of

¹ Ibid, p. 265.

² R. Ege, 'The New Interpretation of Steuart by Paul Chamley' in R. Tortajada (ed.), *The Economics of James Steuart* (Cambridge, 1983), p. 97.

³ J. Shovlin, *Political Economy of Virtue*, p. 5.

⁴ Hirschman, *The Passions*, p. 10.

⁵ Ibid, p. 20.

⁶ Ibid, 60.

that society, rather than the passions and dynastic follies of a ruling prince, to be pursued.¹

Nevertheless, anxiety about luxury persisted.² Montesquieu lamented the unfortunate supplanting of more valuable human virtues which the principle of countervailing interests allowed.³ It was feared that the civic virtue which promoted the common good of the nation was easily lost as members of society expended their efforts on their personal comfort instead.⁴ Likewise, luxury, and the commercial culture that necessarily accompanied it, meant investment in moveable, and sometimes intangible goods. In the aftermath of the financial revolution of the 1690s, it became normal to lend to the government, and to live off the returns or expectation thereof. This could be disturbing because these creditors became dependent on government for their livelihoods and *vice versa*, corrupting the *virtue* of their self-government.⁵ Montesquieu harboured doubts about the national debt, while even Hume fretted about its potential to ruin 'all free governments', including Britain's.⁶

For Steuart, luxury was a driving force behind superfluity.⁷ It also helped to found a useful reciprocity. For as long as the rich consumed domestically manufactured luxuries, they would pay the wages of poor labourers.⁸ It is important to note that he expected no classical republican concern for the destiny of the society itself, except perhaps on the part of the revered statesman.⁹ Steuart thought that the

¹ Hirschman, *The Passions*, pp. 74; 78-81.

² Shovlin, *Political Economy of Virtue*, p. 14.

³ Hirschman, *The Passions*, p. 80.

⁴ M. Kwass, *Privilege and the Politics of Taxation* (Cambridge, 2000), p. 234.

⁵ J. Hoppit, 'Checking the Leviathan, 1688-1832' in D. Winch and P.K. O'Brien, (eds.), *The Political Economy of British Historical Experience, 1688-1914* (Oxford, 2002), p. 286; Pocock, *Virtue*, pp. 68-9; D. Hume 'Of Civil Liberty' in E.F. Miller (ed.), *David Hume*, p. 96.

⁶ Hirschman, *The Passions*, p. 80.

⁷ N. Kobayashi, 'Introduction: The First System of Political Economy' in Skinner, (ed.), *Principles* (1998 edn.), I, p. lxxiv.

⁸ Smout, 'Where had the Scottish Economy got to?', p. 64. Here Steuart followed Hume, whose thoughts on luxury are discussed below pp. 260-1.

⁹ Ege, 'The New Interpretation of Steuart', p. 97.

statesman only had to ensure that labourers could afford a realistic subsistence by developing sensible legislation, to which anyone who wished to enjoy membership of society was obliged to submit. This echoed Hume's idea that justice had to be established in order to keep individual interest in line with the general interest.¹ The public good would not appear spontaneously from the interests of individuals who were free to pursue their own good; it had to be arbitrated by the state and accepted by a disciplined nation of subordinated citizens, or subjects.²

Necker shared the view, contrary to physiocratic teaching, that a restrained luxury was a spur to circulation, innovation, and the arts. It created work for the labouring classes.³ Moreover, to some extent, Necker agreed with Steuart's portrayal of interdependency. Having defended luxury by stating that 'society is founded upon a gentle reciprocity of concessions and sacrifices',⁴ he later argued that if the monarch could expect his subjects to protect the state, then in return they were at least owed protection from sudden price rises.⁵

Where Steuart saw the labouring classes as now virtually free to participate in an open market subject to restriction, Necker believed that the servitude of French labourers still continued indefinitely. This was due to an irreversibly unfavourable labour market, which meant that the people remained at the mercy of the relatively small class of proprietors (*'classe des propriétaires'*).⁶ Because of the inevitable imbalance of power, French labourers could never be free to pursue their own economic aspirations. Their rights under a *liberal* government could not be protected, thanks to the structural inequalities of contemporary society. A physiocratic *liberty*, which

¹ Force, *Self-Interest*, p. 211.

² Redman, 'Steuart's Statesman', p. 55.

³ Shovlin, *Political Economy of Virtue*, pp. 142; 145.

⁴ Necker, *Éloge*, p. 34.

⁵ Necker, *Sur la Législation*, I, pp. 163-4.

⁶ *Ibid*, p. 166; quote p. 119.

offered the people the right to buy and sell without restriction could only ever end in their exploitation, another sort of servitude.

Furthermore, there were other ways in which Necker considered the French labouring classes inevitably less free than in other societies. In a direct comparison of Britain and France, Necker argued that, in the former, political rights were widespread, and the political interests of the British popular classes therefore ranged beyond grain prices. In contrast to these 'many sorts of interests in society... [the people] of France have none, so they are indifferent to everything, except the price of grain'.¹ Because of their limited outlet for political expression, Necker thought, when prices did rise sharply, the people rioted. He considered this reaction justified, given the condition and position of the labouring classes within society. It was part of their dialogue with the state, which ensured that it carried out its reciprocal duty of protecting their interests, basic as they were.²

Overall, the French were an 'infant people',³ who could not be expected to look into the reasoning and potential economic benefits of an unregulated grain trade. Meanwhile, he argued that the physiocrats' 'unlimited love of liberty in political economy and the exaggerated hate of prohibition go back to man's childhood'.⁴ Necker clearly understood childhood in a similar way to Steuart, who had pointed out that children existed in a sort of servitude, in the sense that they were totally reliant upon and hence subordinate to their parents.⁵

A patriarchal economy, complete with paterfamilias, was Steuart's explicit ideal for a national economy. Such a paternal society bound the propertied and the poor, who in the end did not really need their freedom, together. Necker concurred that the strict application of the

¹ Ibid, p. 160.

² Ibid.

³ Ibid, p. 153.

⁴ Ibid, p. 185.

⁵ Steuart, *Principles*, I, p. 256. Under Roman law, children as well as slaves were *obnoxii*. Skinner, *Liberty*, p. 41.

legal claims of property and liberty in a free market economy was a rejection of this paternalism.¹ A physiocratic and ultimately Smithian insistence on property rights and *liberty* was a hasty and immature approach to political economy. To be a member of a society, even a well-to-do and educated member, was to agree to the balance of authority and responsibility, relinquishing fantasies of freedom.²

According to Necker, the condition of the people was fixed because they lacked the leisure to become enlightened.³ The monarch, as legislator, was obliged to accommodate them by ensuring that sudden price rises did not occur. This required regulation, even if this was not profitable on a national level. Necker drew a distinction between actual need and the fear of want. Rather, therefore, than having to do directly with a biological imperative or right of humankind, as in Linguet's thesis, Necker made the danger of starvation into an issue of happiness or social stability, which was always a national concern. It was a matter of balancing all interests within the nation. This balancing sometimes even included compromising the interest of the state itself, in terms of its overall growth and performance.

In this sense, Necker's explanation confirms John Walter and Keith Wrightson's analysis of dearth and its role in strengthening social order in early modern societies.⁴ In Necker's depiction, shortage or perceived shortage offered the normally silent French masses a word or two in a dialogue, which saw the authority and status of government go unquestioned, so long as it publicly took measures against shortage. Offering the people even potentially economically irrational safeguards secured their participation in a system which, at the same time, repressed them. Welfare even more explicitly overtook liberty in Necker's account than in Steuart's. However, for both the responsibility

¹ C. Bouton, *The Flour War* (Pennsylvania, 1993), p. 176.

² G. Faccarello, 'Galiani, Necker and Turgot' in idem (ed.) *Studies in the History of French Political Economy* (London, 1998), p. 141.

³ Necker, *Sur la Législation*, I, pp. 156-7.

⁴ J. Walter and K. Wrightson, 'Dearth and the Social Order in Early Modern England', *P&P*, 71 (1976), p. 23.

for welfare now resided firmly with a national government, and was no longer a matter for feudal lords.

Conclusion

Necker and Steuart's relationship to mercantilism is complicated, especially because of their own conscious attempts to avoid doctrinarism. Nevertheless, some of their thoughts, particularly when it came to population theory or to raw materials, betrayed certain assumptions about the role of the economy in relation to the power of the nation state and the supposedly limited nature of the world market. However, the definition of the nation and especially national good is a problem for criticisms of so-called mercantilism, which depict it as inherently backward. In fact, this is the loophole that allowed for Keynes to give the system its reprieve. The analysis of Steuart and Necker actually ran deeper than simple consideration of balance of trade; they examined the social relations which constituted the nation and, in a sense, also the stability and utility of that unit.

In many ways, the attitudes of these two authors and Linguet towards feudalism, and towards the social configuration that followed, bear a resemblance to E.P. Thompson's analysis of the moral economy. Their work, like Thompson's, focussed on teasing out the implications of capitalisation and the tensions placed on old notions of hierarchy and inequality by the new norms. Thompson depicted the orderly and paradigmatic behaviour of rioting crowds as evidence of 'some deeply embedded, "structural" reciprocity'.¹ The work of Necker and Steuart particularly, reveal attempts to trace the path of this reciprocity into contemporary post-feudal society. In each case, it brought them to consider the relationship between the nation – now composed of

¹ E. P. Thompson, 'Patrician Society, Plebeian Culture', *Journal of Social History*, 7:4 (1974), p. 402.

supposedly unbound subjects rather than lords and vassals – and the state.

For both authors, the decline of feudalism occasioned new roles for the state, particularly intervention in the grain trade. The roles which Steuart and Necker assigned to their respective statesman were similar, but there were important differences. For each, the key danger which labourers faced was that grain prices would exceed their means. Both also maintained that it was within the competence and the remit of a statesman to prevent this from happening. However, Steuart was far more prepared than Necker to credit the notion that self-interest could result in mutually beneficial social relations, because he saw society as bound by economic, as opposed to moral or political, reciprocities. For Steuart, reciprocity could be found in the interchange created by luxury (that is, non-essential) consumption. He supposed that the proprietor and employer were as dependent on the labourers' efforts as the labourers were upon the wages they received from their employers. Even the statesman's interventions were economically reasonable (rather than merely moral), because, thanks to the doctrine of the centrality of labourers, if they failed to subsist, then society was liable to implode.

For Steuart, the statesman remained an almost uninterested observer who checked not the relationship between the producer and consumer; seller and buyer; or employer and wage earner, but rather the relationship between wages and prices. Hence the granary scheme which he designed entirely to this end. Steuart was preoccupied with the statesman's solicitous manipulation of monetary policy and he even envisioned his granary system as a sort of bank where grain was currency.¹ It was essential, then, for the statesman to keep an eye on the relationship between money and value

¹ Steuart, 'Dissertation', p. 368.
Daisy Gibbs

By comparison, for Necker, employers were virtually independent of the individual labourer, as each could be easily replaced in a labour market so prejudiced against them as a class. Necker seemed to think that, in a system of wage-labour in an unfavourable market, the old reciprocity was more likely to have been relocated in the direct relationship between the people and their sovereign government. What this meant was that, for Necker, the survival and happiness of the labouring classes were rooted entirely in the reciprocal political relationship which they shared with the statesman.

Self-interest was a negative force, which meant that economic ties between classes could only be exploitative. Necker expected a statesman, therefore, to use explicit regulation, rather than the more subtle manipulation of economic forces, to protect vulnerable members of society. In this sense, the labouring classes were more tightly bound to their government and their class than in Steuart's system, where there was perhaps more interclass cohesion. This is why Necker could possibly be classed as a predecessor of socialist thinkers, where the same could not apply to Steuart, in spite of all that they did share.

For both Steuart and Necker, the need of the common people for grain promoted national cohesion, and potentially national identity, or at least belonging. However, for Necker the relationship was far more centralised, with reciprocity operating basically on a many to one basis. Meanwhile, in Steuart's work reciprocity still operated on a many to many basis, with the statesman as a benevolent but almost uninvolved overseer.

In fact, Steuart's theory even allowed him to begin to examine the potential international reciprocities for which need and luxury could allow. He could imagine a situation where a developed nation, such as Britain, might have recourse to foreign grain imports. Therefore, he argued that 'trade has an evident tendency towards the improvement of the world in general, by rendering the inhabitants of one country

industrious, in order to supply the wants of another, without any prejudice to themselves'.¹ Necker's model, by comparison, called for self-sufficiency in a hostile world where potential dependence on an international grain trade would leave the nation at the mercy of its enemies.²

Necker's nation clearly maintained its independence and peculiarity at all costs, but in Steuart's work the situation is slightly less pronounced. The cohesion which he presented, nevertheless, depended on complimentary but peculiar national products, and hence economic identities. As in his depiction of the situation within the nation, there was reciprocity, yet hierarchy remained. Moreover, the goal of the nation dependent on another for its subsistence remained national enrichment, and though the two might grow together, clearly an imbalance of wealth and power was to remain intact. In this way therefore, both authors seem to have been limited to considering the nation as the greatest possible economic and political unit, even in spite of international economic bonds of reciprocity.

¹ Steuart, *Principles*, I, p. 137

² Necker, *Sur la Législation*, II, pp. 70-1.

Chapter 5: Citizens, Liberty and the Case for Free Trade

Introduction

This chapter turns to the theory behind the deregulation of the grain trade in Britain and France. It considers free trade arguments before Adam Smith by focussing on the work of Anne-Robert-Jacques Turgot (1727-81) in the French case and that of Josiah Tucker (1713-99) in the British. Turgot wrote at length on the grain trade, especially in relation to his role as intendant in the Limousin region. Tucker, the Dean of Gloucester, meanwhile did not treat the grain issue specifically in his many works on political economy and other subjects. However, in the course of his correspondence with Charles the Third Viscount Townshend (1700-1764) his views on the issue were made explicit. For this reason, although Turgot and Tucker are the main foci of the chapter, it will also treat the work of Townshend, which Tucker himself admitted was highly influential on his own.¹

In turn, the influence of Tucker's work on the Gournay group, the physiocrats, and ultimately on Turgot, has been acknowledged by historians of economic thought.² Tucker and Turgot were in correspondence, and Turgot even translated some of the dean's work into French. In spite of this, Tucker's work has not survived the test of time as well as that of his French counterpart. This can, in part, be attributed to the fact that he penned no single great work. However, Tucker's work has also been somewhat overlooked and often treated as simple mercantilism, in spite of his commitment to many of the

¹ Tucker to Townshend, 13th July 1752 in *The Manuscripts of the Marquess Townshend*, HMC, Eleventh Annual Report, Appendix, Part IV (London, 1887), p. 379.

² R.L. Schuyler (ed.), *Josiah Tucker* (New York, 1931), p. 11.

principles of free trade which underpinned the work of Turgot and ultimately of Adam Smith.

Turgot himself displayed some apprehension of being dubbed a 'Man of Systems', because his work made a remarkably simple model of the apparently complex and variable nature of what is now called economics. For this reason, as with the previous chapter, the approach of the authors is dealt with first. The first section explores the apparent French preference for Cartesian logic in opposition to supposedly British empiricism by examining the epistemological positioning of the authors together with their own ideas about who was qualified to study their commercial subject.

Treating the subject as a science, Turgot and Tucker found that they had to deal with the notion of self-interest, and it is their treatments of this in relation to government supervision and the general good which the second section of this chapter investigates. The admiration and the aspersions which each cast upon the political configuration of the rival nation is explored in relation to their respective ideas about liberty in an economic and political sense.

The final section explores how these thoughts on an individual level were channelled into their views on the international situation. In particular this section explores the 'rich country- poor country problem' in an effort to understand how Tucker and Turgot positioned their own nation and fellow citizens in a putative system of global free trade. Overall the chapter concludes that, although Tucker and Turgot both believed in free trade, they differed in their notions of how to establish lasting commercial freedom and of what global free trade could mean for their respective nations. For while Turgot depicted France as poised to thrive in a free trade world, Tucker presented Britain on the edge of a precipice, and concerned himself with divining how Britain's teetering supremacy might be delivered.

Natural Law and the Science of Political Economy

Josiah Tucker's origins were relatively humble. However, a sound education at a grammar school followed by St John's College, Oxford, together with his ability to make friends in high places, got him on his way. Having taken holy orders, he was appointed curate at St Stephens in Bristol in 1737 and two years later, was made rector at All Saint's in Bristol also. He cut his literary teeth on theological issues, launching his career as a publicist, and controversialist, with a biting critique of Methodism, which was then flourishing in Bristol.¹

The bustling Atlantic port of Bristol, where he could observe the comings and goings of merchants and businessmen, continued to inspire Tucker's work for the duration of his career. Though he pondered theological and social issues – including the naturalisation of foreign Protestants and Jews – he soon also sunk his teeth into political economy. He published his highly successful *Brief Essay* in 1749. The work treated economic issues, such as foreign trade, monopoly and restriction, together with social questions such as religion, naturalisation, and political liberty, which continued to preoccupy its author.²

Tucker's work was extremely popular and he was consulted as an authority on trade by MPs.³ Evidently Tucker's commercial expertise was well respected by the Bishop of Norwich, Thomas Hayter, who was tutor to the future George III. For, in 1752 he commissioned Tucker to write a handbook for the prince.⁴ However, the project was never completed, and in the author's lifetime what there was only circulated as a complete whole on a private basis amongst friends as *Elements of*

¹ R.T. Cornish, 'Tucker, Josiah (1713–1799)', *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography* (Oxford, 2004) [<http://www.oxforddnb.com/view/article/27790>, accessed 22 September 2015]; T. Hutchison, *Before Adam Smith* (Oxford, 1988), p. 228.

² *Ibid.*, pp. 228–9

³ K. Willis, 'The Role in Parliament of the Economic Ideas of Adam Smith, 1776–1800', *History of Political Economy*, 11:4 (1979), p. 537.

⁴ Hutchison, *Before Adam Smith*, p. 299.

Commerce and Theory of Taxes, though fragments were eventually also published under other titles.¹

In the preface to his *Four Tracts* published in 1774, Tucker gave his reasons for terminating the project. Ever the one to revel in his own reputation as a controversialist, he wrote that

I had not made a great Progress, before I discovered that such a Work was by no means proper to be sheltered under the protection of a Royal Patronage, on account of the many jealousies to which it was liable, and the many cavils which might be raised against it.²

This was no exaggeration: Tucker's views regularly got him into trouble. In Bristol he was physically assaulted in the street for his attack on Methodism, and later burnt in effigy for his favourable stance on Jewish naturalisation. However, his work also helped him to make valuable alliances. For example, his support of Robert Nugent's bill for naturalising foreign Protestants ultimately led to Tucker's appointment as Dean of Gloucester in 1758.³

Yet the historiography has not been kind to Tucker either. The originality and pro-free trade stance that he claimed for himself have not impressed economic historians. Jacob Viner dismissed Tucker as a mercantilist, citing the fact that Tucker still invested in a 'balance of labour' doctrine, which led him to encourage the regulation of foreign trade.⁴ Overall, Viner's work cautions against reading too much into 'stray and vague anticipations of later doctrine' in the work of Tucker and most of his contemporaries.⁵ Terence Hutchison likewise argued

¹ Schuyler, *Josiah Tucker*, p. 12.

² J. Tucker, 'Four Tracts together with Two Sermons' [1774] in *The Collected Works of Josiah Tucker* (London, 1993), II, p. vii.

³ Cornish, 'Tucker, Josiah' [<http://www.oxforddnb.com/view/article/27790>, accessed 22 September 2015].

⁴ Hutchison, *Before Adam Smith*, p. 238; J. Viner, *Studies in the Theory of International Trade* (London, 1937), p. 64.

⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 92. Sir Dudley North; William Paterson; Isaac Gervaise; and George Whatley are the only exceptions which Viner allows to this rule.

that, although Tucker pioneered some liberal thoughts, he nevertheless insisted on a 'strong role for government'.¹ Murray Rothbard concurred that Tucker was 'extravagantly hailed in his day as a free trader'.²

Robert Livingstone Schuyler was likewise sceptical about the novelty of Tucker's thought, and also relegated the Dean of Gloucester to the ranks of the so-called mercantilists. However Schuyler allowed, and George Shelton agreed, that Tucker was somewhat unorthodox in envisioning economic life and theory as something like a discrete science.³

In *Brief Essay*, Tucker duly announced his intention to confound popular opinion that this 'science' was 'not reducible to any fixed and certain principles'.⁴ Most of all, he maintained, the subject was not to be considered the sole preserve of merchants. Their opinions – which depended on their private interests – were bound to clash, precluding general consensus on most points.⁵

A similar point was made by George Whatley, who advised that the opinion of merchants 'must ever be the Spring of his actions: Government ought, notwithstanding, to endeavor to procure particular Informations from every one'.⁶ To that end, Tucker suggested that a 'person of a liberal and learned education, not concerned in trade, is better qualified to engage in the study of it as a Science, than a merchant'.⁷ For Tucker, then, first-hand experience, though it was useful, was not the primary qualification for dealing with commercial and ultimately economic subject matter. The issue of trade and its regulation needed to be demystified and placed on the curriculum of the unbiased gentleman's liberal education.

¹ Hutchison, *Before Adam Smith*, pp. 231-2.

² M.N. Rothbard, *Economic Thought before Adam Smith* (Aldershot, 1995), p. 335.

³ Schuyler (ed.), *Josiah Tucker*, p. 13; G. Shelton, *Dean Tucker and Eighteenth-Century Economic and Political Thought* (London, 1981), p.50.

⁴ J. Tucker, 'Brief Essay' (1753 version) in *Collected Works*, I, p. v.

⁵ Shelton, *Dean Tucker*, p. 49.

⁶ G. Whatley and B. Franklin, *Principles of Trade* (London, 1774), pp. 32-3. Adam Smith agreed with this point. A. Smith, *An Inquiry into the Nature and Causes of the Wealth of Nations*, eds. R.H. Campbell, A.S. Skinner, and W.B. Todd, (Oxford, 1976), I.xi.10.

⁷ Tucker, 'Brief Essay', p. vi.

Tucker was not alone in his patronage of this so-called science. His correspondent, Charles Townshend, established an essay prize in the subject as a means of 'introducing the Science of Trade into... [Cambridge] university'.¹ Even though it echoed the calls, raised by the likes of William Petty and Joseph Massie, for a theoretical approach to trade at Oxford and Cambridge, the proposed subject matter was entirely 'maverick' for its time.² Unfortunately it quickly became clear that the subject was 'so entirely foreign to the present system of our education that the introduction of it will probably be attended with some difficulties'.³

In its first year, the competition was a pleasing success for both Townshend and the university. It elicited an uncontroversial prize-winning essay about the connections between trade and civil liberty. Evidently, few questioned the assumption that Britain benefitted commercially from its supposedly exemplary record of civil liberty.⁴ The masters at Cambridge believed with Townshend that British merchants enjoyed freedom from arbitrary government intervention, which encouraged them in their enterprises.⁵

However, the second year proved a fiasco. The masters at Cambridge decided to set an essay question of their own fabrication in preference to the suggestions offered by their benefactor. James Raven points out that Townshend's prime suggestion, which prompted comment on national morality and regulation, could well invite controversy. It was rejected, he argues, due to fears that it might embroil the university in the contentious debates over the Jew Bill, of which Tucker was so active

¹ Townshend to the Reverend Doctor Yonge, 5th November 1754 in *Manuscripts*, p. 385.

² J. R. Raven, 'Viscount Townshend and the Cambridge Prize for Trade Theory, 1754–1756', *HJ*, 28:3 (1985), pp. 536–7.

³ Dr Yonge to Townshend, 17th October 1754 in *Manuscripts*, p. 384.

⁴ Raven, 'The Cambridge Prize', p. 545.

⁵ D.C. North and B.R. Weingast, 'Constitutions and Commitment', *Journal of Economic History*, 49:4 (1989), p. 829.

a part.¹ Therefore, 'populousness', the second matter offered by Townshend in his list, was selected.

However, in addition to Townshend's 'On what circumstances does the populousness of a country principally depend?' a second part was added, namely, '& what effect has the populousness of a Nation on its trade?' Townshend was enraged. He argued that this question precluded proper analysis of the direct relationship which he saw between increasing trade and population growth.² Moreover, according to Raven, Townshend thought that the rejection of his preferred question betrayed an unwillingness on the part of the institution to engage in objective discussion about trade.³ He haughtily refused to even so much as glance over the winning entry and discontinued the annual competition.⁴ The problem of expertise in the subject, therefore, even thwarted attempts to promote its study at university level.

Townshend had expressed his view of the role of trade in a nation in *National Thoughts*, a pamphlet published under the alias 'a landowner'. This nom-de-plume supposedly signified that the author was writing against his own private interests.⁵ It immediately elicited alarm on the part of other landowners and traders who argued that, without the subsidy, grain exports would cease.⁶

However, Townshend's landholdings were in Norfolk, where bounty payments out of King's Lynn and Great Yarmouth were extremely high. From about 1750, the serious financial demands which bounty payments made on the national treasury put the matter on the public agenda. It evidently also worried Townshend who published this piece on the issue in 1751.⁷ Moreover, in spite of the bucolic evocations of the

¹ Raven, 'The Cambridge Prize', pp. 547-8.

² Townshend to Reverend Law, 26th January 1756 in *Manuscripts*, p. 388.

³ Raven, 'The Cambridge Prize', p. 550.

⁴ Townshend to Law, 26th June 1756 in *Manuscripts*, p. 391.

⁵ Rothbard, *Economic Thought*, p. 336.

⁶ D.G. Barnes, *A History of the English Corn Laws* (London, 1930), p. 25.

⁷ *Ibid*, pp. 23-4.

nom-de-plume, the Townshends of Raynham, like their neighbours the Walpoles, were immersed in commercial concerns.¹ The author clearly had a range of matters on his mind as he wrote.

This pamphlet prompted the initial exchange with Tucker, who also initially disagreed with Townshend's standpoint and argued that exporting grain was an unrewarding occupation without the incentive of the bounty payments.² Ultimately, however, he was converted and declared himself Townshend's disciple.³ He remarked especially on what he found to be the sagacity of Townshend's method wherein

a man should form to himself a general plan drawn from ye properties of commerce & then descend to particulars and individuals, & observe whether they are co-operating with ye general interest.⁴

Townshend had apparently achieved this in *National Thoughts* by first laying down 'such general maxims of trade as cannot, in my opinion, be controverted'.⁵ In revealing thus that he had already tasked himself with challenging these general statements, and found them incontrovertible, it seems that Townshend was employing a rhetorical, and somewhat deductive, method to reason out self-evident truths in a world that was inherently ordered. Thanks largely to Newtonian philosophy, actual observed particulars were in the process of devaluation in the esteem of British philosophers. By the eighteenth century they were preoccupied with liberal governmentality and prioritised 'universals and the (invisible) laws of nature',⁶ which were thought to guide everything from planetary arrangements to the economy.

¹ Raven, 'The Cambridge Prize', p. 543.

² Tucker to Townshend, 12th March 1752 in *Manuscripts*, pp. 371-2.

³ Tucker to Townshend, 13th July 1752 in *ibid*, p. 379.

⁴ *Ibid*, p. 375. Hume made a similar point about drawing general conclusions from particular cases. D. Hume, 'Of Commerce' in E.F. Miller (ed.), *David Hume* (Indianapolis, 1987), p. 254.

⁵ C. Townshend, *National Thoughts* (London, 1751), p. 26.

⁶ M. Poovey, *A History of the Modern Fact* (Chicago & London, 1998), p. 214.

However, Townshend's next move, as Tucker described, was to decide whether the corn bounty policy was aligned with these maxims. Here he added in the Bishop of Ely's wheat price data, in order to prove his overall point that the corn bounty was harmful.¹ These figures, therefore, helped Townshend to subvert the inductive objection and ground his universal abstractions in numerical fact. This conformed to the old-fashioned way, more akin to political arithmetic and loosely informed by Baconian empiricism.² In a way, then, he pre-empted Smith, who famously scoffed at political arithmetic, but nevertheless engaged with the figures and theories which it had furnished. For it was not the 'impulse' towards statistics itself, but the 'inspiring message, the suggestive program [of political arithmetic], which wilted in the wooden hands of the Scottish professor'.³

Tucker's method of generating universal knowledge ultimately also required the kind of observation, and not mere reasoning, which made good his claim to scientific enquiry according to its contemporary meaning.⁴ He understood commerce as a natural human inclination, which meant that the same principles were to be observed in all human interactions in every society, and duly encouraged young readers to make a general tour. This was not so that they could buy exotic and lavish clothing and take on foreign airs, but so that they could 'rub off local prejudices' and unravel the commercial mores of other societies, becoming acquainted with the universal characteristics which supposedly united them all.⁵

Tucker credited all human beings with certain 'powers' including 'the prerogative of reason and reflection'.⁶ However, he allowed most people only to apply them in the identification and pursuit of their own

¹ Townshend, *National Thoughts*, p. 28.

² Poovey, *Modern Fact*, p. 149.

³ J.A. Schumpeter, *History of Economic Analysis* (London, 1955), p. 212.

⁴ Ibid, p.155; B.J. Shapiro, *A Culture of Fact* (Ithaca & London, 2000), p. 77.

⁵ J. Tucker, 'Instructions for Travellers' [1758] in *Collected Works*, III, p. 3.

⁶ J. Tucker, 'The Elements of Commerce and Theory of Taxes' [1755] in *Collected Works* (London, 1993), III, p.55.

good within social limits. Self-interest was for Tucker universal, but it did not necessarily result in universal benefit or even accord. He argued that

the circulation of commerce being only directed by the reason or wisdom of man, is therefore subject to all those impediments, obstructions and irregularities, which result from the vices and extravagancies, the partial interests, the false conceptions, and mistaken policy of mankind.¹

Humankind was imbued with self-love. Tucker followed Bernard Mandeville and others in remarking that public good emanated from the free pursuit of individual interest.² He even agreed that self-love offered the capacity for civilisation and sociability along the lines that Montesquieu and Hume had sketched.³ Where formerly only a virtuous devotion to the *polis* was enough to socialise individuals, the new bonds forged by commercial activity and the politeness it required allowed the formation of a more modern and harmonious society.⁴

However, Tucker also implied that self-interest could corrupt the field of study that he was attempting to establish. He remarked that the student of commerce had to be careful to adhere to universal principals first, or else it was likely that 'he studies Trade only as a Monopolist, & doth more hurt than good to the community'.⁵ The true science of commerce had to be freed of the prejudices that grew from self-interest, and then deployed in the form of political economy. This prevented harm from coming to a society composed of self-interested individuals. Hence he thought of the Board of Trade as 'Guardians of the Publick Welfare'.⁶ The implication was that a statesman or an economist

¹ Ibid, p. 60.

² Viner, *Studies*, p. 99.

³ A.O. Hirschman, *The Passions and the Interests* (Princeton, 1977), p. 61.

⁴ J.G.A. Pocock, *Virtue, Commerce, and History* (Cambridge, 1985), pp. 114-5.

⁵ Tucker to Townshend, 12th March 1752 in *Manuscripts*, p. 375.

⁶ Tucker, 'Brief Essay', p. ix.

needed to be disinterested in order to fully appreciate the subtleties of the economic system.¹

If private interest were put aside, the general principles of trade could be carefully divined by humankind, particularly by observing Christian morals, since they operated in an intricate system, formed by 'the same good Being who formed the religious system'.² The Dean of Gloucester, a man of the church, was obviously very well-placed, therefore, to write on the subject. Moreover, Tucker was neither a trader nor a landowner, and proclaimed, 'I have no private ends of my own to serve, either one way or the other'.³ Evidently, self-interest could be relegated to the economic sphere, and there had to be some other motive to guide governments and economists.⁴

However, Tucker also singled out the landed-interest as peculiarly qualified to arbitrate on the subject simply because their private interests were, he supposed, intrinsically linked to the good of the nation in which their property was immovably situated.⁵ In this sense, Tucker was tackling what John Pocock identifies as the 'tension between virtue and commerce'.⁶ He was committed to the idea that 'political capacity' was not rooted in inalienable rights, but was made possible by inequalities and the necessary exchange of property. For if rights were not inalienable, then representatives could not be elected, and there could be no government. Actually, individuals gave up their claim to a political personality, in order to participate in a society where they owned property, though no longer necessarily in the landed form.⁷ Tucker clutched one last shred of the *virtue* of yore, when he recommended that a proprietary connection to the land itself could save representatives from the corruption inherent in the government of

¹ P. Force, *Self-Interest before Adam Smith* (Cambridge, 2003), p. 204.

² Tucker, 'Instructions for Travellers', p. 73.

³ Tucker, 'Brief Essay', p. 140.

⁴ Force, *Self-Interest*, p. 206.

⁵ Tucker, 'Brief Essay', p. x.

⁶ Pocock, *Virtue*, p. 122.

⁷ *Ibid*, pp. 119-20.

a society without rights.¹ How satisfying it must have been for Tucker when the landowning Townshend used corn price data to prove that his stance, which seemed economically irrational on the private level, was beneficial to both his nation and his class.

Turgot, another correspondent of Tucker, seems to have been similarly inclined towards the idea of a scientific political economy. He agreed that the studies and learning of a merchant 'only amounts to a part of the science of commerce'.² Although Turgot contributed to the *Encyclopédie* and was anxious for Morellet to get on with his dictionary,³ he implied that the subject needed to be moved forward from works of reference such as Savary's *Dictionnaire Universel de Commerce* (1723), which was penned as guide to terminology predominantly for merchants.⁴ Turgot argued that it was up to a 'philosopher and a statesman' to consider the reasons behind price-revolutions, diversity of fashion, and the fundamental natural laws which guided commerce in its entirety, as well as 'the complicated relations by which commerce is bound with all branches of political economy'.⁵

However, in the process of putting this science to paper, Turgot's master, Vincent de Gournay had been branded a 'man of systems' by his critics. Turgot had been under the tutelage of the anglophile Intendant of Commerce since 1755. It was during this period that he wrote several pieces for the *Encyclopédie* and was also introduced to the work of British political economists, including Josiah Tucker.⁶ He was already

¹ Here Tucker's thought bore relations to physiocratic theory and Turgot's project for provincial assemblies. J. Shovlin, *The Political Economy of Virtue* (London, 2006), p. 143.

² A.R.J. Turgot, 'Éloge de Vincent Gournay' [1759] in G. Schelle (ed.), *Oeuvres de Turgot* (Paris, 1913), I, p. 596.

³ Turgot to Mlle de Lespinasse, 26th January 1770 in *Oeuvres*, III, p. 421.

⁴ A.F. Terjanian, *Commerce and its Discontents in Eighteenth-Century French Political Thought* (Cambridge, 2013), p. 13.

⁵ Turgot, 'Éloge', pp. 596-7.

⁶ F. Bayard, J. Felix, and P. Hamon, *Dictionnaire des Surintendants et Contrôleurs Généraux des Finances* (Paris, 2000), pp. 175-6.

published, therefore, when, in 1759, Gournay died, and took it upon himself to defend his legacy.

Interpreting the charge levelled against Gournay in 'philosophical', that is, essentially methodological or even epistemological terms, Turgot surmised that Gournay's critics were casting aspersions on the practice of assuming patterns from single observations and the 'mania for plying facts to ideas and not ideas to facts'.¹ Turgot retorted that Gournay's efforts, and his own, tended to the polar opposite of presuming more knowledge than could ever be experimentally demonstrated, by promoting free-trade in opposition to government intervention. Actually, he argued, commerce depended upon

a profusion of operations whose immensity alone prevents their being known and which, moreover, always depend on a multitude of ever changing circumstances which cannot be mastered or foreseen.²

Nobody could be more expert in the matter of trade than the individuals concerned in each and every transaction. The experts of industry were not to be found amongst the virtuosi in government office or laboratories, but in the workshops and factories themselves. Across the Channel the failure of English science to compile an epic Baconian 'History of Trades' had proved these limits.³ It was practical for economic thinkers to retreat from the overwhelming complexities of the plethora of individual contributions to and interactions with the growing economy.

For Turgot, free trade was to be the triumph of the collective omniscience over the tyranny of the foolhardy individual who would presume to know it all. This theory also reflected his understanding of the origins of human language, which he, like Étienne Bonnot de

¹ Turgot, 'Éloge', p. 619.

² Ibid.

³ W.E. Houghton, 'The History of Trades: Its Relation to Seventeenth-Century Thought', *Journal of the History of Ideas*, 2:1 (1941), pp. 57-8.

Condillac, believed developed from innumerable individual encounters and exchanges.¹ Meanwhile, the impossibility of understanding all potential variations of trade and trading circumstances essentially allowed Turgot to invoke the absurdities of, and hence effectively shelve, empirical inductive reasoning as far as the economist was concerned.² This allowed him to focus his attention on the general and universal aspects of his subject, whilst endorsing the ‘sensationalist epistemology’ of the multitude.³

Turgot’s most systematic piece on the subject of political economy had, like Tucker’s, an unusual initial intended readership: it was written to help two Chinese visitors to France understand the research questions which he had put to them about their own economy.⁴ It was therefore part of a research project into the political economy of China. The ‘pronounced sinophilia’ at the court of Versailles is known to have influenced Quesnay and the physiocrats.⁵ Thought about the Chinese economy clearly also inspired Turgot to consider the technical aspects of political economy at home and abroad. However, it was only with reluctance on his part that the result was published.

Nevertheless, in 1766 Turgot’s piece appeared in *Éphémérides du Citoyen*, (by then the mouthpiece of Physiocracy)⁶ under the title *Réflexions sur la Formation et la Distribution des Richesses*. The work modelled the third phase of Turgot’s wider stadial theory of economic development, namely the origins and development of agricultural capitalism.⁷ It conforms to the kind of ‘conjectural history’, which was

¹ H.C. Clark, *Compass of Society* (Lanham, 2007), p. 222.

² Poovey, *Modern Fact*, p. 177.

³ Clark, *Compass*, p. 222.

⁴ Turgot to Tucker, 12th September 1770 in *Oeuvres*, III, p. 422.

⁵ S.G. Jacobsen, ‘Physiocracy and the Chinese model’ in Y. Ma and H.M. Trautwein (eds.), *Thoughts on Economic Development in China* (New York, 2013), p. 12.

⁶ A. Clément, ‘Nicolas Baudeau, an anti-Physiocrat? *Éphémérides du Citoyen* prior to “conversion” (1765–1766)’, *The European Journal of the History of Economic Thought*, 22:3 (2015), p. 534.

⁷ P. Groenewegen, *Eighteenth Century Economics* (London, 2002). A four stages system set Turgot apart from the physiocrats, for whom there were only two epochs: ‘before the discovery of agriculture and after’. L. Vardi, *The Physiocrats and the World of the Enlightenment* (Cambridge, 2012), p. 130.

justified on account of the sort of ‘a priori principles’ which Mary Poovey has described, and in particular ideas about natural law. Meanwhile the stadial theory was also in-keeping with notions of the perfectibility of humankind.¹ Like Tucker, Turgot also understood the economy at large as a somewhat providential system and believed even more so than Tucker that, if let alone, even apparently negative human attributes (like unrestrained self-interest) could work to the benefit of all members of every society.²

This was in spite of the fact that Turgot witnessed the chaos which deregulation of the grain trade seemed to cause. Having entered a career in public administration in 1751, Turgot was finally appointed intendant of the *généralité* of Limoges in 1761, and many of his most important works, including *Réflexions*, were written during his time in this office.³ In this role, Turgot was at the front line of administration throughout the deregulation of the grain trade between 1763 and 1770. Moreover, he served in a region that suffered heavily from shortage and eventually famine. This adversity did not, however, cause Turgot to compromise in his commitment to a free grain trade, which he had developed under Gournay and in parallel to the physiocrats.⁴

It was in order to explain his stance and the measures he was taking, that Turgot composed two sets of letters. Penned in 1770, these took the form of administrative advice to the Controller General, Joseph Marie Terray. The *Lettres au Contrôleur Général* generally concerned Turgot’s own measures to combat crisis in his region. The *Lettres sur le Commerce des Grains*, meanwhile explained the principles of a free grain trade, in an attempt to convince Terray to preserve the liberal legislation. In comparison with Tucker, Turgot was often relatively

¹ Poovey, *Modern Fact*, p. 223; R.L. Meek, ‘Smith, Turgot, and the “Four Stages” Theory’, *History of Political Economy*, 3:1 (1971), p. 24.

² Hirschman, *The Passions*, p. 42; L. Dupré, *The Enlightenment and the Intellectual Foundations of Modern Culture* (New Haven, 2004), p. 207.

³ Bayard et al., *Dictionnaire*, pp. 175-6.

⁴ E. Rothschild, ‘Commerce and the State: Turgot, Condorcet and Smith’, *The Economic Journal*, 102:414 (1992), pp. 1202-3.

reluctant to see his work published. Even though he was convinced that the Controller General had not so much as scanned this important work, it was only posthumously that the letters were published in full.¹

Like Townshend, Turgot attempted to confound the popular experience of a government policy by using figures which proved prevalent opinion to be misinformed and unfounded. He used numerical data to illustrate that real-life experience actually played out just as theory predicted. He presented the supposed fact that the British, who enjoyed relative freedom to export grain, had sent no more than 364,000 *setiers* abroad in eighty years. Turgot concluded therefore that ‘experience is fully in agreement with reason here’.² Like Townshend, Turgot had managed to find some numbers to support his theoretical propositions, which helped make the specific argument in favour of free trade more robust. He devoured information, writing to Tucker in 1773 to request weekly grain price tables from a selection of villages, in order to help him understand the relationship between regulation and price variation that he had detected in France.³

The deployment of fact in the form of numerical data seems to have been reserved for special purposes. It was not always an essential part of the writing of at least two of the three authors under consideration in this chapter, for Tucker and Turgot were often comfortable enough to reckon on their reason alone, when writing for a more general public. This is in spite of the fact that Friedrich von Hayek placed Tucker in firm opposition to Cartesian rationalism, esteeming him amongst the ‘*English contemporaries*’ of the Scottish David Hume and Adam Smith, who seconded their ‘British tradition’ of liberty. Supposedly British liberty was spontaneous and resided firmly outside of government.⁴ Hayek used what he perceived as British and French epistemological

¹ Schelle (ed.), *Oeuvres*, III, p. 266, n.; Rothschild, *Economic Sentiments*, p. 74.

² Turgot, ‘Lettres sur le Commerce des Grains’ [1770] in *Oeuvres*, III, p. 294.

³ Turgot to Tucker, 10th December 1773 in *Oeuvres*, III, p. 615.

⁴ F.A. Hayek, *Constitution of Liberty* (London, 2006 edn.), p. 50. The italics are mine: Josiah Tucker was from Wales.

divergences to understand their rival theories of liberty, arguing that the trial and error of British institutional history – sometimes in the form of collective morality – freed its theorists from the need for ‘higher, supernatural intelligence’.¹ This account chimed in neatly with a ‘dual revolution’ scenario, which assigned economic development to Britain, and allowed France the conscious instigation of formal political freedoms and rights.²

This, however, overlooks both Tucker’s moral objections to unlimited self-love, imbued with Anglican moralising, and Turgot’s (though only his protégé, Condorcet, is explicitly mentioned by Hayek) appreciation for trial and error in his system of useful knowledge and his conception of who was included amongst the rightful possessors of such knowledge.³ For as we shall see, Tucker had serious doubts about the capacity of individuals to conform to Hayek’s assumed institutional moral code, while Turgot had his own apprehensions about government intelligence in economic matters.

Liberty, Self-Interest and the Public Good

One of the themes of the *Brief Essay*, in which Tucker set out to compare the characteristics of Britain with those of France, was the effect of the form of government on economic growth. It is important to note that, although Tucker invested in the notion of universal principles, he also accepted that ‘the *distinguishing* characteristics of a people... depend on their *National Polity*’.⁴ In other words, it was in the power of the government to influence the characteristics of its subjects. Townshend also seems to have considered the effects of form of government on national prosperity, since another of the questions he suggested for the ill-fated Cambridge essay prize challenged the entrant to discuss just

¹ Ibid, p. 53.

² C. Jones and D. Wahrman, ‘Introduction. An Age of Cultural Revolutions?’ in idem (eds.), *The Age of Cultural Revolutions* (Berkeley, 2002), p. 1.

³ Clark, *Compass*, p. 234.

⁴ Tucker, ‘Elements’, p. 62.

that.¹ Here they diverged from Montesquieu's argument that laws needed to suit the characteristics bred in people by their physical surroundings, which James Steuart had tended to follow.²

However, above all in his own work Townshend tackled public welfare measures. In *National Thoughts*, Townshend argued that cheap credit, to which the poor were apparently known to resort in hard times, bypassed the poor law, which was their intended recourse.³ He remained concerned with the affairs of the labouring classes and in 1753 he personally introduced a bill in Parliament that attacked the settlement clauses of the poor law and confronted the Elizabethan apprenticeship rules. He reviled apprenticeship legislation as a 'monopoly', which 'in any kind of Trade, by confining the same in a few Hands, is prejudicial to the Extension thereof'.⁴

Tucker also took great pleasure in gainsaying the popular vision of the Golden Age of Elizabethan England as he reflected on the institutional history of Britain. He maintained that Elizabeth was not the benevolent figure which history recalled. In fact, Elizabeth's was an age of tyranny, when the Royal Prerogative was exploited in order to establish unjust monopolies. This was in spite of valiant opposition on the part of a band of MPs, which included a Townshend ancestor.⁵ Meanwhile, Tucker believed, it was highly incompatible with despotism, and

the views of a Prince, who intends to govern arbitrarily, to permit his subjects *in general* to grow rich by Trade. For indeed, how can this be done without granting a general liberty?⁶

¹ Townshend to Dr Thomas, 29th October 1755 in *Manuscripts*, p. 286. The question read 'Has free trade or a free Government the greater effect in promoting the wealth and strength of a Nation?' Rothbard, *Economic Thought*, p. 342, n. 48.

² A. Garrett, 'Human Nature' in K. Haakonssen (ed.), *Cambridge History of Eighteenth-Century Philosophy* (Cambridge, 2006), p. 195.

³ Townshend, *National Thoughts*, p. 17.

⁴ 'A Bill, Intituled, An Act for encouraging Industry in the Kingdom, by removing certain Disabilities and Restraints contained in several former Acts', *House of Lords Sessional Papers 1714-1805* (12th November 1747 to 7th June 1753), p. 399.

⁵ Tucker, 'Elements', pp. 182-185.

⁶ *Ibid*, pp. 196-7.

Elizabeth I, Tucker claimed, had reinforced her own despotic reign by granting favours to fawning dependents in the form of monopolies.¹ In this sense he belonged to the Whig tradition, which maintained that *virtue* and freedom rested on the economic independence granted by unchecked ownership of property, often, but not necessarily, of the landed variety.²

Tucker made it his own mission to bring the 'Glorious Revolution in the Commercial System, which we have happily obtained in the Political',³ by exorcising the nation of monopoly. The revolution of 1689 was commonly seen as the end of French style tyranny,⁴ and Tucker made particular reference to the fact that France continued to suffer from many such inconveniences of an absolutist government. Its merchants in particular, he argued, could not depend on the security of their gains, hampering the overall national capacity for wealth generation.⁵

Townshend, who esteemed the 'safety and security in which every man found his person and property in *England*', made a similar observation about France's relative lack thereof.⁶ Both argued that French commerce, and hence the development of its national wealth, was thwarted by the arbitrary interventions of an unrestrained government which was a stranger to credible commitment.⁷

Furthermore, Tucker argued that tyranny had also pervaded the feudal society of former times. 'Gothic Barons' had maintained their influence by 'chaining down the Mass of the People in Slavery and Want'.⁸ He formed a theory of civil authority revolving around the development of

¹ Cf. Q. Skinner, *Liberty before Liberalism* (Cambridge, 1998), p. 95.

² Pocock, *Virtue*, p. 231.

³ Tucker, 'Elements', p. 136.

⁴ M. Goldie, 'The English System of Liberty' in M. Goldie and R. Wokler (eds.), *The Cambridge History of Eighteenth-Century Political Thought* (Cambridge, 2006); I. Hont, 'The "Rich Country- Poor Country" Debate in Scottish Classical Political Economy' in I. Hont and M. Ignatieff (eds.), *Wealth and Virtue* (Cambridge, 1983) p. 285.

⁵ Tucker, 'Brief Essay', p. 23.

⁶ Townshend, *National Thoughts*, p. 34.

⁷ North and Weingast, 'Constitutions and Commitment', p. 829.

⁸ Tucker, 'Elements', p. 91.

wage labour, where mutual interest eventually assumed the role formerly played by patron/ servant relations.¹ Overall, Tucker developed a history of receding monarchical and feudal powers in which he equated the increasing access to property on the part of the 'lower and middling class of People' with their increasing political freedom.²

Tucker referred to certain modes of living which were outdated, yet often supported by custom. For instance, he proposed that the custom of the 'Barbarian or Scythian Way of life', which saw sheep tended by wandering shepherds, was a major force in opposition to enclosure, which itself was actually in the interest of the poor.³ Custom was portrayed as a delusion of the poor, which hid their true interests from them. Commerce, on the other hand, had a civilising function in his work. Increasing understanding of reciprocal and shared interests helped individuals to understand and accept their place in society.⁴ Here Tucker was in accordance with David Hume's work and Scottish political economy in general, which saw a landed aristocracy as compatible with commerce and the division of labour. At the same time, the theory served his crusade against 'enthusiasm', in that it rejected radical libertarianism as a 'Puritan survival'.⁵

Indeed, both Tucker and Townshend portrayed total liberty as potentially counterproductive. In *National Thoughts* Townshend identified the depravity of the poor as a problem. Writing at the height of the gin craze, he decided that the people of England were a danger to the nation's prosperity due to their 'idle and licentious behaviour'.⁶ Townshend maintained that the government needed to remove access to cheap credit on the paltry sums that were required to keep the poor

¹ Pocock, *Virtue*, p. 164.

² Tucker, 'Elements', p. 91.

³ Ibid, p. 97.

⁴ Pocock, *Virtue*, pp. 262-3; Hont, *Jealousy of Trade*, p. 162.

⁵ Pocock, *Virtue*, p. 263; Force, *Self-Interest*, p. 160.

⁶ Townshend, *National Thoughts*, p. 1.

in drink and leisure.¹ This also tied in with part of his argument against the bounty on corn, which maintained that the price of labour had to be kept as low as possible to ensure the competitiveness of British goods.² Townshend remained, therefore, prisoner to notion that higher wages were incompatible with lower unit prices, and necessarily rendered goods uncompetitive.³

Tucker agreed with Townshend, seeing popular vices as counterproductive to the national good, as they were 'attended with Expense' and so required higher wages, rendering British-made goods uncompetitive in foreign markets.⁴ The two authors saw social and economic issues as inseparable and tended towards the opinion that the labouring classes needed to be kept in a strict condition of austerity in order for the nation as a whole to make economic gains.⁵ The poor were teetering on the border between vice-ridden passions and healthy disciplined interest. In their version, the outcome was not 'infallible' as it was to Hume, and required intervention.⁶

Salim Rashid suggests that by the time Townshend came to pen the bill of 1753, which would allow for more freedoms for the poor, he had revised his thinking somewhat from the paternalism of *National Thoughts*.⁷ However, it is hard to say for certain whether Townshend experienced any sort of epiphany. Tucker certainly managed to agree wholeheartedly with Townshend's concerns about the conduct of the poor and to advocate rigid social control without ever identifying any

¹ Ibid, p. 5.

² Ibid, p. 35.

³ Adam Smith loosed this 'Gordian knot' with his division of labour theory. Hont, *Jealousy of Trade*, p. 373.

⁴ Tucker, 'Brief Essay', p. 37.

⁵ Townshend is specifically named in E.S. Furniss's discussion of the 'Doctrine of the Social Importance of the Laborer', though, surprisingly, he is not mentioned in the ensuing consideration of the 'scathing indictments of the lax morals of the lower orders by social observers of the period'. Reference to Tucker is made in both cases however. E.S. Furniss, *The Position of the Labourer in a System of Nationalism* (New York, 1965), p. 22 n 3; pp. 98-9.

⁶ Hirschman, *The Passions*, p. 66; Pocock, *Virtue*, p. 69.

⁷ S. Rashid, 'Lord Townshend and the Influence of Moral Philosophy on Laissez-Faire', *The Journal of Libertarian Studies*, 8:1 (1986), p. 71.

contradiction with his enthusiasm for freeing trade.¹ Later, when considering the colonial crisis in 1774, Tucker explicitly identified strict government and social hierarchies with order, stating in the voice of a concerned merchant writing to a rebellious American nephew that

Governments there must be of some kind or other; and Peace and Subordination are to be preserved; otherwise there would be no such Thing as true liberty subsisting in the World.²

Too much of the wrong kind of freedom could definitely be harmful. Indeed, since he thought that ‘the Good of any state doth plainly arise from the increase, employment and *morals* of its subjects’,³ controlling the way people behaved was, for Tucker, the key to national prosperity.

An absolutist government, therefore, was actually peculiarly well appointed for this purpose, and, referring to the French case, Tucker argued that actually ‘the Subordination of the Common People is an unspeakable advantage to them in respect to Trade’.⁴ He considered the labouring classes of Britain in need of the sound discipline, which an elected government struggled to provide. For the privilege and significance apparently accorded them by a culture of electioneering set them ‘above control, frees them from all restraint, and brings down the Rich to pay their Court to them, contrary to the just and proper order of society’.⁵ In many ways, he seemed to agree with the Augustinian position, that the state could and should be used to enforce Christian morals and regulate destructive passions.⁶

Clearly both Tucker and Townshend conceived of liberty as deeply entwined in the security of property against arbitrary intervention,

¹ Tucker to Townshend, March 12th 1752 in *Manuscripts*, p. 371.

² Tucker, ‘Four Tracts’, p. 93.

³ Tucker, ‘Elements’, p. 63. Emphasis added.

⁴ Tucker, ‘Brief Essay’, p. 14.

⁵ *Ibid*, p. 38.

⁶ Hirschman, *The Passions*, p. 15. Adam Smith strongly disagreed, seeing luxury and emulation as stabilising forces in society. Force, *Self Interest*, pp. 228-9.

which was not only afforded by social existence and civil government, but even necessitated it.¹ However, Tucker insisted that these ideals were by no means safe-guarded by democracy. For popular opinion could be, as far as Tucker was concerned, a form of monopoly as dangerous, if not more so, than the tyrannical merchant monopolies which he despised.² Thus when it came to electioneering, Tucker feared that

the English Populace are too deeply versed in Politics,- and yet too little; too deeply to obey with Readiness and Cheerfullness; and too little to make a wise and prudent choice for themselves.³

With its mixed constitution, Tucker suggested that the British government was in danger of pandering to the views of the unenlightened masses, whose misunderstandings could prejudice the perfection of British political economy which had to remain '*compatible with the good of the Whole*'.⁴ Therefore, since Tucker believed that self-interest was a potential threat to the economic and general good of the nation, a strong government was required to press and enforce policies of free trade which he anticipated were likely to be unpopular with the people.⁵

This sort of theoretical incongruity between economic liberty and the advocacy of aspects of authoritarian government made an appearance in French, and particularly physiocratic, thought also. David McNally has attempted to clear up the 'paradox' which the physiocratic doctrine of legal despotism seems to present by locating it in a wider worldview. Physiocracy required that 'the state establish social arrangements which specifically favour a capitalist organization of agriculture at the

¹ Pocock, *Virtue*, p. 180.

² In a sense, Hilton L. Root is in agreement, arguing that a 'more accurate discription [of the moral economy] would emphasise the monopolistic character of the policies that crowds were trying to defend and the costs their actions imposed on the population at large.' H.L. Root, *The Fountain of Privilege* (Berkeley, 1994), p. 108.

³ Tucker, 'Instructions for Travellers', p. 67.

⁴ Tucker, 'Elements', p. 129.

⁵ Tucker, 'Brief Essay', pp. 50-3.

expense of customary rights'.¹ In other words, the implementation of physiocratic doctrine was to be so newfangled that it was bound to be unpopular and required a form of despotism for its enforcement. However, legal despotism had an internal safeguard which prevented it from becoming the arbitrary exercise of power on the part of the sovereign. This safeguard was the fact that the sovereign need not design laws, for these could be derived from nature. Legal despotism, therefore, was only the administrative configuration in which natural laws were allowed to predominate.²

McNally placed Turgot in agreement with the doctrine, essentially because he seemed to agree with many of the principles behind it,³ but how far Turgot ever conformed to the dogma of the physiocrats is a problem in itself.⁴ Gustav Schelle argued that Turgot was allergic to the physiocratic brand of moralising natural law. He could therefore never fully subscribe to the doctrine of legal despotism, but nevertheless agreed with some of the causes and implications of this mode of thought.⁵

Like the physiocrats, Turgot alleged that whatever the farmer 'produces of the earth beyond his personal requirements is the sole source (*fonds*) of the wages which all other members of society receive in exchange for their labour'.⁶ Thus he agreed with the physiocratic doctrine of the primacy of the agricultural 'productive' class, and argued that the interests of this class were identical to the interests of the rest of the

¹ D. McNally, *Political Economy and the Rise of Capitalism* (Berkeley, 1990), p. 120.

² M. Sonenscher, *Before the Deluge* (Oxford & Princeton, 2007), p. 214; L. Charles and P. Steiner, 'Entre Montesquieu et Rousseau. La Physiocratie parmi les Origines Intellectuelles de la Révolution' in R Bach (ed.), *Rousseau: Économie Politique* (Montmorency, 2000), p. 86.

³ McNally, *Political Economy*, p. 131.

⁴ For a recent account see P.H. Goutte and G. Klotz, 'Turgot: a Critic of Physiocracy?' *The European Journal of the History of Economic Thought*, 22:3 (2015), pp. 28-9

⁵ Schelle, *Oeuvres*, II, p. 29.

⁶ A.R.J. Turgot, 'Réflexions sur la Formation et la Distribution des Richesses' [1766] in *Oeuvres*, II, p. 537.

nation, who 'receive both their commodities and wages with which they buy commodities from them'.¹

However, Turgot also distinguished between the owners and the cultivators of land more meaningfully than the physiocrats, which allowed him to develop a theory of capital investment. He argued that the profit which cultivators generated above their production needs could not be construed as net product or revenue. This was because he thought that it acted as an incentive. Without this, he thought the cultivator would be disinclined to invest time and funds in land, when it would be far more convenient to lend the money on interest or even purchase land outright.² Moreover, he argued, the profit that entrepreneur-cultivators derived from their agricultural activity was generally converted into capital, which would ultimately need to be reinvested in order to perpetuate agricultural improvement.³ Only the gains that the landowners themselves received in rent from the cultivators could be considered revenue.

Nevertheless, the theory led Turgot to agree with the physiocrats that, if the prices of agricultural production were artificially depressed by regulation, then investment in agriculture became unprofitable and unattractive to entrepreneur improvers. Under the legislation of the grain trade, such cultivators, Turgot argued, faced a double 'monopoly': firstly they were only allowed to sell to their French compatriots, and secondly, they were only allowed to purchase French manufactures. They were discouraged from production on both counts.⁴

The first 'monopoly' was especially injurious since production 'always proportions itself to the habitual level of consumption'.⁵ This meant that, as long as exportation remained illegal, cultivators in an average

¹ Turgot, 'Lettres sur le Commerce des Grains', p. 313.

² Turgot, 'Réflexions', p. 600.

³ Ibid, pp. 570-1.

⁴ A.R.J. Turgot, 'Projet de Lettre au Contrôleur Général Bertin sur un Projet d'Edit' [1761] in *Oeuvres*, II, p. 124.

⁵ Turgot, 'Lettres sur le Commerce des Grains', p. 319.

year produced only as much as the population of France consumed. In a poor harvest year this meant shortage. However, as long as the cultivators were allowed to export their produce, they furnished a surplus relative to the number of consumers in France, since the excess was channelled abroad. If harvests failed, Turgot argued, the product which normally stood in excess of French demand could then be consumed domestically, as local prices rose to match the costs of transporting grain abroad.

Turgot also developed the idea of a *marché général price*. He emphasised that this was not the price at a specific market like the *prix du marché*, but a general market price which was established thanks to the ease of communications between ports where grain was bought and sold.¹ If the free circulation of grain were perfected, then the highest price that inland consumers could expect would be the *marché général* price plus the costs of transport to their location.²

Turgot believed that an unregulated grain trade was the only way to encourage proper circulation and the appropriate storage of supplies. Public administration of such matters inevitably ended in losses on the government's account. It also discouraged merchants who were unable to compete with a subsidized and often corrupt public vendor who operated at a loss.³ Free merchants by comparison, who always kept themselves informed of market conditions, understood when or where to sell grain. They were therefore far more efficient at addressing scarcity than the clumsy efforts of administrators who were generally fixated on local conditions.⁴ He inquired

¹ Ibid, p. 295, n.

² Ibid, pp. 343-4; in his notes to George Whatley's *Principles of Trade*, Benjamin Franklin explained a very similar point using the analogy of water level. Whatley and Franklin, *Principles*, p. 47, n.

³ Turgot, 'Lettres sur le Commerce des Grains', p. 276. DuPont could not find the originals of the letter on public granaries, but supplied his own notes in lieu of the lost letters.

⁴ Ibid, p. 332.

do we think that in dismissing commerce by means of debasement, in intimidating storage, in announcing that we regard the property of grain as less sacred than any other kind, in exposing it to the whim and the ignorant or interested inspection of a gaggle of judges or sub-administrators we can transport or store it effectively?¹

The rhetorical device challenged the notion of grain as a privileged commodity, proposing that, by refusing to allow it to behave as any other moveable property, administrators were in fact debasing it. Consumers, Turgot argued, could stand to be exposed to a free grain trade because they were protected by the natural law of competition, 'which is a restraint on everybody, and which renders all those manoeuvres and all those claims to monopoly... impossible'.² The market was an even better overseer than government officials, who had the potential to be just as immoral as merchants. Therefore, though the people currently languished under an 'empire of prohibitions',³ Turgot did not offer absolute freedom in its place, for liberalisation from human laws entailed subjection to natural ones.

In light of the tumults and shortage which seemed to accompany the deregulation of the grain trade, however, the principles of Turgot, let alone the perhaps even more abstract theories of the physiocrats, became hard to defend. Turgot had first-hand experience of this problem as the Intendant of the Limousin region throughout the crisis of the late 1760s. This was a particularly difficult region, situated in the agriculturally backward southern interior, where *métayage* was prevalent. This system saw farmers surrender their crop to the landlord, retaining a modest share for their own consumption. Turgot, following physiocratic thought, contrasted this negatively with the capitalist tenant farming of the north.⁴ Meanwhile, the people generally

¹ Ibid, p. 323.

² Ibid, p. 332.

³ Ibid, p. 343.

⁴ Turgot, 'Réflexions', p. 550. Adam Smith claimed that this sort of labour had been so long extinct in Britain that there was no English name for it, and used the French term. Groenewegen uses 'sharecropping'. Groenewegen, *Eighteenth Century Economics*, p.

thrived on the cheaper grains such as buckwheat or maize, as well as turnips and chestnuts.¹

All of this meant that, in the Limousin, even the highest grain prices relative to normal for the region failed to exceed the *marché général* prices of wheat at the port towns. Therefore there was little incentive for merchants to bring grain.² As a result, when the alternative food-crops of the region, buckwheat and chestnuts, failed due to wind and rain, as they did in 1769, Turgot had little choice but to intervene. However, he prioritised and therefore preserved the free grain trade, by compromising the freedom of other markets, such as the labour market where he implemented public work schemes.³ He understood lawmaking as a process which made progress through the freedom for trial and error, and disapproved of the notion of omniscient lawgivers.⁴

Overall, Turgot acknowledged that the establishment of free trade was going to take time. The 'hypothetical-deductive method' of economic modelling depended on a time lapse to prove its case against the observation characteristic of traditional political economy.⁵ In particular Turgot realised that the people, and hence also the authorities who governed them directly, seemed unwilling to adopt the new system. This meant education was required. In order for the system to work, Turgot contended that

liberty must not only be established without contradiction and trouble, both on the part of the magistrates, as well as on the part of the people... but this change must also be sufficiently consolidated, well-known and

332; cf. A. Smith, *An Inquiry into the Nature and Causes of the Wealth of Nations*, eds. R.H. Campbell, A.S. Skinner, and W.B. Todd (Oxford, 1976), III.ii.11.

¹ A.R.J. Turgot, 'Lettres au Contrôleur Général' [1770] in *Oeuvres*, III, p. 112.

² *Ibid*, p. 121.

³ Rothschild, 'Commerce and the State', p. 1206.

⁴ Clark, *Compass*, p. 234.

⁵ A. Skornicki, *L'Économiste, la Cour et la Patrie* (Paris, 2011), p. 322.

even ancient so that the merchants experience a total confidence and dare to risk their fortune on this assurance.¹

The problem was that, just when prices were supposedly reaching the point where the market would come to the rescue of consumers, local authorities were swooping in with anti-liberal interventions.²

Turgot accused the government of succumbing to popular prejudice by clinging to grain laws, which were the 'relics of gothic barbarism and the weakness of all governments which had not recognised the importance of trade, nor knew to defend public liberty from the invasions of the monopolising spirit and of private interests'.³ As Tucker had harked back to the Elizabethan era, so Turgot evoked an even older medieval past, where over-mighty courtiers abused the freedom of the individual in securing private monopolies against the interests of the honest commercial-minded farmer.

Though suffering a decline at the turn of the century, the use of the term 'monopoly' expanded, in both French and English-language texts, after 1740. The term was also tracking another, namely 'liberty', although the latter was far more common.⁴ Evidently, the two could act as antonyms. As shown in chapter two, the Rouen parlement had identified monopoly as the abuse which caused the failure of the liberalisation project.⁵ Monopoly was generally seen as an inevitable 'shortcoming' of the new liberal order, and the remedy which proponents of freedom offered was 'even more enlightenment'.⁶ Liberal commerce not only caused increasing refinement, therefore, but it also required it.

However, in the work of Tucker and Turgot the term 'monopoly' was applied to instances where formal politics trespassed into the economic

¹ Turgot, 'Lettres au Contrôleur Général', p. 119.

² Turgot, 'Lettres sur le Commerce des Grains', p. 341-2

³ Turgot, 'Éloge', p. 602.

⁴ Google Ngram viewer (<https://books.google.com/ngrams>, accessed 7 October 2015).

⁵ See above p. 111.

⁶ Rothschild, *Economic Sentiments*, p. 157.

sphere. If this happened, even 'angel' monopolists could make mistakes.¹ Benjamin Franklin summed up the fears of both authors, commenting that most laws 'for regulating, directing, or restraining of Trade; have, we think, either been political Blunders, or Jobbs obtain'd by artful Men, for private Advantage'.² Meanwhile, the idea that the economy was governed by its own rules, like any other aspect of nature which science observed, meant that it could be safely emancipated from dirigiste regimes. This was the point of Quesnay's *Tableau Économique*.³

This was not as subversive as it may sound. Arnault Skornicki sees steps towards the invention of a discrete field of economics in this period as an endogenous process within the political consolidation of central power.⁴ A depoliticised and hence free economic space, as opposed to the patrimonial and feudal economy of the dark ages, undermined the old court of fawning and unproductive aristocrats. *Laissez-faire* offered a way out of the 'welfare state for the privileged' that persisted in France especially.⁵ Freed from this medieval baggage, an enlightened and liberal monarch would be left to govern the commercial environment (rather than the people) in accordance with the law of nature.⁶ This was possible because, thanks to the 'harmony-of-interests doctrine', the monarch's interests, unlike those of the bloated aristocracy, could be identified with the public good.⁷

In the history which Turgot depicted, worthy landlords came to realise that the slavery or vassalage of the past could be exchanged for the more incentivised, productive and hands-off systems of *métayage* and eventually tenant farming.⁸ These allowed for improvement and the

¹ Ibid, p. 161.

² Whatley and Franklin, *Principles*, pp. 33-4.

³ C. Larrère, *L'Invention de l'Économie au XVIIIe Siècle* (Paris, 1992), p. 193.

⁴ Skornicki, *L'Économiste*, p. 26.

⁵ M. Kwass, *Privilege and the Politics of Taxation in Eighteenth-Century France* (Cambridge, 2000), p. 24.

⁶ Skornicki, *L'Économiste*, p. 213.

⁷ Hirschman, *The Passions*, p. 98; Adam Smith also distinguished between the ineffectual nobility and the more useful gentry. R. Phillipson, 'Adam Smith as Civic Moralist' in Hont and Ignatieff (eds.), *Wealth and Virtue*, p. 192.

⁸ Turgot, 'Réflexions', pp. 548-9.

generation of ever more wealth from reinvestment. The same tied in with the physiocratic doctrine of the 'commercial nobility'. For physiocrats, noble status depended on prosperity, rather than the more abstract notion of birthright.¹ The civic personality, however, was still grounded in the property-ties to the land, from where all wealth was supposedly derived.²

Turgot subscribed to a similar vision, advocating a provincial assembly system that would see only the owners of land credited as full citizens.³ At court the commercial nobility was supposed to effectively embody the enlightenment and hence effect good policy by helping to translate natural law into policy. It was a weak and misguided government which, overawed by the 'tyranny of custom', pandered to the feudal principles that had become enshrined in popular prejudice. Attempting to regulate the grain trade could only weaken the regime further, as it meant promising 'to engage personally in procuring them [the people] an abundance, whatever happens: but you must be very sure of the fact to make such an engagement'. Turgot confessed that 'no project for regulation has given me any such confidence'.⁴

Both Tucker and Turgot depicted conditions where self-interest in the extreme could damage the overall freedom of trade. Contrary to Hayek, the British Tucker's solution was more careful supervision on the part of the government, whilst the French Turgot advocated leaving the matter as far as possible up to marketplace competition. Both, however, were virulently opposed to monopoly, which had obvious links to monarchical power. Yet, using the term in its more general sense, they opposed popular freedom also. Though they acknowledged that

¹ Hume made a similar point, arguing that French economic growth was hampered by the commitment to 'honour' in an absolute monarchy. D. Hume, 'Of Civil Liberty' in Miller (ed.), *David Hume*, p. 93.

² Skornicki *L'Économiste*, p. 210; Charles and Steiner, 'Entre Montesquieu et Rousseau', p. 92.

³ Shovlin, *Political Economy of Virtue*, p. 143. Turgot did not pen the *Mémoire sur les Administrations Provinciales* himself; it was more of a collaboration with Dupont. Skornicki *L'Économiste*, p. 356.

⁴ Turgot, 'Lettres sur le Commerce des Grains', p. 354.

political freedoms were inextricably linked to the economic development they were describing, they saw society in many ways as conveniently restricted anew by alternative sources, or economic forces. These ideas also permeated their thought about the international situation.

International Thoughts. The Division of Labour and Mutual Growth.

For both Tucker and Turgot, the natural human propensity for exchange constituted the glue of society. In Tucker's version, humans, as compared to brute animals, were highly deficient in isolation from society. However, humankind was possessed of a social instinct, which inclined individuals to offer each other '*mutual Assistancess*'.¹ When a society is formed, he proposed,

the common Labour of the society is branched out into separate and distinct Parts: Then it is that each Individual chooses a *particular* Course of Life, according as his Circumstances, or *Genius* shall determine his Pursuits.²

Tucker thought that humans needed to perform a certain number of operations to survive, but in a society these could be shared. This was by no means groundbreaking, and this motive for civilisation and sociability can be seen ultimately as an intellectual implication of Hobbes's rejection of the Aristotelian '*zoon politikon*'.³

Tucker was more innovative when he reflected that a greater number of people in a society meant that each individual member needed to perform fewer operations, and so could become more expert at their own allotted task.⁴ Here he began to pre-empt Adam Smith's division of labour theory, though Hume also referred to the 'partition of labour'

¹ Tucker, 'Elements', p. 57.

² Ibid.

³ Hont, *Jealousy of Trade*, pp. 38; 170.

⁴ Tucker, 'Elements', p. 63.

and discussed the issue with Tucker directly.¹ Meanwhile, William Petty, Bernard Mandeville and Francis Hutcheson had all made their own contributions to the subject's genealogy.²

It helped that some people were born with special talents, but Tucker also viewed specialisation of roles by gender and age group with approval. Though he never pinned down the theory with a metaphor as neat as Adam Smith's, Tucker described a button factory where, as a machine operator stamped out buttons, a child worked alongside to speed up the process by removing the finished article and replacing it with a fresh piece of metal. Whereas Smith, drawing on the *Encyclopédie*, delighted in the minute attention which the study of the pin factory seemed to represent,³ Tucker had his own reasons for relishing the button factory. This form of specialisation not only sped up production and reduced cost per unit, but it also meant that women and children had no excuse for idleness and could be put to useful employment.⁴ The process did not require skill or intricacy, but small and otherwise idle hands.

Turgot's ideas about the origins of society were even more developed. Society began with cultivation, which was 'the only motive for division, and the law which secures the property of all'.⁵ However, commerce would always have to take place because even in a nation of equally apportioned land, cultivators would soon find that one no parcel of ground could produce everything they needed. Moreover, what the earth produced still needed work before it could be consumed: even wheat had to be ground into flour and baked before it was edible. If a person were 'reduced to his own field and his own labour, he would waste much time and effort in order to be very poorly equipped in every respect, and would cultivate his land very badly'.⁶ Dividing the

¹ Hont, *Jealousy of Trade*, p. 273.

² R. Mankin, 'Pins and Needles', *The Adam Smith Review*, 4 (2008), p. 190.

³ *Ibid*, pp. 190-1.

⁴ Tucker, 'Instructions', pp. 34-5.

⁵ Turgot, 'Réflexions', p. 534.

⁶ *Ibid*, p. 536.

labour, therefore, was in the interests of everybody, as each person became expert at their role.

This resulted in a tripartite society of cultivators, artisans and proprietors, whose 'reciprocal exchange of needs' bound them in chains of necessity.¹ However, Turgot realised that capital advances were required at each stage in economic development. Nature provided the first advance: farmers initially took their seeds from the spontaneous growth of the earth and then survived until the first harvest by hunting and fishing. Thereafter advances were formed by savings.² Everywhere this led to an additional division within the agricultural and artisanal or industrial pursuits, between the entrepreneurs who provided capital advances and the wage labourers who took immediate earnings from the advance.³

Because of this, Turgot advocated the physiocratic style policy of a single tax on the landowning class, which he called the '*disponible*' (or available) class. He exempted capitalist entrepreneurs from the same, on the grounds that their gains were part of a wider process of circulation. Taxing land could not hurt the circulation of money, but if the capitalist class were deprived of their savings, then the capital reserve would be diminished and interest rates would be pushed upwards, precluding continued growth.⁴

The savings rate was, according to Michael Sonenscher, Turgot's answer to what Istvan Hont dubbed the 'rich country- poor country' problem. This was essentially an inquiry into what made some countries rich and others poor and whether this disparity would remain into perpetuity.⁵ Hume had posed the problem in *Of Commerce* (1752), by suggesting that the international trade of a rich country, in

¹ Ibid, p. 537.

² Ibid, pp. 564-5.

³ R.L. Meek, *Turgot on Progress, Sociology and Economics* (London, 1973), p. 22.

⁴ Sonenscher, *Before the Deluge*, pp. 288-290.

⁵ Ibid, p. 287; I. Hont, 'The "Rich Country- Poor Country" Debate', p. 271.

spite of a myriad of advantages, was hampered by falling interest rates as a result of the influx of currency in exchange for its exported goods. This was attended by high costs of domestic labour. Industrial initiatives in poor countries therefore gained a competitive advantage. They soon became rich themselves from their own export trade, deposed the original rich country, and then ultimately suffered the same fate themselves.¹ For Turgot, however, if the savings rate stayed high, and capital was not wasted on luxury, then there would be no automatic downfall for a rich country.²

Tucker also disagreed with Hume and argued that his notion of the rich country's demise through commerce only enflamed jealousy of trade, by making it seem that 'every poor Country is the natural and unavoidable Enemy of a rich one'.³ Tucker condemned this sort of conflict in *The Case of Going to War for the Sake of Trade*, and, interestingly, this was the second of two of his texts which Turgot chose to translate.⁴ The essay was originally a fragment of *Elements*, but it made a timely appearance when published as a standalone pamphlet at the end of the Seven Years' War in 1763.⁵ Here Tucker argued that war was commercially and economically detrimental to winners and losers alike, and a distraction from the proper methods of wealth generation.⁶ Both Tucker and Turgot abhorred the 'pathological conjunction' of economic competition and the political and military rivalry of nations, which Hume had labelled 'jealousy of trade'.⁷

¹ Sonenscher, *Before the Deluge*, p. 185; I. Hont, 'The "Rich Country- Poor Country" Debate Revisited' in C. Wennerlind and M. Schabas (eds.), *David Hume's Political Economy* (London, 2008), p. 243.

² Turgot, 'Réflexions', p. 588.

³ Tucker, 'Four Tracts', p. 11.

⁴ According to Gustav Schelle, Turgot's French-language version has been lost. Turgot also translated Tucker's *Expediency of a Law for the Naturalization of Foreign Protestants* (1752). *Oeuvres*, I, p. 442, n.

⁵ It was also reprinted in 1774 as the second of his *Four Tracts*. Tucker, 'Four Tracts', p. vi.

⁶ Cornish, 'Tucker, Josiah', [<http://www.oxforddnb.com/view/article/27790>, accessed 22 April 2015]; Tucker, 'Four Tracts', p. 66.

⁷ Quote from Hont, *Jealousy of Trade*, p. 6; Tucker, 'Four Tracts', p. 74; Turgot to Hume, 23rd July 1766 in *Oeuvres*, II, p. 496; Turgot to DuPont, 20th February 1766 in *Oeuvres*, II, p. 512.

Tucker's own answer to the 'rich country- poor country problem' was that trade could benefit all. Strongly influenced by providentialism, Tucker could not believe that the self-preservation instinct sat in opposition to the Christian principle of universal benevolence, and that it should ultimately lead to self-destruction.¹ Rather, he thought that it was the self-interest of individuals and states *in excess* that drove them towards the monopolising principles which precluded mutual growth. Self-love, therefore, needed to be tempered with reason rather than passion.²

This could allow trading nations to exist in harmony.³ According to Tucker, while poorer countries grew in wealth and comfort, richer countries could nevertheless preserve their advantage through the improvement and mechanisation of industry and by maintaining constant industriousness.⁴ Enlightened governments were required to ensure that trading remained free, or in other words, protect the even playing field from monopolists on an international level, just as he had shown was the function of government in domestic trade.

Tucker also alluded to international specialisation and reiterated the cohesive power which he had attributed to the division of labour, suggesting that

In the *natural* World, our bountiful Creator hath formed different Soils, and appointed different Climates; whereby the inhabitants of different Countries may supply each other with their respective Fruits and Products; so that by exciting a reciprocal Industry, they may carry on an Intercourse mutually beneficial, and universally benevolent.⁵

¹ L. Dickey, 'Doux-Commerce and Humanitarian Values', *Grotiana*, 22:1 (2001), p. 303; Tucker, 'Four Tracts', p. 12.

² Hirschman, *The Passions*, p. 43.

³ *Ibid*, p. 317.

⁴ Hont, 'The "Rich Country- Poor Country" Debate', p. 287.

⁵ Tucker, 'Four Tracts', p. 67. Here he agreed with Hume, 'Of the Jealousy of Trade' in E.F. Miller (ed.), *David Hume*, p. 329.

Tucker was vague about how exactly various trades and industries should be divided. Clearly he envisioned Britain as a manufacturing nation, but also saw agriculture as 'a species of manufacture', and the most important one at that.¹ Overall, he seems to have advocated mixed economies with trade sufficiently open as to absorb the danger of high prices of provisions.

Complete international specialisation was not necessarily seen as a particularly safe avenue for any country. In his three-island metaphor, Jean-François Melon seemed to show that a new balance of wealth could not replace the old balance of power and bring peace to Europe. The island that supplied provisions would always enjoy supremacy over the others until each could become self-sufficient.² Turgot had briefly touched on the autonomy of the farmer in *Réflexions*, arguing that because of the prime necessity of subsistence goods, a farmer and ultimately the proprietor had the greatest claim to independence.³ Nevertheless, elsewhere he had also argued that wealth and a burgeoning population were as necessary as agricultural self-sufficiency for a state to be independent.⁴

However, his ideas about the contribution which the liberalisation of the French grain trade could offer to the international economy is very revealing of his attitude to the mutual benefits of international trade. He reasoned that by depositing its grain on the *marché général*, France, by virtue of its size and fertility, would greatly swell the overall amount available. This was 'to the profit of all nations and each one in particular, in that it must reduce the price at the *marché général* to the benefit of consumers'.⁵ Turgot envisioned a global grain trade which, when finally perfected, would see an end to risk in the ventures of grain

¹ Tucker to Townshend, 2nd April 1752 in *Manuscripts*, p. 374.

² J.F. Melon, *Essai Politique sur le Commerce* [1734] (Bordeaux, 1736 edn.), chapter 1; Hont, *Jealousy of Trade*, pp. 31-2. The essay was promptly translated into English. J.F. Melon, *A Political Essay upon Commerce*, translated by D. Bindon (Dublin, 1738).

³ Turgot, 'Réflexions', p. 537.

⁴ Turgot, 'Éloge', p. 606.

⁵ Turgot, 'Lettres sur le Commerce des Grains', p. 319.

merchants, since the international market, able to absorb shocks caused by local conditions, would always provide grain at a level price, which could then be moved inland for a profit.¹

Clearly Turgot saw France, at least potentially, as an agricultural powerhouse. However, the notion of France as an agricultural state and of Britain and the Dutch Republic as trading states, which apparently underpinned the physiocratic model,² did not make a strong appearance in his work. Although he conceded that Britain and the Dutch Republic enjoyed 'a prodigious superiority' in commerce, he put this down to their political economy, which he saw as inspired by the work of Josiah Child and Johan de Witt, rather than as a result of any naturally occurring conditions of the two nations.³ He therefore considered France equally capable of becoming a successful commercial nation. One of his key departure points from the physiocrats was his lack of an insistence on agriculture as the only useful economic pursuit in France. In a letter to Dupont de Nemours he repudiated the idea of 'alleged national industries' (*prétendue industrie nationale*) and called the protection of them childish. Trade barriers, he thought, fostered misguided jealousy.⁴

With personal experience of regions far removed from the physiocratic idyll, Turgot understood France as heterogeneous and disparate. This helped inform his attitude towards local protectionism. He thought that national and local prospects were hampered by a 'hydra' of local institutions and legal frameworks, the relics of a gradual unification, which only persisted because 'the urgent needs of the kingdom have not yet allowed for the reformation of this chaos or the establishment of a uniform law'.⁵ The only way to protect various regions from inevitable shortage was to integrate them into a larger whole, which thanks to its

¹ Turgot, 'Projet de Lettre au Contrôleur Général', p. 128.

² T.J. Hochstrasser, 'Physiocracy and the Politics of Laissez-Faire' in Goldie and Wokler (eds.), *Cambridge History of Eighteenth-Century Political Thought*, p. 425.

³ Turgot, 'Éloge', p. 598.

⁴ Turgot to DuPont, 20th February 1766 in *Oeuvres*, II, p. 510.

⁵ Turgot, 'Éloge', pp. 608-9.

greater variation of environs and conditions, could come to their rescue whenever needed.¹

All regions, he argued, were equally vulnerable to harvest disaster, and the seemingly infertile regions in the south had just as much productive potential as the bountiful northern regions and the area around Paris. The comparative backwardness of southern agriculture, he asserted, was due to the long-term inability there to raise capital and invest in improvement which, in turn, could be blamed on the prevalence of *métayage* as opposed to tenant farming. Entrepreneurs were simply not attracted to the region because of its chronically low grain prices, which seemed to result from market controls. It was the influence of large cities like Paris that rendered agriculture profitable and improvable, but the markets of the south were shielded from the capital's influence, and hence shut off from development.²

Here, for comparison, Turgot referred to what he saw as the equivalent situation in Britain: England and Scotland. Due to the high value of English grain, entrepreneurs were attracted to agricultural activities, and tenant farming had become the norm, with *métayage* extinct. In Scotland also, *métayers* were becoming thin on the ground, presumably because of the influence of the post-union free trade.³ Turgot's system of thought about free trade and progress made it impossible for him to draw meaningful fundamental differences between nations, so that all apparent divergence had to depend on custom or the effects of government intervention.

Tucker did not hesitate to contextualise his observations on the rich country- poor country debate in the relationship between England and Scotland, and Hont has observed the discrepancy between the approach of the Welshman and of the 'North-Briton' to this issue. The Scottish

¹ Turgot, 'Projet de Lettre au Contrôleur Général', p. 127.

² Turgot, 'Lettres sur le Commerce des Grains', pp. 309-310.

³ Ibid, p. 311.

Hume saw the low wages of his compatriots as a competitive advantage, and a reason to involve his country in the predominantly English manufacturing industry.¹ Tucker, by comparison, saw England's lead as permanent as the two countries grew wealthier in tandem. A wealthier Scotland was merely a wealthier trading partner, which, he argued by alluding to individual shopkeepers, could not be a bad thing.² In spite of his intolerance of restrictions on trade, which he thought exhibited excessive self-love on a national level,³ his underlying assumption was that England was able to remain the shopkeeper of choice through consistent industriousness and constant improvement.

His attitude to colonies was informed by the same logic: if the American colonies were allowed their independence, then Britain would ultimately win over the majority of transatlantic trade by means of its existing and continuing commercial prowess.⁴ However, when it came to Scotland and Ireland, Tucker was highly in favour of full integration with Britain, as part of his wider stance on immigration and naturalisation. In fact, he argued that it was preferable to incorporate and enrich Ireland than to let France gain by Irish trade.⁵

At the point of writing his *Brief Essay* Tucker still imagined that the American colonies could be highly beneficial to the metropole. Yet even as he wrote in favour of incorporating Ireland into Britain, he was already anticipating the difficulties of maintaining a distant overseas empire.⁶ He soon argued that the colonies had begun very quickly 'to shew no other Marks of Attachment to their antient Parent, than what

¹ Hont, 'The "Rich Country- Poor Country" Debate Revisited', p. 245.

² Tucker, 'Four Tracts', p. 35. Reducing the issue to the individual level is reminiscent of Hume's statement that 'a single man can scarcely be industrious, where all his fellow citizens are idle'. Hume, 'Of the Jealousy of Trade', p. 329.

³ Dickey, 'Doux-Commerce', p. 312.

⁴ Tucker, 'Four Tracts', p. 196-7; David Hume was of a similar opinion. He wrote to Adam Smith that after American independence 'our Navigation and general Commerce may suffer more than our Manufactures'. Hume to Smith, 8th February 1776 in E.C. Mossner and I.S. Ross (eds.), *The Correspondence of Adam Smith* (Oxford, 1987), p. 186.

⁵ Tucker, 'Brief Essay', p. 58.

⁶ J.R. Reich, *British Friends of the American Revolution* (Armonk, NY, 1998), p. 10.

arose from Views of Self-Interest and Self-Love'.¹ Nevertheless, Tucker argued that this drive for colonial independence was inevitable, particularly under a free constitution.² Ultimately he concluded that both the British and Americans only stood to lose from continuing in their unhappy and potentially violent relationship.³ Thus Tucker understood the American desire for independence, but was clearly unable to conceive of the Irish not wishing to be wedded to Britain. This was because he understood the Irish union as in the interests of both parties, where the interests of the American colonies, he believed, had diverged from the British.⁴

However, what Tucker ultimately wished to extend to Ireland seems more like amalgamation into one composite nation rather than an empire. He considered Ireland about as foreign as Yorkshire, which he thought had historically been independent itself. He reasoned that Britain and Ireland having 'one *common Head*, - one *common Interest* both in *Church* and *State*, - the *same* Friends, - and the *same* Enemies... ought to have been long since *consolidated* together'.⁵ He promoted a single united kingdom where a share of predicted Scottish and Irish gains reverted to England not only through taxation, but also through more enthusiastic participation in English trade on the part of the Celtic Fringe nations.⁶ When it came to defending his stance on American independence in view of a possible copycat Irish rebellion, he emphasised the physical proximity of Ireland and the commercial benefits which he expected both Britain and Ireland to reap from a union.⁷ Interest, or economic concerns had a lot to answer for when it came to Tucker's vision of national boundaries.

¹ Tucker, 'Four Tracts', p. 144.

² Ibid, p. 149; Pocock, *Virtue*, pp. 161-2.

³ Tucker, 'Four Tracts', p. 189-190.

⁴ J. Livesey, 'Free Trade and Empire in the Anglo-Irish Commercial Propositions of 1785', *Journal of British Studies*, 52:1 (2013), p. 112.

⁵ Tucker, 'Brief Essay', p. 60.

⁶ Ibid, p. 59.

⁷ J. Tucker, 'A Series of Answers to Certain Popular Objections' [1776] in *Collected Works*, V, pp. 75-8.

Turgot also mused on the meaning of nationhood and national belonging, deciding that a *nation* was constituted by shared language, but a *people* had to be 'enclosed in a territory and united under a single government'.¹ The British and the Pennsylvanians belonged to the same nation, therefore, as did the French and the Swiss, but, through their independence, each was a separate people. Ethnicity, in other words, did not determine belonging to a nation state. Turgot looked forward to the point when the colonies of both Britain and France would be cut loose to form new independent trading entities, and remarked to DuPont that colonial possessions were really only useful for spreading the language of the metropole.²

In comparison with Turgot, Tucker's appreciation of free trade had its limits. Even as he discussed the rich country- poor country issue and described the mutual gains offered by free international exchange, Tucker offered suggestions to ensure English commercial dominance by using the tax regime to 'discourage the too great or excessive Consumption of alien Manufactures'.³ Not only did he advocate the manipulation of international trade by using tariffs and duties, but he also considered bounties on nascent industries useful.⁴ However, his advocacy of economic props boiled down to his desire to safeguard Britain's status as a rich nation. He evidently did not doubt the British capacity for continual improvement, only the commitment of British people to this destiny.

Tucker was deeply opposed to popular vice, but he also reviled the apparent indulgences of the higher echelons of society, prescribing taxation on '*Injoyment*'.⁵ Interestingly Hume also did not condemn the

¹ Turgot to DuPont, 20th February 1766, *Oeuvres*, II, p. 514.

² Turgot to Tucker, 12th September 1770, *Oeuvres*, III, p. 422; Turgot to DuPont, 20th February 1766, *Oeuvres*, II, p. 512.

³ Tucker, 'Four Tracts', p. 42. Adam Smith was also not above deeming the luxury consumption of foreign goods by idle individuals 'in every respect hurtful to the society'. Smith, *WN*, II.ii.33-4.

⁴ Tucker, 'Elements', p. 132.

⁵ *Ibid*, p. 214; Adam Smith argued that a tax on menservants, thought of as a non-essential or luxury expense of the rich, actually fell most heavily on the middling sort and not the rich. Smith, *WN*, V.ii.g.12.

fact that taxation could curtail luxury. He argued against Turgot in their correspondence that taxation should not fall upon the land, preferring the indirect method. He rather callously pointed out that higher grain prices made the poor work more and consume less; indirect tax would simply have the same effect.¹

This was, however, somewhat contradictory to his argument elsewhere, and generally speaking Hume was in favour of luxury. Civic virtue inspired members of small primitive societies like Sparta, but Hume argued that 'as these principles are too disinterested and too difficult to support, it is requisite to govern men by other passions, and animate them with a spirit of avarice and industry, art and luxury'.² As hordes of vassals matured into an independent middling sort, they became committed to liberal property rights, and hence grew into a strong base for a liberal constitution.³ Hume defined luxury itself as 'great refinement in the gratification of the senses; and any degree of it may be innocent or blameable'.⁴ Focussing on the public goods which luxury seemed to offer, he could more or less ignore its negative connotations for individuals. In fact he thought that if the overall social outcome of luxury was beneficial, then the question of individual vice was irrelevant.⁵ In this he pre-empted Adam Smith.⁶

However, luxury remained a contentious issue. Not only could it have a corrupting effect on individual morals, but it could also be thought to induce sterility in the economy. This was the view of the physiocrats, who saw aristocratic excess and ornamentation as detracting from investment in the land.⁷ Turgot inherited this ambivalence, since his theory of economic growth more or less depended on the savings

¹ Hume to Turgot, September 1766 in J.Y.T. Greig (ed.), *The Letters of David Hume* (New York & London, 1983), p. 94.

² Hume, 'Of Commerce', p. 263.

³ J. Robertson, 'The Scottish Enlightenment at the Limits of the Civic Tradition' in Hont and Ignatieff (eds.), *Wealth and Virtue*, p. 157.

⁴ D. Hume, 'Of Refinement in the Arts' in Miller (ed.), *David Hume*, p. 268.

⁵ C.J. Berry, *The Idea of Luxury* (Cambridge, 1994), p. 145; Force, *Self-Interest*, pp. 212-3.

⁶ Force, *Self-Interest*, p. 160.

⁷ Berry, *Luxury*, p. 139.

accumulated by capitalists. In his physiocrat-informed understanding, luxury undermined long-term economic growth, and hence also tax yields: overall it tended to destroy a nation's capital.¹

The aristocracy was afflicted by luxury, but those who wished to become rich still had no choice but to be thrifty.² According to Turgot thrift was already the prevailing mind-set in Europe, and he knew this, he argued, because interest rates had been in continual decline over the centuries.³ Characteristically, although he condemned luxury, he seemed to believe that the issue would right itself if left alone. Thus Turgot offered no elaborate tax scheme akin to Tucker's, only the single tax on land. Their divergence in this regard is emblematic of their interpretations of the fundamental meaning of liberty.

Conclusion

Tucker and Turgot wrote handbooks for generating national wealth. Though both understood the world in terms of universal and generally applicable principles, underlying Tucker's advocacy of free trade was the perceived need for careful supervision of both the producers and consumers of Britain itself. The same concern for specifically British enrichment pervades Townshend's pamphlet too. Their desire to protect the British economy evidently coincided with the idea of universal principals, because they interpreted Britain's leading economic situation as by no means intrinsic or permanent. Tucker and Townshend, then, were anxious to preserve national industriousness, and hence a position at the top of a hierarchy of nations which were all making their way up a gradual incline towards enrichment. Tucker in particular, nevertheless, managed to avoid classic *mercantilist* wisdom. Thanks to his profound belief in improvement he saw global trade and wealth as infinitely expandable. In spite of this, he still insisted that the

¹ Turgot, 'Réflexions', p. 588; Shovlin, *Political Economy of Virtue*, p. 142.

² Turgot, 'Réflexions', p. 589.

³ *Ibid*, pp. 588-9.

greatest share at any one time could and should be dominated by Britain.

Turgot's aims, however, are less clear. The French context is clearly a given in his practical discussions of the grain trade. Most of his theoretical work, meanwhile, explained how a nation like France could produce stable taxable revenue. More or less silent on the issue of how to spend the tax, Turgot's work nevertheless tended towards the protection and perpetuation of the existing government, of which he was a functioning part. He regularly made reference to British success, as he perceived it, in generating an export market for agricultural produce and developing the farming sector, although he agreed with Tucker and Townshend in rejecting corn bounties. Evidently he believed that France was playing catch up, but his work was not ostensibly nationalistic in the way that Tucker's and Townshend's was.

They all agreed on the fundamental point that, in order to provide for the nation, farmers required a free market for their produce. This meant that their understanding of the national good, one way or another, coincided. Turgot argued that the interests of the poor consumers of grain were identical to those of the capitalist producers. A similar association of interests appeared in Tucker's work also, for he understood a landowner's bond to immovable property as a bond to the very substance of the nation. Both understood nationality in a very literal way, which, since it essentially depended on physical settlement and the allegiance of interests, easily allowed for naturalisation. Their emphasis on landowners, meanwhile, meant that the 'public good' was not located in the welfare of the people at all, but in the welfare of agricultural capitalists. Turgot and Tucker more or less marginalised the poor, therefore, and concentrated on the benefits of agricultural proprietors only.

This seems to have also informed their idea of sovereignty, which neither saw as resting with the people in any meaningful way. Tucker

was unabashed in his rejection of individual rights and his adherence to representative government in all it entailed. He despised increased enfranchisement and the shameless electioneering which he thought it involved. Turgot, meanwhile, would even deny the title of full citizenship to all those who were not possessed of property. Their appreciations of political freedoms were strictly limited, and they were well aware that their economic designs were antithetical to popular custom. By casting the popular objections to free trade as the cries of a villainous monopoly, they justified policies which seemed to fly in the face of due concern for the welfare of the poor.

Yet one of the fundamental discrepancies between the two was in relation to the circumstances that they thought were required to establish and maintain the commercial freedom which they both advocated. Removing monopolies was insufficient for Tucker, as he believed that unrestrained self-love would descend into base self-interest. People could not be trusted at all times to adhere voluntarily to a Christian moral code, so an enlightened government was needed to arbitrate between rival interests, or else face renewed monopoly. For Turgot, however, the market mechanism generally sufficed, and he understood individual negotiations as adequately suited to addressing any potential conflict between private interests. He was therefore adamant that the issue should be removed from the mandate of the administration.

When it came to the international grain market, therefore, Turgot had a strong sense of its workings and reliability, as well as its potential to unify and calibrate France economically. Therein lay his understanding of contemporary France and his vision for its future. For he rejected the parochialism which he identified in attitudes towards the regulation of grain in particular and which he blamed for the uneven development of the country. Tucker, meanwhile, found no fault with the uneven development that he saw in Britain and the wider world, which he thought needed some sort of order. Even as he hoped for union with

Ireland, he saw it in terms of returns made out to England, allowing wealth to Ireland only in proportion to England's. Turgot, therefore, looked forward to a free trade world and the unified prosperous France which he imagined accompanied it, where Tucker anticipated the future with certain apprehensions.

Chapter 6: Corn Laws, Systems, and *The Wealth of Nations*

Introduction

This chapter reintroduces the most influential of Adam Smith's work, *An Inquiry into the Nature and Causes of the Wealth of Nations*, to the discussion. The contemporary significance of Smith's work is a controversial matter. It clearly aimed to tackle contemporary issues, since David Hume accused Smith of delaying its publication in order to treat the highly topical colonial situation.¹ However, it has been argued that its actual influence was limited. For example, Smith's timing on the colonial issue was actually quite poor, as the eventual publication of *Wealth of Nations* on 9th March 1776 came 'too early for Parliament to listen to his proposals, and... too late for Congress to want to listen to them'.² In spite of this, Hume implied shortly after its publication that London was buzzing with the *Wealth of Nations*.³

Though he clearly wished to inform opinion on important contemporary issues, the renown which the author's name enjoys today was laboured and gradual. In fact, immediately following his death, Smith fell into relative obscurity, only to be, in spite of the multiplicity of possible interpretations of his work and views, 'transformed, by 1800, into the modern hero of commerce'.⁴ Thus Smith's influence on economic thought and history since the nineteenth century is, by comparison with the earlier period, easily acknowledgeable. Given the danger of anachronism that this profound influence presents, it has

¹ Hume to Smith, dated 8th February 1776 in E.C. Mossner and I.S. Ross (eds.), *The Correspondence of Adam Smith* (Oxford, 1987), p. 185.

² D. Stevens, 'Adam Smith and the Colonial Disturbances' in A.S. Skinner and T. Wilson (eds.), *Essays on Adam Smith* (Oxford, 1975), p. 217.

³ Hume to Smith, dated 3rd May 1776 in Mossner and Ross (eds.), *Correspondence*, p. 194.

⁴ E. Rothschild, *Economic Sentiments* (Cambridge, MA, 2001), p. 64.

been more expedient until now to more or less exclude the work from the analysis. However, Smith's work can hardly be simply ignored, given its almost unparalleled scope and structure at the time of publishing, and its endurance in spite of more recent opprobrium.

Besides this, Smith discussed the grain trade at length, making a contribution at the end of the eighteenth century to this particular debate at least. In fact, Istvan Hont and Michael Ignatieff see Smith's offering on the grain trade, together with the implications of his wider conclusions for the same, as the most controversial element of his work in his own lifetime.¹ Governor Thomas Pownall, who supplied the only thoroughgoing analysis of the work during the remainder of Smith's life, certainly took issue with its treatment of the grain trade.² In a public letter to Smith he defended the corn bounty and measures that served to discourage the importation of foreign grain under normal circumstances. He argued that although the nation as a whole benefitted from the influx of wealth generated by trade, the landed class and agricultural labourers were the last to see any advantage. He thought that the bounty, however, helped to allocate some of the nation's growing prosperity directly to the agricultural sector, in order to prevent a depression in that part of the economy.³

Pownall had been instrumental in the passing of the legislation of 1772, which placed duties on wheat imports; forbade exportation and allowed free importation of wheat when it exceeded 48s per bushel; and preserved the bounty on any grain exported otherwise.⁴ Hont and Ignatieff suggest that Smith's dissatisfaction with this act can 'indicate how far beyond the common sense consensus his advocacy of "natural

¹ I. Hont and M. Ignatieff, 'Needs and Justice in the Wealth of Nations: an Introductory Essay' in idem (eds.), *Wealth and Virtue* (Cambridge, 1983), p. 14.

² R.R. Teichgraeber, "'Less Abused than I had Reason to Expect": The Reception of *The Wealth of Nations* in Britain, 1776-90', *HJ*, 30:2 (1987), p. 338.

³ T. Pownall, 'A Letter from Governor Pownall to Adam Smith' dated 25th September 1776 and reprinted as Appendix A in Mossner and Ross (eds.), *Correspondence*, pp. 361-4.

⁴ D.G. Barnes, *A History of the English Corn Laws 1660-1846* (London, 1930), p. 42.

liberty” had taken him’.¹ Only the physiocrats had dared to go as far as Smith in his advocacy of the freedom of owners of grain to exercise their property rights over the vital commodity.² Evidently Pownall felt that it was necessary to publicly defend these measures from the challenge posed by *Wealth of Nations*. He likewise called into question Smith’s thought on money and trade monopolies as well as his stance on the colonies.³

The *Wealth of Nations* was also drawn without much hesitation into debates over grain regulation in Scotland during 1777. At issue was whether to raise the minimum price limit at which the Scottish importation of oats and oatmeal was permitted. This rise would cause the price of bread in Scotland to escalate, and, it was argued, cause wages to increase also, compromising the competitiveness of Scottish manufactures. Opponents of the change, and of the corn laws generally, made use of Smith’s work, reducing it, however, to little more than a slogan in favour of absolute freedom of trade.⁴

Smith’s work on the grain trade would later resurface in debates on the corn laws of 1815.⁵ His uncompromising position on the regulation of the grain trade informed the reputation of his book at large, serving to amplify the free-trade content therein. It is because of its focus on the grain trade and the practicalities of economic competition that this chapter concentrates primarily on the *Wealth of Nations*, rather than on the catalogue of Smith’s work, although it makes references to his general philosophy of commercial man.⁶

Kirk Willis argues that Smith actually had an important effect on key politicians of his time, such as Lord Shelburne and William Pitt. He states that the free trade doctrine of the *Wealth of Nations* ‘helped to

¹ Hont and Ignatieff, ‘Needs and Justice’, p. 20.

² Ibid, p. 21.

³ Pownall, ‘Letter’, p. 375.

⁴ Teichgraber, ‘The Reception of *Wealth of Nations*’, pp. 351-3.

⁵ D.G. Barnes, *English Corn Laws*, pp. 119-125.

⁶ I. Hont, *Jealousy of Trade* (Cambridge, MA & London, 2005), p. 51.

free Pitt from the grip of the old protectionist orthodoxies', suggesting that the Commercial Treaty of 1786, which relaxed duties on French agricultural goods, owed its success in part to Smith's influence on Pitt.¹ This fed back into Smith's reputation. According to Richard Teichgraeber, 'with the events of 1786 came an unprecedented level of public acclaim for the author of the *Wealth of Nations*'.²

It was only then that Smith was respected as an authority on trade, though, for the time being, only one of many. The *Wealth of Nations* was frequently cited in Parliament, but so too were the works of David Hume, Josiah Tucker and Arthur Young. Even the likes of John Locke, Gregory King, Charles Davenant and Josiah Child continued to be cited. Moreover, there was little if any discussion of Smith's thought in Parliament. MPs often mined the *Wealth of Nations* for catchphrases and statistics.³ The full impact of Smith's thought thereafter was perhaps softened for the time being by the association of its author with French Revolutionary principles, together with the fact that some of its matter seemed simply impractical at the end of the eighteenth century, especially in a wartime context.⁴

Since then, however, economists in particular have favoured Adam Smith. Because of this, Hont argues that Smith's thought is sometimes reduced to hard economic principles, at the cost of neglecting his 'humane, liberal, and cautious politics'.⁵ He distinguishes Smith's work from physiocratic thought (which it seems superficially to resemble) by highlighting Smith's disdain for the forcible means by which he supposed the physiocrats intended to implement their own corrective system. Although Smith also endeavoured to correct, he seemed nevertheless to entertain a paradoxical respect for misguided opinion and sentiment. It is argued that Smith actually perceived the identity of

¹ K. Willis, 'The Role in Parliament of the Economic Ideas of Adam Smith, 1776-1800', *History of Political Economy*, 11:4 (1979), p. 539.

² Teichgraeber, 'The Reception of *Wealth of Nations*', p. 362.

³ Ibid, p. 362; Teichgraeber, 'The Reception of *Wealth of Nations*', p. 510.

⁴ Willis, 'Ideas of Smith in Parliament', pp. 542-4.

⁵ Hont, *Jealousy of Trade*, p. 356.

nations in their errors of judgement when it came to political economy. For this reason, this chapter follows Hont's lead by examining Smith's own studies of the mercantile and physiocratic systems, particularly in terms of how to govern the grain trade. In this way it attempts to unlock Smith's vision of national character and reveal an apprehension towards globalisation.

Thus the first section deals with mercantilism and the mercantile system, carefully distinguishing Smith's version from the historiographical concept, which is something quite different. Mercantilism has become something of a vague catchall term that exists only for the historian's convenience. However, Smith understood the mercantile system as a very specific and almost tangible historical reality. He saw it as a crucial misunderstanding about the generation of national wealth which had allowed individuals and groups to manipulate government in their own favour and in pursuit of their own interests. Importantly, of course, Smith did not condemn the pursuit of self-interest itself, but argued that its political expression caused inefficiencies in the allocation of resources and labour.¹

The second section moves onto Smith's interpretation of the physiocratic system, particularly the elements and ideas which he criticised and ultimately rejected, such as the notion of agricultural kingdoms and commercial republics. It is argued that Smith saw both the mercantile and physiocratic systems as equally fallacious and artificial. Evidently he objected to the excessively violent imposition of any sort of policy on society, even if it was theoretically correct. The third section, therefore, explores further Smith's own rejection of systems of political economy as he understood them, and ultimately investigates his own approach to government. His own system is complicated all the more by the fact that he attacked so virulently the notion of systematised economic planning and intervention.

¹ A.O. Hirschman, *The Passions and the Interests* (Princeton, 1977), p. 103.
Daisy Gibbs

The 'mercantile system' is perhaps one of Smith's most famous and notorious creations. Smith has taken much of the flack for this Frankenstein's monster of historiography, which, patched together and given a life of its own by a new science, somehow refuses to be borne away into intellectual obscurity by the icy tides of modern scepticism. A modern Prometheus in his own right, Smith has also been held personally responsible for setting the world ablaze with a burning desire for the gains of unfettered capitalism.¹ However, Smith can only take so much credit, for many of the ideas most closely associated with his thought – the division of labour; *laissez-faire*; and even the mercantile system – were already in circulation when he came to put pen to paper. The originality and provenance of Smith's thought has been well explored, and is not the focus of this chapter.² Rather, the chapter argues that even Smith contemplated the free-trade future which he depicted with some apprehension. For it could be argued that Smith understood the division of labour and the four-stage theory of economic growth as processes which ended in homogeneous and intellectually sterile societies, and that, actually, he understood failure to achieve political economic perfection as the defining factors of the economic identity of Britain and the other nations he studied.

The Mercantile System

Lars Magnusson sees mercantilism as a revolution in economic thought that predated Adam Smith's contribution. According to Terence Hutchison, this sort of revolution requires four conditions, namely: changes in 'research priorities'; changes to empirical content; a new conceptual framework; and new policy objectives.³ The first two, Magnusson sees in the propensity of economic authors of the sixteenth

¹ S.J. Pack, *Capitalism as a Moral System* (Aldershot, 1991), p. 1.

² See for example J.A. Schumpeter, *History of Economic Analysis* (London, 1955), p. 185; E.A.J. Johnson, *Predecessors of Adam Smith* (New York, 1965), p. 10; T. Hutchison, *Before Adam Smith* (Oxford, 1988), p. 362; D.P. O'Brien, *The Classical Economists Revisited* (Princeton, NJ & Oxford, 2004), pp. 35-44.

³ L. Magnusson, *Mercantilism* (London, 1994), p. 9; T. Hutchison, *On Revolutions and Progress in Economic Knowledge* (Cambridge, 1978), pp. 291-4.

and seventeenth centuries to describe the economy in the rational terms and the anatomical metaphors of the scientific revolution. They researched the economy – with empirical principals borrowed from Francis Bacon – as a natural and independently functioning system.¹ For example, Thomas Mun concerned himself with the causes and effects of economic growth in general when he argued that England had an unfavourable balance of trade to thank for its deplorable economic situation. This is compared with the narrow and often accusatory approach of Mun’s predecessors, such as Gerard Malynes’ attempt to blame foreign bankers, and not the wider economic forces which influenced their behaviour, for the economic dislocation of the 1620s.²

Although some of the national policy objectives of mercantilism seem to be derived from orthodox economic wisdom or even stereotypes – such as the benefits of exporting more than was imported – Magnusson argues that the balance of trade doctrine was invented anew to better justify and convey that message.³ This discourse has long been treated as a fallacy and an aberration, which had to be abandoned before economics proper could be born. However, Magnusson repositions it as an intellectual predecessor of modern economics because it apparently represented an innovative conceptual framework. This new framework, Magnusson supposes, also made for a shift in the general concerns of policy from the consideration of the allocation of wealth, to a preoccupation with its generation through foreign trade, thus satisfying the final two conditions of a revolution in economics.⁴

Magnusson argues that tracts on economics should be understood within long-standing discourses and epistemological systems.⁵ His version of mercantilism is something more akin to a process than a fixed doctrine, allowing for a great deal of variation in the subjects and

¹ Magnusson, *Mercantilism*, p. 11.

² *Ibid*, p. 72.

³ *Ibid*, p. 74.

⁴ *Ibid*, p. 9.

⁵ *Ibid*, p. 23.

outcomes of the literature, provided the authors conformed to an overall pattern of thought. Frameworks such as the balance of trade doctrine could come and go, and Magnusson, following E.A. Johnson, allows that the balance of trade morphed after the 1760s into an emphasis on 'foreign paid incomes'.¹ However, he argues, it was the process of fixing economic meanings to borrowed terms and viewing the subject as a discreet science which made possible the future development of modern economics.²

Continuing this line of reasoning, Magnusson depicts Adam Smith's condemnation of the mercantile system as one of the greatest cover-ups of all time. It 'suppressed' all memory of a seventeenth-century revolution in economic thought.³ He admittedly closely follows Hutchison's example, opening the question of Smith's status as a revolutionary, whilst also acknowledging the point made by others that Smith was perhaps a synthesiser rather than pioneer of eighteenth-century opinion.⁴

Adam Smith did not write about mercantilism, but it is implied that he inherited a straw man from the physiocrats, called the mercantile system, which in turn stereotyped the thought of earlier economic thinkers.⁵ In order to support his own conclusions, Magnusson must argue that Smith deliberately depicted the doctrine of the mercantile system as hopelessly deluded, in order to overstate the innovative quality of his own work.⁶ This is relatively easy when focussing on Smith's chief objection to the mercantilist system of thought: that it confused money with wealth. Here Magnusson himself is by no means unprecedented. D.C. Coleman, for example, identified that what little

¹ L. Magnusson, 'Is Mercantilism a Useful Concept Still?' in M. Isenmann (ed.), *Merkantilismus: Wiederaufnahme einer Debatte* (Stuttgart, 2014), pp. 21-2; Johnson, *Predecessors*, p. 151.

² Magnusson, *Mercantilism*, p. 168.

³ *Ibid*, p. 216.

⁴ Hutchison, *On Revolutions and Progress*, p. 23; R.H. Campbell and A.S. Skinner, 'Introduction' in A. Smith, *An Inquiry into the Nature and Causes of the Wealth of Nations*, eds. W.B. Todd, R. H. Campbell, and A.S. Skinner (Oxford, 1976), I, p. 23.

⁵ Magnusson, *Mercantilism*, p. 25.

⁶ *Ibid*, p. 216.

Adam Smith did write of mercantilist theory was 'largely wrong', particularly when it came to overemphasising the convention, known as bullionism, of identifying national wealth with the quantity of precious metals in the nation.¹

However, the very fact that Adam Smith, according to Magnusson, stifled the seventeenth-century revolution means that he must have identified the same actual economic discourse as Magnusson, and then decided to denigrate it under the guise of 'the mercantile system'. For if the impression of innovation was truly Adam Smith's goal, then a seventeenth-century revolution as described by Magnusson was surely his main rival. Yet Magnusson is quick to admit that Smith himself blurred the line which connected the participants of the discourse to the apparent practical manifestations of the mercantile system via the cardinal falsehood of his version of the mercantile system: equating wealth and money.² Joseph Schumpeter particularly resented this 'unintelligent criticism' because, he suggested, Smith was conscious of its fallaciousness, but nevertheless vaguely insinuated it, deliberately misleading his own readers.³

All this implies that Smith's key target was not the authors of the standard discourse of the previous century at all. The defamation of the mercantile system was merely the collateral damage of a blunt attack on the injudicious architects of its application and perpetuation in Smith's own times. After all, Smith prefaced Book IV of the *Wealth of Nations* – which dealt specifically with the mercantile system – with the statement that this was 'the modern system, and is best understood in our own country and in our own times'.⁴

¹ D.C. Coleman, 'Adam Smith, Businessmen, and the Mercantile System in England', *History of European Ideas*, 9:2 (1988), p. 164.

² Magnusson, *Mercantilism*, p. 25;

³ Schumpeter, *History of Economic Analysis*, p. 361, n. 24.

⁴ Smith, *WN*, IV.2.

What Magnusson attacks most viciously in his own book is the depiction put forth by Smith, as well as more modern historians such as Robert B. Ekelund and Robert D. Tollison, that sees the principles of the mercantile system as a simple justification on the part of rent-seeking individuals for their lobbying activities, which prejudiced government in favour of their private interests.¹ Magnusson dismisses this view on the grounds that the economists, Ekelund and Tollison, failed to relate the rent-seeking industry of state monopolies, which they consider the essence of mercantilism, back to the body of literature to which he himself applies the term. It does not seem to trouble Magnusson in his flurry of criticism, that, however effectively or otherwise, Ekelund, Tollison, and, most importantly of all, Smith may well have been discussing something quite different to the seventeenth-century discourse which is the subject of his own book.

Smith's own condemnation of the existing grain regulation was closely related to his argument against the mercantile system and its iterations in political economy. He deemed the laws highly overrated in a digression within Book IV of the *Wealth of Nations*, which criticised the mercantile system in general.² However, before moving on to the specifics of the grain trade, Smith dealt with bounties, declaring them a practical manifestation of the pathological notion that a favourable balance of trade was the key to national enrichment.³ The corn bounty itself, Smith argued, was enacted as an 'expedient' to artificially inflate falling grain prices by a parliament which, in 1689, he said, was packed with landowners.⁴

However, he closely related this tactic to the landowners' emulation of their commercial counterparts. In this sense, Smith depicted the commercial monopolising tendency infecting the minds of the

¹ Magnusson, *Mercantilism*, p. 49; R.B. Ekelund and R.D. Tollison, *Mercantilism as a Rent-Seeking Society* (College Station, TX, 1981), p. 5.

² Smith, *WN*, IV.v.b.1-53.

³ *Ibid*, IV.v.a.1-40.

⁴ *Ibid*, I.xi.g.10.

landowning classes – normally the most immune of all groups to such a ‘wretched spirit’ – who therefore lent their support to an unhelpful and unwholesome policy.¹ Unfortunately, according to Smith, the landowners were misled by their own greed, and, he stated bluntly, the only people whose interests were really served by the bounty were the corn merchants. Here then, Smith was objecting to the old adage that ‘interest will not lie’, because, as Gunn has also pointed out, interest is not always easily determined.² Certainly, Smith argued, the landowners who demanded the bounty ‘did not act with that complete comprehension of their own interest which commonly directs the conduct of those two other orders of people [merchants and manufacturers]’.³

Nevertheless, landowners’ desire for state subsidy was not itself directly to blame for the failure of the policy. An export bounty was not, Smith contended, an effective way of increasing the price of the export good, in this case grain. Nor, therefore, was it a means of enhancing the value of land through improvement.⁴ Allocating blame to government in general, Smith declared that due to the prejudicial emphasis on trade, which assumed that wealth comes from exportation and not production, the corn bounties were failing to reward agricultural investment. The winners, of course, were the merchants, whose interest had been neatly served thanks to inept self-interest on the part of the landed interest, coupled with their incompetent implementation thereof, as part of the legislature. The mercantile system, not the self-interest of the landowners, was to blame in this case, because it was indeed ‘the mercantile system [that] proposes to enrich the whole country, and to put money into all our pockets by means of the balance of trade’.⁵

¹ Ibid, IV.ii.21.

² J.A.W. Gunn, ‘Interest Will Not Lie’, *Journal of the History of Ideas*, 29:4 (1968), p. 556.

³ Smith, *WN*, IV.v.a.24.

⁴ Ibid, IV.v.a.25.

⁵ Ibid, IV.v.a.1.

In this sense, it appears that Smith was not necessarily adverse to bounties in principle. Those designed with the real national good – such as national defence or fishing – at heart were deemed acceptable.¹ The key problem with the corn bounty according to Smith, it seems, was that it failed to reward actual production in the same way as the so-called tonnage bounties, which were offered to certain fisheries. Nevertheless, it is perhaps likely that Smith would still condemn a bounty on grain production on the grounds that bounties artificially prejudiced the pursuits of individuals, which ought to be guided by market forces rather than legislation.² After all, he criticized the bounties on fishing on the same grounds, only to justify them once more for their supposed contribution to national defence, as a means of putting mariners through their paces.³ Smith was silent on the question of whether boosting land values was a helpful national as well as private aim, though he condemned the bounty for raising the nominal value of grain, which in turn, he thought, discouraged industry.⁴

Interestingly, at this point Smith did not downplay the special characteristics of grain, as perhaps his French counterparts, such as Anne-Robert-Jacques Turgot, might have. In fact, Smith argued that corn did not function in the same way as manufactured goods, because ‘the nature of things has stamped upon corn a real value which cannot be altered by merely altering its money price’.⁵ For Smith, grain prices were the long-term measure of true value where gold and silver, ideal for assessing short-term price fluctuations, were on a steady decline.⁶ This is not to say that Smith believed any less than Turgot that grain should be subject to market forces rather than regulation. Indeed, it meant that he saw any attempt to regulate the price of grain as, in the

¹ J. Hoppit, ‘Bounties, the Economy and the State in Britain, 1689-1800’ in P. Gauci (ed.), *Regulating the British Economy, 1660-1850* (Farnham, 2011), p. 159.

² Smith, *WN*, IV.v.a.3.

³ *Ibid*, IV.v.a.27.

⁴ *Ibid*, IV.v.a.21.

⁵ *Ibid*, IV.v.a.23.

⁶ *Ibid*, IV.v.a.15 & 16. Governor Thomas Pownall disagreed with this point, arguing that the value of all goods was relative. Pownall, ‘Letter’, p. 346.

words of Donald Winch, 'self-defeating'.¹ Bounties, he argued, did not boost the value of land, but only placed a double burden on consumers, in the form of taxes raised to make bounty pay-outs, and the inconvenience of a period of higher relative prices as wages lagged behind corn prices.²

What seems like a vilification of the grain merchants in the section on bounties is immediately balanced by Smith's official digression on the subject, which more or less comes to their rescue. According to Smith, their trade was peculiarly 'exposed to popular odium', which itself stemmed from the 'ancient policy of Europe'.³ Here Smith seems to have reversed the causal link that the likes of Josiah Tucker and Turgot drew between misinformed popular opinion and legislation and which blamed the people for their old-fashioned views.⁴ Ignoring the contemporary case of France, Smith suggested that a change in the laws restricting inland dealers would simply put a stop to popular prejudice in the same way as he argued it had for the 'imaginary crime' of witchcraft. He wrote that

The law which should restore entire freedom to the inland trade of corn, would probably prove as effectual to put an end to the popular fears of engrossing and forestalling.⁵

By making popular opinion the result of legislation, and not *vice versa*, Smith absolved the people of responsibility for the same. It seems that their natural inclinations were in a suspended state as a result of faulty legislation, but that, as soon as these problems could be resolved, the market and human trading inclinations would suffice to resolve subsistence issues.⁶

¹ D. Winch, 'Science and the Legislator', *The Economic Journal*, 93:371 (1983), p. 507.

² Smith, *WN*, IV.v.a.8.

³ *Ibid*, IV.v.b.7; 9.

⁴ See above p. 249.

⁵ Smith, *WN*, IV.v.b.26.

⁶ Smith, like David Hume, saw economic regulation as the reign of terror. Rothschild, *Economic Sentiments*, p. 13.

The inland grain merchants, in Smith's depiction, were more subject to economic forces than most merchants, as they were so numerous and yet dispersed as to be unable to conglomerate or institute informal monopolies.¹ However, because of the nature of their business, Smith argued, corn merchants were especially vulnerable to popular opprobrium and government control. Smith attempted to outline the fabrication of a web of regulation stemming from the laws of Edward VI in 1551, and show that it was based on fundamental misunderstandings of the proper functioning of the economy, and particularly the division of labour.² However, he also tried to show that the more recent lifting of several regulations first and foremost by 15 Charles II, c.7 (1663) and then by 12 George III, c. 71 (1772), had diminished the subsistence problem more than any law which imposed restrictions.³

Regulation of the importation and exportation of grain was another problem. For these regulations 'though prior to the establishment of the bounty, were dictated by the same spirit, by the same principles, which afterwards enacted that regulation'.⁴ Smith had already pointed out that regulation of this sort had been designed to reward and augment national agriculture, along the same lines as monopolies and other institutions benefitted industry.⁵ However, in a chapter describing the effects of restraints of importation, Smith had shown that such regulation tended only to support merchants of the commodity in question.⁶ Smith pointed out that the duties on the importation of grain (which were so high that they essentially constituted a prohibition), together with the grain bounty, meant that Britain was constantly either exporting vast quantities of grain, or importing the same in times of dearth. If not for the regulation, he suggested, one year's surplus would relieve another year's shortage, and international grain

¹ Smith, *WN*, IV.v.b.4.

² *Ibid*, IV.v.b.21.

³ *Ibid*, IV.v.b.22; 27.

⁴ *Ibid*, IV.v.b.35.

⁵ *Ibid*, III.iv.20.

⁶ *Ibid*, IV.ii.16.

merchants would be out of a job. Smith observed that these merchants were accordingly the most eager supporters of the renewal of the bounty, where landowners had finally woken up to the faults thereof.¹

Concluding his discussion of the corn laws, Smith maintained that Britain's current prosperity could by no means be attributed, as it apparently often was, to 'that system of laws... which is connected with the establishment of the bounty'.² Addressing the laws themselves, especially in relation to foreign exports, Smith argued that

To hinder, besides, the farmer from sending his goods at all times to the best market, is evidently to sacrifice the ordinary laws of justice to an idea of public utility.³

This point tends to confirm the arguments of both Istvan Hont and J.T. Young on the issue of Smith's approach to state intervention in the economy. Ideas or projects for public utility were probably doomed to end in mercantilist mismanagement or even despotism.⁴ Smith continued to separate out the political sphere, a forum for public folly, and the economic sphere, an arena for private gain.⁵ Now he was prepared to blame popular prejudice for the instigation of laws, because, it seems, they had certain ideas about their own utility, which even a legislator ought not to entertain. The economic arena had to remain, as far as possible, undefiled by political intervention of any sort.

D.C. Coleman complained that Smith was very vague about the actual historical processes behind the generation of the mercantile system. He

¹ Ibid, IV.ii.20.

² Ibid, IV.v.b.43.

³ Ibid, IV.v.b.39.

⁴ Hont, *Jealousy of Trade*, p. 377; J.T. Young, 'Unintended Order and Intervention: Adam Smith's Theory of the Role of the State' in S.G. Medema and P.J. Boettke (eds.), *The Role of Government in the History of Economic Thought* (Durham, 2005), p. 97.

⁵ Hirschman, *The Passions*, p. 104. David Hume also drew a distinction between the political interests of government and the commercial interests of society. J. Robertson, 'The Scottish Enlightenment at the Limits of the Civic Tradition' in Hont and Ignatieff (eds.), *Wealth and Virtue*, p. 154.

himself considered *mercantilism* as no more than an ‘unplanned miscellany of regulatory measures’.¹ In other words, Smith’s system and the vague idea of mercantilism that followed it were fictional. He argued that it was therefore misleading of Smith to label this a system, along with the genuinely ‘theoretical construct’ of physiocracy. However, it seems that Smith’s depiction of the legislation which surrounded corn was not too far removed from the legislative ‘ragbag’ which Coleman himself conjured.² This bundle of regulations, or *system of laws* was shown to have developed from a series of self-interested initiatives; misapprehensions about how wealth was generated; ancient prejudices about the causes of shortage; and surviving vestiges of former systems.

The laws themselves were not actually part of the so-called ‘mercantile system’. When related to the corn laws and their history, Adam Smith depicted the mercantile system as a myth of national wealth generation which was then translated into a specific mode of expression and deftly drawn upon in order to realise private interests. However, the culprits are somewhat harder to distinguish. As Coleman and also Charles Wilson have pointed out, Smith seems to have been inclined towards ‘physiocratic antipathy’ and ‘a remarkable hostility towards the agents of... enterprise’.³

Yet Smith did not stop at criticising those who had apparently devised the system and its blunders. He also blamed those who invested in such a system and actually believed that systematic state intervention in the economy was useful for generating growth or even so much as stability. Such a system made a whimsy of the complexities of the natural system, which could not be expected to conform to simple maxims about the balance of trade. In this sense, his thought resembled that of Anne-

¹ Coleman, ‘Adam Smith, Businessmen, and the Mercantile system’, p. 164.

² Ibid, pp. 164; 165.

³ Ibid, p. 161; quote from C. Wilson, “‘Mercantilism’: Some Vicissitudes of an Idea’ in idem, *Economic History and the Historian* (London, 1969) p. 64.

Robert-Jacques Turgot, and his predecessor, Jacques-Claude-Marie Vincent de Gournay.¹

Against the existing 'system of laws' governing the grain trade, Smith offered the 'liberal system of free exportation and free importation'. This was to transform the various nations of Europe into one great famine-free 'empire'.² He envisioned a transcontinental market, which, independent of misguided nationalist or utilitarian intervention, allocated grain exactly when and where it was needed. In this apparent preference for *laissez-faire*, especially in the grain trade, Smith's thought has been likened to physiocratic thought.³ However, Smith had his own objections to that system also.

The Physiocratic System

The physiocratic system, Smith declared, only existed 'in the speculations of a few men of great learning and ingenuity in France'.⁴ In other words, it had not yet caught on in the same way as had the mercantile or 'commercial' system. It was perhaps for this reason that he dedicated just one chapter to it, tacked on to the end of a book committed otherwise almost entirely to exposing the mercantile system.

Though Smith considered what he called the 'agricultural system' to be teeming with errors, he was relatively complimentary of the physiocrats; they had designed a model which closely approximated his own perception of the functioning of the economy.⁵ Thanks to the shared elements of theory between Smith and the physiocrats, particularly the emphasis placed on *laissez-faire*, the originality of Smith's thought is again a subject of controversy. However, historians such as Andrew Skinner have endeavoured to show that Smith's key

¹ See above, pp. 230-1.

² Smith, *WN*, IV.v.b.39.

³ O'Brien, *The Classical Economists*, p. 43.

⁴ Smith, *WN*, IV.ix.2.

⁵ *Ibid*, IV.ix.2.

ideas, and in particular the division of labour theory, were in place before he embarked, as the tutor to the stepson of Charles Townshend (in turn the brilliant son of our own Charles Townshend), on a tour of Europe and, crucially, before his eighteen-month sojourn in France from 1765.¹ During this time he did, however, witness the beginning of the strife over the recent deregulation of the French grain trade.²

As Hont has shown, Smith tended to criticise the physiocrats for their apparent adherence to the idea that the economy could and should be manipulated in any sense. Thus, though Smith agreed with the physiocrats in the theory of their system, which had economic liberty at its core, he disagreed with the mode of abrupt and forcible practical application of the theory which the physiocrats seemed to have in mind.³ Smith viewed the current economic condition of Europe as a perversion of the natural path, for as A.W. Coats also pointed out, Smith's application of the term natural, as applied to economic progress, by no means connoted inevitability.⁴

However, according to Hont, Smith thought that European economies had nevertheless managed to revert to a general pattern of growth, as an unintended consequence of the interventions of statesmen. Thus, Hont writes that for Smith, 'the art of economy was not in superimposing the natural order on the actual one, but rather discovering how natural progress asserts itself... through the complex development of unintended consequences'.⁵ Therefore, according to Hont, although Smith, like the physiocrats, subscribed to the idea of natural law, the notion that a government should try to enforce this law was inherently offensive to his perception thereof.⁶

¹ Willis, 'Ideas of Smith in Parliament', p. 522; A. Skinner, *A System of Social Science* (Oxford, 1996), pp. 124-5; D. Winch, 'Smith, Adam (*bap.* 1723, *d.* 1790)', *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography* (Oxford, 2004) [<http://www.oxforddnb.com/view/article/25767>, accessed 25 June 2015]

² Hont and Ignatieff, 'Needs and Justice', p. 15.

³ Hont, *Jealousy of Trade*, p. 355.

⁴ A.W. Coats, 'Adam Smith and the Mercantile System' in A.S. Skinner and T. Wilson (eds.), *Essays on Adam Smith* (Oxford, 1975), p. 223

⁵ Hont, *Jealousy of Trade*, p. 375.

⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 361.

Likewise, Rothschild has argued that Smith harboured a profound respect for the freedom of public opinion, which precipitated also a bizarre reverence for apparent public misapprehensions and prejudices.¹ For he acknowledged that all parts of society were equally motivated by their own interests, which included not just material gain, but intangible social advantage and respect.² Since he believed that most individuals were preoccupied with their own daily occupations, he understood that it was naturally difficult for them to have a sense of genuine political wisdom.³ Attempting to inculcate new values too abruptly went far beyond the remit of the government.

Smith discussed the physiocratic system in relation to the mercantilist system, which he thought had been implemented most notably in France by Jean-Baptiste Colbert. According to Smith, Colbert was guided by the 'prejudices' of a system which told him that France needed to export more labour value than it imported in a vicious zero-sum game, where even the number of trade routes was finite. So he sacrificed the natural development of agriculture to the demands of cities, which he erroneously saw as the source of wealth. As a result, he distorted the natural balance of industry, by forcing labour into the industrial channel, leaving French agriculture stunted and unable to support continuous growth of the economy in general.⁴

According to Smith, it seems that Colbert had been highly susceptible to the mercantile system by dint of his own quirks and foibles. He was a 'laborious and plodding man of business' to whom the idea of regulation and state control was highly appealing.⁵ Smith described him in detail as

¹ Rothschild, *Economic Sentiments*, p. 68.

² Hirschman, *The Passions*, p. 111.

³ R. Phillipson, 'Adam Smith as Civic Moralizer' in Hont and Ignatieff (eds.), *Wealth and Virtue*, p. 191.

⁴ Magnusson, *Mercantilism*, p. 185; Smith, *WN*, IV.ix.3.

⁵ Smith, *WN*, IV.ix.3.

a man of probity, of great industry and knowledge of detail; of great experience and accurateness in the examination of publick accounts, and of abilities, in short, every way fitted for introducing a method and good order into the collection and expenditure of the publick revenue.¹

In other words, a bit of a bean-counter. Whether it is fair to typecast Colbert as a *mercantilist*, with all its implied Smithian disdain, has been questioned.² Certainly Smith's reduction of Colbert's character to a 'plodding' stereotype is unfair to a 'remarkable bibliophile' and patron of the arts.³ However, thought about the balance of trade was dominated by the terminology and imagery of double-entry bookkeeping and it suited the purposes of Smith's argument to create a persona preoccupied with neat columns of figures.⁴

Though intelligent, Smith implied that this caricatured Colbert was just the sort to invest in wrongheaded ideas of a balance of trade and to expect that he could, by counting, achieve economic perfection. Smith seemed to think that while these skills were suited to the administration of public accounts, Colbert had supposedly been foolish enough to attempt to extend this bureaucratic approach to national commerce. It was this kind of behaviour which Smith argued had led Colbert to crush the natural economic inclinations and liberties of French subjects with regulation.

Smith then portrayed the physiocratic system as a backlash against the fallacies of the mercantile system. It was a corrective, by which its proponents hoped to bend 'the rod' as far in the one direction as had proponents of the mercantile system in the other.⁵ The ingenious physiocratic system had found, according to Smith, 'numerous' followers. It had also positively influenced the political economy of

¹ Ibid.

² M. Isenmann, 'War Colbert ein „Mercantilist“?' in idem (ed.), *Merkantilismus*, p. 167.

³ I. Murat, *Colbert* (Charlottesville, 1984), p. 117.

⁴ A. Finkelstein, *Harmony and the Balance* (Ann Arbor, 2000), p. 90.

⁵ Smith, *WN*, IV.ix.4; Hont, *Jealousy of Trade*, p. 363.

France, especially by removing many of the various ‘oppressions’ which were stifling French agriculture.¹

Smith also approved of the physiocratic answer to the ‘rich country-poor country debate’. Their version saw rich mercantile nations gradually supplanted by nations that earned a surplus through steady agricultural improvement and invested in new manufacturing efforts of their own. To this Smith grafted his own key element for sustainable long-term economic growth: the division of labour.² Smith understood and agreed with the theory that mercantile states came to the rescue of purely agricultural entities, which thanks to ‘some defect in their policy’ had no manufacture of their own. He very much approved of the physiocratic doctrine which advised landed nations to allow unrestricted and duty-free exchange with their commercial neighbours. Otherwise, he noted, they risked inflating the costs of manufactured goods at home, depressing the prices of their own domestic agricultural produce.³

Nevertheless, it is clear that Smith also considered the notion of the agricultural kingdom, biased towards the primary sector, as something of an aberration. For, he maintained, internal commerce, the exchange of domestic agricultural produce for manufactures, was of great importance in any nation. In order to explore the issue, Smith examined cases of nations that had, he thought, rejected trade. Thus he explored the model of the supposedly rich but underdeveloped China, a model of perfection among the physiocrats.⁴ According to Smith, the Chinese esteemed agriculture above industrial labour and initiatives, and spurned overseas trading. However, China enjoyed an extensive inland trade,⁵ which meant that the division of labour was supported by the

¹ Smith, *WN*, IV.ix.38.

² I. Hont, ‘The “Rich Country- Poor Country” Debate in Scottish Classical Political Economy’ in Hont and Ignatieff (eds.), *Wealth and Virtue*, p. 300.

³ Smith, *WN*, IV.ix.26

⁴ G. Lottes, ‘China in European Political Thought’ in T.H.C. Lee (ed.), *China and Europe* (Hong Kong, 1991), p. 75.

⁵ David Hume made the same point. D. Hume ‘Of Commerce’ in E.F. Miller (ed.), *David Hume* (Indianapolis, 1987), p. 264.

domestic market alone, and the nation grew wealthy.¹ This, Smith thought, was an important first step to commercial supremacy, for such a nation ought to be beginning to engage in overseas trade.² In Smith's analysis, it was, therefore, Chinese political economy which halted economic development there, and not the intrinsic characteristics of the Chinese people themselves, as Montesquieu thought.³

However, in its partiality towards nations like China, and its potential for fanaticism, physiocracy was, according to Smith, potentially even more harmfully inconsistent than the mercantile system. His chief concern with the system was its apparent devaluation of the so-called 'barren and unproductive' class of manufacturers.⁴ Smith believed that manufacturing had far more potential for improvement than agriculture, due to its potential for subdivision. Thus for continual economic augmentation, the industrial and not the agricultural sphere was to be depended upon. Hence, as Laurent Dobuzinskis has indicated, where Quesnay saw only the flat circulation of wealth, Smith imagined it rising in a spiral of infinite growth.⁵

Smith concluded that the system was quite good, but 'in representing the labour which is employed upon land as the only productive labour, the notions which it inculcates are perhaps too narrow and confined'.⁶ These inculcations presented a danger. He argued that to place restrictions on manufacturing and trade risked inflating the cost of manufactured goods, which in turn would depress the prices of agricultural produce and therefore discourage investment in agriculture.⁷ As agricultural development was actually an unintended

¹ Towards the end of *WN*, Smith attributed Britain's economic prowess to uniformity of the internal tax regime and lack of internal tolls and duties, advantages which the French economy did not enjoy. Smith, *WN*, V.ii.k.69.

² Smith, *WN*, IV.ix.41.

³ Smith, *WN*, I, p. 112, n.33.

⁴ Smith, *WN*, IV.ix.29.

⁵ *Ibid.*, IV.ix.35; L. Dobuzinskis, 'Adam Smith and French Political Economy' in D.F. Hardwick and L. Marsh (eds.), *Propriety and Prosperity* (Basingstoke & New York, 2014), p. 69

⁶ Smith, *WN*, IV.ix.38.

⁷ *Ibid.*, IV.ix.38; 49.

consequence of the mercantile system, the unintended consequence of the agricultural or physiocratic system would be to 'in the end discourage their own favourite species of industry'.¹

Physiocracy, therefore, was also an unnatural system which had been concocted, unlike the other, within Smith's lifetime, in order to guide (wisely or not) the next generation of French ministers. It was essentially the equal and opposite of the mercantile system, and was, it seems, potentially susceptible to some of the same pitfalls. Smith reckoned the natural inclinations of people sufficient to guide them into the most appropriate mode of employment and hence establish, without government prompts, a 'natural balance of industry'. This rendered Quesnay's 'arithmetical formularies' totally unnecessary and slightly suspect.² Smith noted in passing that this was a system which appealed to quacks and lovers of paradox.³ Most importantly he criticised the inflexible and contrived regimen which the French physician seemed to propose.⁴

Hont sees Smith attacking the mercantile system and feudalism as the institutional underpinnings of unfreedom, splitting the physiocratic system off into a category of its own, best described as the preserve of projectors.⁵ However, it seems that, in Smith's depiction, the so-called commercial and agricultural systems were a pair of malformed casts of development applied by zealots to force the uneven or lopsided growth of states according to their own premature vision of the final form, be it agricultural or commercial. In Smith's vision, though he acknowledged that some nations had a greater or lesser land base, it seems that a natural and perfectly developed nation was both. Apparently the international division of labour, or specialisation, could be helpful, but was not to be valued above a domestic 'natural balance'.⁶

¹ Ibid, IV.ix.49.

² Ibid, IV.ix.27; Hirschman, *The Passions*, p. 100-4

³ Smith, *WN*, IV.ix.38.

⁴ Ibid, IV.ix.28.

⁵ Hont, *Jealousy of Trade*, p. 361.

⁶ Smith, *WN*, IV.vii.c.43.

Here, as Hont has shown, Smith departed from the physiocrats again. They were reluctant to accept the commercial stage as a final and inevitable phase of an archetypal nation's natural development.¹ Hont argues that Smith himself saw the proper four-stages path as perverted in Europe thanks to its institutional development, but he acknowledged that a clean slate like the economy of the colonies was an opportunity for the realisation of the natural order of things.²

Winch describes Smith's attitude towards America as 'optimistic'.³ Land there was abundant; taxes and rents negligible; wages were high; and the settlers skilled and experienced. However, when it came to the existing regulation of the colonies, Smith was somewhat gloomier. Nevertheless, he had a certain appreciation for the fact that the Navigation Acts seemed to have established, for the time being, a coherent mutually beneficial economic unit. The regulation of the colonial economy had actually, serendipitously, restricted them to a natural course of development which prioritised the establishment of the agricultural foundation of a fully-developed economy according to a four-stage plan.⁴ Smith thought that the colonies were largely unscathed by economic regulation, which was actually most deleterious to the metropole which imposed it. Apparently, modern historians have tended to agree with this observation.⁵

What seemed unjust politically had its hidden benefits for economic development. For, as Smith put it,

¹ Hont, *Jealousy of Trade*, p. 369.

² *Ibid*, pp. 374-5.

³ D. Winch, *Classical Political Economy and Colonies* (London, 1965), p. 90.

⁴ A.S. Skinner, 'Adam Smith and America: The Political Economy of Conflict' in R.B. Sher and J.R. Smitten (eds.), *Scotland and America in the Age of Enlightenment* (Edinburgh, 1990), pp. 150-1.

⁵ D. Stevens, 'Adam Smith and the Colonial Disturbances' in Skinner and Wilson (eds.), *Essays on Adam Smith*, p. 212.

Though they had not, therefore, been prohibited from establishing such manufactures, yet in their present state of improvement, a regard to their own interest would, probably, have prevented them from doing so.¹

Their own interests would 'probably' have kept the colonists on course, so long as they did not get any ideas from the mercantile system. The logic ran that, thanks to the 'very extensive market' for agricultural goods furnished by the more developed economies of the Old World, the natural order of American development was as much as guaranteed.²

The North American colonies provided Smith with an example of natural order achieved as an unintended consequence of intervention on the part of statesmen.³ After all, Smith's discussion of colonies appeared in Book IV, which dealt with systems of political economy.⁴ However, it was the serendipitously archetypal development of the colonies, which, in Smith's system, rendered eventual confrontation inevitable.⁵ The tension came from the fact that this sort of division of labour, mutually beneficial as it was for the time being, was ultimately unsustainable. This was because, as he had shown with China, a national economy was incomplete, according to Smith, until it not only included an internal exchange of manufactured for unmanufactured goods, but also participation in overseas exchange of more than subsistence goods. While in economic infancy, the regulation of the colonies was only an emblem of their subordination. However, as they matured, it was quickly becoming a genuine hindrance and a disadvantage.⁶

¹ Smith, *WN*, IV.vii.b.44.

² *Ibid.*, II.v.21; quote from IV.vii.b.27.

³ Hont, *Jealousy of Trade*, p. 374.

⁴ Smith, *WN*, IV.vii.

⁵ Skinner, 'Adam Smith and America', p. 153.

⁶ B. Bailyn, '1776. A Year of Challenge – a World Transformed', *Journal of Law and Economics*, 19:3 (1976), pp. 465-6.

The idea of specialisation enshrined in the Navigation Acts, therefore, had its expiration date. It is for this reason that Smith's theoretical conception of national economic identity is somewhat complex, certainly more so than the physiocratic stereotypes of agricultural kingdom and commercial republic. The physiocrats evaluated nations based on their size, situation and topographical characteristics, distinguishing France, therefore, from its rivals, Britain and the United Provinces.¹ Smith, meanwhile, also acknowledged certain natural economic advantages that some nations enjoyed by virtue of their peculiar situation. Most notably, he conceded that, due to the expenses incurred in cultivation, the sustained production of wine in his native Scotland was impossible, or at the very least pointless, when Burgundy or Claret were easily to be imported for a fraction of the price.²

Nevertheless, competitive advantages did not amount to a prescribed policy for Smith, as it did for the physiocrats. Hence, such advantages or disadvantages were also not to be taken as a hallmark of economic identity in any meaningful way. After all, if it had been deemed desirable by a sufficiently powerful faction, Smith suggested, steps could have been taken to transform Scotland into a wine country, simply by banning the import of foreign wine. Though this seemed ludicrous, Smith was keen to point out that actual policies restricting various imports followed this flawed logic.³

Perhaps he was even mocking the notion held, according to Rosalind Mitchison, by improvers of Scotland in particular, that every country should have its own 'staple product'.⁴ Even David Hume invested to an extent in the idea of staple products, which were based on the natural

¹ P. Steiner, 'Physiocracy and French Pre-Classical Political Economy' in W.J. Samuels, J.E. Biddle, and J.B. Davis (eds.), *A Companion to the History of Economic Thought* (Oxford, 2003), p. 64.

² Smith, *WN*, IV.ii.15. Smith's thinking bore relations to that of Josiah Tucker and David Hume. See above p. 235.

³ Smith, *WN*, IV.ii.15-16.

⁴ R. Mitchison, 'Patriotism and National Identity in Eighteenth-Century Scotland' in T.W. Moody (ed.), *Nationality and the Pursuit of National Independence* (Belfast, 1978), p. 81.

conditions of a nation or region. Nevertheless, if these were lost, then the nation could 'blame their own idleness, or bad government'.¹ Evidently Hume also must have thought that there was something in the idea that regulation might provide life-support for a nation's staple product. In any case, Smith was clear that it was foolish to apply regulations in order to attempt to foster one.

Smith, in fact, seems to have identified all nations as removed by varying degrees from an identical ideal. If economic identities existed for nations, it was in the form of their deviation from the Smithian paradigm of perfection. That Smith did not advocate, as Hont has shown, snapping divergent economies back into a preconceived ideal, indicates that he perceived irremovable national identity in institutional configurations. It was for these reasons, therefore, that he famously declared that

To expect, indeed, that the freedom of trade should ever be entirely restored in Great Britain, is as absurd as to expect that an Oceana or Utopia should ever be established in it.²

Britain's institutional biases were, for Smith, a feature of the national consciousness or opinion, which he esteemed so highly.³ George Stigler has argued that, while Smith usually depicted economic behaviour as governed by the highly rational motivation of self-interest, when it came to politics he allowed for irrational behaviour, emphasising the role of emotion, prejudice and ignorance.⁴ Clearly national economic identity was an important prejudice, which Smith seems to have potentially acknowledged. On board the 'ship of state', it was structural leanings or biases such as these for which he needed to accommodate in his own system of navigation.

¹ D. Hume, 'Of the Jealousy of Trade' in E.F. Miller (ed.), *David Hume*, p. 330.

² Smith, *WN*, IV.ii.43.

³ Rothschild, *Economic Sentiments*, p. 68.

⁴ G.J. Stigler, 'Smith's Travels on the Ship of State' in Skinner and Wilson (eds.), *Essays on Adam Smith*, pp. 240-1.

Adam Smith's 'System'

Tracing the same intellectual genealogy as A.V. Judges, Magnusson alleges that Adam Smith lifted the term 'mercantile system' from the Marquis de Mirabeau's *Philosophie Rurale* of 1763. Here the French author and physiocrat had attacked the '*système mercantile*', and in particular, what he saw as its most flawed assumption: the belief that a nation might grow rich by importing money.¹ The idea of systems, however, as we have seen, dated back even further, at least to Jean-François Melon's *Essai Politique sur le Commerce*.² Though strictly positive in Melon's work, the notion of systematic thinking took on a dubious quality for other economic writers, such as Anne-Robert-Jacques Turgot and James Steuart. For, as we have seen, Turgot took pains to spare his mentor, Gournay from the aspersions cast on him as a 'man of systems'. Likewise, Steuart hoped in his work to avoid the trap of over-simplified systematic thinking.

There can be no doubt but that, when he came to applying the term *system* to both the mercantilist and physiocratic modes of thought, Smith was well aware of its negative connotations. Indeed, in a passage which closely echoes James Steuart's thought on the matter of systems, Smith dissected education and the systems fabricated by philosophers and charlatans:

Different authors gave different systems both of natural and moral philosophy. But the arguments by which they supported those different systems, far from being always demonstrations, were frequently at best but slender probabilities, and sometimes mere sophisms, which had no

¹ A.V. Judges, 'The Idea of a Mercantile State' in D.C. Coleman (ed.), *Revisions in Mercantilism* (London, 1969), p.38; Magnusson, *Mercantilism*, p. 25.

² See above p. 181.

other foundation but the inaccuracy and the ambiguity of common language.¹

This systemising spirit, Smith argued, stemmed from the invention of human language itself, and was evident in the philosophical systems and religions of ancient civilisations. However, the same disposition was apt to infect political economists, particularly those who, like the physiocrats, tended to run in a sect. Smith argued that ‘the admiration of this whole sect for their master... is not inferior to that of any of the ancient philosophers for the founders of their respective systems’.² In other words, Quesnay’s followers were capable, according to Smith, of little independent critical thought. Such was the awe with which they beheld the genius of their leader that the physiocrats had grown blind to the flaws of this sparkling model. What is more, modern commentators, such as Joseph Schumpeter and Ronald Meek, tend to agree with Smith on this point, seeing the physiocrats as a school or sect as devoted to their leader as the followers of Marx and Keynes.³

Smith was not necessarily opposed to systematic thinking: his approach to knowledge generation was indeed predicated upon producing ‘system knowledge’.⁴ He subscribed to Newtonian inductive thinking and searched for cosmic interconnections.⁵ However, he also thought that it was the task of a student to critically assess systems in order to explode those which were false or obsolete. Smith thought that state education, where funding was not predicated on performance, often perpetuated false doctrines. Such institutions had no reason to teach anything but antiquated and apparently debunked theories.⁶ Evidently,

¹ Smith, *WN*, V.i.f.26; cf. J. Steuart: ‘The imperfection also of language engages us frequently in disputes merely verbal’. *An Inquiry into the Principles of Political Economy*, ed. A. Skinner (Edinburgh, 1998), I, p. 9

² Smith, *WN*, IV.ix.38.

³ Schumpeter, *History of Economic Analysis*, p. 223; R.L. Meek, *The Economics of Physiocracy* (London, 1962), p. 27.

⁴ K. Haakonssen, *The Science of a Legislator* (Cambridge, 1981), p. 79.

⁵ Campbell and Skinner, ‘Introduction’, pp. 2-3.

⁶ Smith, *WN*, V.i.f.46.

Smith saw vested interest as a powerful force in the generation and preservation of questionable knowledge.

In this way, Smith wielded the accusation of uncritical and systematic thinking as a weapon against rival theories. Even James Steuart, who himself explicitly opposed *systems* of thought, was not safe. Smith famously dismissed Steuart's major work, writing to William Pulteney, that 'without once mentioning the book, I flatter myself that every false principle in it, will meet with a clear and distinct confutation in mine'.¹ Because of this deliberate omission, it is harder to determine precisely what Smith thought of Steuart's various ideas. As we saw, Hutchison and Magnusson suggest that Smith's successors exaggerated the primitiveness of political economy and particularly the mercantile system before 1776, thus undermining the contribution made to the subject by Steuart and others.² Meanwhile, Gary Anderson and Robert Tollison have come to Smith's rescue, arguing that Steuart's work indeed represented the 'apotheosis' of a rival system of thought, meaning that Smith was justified in his icy treatment of his fellow Scotsman.³ Finally, Hont has argued that Smith saw Steuart, and the physiocrats alike, as well-meaning, but ultimately wrong-headed projectors, thus distinguishing them from what he interprets as the real scourge of *Wealth of Nations*: corrupt institutions, such as the mercantile system and feudalism.⁴

Smith evidently considered Steuart's work to be littered with false principles. However, since he made the conscious decision not to refer to them explicitly, it is next to impossible to decide whether they align, as is normally claimed, with the erroneous logic of the mercantile system that was portrayed in *Wealth of Nations*.

¹ Smith to William Pulteney, dated 3rd September 1772 in Mossner and Ross (eds.), *Correspondence*, p. 164.

² Hutchison, *On Revolutions*, p. 217; Magnusson, *Mercantilism*, p. 2.

³ G.M. Anderson and R.D. Tollison, 'Sir James Steuart as the Apotheosis of Mercantilism and His Relation to Adam Smith', *Southern Economic Journal*, 51:2 (1984), p. 457.

⁴ Hont, *Jealousy of Trade*, p. 361.

However, for Smith to associate Steuart's work too closely with the mercantile system would risk giving Steuart ownership of a system of values, albeit supposedly misguided values, which Smith seemed to be deliberately keeping vague. He drew no straight lines from Mun or other individual writers to the shadowy intellectual tendency which mistook money for wealth.¹ Connecting the mercantile system to Steuart's *Principles* could connect it to more developed and credible tenets than perhaps Smith was prepared or able to refute. For although Steuart seemed to invest in some of the ideas which Smith designated as false, he nevertheless produced some tolerable policy prescriptions to deal with some of the observable problems of his time.² By declining to so much as acknowledge Steuart's contribution, Smith reduced him to a mere adherent of a specious system, just like the myriad of unnamed physiocrat disciples who blithely trailed in Quesnay's misguided footsteps.³

Nevertheless, Smith, a student of astronomy as well as a political economist, appreciated the appeal of 'the beauty of a systematical arrangement'.⁴ Indeed, Rothschild has argued that Smith's famous 'invisible hand' was no more than a device aimed at the same lovers of system who would otherwise be inclined to get their own hands dirty and intervene with the economy.⁵ Smith's own system is therefore elusive in the *Wealth of Nations*, and normally referred to hypothetically when explaining the behaviour of economic agents. For example, 'perfect liberty' is referred to when explaining the meaning of the 'market price',⁶ and is touched on in relation to the proper employment of labour and stock (or capital).⁷

¹ Judges, 'The Idea of a Mercantile State', p. 39.

² A. Skinner, 'Sir James Steuart: Author of a System' in M. Blaug (ed.), *David Hume (1711-1776) and James Steuart (1712-1780)* (Aldershot, 1991), p. 294.

³ Cf. Hutchison, *On Revolutions*, pp. 217-8.

⁴ Smith, *WN*, V.i.f.25

⁵ E. Rothschild, 'Adam Smith and the Invisible Hand', *The American Economic Review*, 84:2 (1994), p. 322.

⁶ Smith, *WN*, I.vii.6; 30.

⁷ *Ibid*, I.x.a.1.

However, the 'system of natural liberty' itself is described only in opposition to the two systems of political economy in Book IV. Here it is the system which 'establishes itself of its own accord' in the absence of economic 'preference or restraint'.¹ Most importantly, it is not, as Young points out, to be understood as a rival system of political economy.² Rather, the term is used as shorthand for the conditions wherein economic agents are left to their own devices, within the laws of justice. Such an environment obviated the need for intervention on the part of the sovereign. Any sovereign that did dare to meddle 'must always be exposed to innumerable delusions'.³ This system or mechanism was above human control and understanding. Smith's description of the free economy therefore, bears a resemblance to that proffered by Turgot in his defence of Gournay, who, he maintained, was not subject to any such delusions.⁴

Nevertheless, Smith left the sovereign with three duties, namely: defence; the arbitration of justice; and 'errecting and maintaining certain publick works and certain publick institutions, which it can never be for the interest of any individual... to erect and maintain'.⁵ Because of this, Jacob Viner denied Smith the status of 'doctrinaire advocate of *laissez-faire*'. Smith, he argued, appreciated the dangers which private interest could pose to that of the public, and was in favour of *laissez-faire* only in so far as it was the best and fairest instrument of resource allocation or the provision of services.⁶ Various historians have followed suit, also attempting to explain the concrete examples of exceptions from the rule of non-intervention in Smith's work.

¹ Ibid, IV.ix.51.

² J.T. Young, 'Justice Versus Expediency. *The Wealth of Nations* as an anti-Political Economy' in E.L. Forget and S. Peart (eds.), *Reflections on the Classical Canon in Economics* (London & New York, 2001), p. 155.

³ Smith, *WN*, IV.ix.51.

⁴ See above p. 231.

⁵ Smith, *WN*, IV.ix.51.

⁶ J. Viner, *The Long View and the Short* (London, 1958), pp. 244-5; Young, 'Unintended Order and Intervention', p. 91.

Skinner suggests that while Smith dismissed conscious paternalism as incompetent, he nevertheless saw state intervention as necessary in correcting the weaknesses of individuals (such as ignorance or myopia)¹ and providing services where the market failed to do so (namely defence; justice; infrastructure; and possibly education).² In a similar way, Winch ultimately fitted Smith's interventionism into a holistic – or, at least, not merely economic – model established in the sum of his writings. This model required the balancing of jurisprudence, reason of state and economic priorities, allowing for the concrete policy directives which appeared in *Wealth of Nations*.³

Meanwhile, Nathan Rosenberg suggests that a key theme in Smith's work is the pursuit of 'the details of the institutional structure which will best harmonize the individual's pursuit of his selfish interests with the broader interests of society'.⁴ In this sense, he argues that Smith viewed the mercantile system as an institution that allowed for merchants and others to pursue their own interest without benefiting society as a whole.⁵ As an alternative, Rosenberg maintains, Smith attempted to sketch out institutional circumstances which linked reward (and hence self-interest) to socially beneficial performance.⁶

Smith's approach has even been deemed explicitly utilitarian, to the extent that he used public utility as a category for judging the viability and prudence of policy.⁷ Finally, J.T. Young, dismissing this theory, argues that Smith saw utility as the unintended consequence of the natural and social inclination of human passions towards commutative justice, which also happened to be the ideal condition for the proper functioning of the economy.⁸ According to Young, Smith thought that

¹ Skinner, *A System of Social Science*, pp. 183-5.

² *Ibid*, pp. 188-191.

³ Winch, 'Science and the Legislator', pp. 508-9.

⁴ N. Rosenberg, 'Some Institutional Aspects of the Wealth of Nations', *Journal of Political Economy*, 68:6 (1960), p. 559.

⁵ *Ibid*, p. 560.

⁶ *Ibid*, p. 570.

⁷ T.D. Campbell and I.S. Ross, 'The Utilitarianism of Adam Smith's Policy Advice', *Journal of the History of Ideas*, 42:1 (1981), p. 92.

⁸ J.T. Young, 'Unintended Order and Intervention', pp. 96-98.

those instances when public utility or indeed equity did not follow as the unintended consequence of justice were the ones which required intervention, which therefore adhered to a consistent pattern.¹

However, Smith's interventionism did not end with his recommendations for positive intervention in political economy: he had to at least address the existing regime of regulation and misallocation. Smith's work could be seen as intrinsically interventionist, for he advocated 'allowing every man to pursue his own interest his own way, upon the *liberal plan* of equality, liberty and justice'.² This sort of negative freedom for all parties required definition and, it seems, a planner or arbiter.³ Winch in particular has pointed out that Smith's assertion, that political economy was a 'branch of the science of a statesman or legislator', seemed more than anything else to thoroughly contradict the idea of non-interventionism.⁴

Hont and Rothschild imply that Smith was aware of the implicit interventionism of liberal policy.⁵ Just like the physiocrats, Smith was caught up in the paradox of implementing non-intervention. For Hont, Smith averted this contradiction by emphasising that unintended good could come of existing erroneous government policy: how else had any growth at all been possible under the mercantile system?⁶ As we know, Smith was sufficiently realistic (or defeatist) to admit that a purely free-trade Britain was a utopian fantasy. However, he also implied that British independence, identity, and indeed supremacy all depended on its existing regulation. For even as he fantasised about a free international grain trade, he appreciated that the individual states of the European continent would thus also disappear into one utopian 'empire'.⁷

¹ Ibid, p. 106.

² Smith, *WN*, IV.ix.3. Emphasis added.

³ Q. Skinner, *Liberty before Liberalism* (Cambridge, 1998), pp. 112-3.

⁴ Winch, 'Science and the Legislator', p. 501.

⁵ Hont, *Jealousy of Trade*, pp. 361-2.

⁶ Ibid, p. 374; Smith, *WN*, IV.ix.28.

⁷ Smith, *WN*, IV.v.b.39.

This was an interesting choice of term for Smith, given that empire was traditionally the downfall of republics.¹ Later in the same section Smith referred to small states such as the Swiss cantons and the city-states of Italy. He argued that it was wise for small republics to limit exportation of grain while the greater states which surrounded them pursued mercantilist policies.² Here Smith entered a debate, which Richard Whatmore has described, about the survival of small republics in the face of the burgeoning commercial empires of Britain and France. Evidently Smith seems to have agreed with the common view that the inherent inequality of commerce was incompatible with the virtue required to make a small republic into a viable alternative to a sprawling empire.³

The great empire which Smith envisioned perhaps resembled the Roman Empire, which drew its grain from Sardinia, Sicily, and increasingly North Africa. G.E. Rickman highlights the political significance of grain in Rome, where, by the early years of the empire, the commodity was being distributed for free to maintain political stability.⁴ Edward Gibbon complained that, by the later stages of the empire, grain and other commodities were being freely bestowed on an idle and licentious Roman crowd by a lax and fearful government.⁵ In general, this international grain sharing scheme, though peaceful, was not consistent with a virtuous republican political character.

Meanwhile, Smith clearly acknowledged the role which national rivalry had to play in political economy. In particular he lamented that a mutually beneficial commercial exchange with France was being

¹ Pocock, *Virtue*, pp. 146-7.

² Smith, *WN*, IV.v.b.39.

³ R. Whatmore, "Neither Masters nor Slaves": Small States and Empire in the Long Eighteenth Century' in D. Kelly (ed.), *Lineages of Empire: the Historical Roots of British Imperial Thought* (Oxford, 2009), p. 70.

⁴ G.E. Rickman, 'The Grain Trade under the Roman Empire', *Memoirs of the American Academy in Rome*, 36 (1980), p. 263-4.

⁵ E. Gibbon, *The History of the Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire*, ed. D. Womersley, (London, 1994), I, p. 600.

sacrificed due to *jealousy of trade*. He complained that too much emphasis had fallen on the British manufacturing endeavour, so that instead of trading with France, British manufacturers attempted to reproduce French products, which were prevented by regulation from entering the market. This was partly a ramification of mercantilist ignorance, which taught that national wealth came from exporting more than neighbouring states could. However, Smith also acknowledged that the mutual growth of a trading partner could be regretted in wartime.¹ Thus he complained that

If those two countries [Britain and France], however, were to consider their real interest, without mercantile jealousy or national animosity, the commerce of France might be more advantageous to Great Britain than that of any other country.²

Smith made references to France throughout the *Wealth of Nations*, especially, of course, in relation to the physiocratic system.

Unfortunately, all the factors which Smith showed could make for a uniquely profitable trading relationship between Britain and France were also revealed to be the causes of the bitter rivalry between the two nations. Thus he argued that

Mercantile jealousy is excited, and both inflames, and is itself inflamed, by the violence of national animosity: And the traders of both countries have announced, with all the passionate confidence of interested falsehood, the certain ruin of each, in consequence of that unfavourable balance of trade, which, they pretend, would be the infallible effect of an unrestrained commerce with the other.³

Clearly Smith was somewhat scornful of the false economics of animosity which he detected. Yet he had already deemed economic

¹ Smith, *WN*, IV.iii.c.11.

² *Ibid*, IV.iii.c.12.

³ *Ibid*, IV.iii.c.13.

intervention for matters of national defence a permissible policy. Not only was he in favour of the civic virtue of martial combat, but he also did not object to standing armies.¹ Smith suggested that military action was reasonable in preserving liberty, security of property, and the Protestant religion in British territories, although he suggested that Ireland and the North American colonies were enjoying these rights at the expense of a metropole beleaguered by national debt.²

Smith also famously justified the Navigation Acts. Although he acknowledged that the regulations were inefficient because they removed many potential buyers and sellers from the British market, he nevertheless defended them on the grounds that they offered the opportunity to develop a strong naval force.³ In this sense, he also justified the 'round-about foreign trade of consumption' which he implied preoccupied British political economy against national economic interest.⁴

Thus he envisioned Britain as a nation of over-mighty merchants, a view that is borne out also in his depiction of the grain trade. Here merchants exported vast quantities of the stuff in times of plenty, only to ship much the same amount back in again when harvests fell short.⁵ For better or for worse, Smith argued, the biases of the British economy were entrenched, for the numbers of merchants and manufacturers now in business, together with their leagues of employees, constituted a

¹ Rothschild, *Economic Sentiments*, pp. 68-9.

² Smith, *WN*, V.iii.88.

³ *Ibid*, IV.ii.24; 30.

⁴ *Ibid*, IV.iii.c.5. Smith argued that round-about trade, that is, exchanging foreign goods abroad in return for other foreign goods, was less beneficial than exchanging domestically manufactured goods for the latter, which, as Bloomfield has pointed out, bore an uncanny resemblance to the mercantilist idea of 'balance of employment'. A.I. Bloomfield, 'Adam Smith and the Theory of International Trade' in A.S. Skinner and T. Wilson (eds.), *Essays on Adam Smith*, p. 473. Governor Thomas Pownall thought that Smith's economic analysis of the commercial monopoly was wanting. It was his opinion that the circuits which merchants were encouraged to take were highly beneficial, as they offered the opportunity for the 'superlucration' of profits. Teichgraeber, 'The Reception of The Wealth of Nations in Britain', p. 348.

⁵ Smith, *WN*, IV.v.a.22.

formidable interest group.¹ Yet Smith's attitude towards the bias is also somewhat ambiguous.

Pocock has drawn attention to the anxiety with which the Scottish moral philosophers in particular perceived the implications of the division of labour and a modern economy. They apprehended with dread the fact that occupational specialisation spelled the end for the idealised warrior citizens, who bore arms and understood their own 'moral freedoms'.² Smith himself deplored the intellectual 'torpor' which awaited those who bore the brunt of the division of labour. This modern workforce squandered their lives, performing the monotonous single operations allocated to them by the progress of the division of labour until their minds were dulled to every other intellectual, social, spiritual, or indeed martial pursuit.³ Thus Smith depicted a future free of dire poverty and war, but which was nevertheless also desensitised and devoid of the full range of human emotion and activity. Playing their limited roles in a wider empire, Smith hoped, or perhaps feared, that states too could lose their defining identities.

However, Smith left it to a more enlightened statesmen of the future to actually implement the insipid natural system.⁴ In fact Richard Teichgraber has argued that Smith looked on in amazement at the ease with which the sort of free-trade ideas espoused in *Wealth of Nations* began to take in the immediate aftermath of its publication.⁵ Flawed as it was, Smith seems to have acknowledged that the errors of the mercantile system had helped to develop a mighty force to fight the wars which the system itself served to perpetuate. He hinted at paths out of the self-sustaining loop of war for trade and trade for war, among them a free and unsubsidised grain trade. Though he despised vainglorious warfare and the national vanity project that was

¹ Ibid, IV.ii.43.

² J.G.A. Pocock, 'The Political Limits to Premodern Economics' in J. Dunn (ed.), *The Economic Limits to Modern Politics* (Cambridge, 1990), p. 133.

³ Smith, *WN*, V.i.f.50; D. Winch, *Adam Smith's Politics* (Cambridge, 1978), p. 111-120.

⁴ Smith, *WN*, IV.vii.c.44.

⁵ Teichgraber, 'The Reception of The Wealth of Nations', p. 359.

colonialism, for the time being, it seems, he revered too much the right of ardent and passionate public opinion to indulge in such prejudice and folly.¹ Ultimately he depicted the potential monotony of a peaceful and productive future with some wistful apprehension.

Conclusion

Adam Smith's *Wealth of Nations* contained complete, though unequal, descriptions of two systems of political economy: the mercantile and the physiocratic system. He proceeded to show that each had its own peculiar imperfections. However, the mercantile system was Smith's primary target. He portrayed it as a bundle of principles which had guided statesmen and politicians erroneously into attempting to manipulate the economy. In particular, it offered alluring sophisms, such as the balance of trade doctrine, which taught that national economic growth was exclusively export led.

It was this system of thought which deceived statesmen into heavily regulating the economy. An important example was the corn trade. Here even landowners, misinformed by the casuistry of the mercantile system and the treacherous example of the merchant interest, helped to cast a net of regulation over the production and marketing of grain. This of all trades, Smith argued, was best left to its own devices, and the grain bounty especially was ineffective if not downright harmful. In general, he pointed out, bounties were the preserve of failing industries, which the false reasoning of the mercantile system deceived the government into protecting.

Similar fallacious reasoning, however, informed the physiocratic system also. Even though the physiocrats celebrated free trade and the natural system just as highly as Smith, he nevertheless had plenty of criticism for this system too. Physiocracy undervalued the national

¹ Rothschild, *Economic Sentiments*, p. 68.
Daisy Gibbs

manufacturing initiative. As far as Smith was concerned, both a healthy agricultural and a strong manufacturing sector were necessary components of a developed economy. Smith believed that internal commerce was perhaps the most important kind. This, at least, was how he imagined the Chinese economy thrived, in spite of its government's disdain for international trade.

Though Smith acknowledged that the physiocratic doctrine had inspired some positive changes in France, particularly in regard to agriculture, he viewed the system as potentially dangerous. He thought that the bias towards agriculture, which was the system's *raison d'être*, would ultimately cause the price of manufactured goods to escalate, diminishing the cost of agricultural goods, contrary to the system's most cherished intentions. However, at the time of writing *Wealth of Nations*, Smith was relatively confident that the physiocratic system had no future as an influential doctrine; it was the product of its times and too academic to persist.¹

However, most importantly, Smith argued that both of these systems shared the same fatal flaw: the fact that they were artificial constructs designed to manhandle the economic mechanism into compliance. Statesmen and philosophers in their ignorance and their hubris had designed each of the systems in order to pre-empt natural progress and to mould the economy into the form that they determined most beneficial. Though they stood for completely opposite ends, the fact that each system advocated intervention of sorts to create an economy based on a preconceived and therefore inherently prejudiced model was enough for Smith to dismiss them as fallacious. In reality, Smith argued, only nature in the guise of the innumerable rational decisions of countless individuals could decide the most appropriate economic configuration for a nation.

¹ Hont, *Jealousy of Trade*, p. 381.
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This, however, left Smith with a dilemma. Hont has shown that Smith was reluctant to endorse any intervention, and, moreover, that he discerned growth and progress in Britain and other countries in spite of the influence of the mercantile system.¹ Smith urged some unravelling of the threads of regulation which he saw as stifling economic growth and equality, particularly when it came the grain trade, and the restrictions on Ireland's agricultural sector.² However, there was some regulatory apparatus of which he approved, despite his vehement attack on the mercantile system which had precipitated it. National defence, for Smith, not only fell within the field of action of an otherwise near-redundant statesman, but also justified state intervention in commercial activity.

The importance of this issue, however, was apt to fade in as far as war was rendered unessential in a world where peaceful free trade prevailed. Smith's attitude to the after effects of the free trade and economic liberalism which he seemingly promoted is somewhat ambiguous. He prescribed state education for labourers whose working lives he expected to become so specialised that they themselves would come to resemble mere automatons in the sterility of their minds. He made no direct comment on the corresponding docility awaiting free trade states, though he implied that, without their excessively competitive political economies, nations were liable to dissolve into one great homogenous empire.

For Smith, Britain was defined in its political economy by its aggression. Having abandoned themselves to the falsehoods of the mercantile system, Smith's real-world statesmen and politicians had nurtured an economy which prioritised mercantile pursuits above all. In spite of the fact that he supposed many countries were under this same illusion, he depicted Britain in most detail in the *Wealth of Nations*, and commented on the interested groups that had developed there. He portrayed the

¹ Ibid, p. 374.

² Smith, *WN*, IV.ii.17.

mercantile and manufacturing interest as swollen out of proportion, encompassing now not only merchants and manufacturers themselves, but also their underlings. Moreover, he made few suggestions as to how the problem of Britain's economic deformity was to be addressed, for, he hinted, the interests of these groups, who naturally tended to their own preservation, were now, and so forever, disproportionately represented.

In spite of his objections to vacuous national animosity, Smith also identified British values, typical of the eighteenth century, which had to be defended. These were, of course, liberty; security of property; and religious toleration.¹ Smith had to admit that, for the protection of these, the ingrained hostility of the mercantile system was peculiarly adept. Still, it also served to intensify national animosity so that nations became trapped in loop of economic tension and conflict. There was, therefore, more than one way in which Smith considered Britain and other mercantilist nations to be irreversibly shackled to the system. Moreover, it seems that, in some ways, Smith struggled to decide whether indeed national identity and autonomy should be sacrificed to the perfection of political economy, and civic virtue abandoned to free trade.

¹ Ibid, V.iii.88. Rothschild argues that Smith's conception of liberty potentially incorporated political as well as economic freedoms, in spite of the increasing contemporary anxiety towards the former. Rothschild, *Economic Sentiments*, p. 59.

Conclusion

This thesis set out to combine recent trends in the historiography of nationhood and economic thought with the detailed social history of the likes of E.P. Thompson and Ernest Labrousse, by making local case studies of the grain trade in practice and by analysing a selection of contemporary published works. In this way it has begun to probe experiences of national belonging and citizenship in eighteenth-century Britain and France. The findings of this thesis have been many and detailed, however, there are three central points to make in conclusion.

The first two have to do with conditions which historians have sometimes argued were necessary for economic growth in this period: nationalism and liberty. This thesis has revealed that the two concepts were not always universally experienced or embraced in eighteenth-century Britain and France. Nor were their effects obvious, straightforward or predictable. The so-called economic nationalism of mercantilism, for example, could have effects not all together conducive to national economic development. The third point, which this conclusion makes, is about governmental processes and structures. For, in the course of exploring experiences of citizenship and national belonging, this thesis has shed some light on the important subjects of relationships between the centre and the periphery and the role of the state in everyday life.

Although this thesis was presented as a comparative history in the introduction, the transnational interplay of ideas has inevitably played an important role. Changing economic conditions led eighteenth-century writers of various nationalities to make their own international comparisons, and to investigate the reasons for economic growth and

decline.¹ They considered comparative characteristics and tried to assess the causes of the differences that they detected.

Many writers not only travelled abroad in the course of their researches, but also struck up correspondences and even friendships with their foreign counterparts. In the course of these interactions, ideas were shared or borrowed. Even protectionist ideas, such as German-style national granaries, could be imported into thought about the British grain situation, without much consideration of the irony that this presents. This thesis has therefore exposed a paradoxical relationship between the *histoire croisée* of the borderless flow of economic thought in the eighteenth century, and the nationalistic and closed economic attitude that it often engendered.

For in spite of the transnational flow of ideas, the unit of analysis remained the nation. Perhaps economic thinkers deliberately overlooked the local alliances, which formed in regional communities like Norfolk and Tours with the aim of preserving smaller economic ecosystems. These local coalitions did not seem to fit in with the broad national approach to economic thought which depended on clashing or coordinating *class* interests. However, these case studies show that the translation of this national element of economic thought into practice was not always straightforward. Even apparently widespread and popular ideas, such as those of mercantilism, either failed to penetrate society, or else underwent reinterpretation as they percolated downwards towards local level.

In Norfolk something similar to the moral economy prevailed even into the late eighteenth century. Popular hostility to high subsistence prices prompted and justified action by local authorities, who agreed that the grain visible in surrounding fields was failing to translate into plenty in the marketplace. They too explicitly blamed this problem on exportation of grain overseas. However, their sympathy for the cause of

¹ R. Whatmore, *Republicanism and the French Revolution* (Oxford, 2000), p. 19.
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the rioters was enhanced by the fact that they associated high grain prices with the decline of the woolens industry in the region. This was an industry in which many members of the local government were directly concerned. They seem to have invested sincerely in mercantilist propositions, which suggested that growth depended on exporting manufactured goods abroad as cheaply as possible, ideally in exchange for money. This was translated into their business logic: the authorities of Norwich saw overseas export of manufactured goods as the key to their own prosperity. Selling manufactured goods abroad was therefore prioritised over the exportation of agricultural goods like wheat, barley and malt.

The desire of merchants to export grain hurt the Norwich industrial interest and therefore, they supposed, also the national interest. As a result they demanded a national halt to grain exportation, whilst promoting the export of their own manufactured goods. The role that Norfolk grain could play in the economies of other parts of the nation went unstated. Norfolk worsted and the malt business were the only concerns of the petitions which emanated from Norwich regarding grain.

In this way, mercantilist thought allowed Norfolk authorities to articulate their localised commercial survival in terms which might appeal to a national parliament and challenge the interests of the provincial elite which dominated there. Mercantilism offered a rationale for parochial interests that honoured a version of the moral economy and helped to hold in check the modernising activities of parliament.¹

Meanwhile, in the colonial arena, the mercantilist agenda sometimes justified the suppression of enterprise by the metropolitan state. Colonies were assigned a specific role according to mercantilist theory, casting some profit making activities outside the national cause. The

¹ H.L. Root, *The Fountain of Privilege* (Berkeley, 1994), p. 111.
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government at the centre on one hand, and traders, planters, and authorities at the periphery on the other, disagreed about how the national interest was best served. Lip service to the idea of the national good was evidently not enough to prevent enterprising individuals colluding with the enemy. During the Seven Years' War, for example, the French inhabitants of the West Indian islands occupied by British forces collaborated with their 'oppressors'. Observers like Adam Smith were right to think that the idea of the national good was used to justify the pursuit of some private interests and rent-seeking activities, whilst impeding other sorts of growth.

In France, mercantilism was used initially to articulate and justify a programme of deregulation. When this programme began to fail, local authorities in Tours grew sympathetic towards the popular preference for a locally regulated grain trade. Of course, a controlled trade also had its attractions for the officers themselves in the form of marketplace fees and rents from tollgates. Meanwhile, the heads of local manufacturing initiatives also attempted to tap into the same justification for very localised protection of subsistence goods. Unlike the Norfolk authorities, however, those of Tours, and even those at the parlement level in Rouen, failed to invoke mercantilist ideas to justify their mutinous actions. They related to the state, and particularly to the monarch, in humanitarian terms.

At French provincial level, in the absence of a shared mercantilist agenda, it seems that it was harder to see local and central interests as even rhetorically aligned. Perhaps mercantilist ideas could otherwise have served as a transparent government rationale, without which state activity could become the object of intrigue and suspicion. Mercantilist language evidently sometimes contributed to a sense of belonging to a wider whole and could potentially help regions and even individuals to understand their own economic endeavours as efforts towards a greater goal.

However, it did not offer a realistic explanation about how this could be achieved. This meant that it could be used in service of parochial objectives, which were detrimental to national economic growth according to modern economists.¹ Since definitions of what was actually beneficial to the nation varied, the idea of mercantilism as 'economic nationalism' is therefore problematic. This means that the idea that a sense of nationality was necessarily also a force in favour of economic development is also questionable.²

The idea of divergent interests also plagued the notion of liberty. Liberty, or the security of property, was understood in the eighteenth century as an important condition for investment and enterprise. Still now economic historians argue, apparently without reservation, that the liberal constitution of Britain proved a key advantage for economic growth above and beyond absolute monarchies, such as France.³ However, when it came to the grain trade, the idea of unrestrained freedom of property proved to be problematic in conceptual and constitutional terms.

In France, for example, *libéralisation* was rejected as a faulty new technology for dealing with the old problem of subsistence. This was because, without traditional restraints, selfish traders were thought to undermine the general interest through hoarding and speculation. This view was propounded by the Rouen parlement in spite of its commitment to liberty. Due to the behaviour of selfish individuals, total liberty was not a sound practical policy for the administration of national subsistence.

David Todd denies continuity between protectionist thought in France after 1830 and earlier mercantile jealousy, arguing that the former

¹ Ibid, pp. 85-6.

² Cf. D.S. Landes, *Wealth and Poverty Of Nations* (London, 1998); L. Greenfeld, *The Spirit of Capitalism* (Cambridge, MA & London, 2003), p. 21.

³ D.C. North and B.R. Weingast, 'Constitutions and Commitment', *The Journal of Economic History*, 49:4 (1989), p. 808.

emerged in part as a rejection of the 'urban pauperism' associated with British free trade industrialism.¹ It is true that much mercantilist thought of the eighteenth century was indeed predicated on jealous or martial inclinations, and failed to consider the plight of the labouring poor. For example, Jean-François Melon's three island metaphor preached self-sufficiency as a mode of commercial self-defence in an inherently hostile international environment. Developing a strong and diversified economy was not a simple economic objective, but a matter of international relations.² However, there were those who considered the problem in humanitarian terms, pondering the relationship between wages and prices of food. Their work exhibited a 'patriarchal compassion' for the poor that moved beyond the simple objective of national 'power and plenty', and the maintenance of a thriving workforce, and resulted in protectionist-style regulation.³

This was because, as well as resulting in social instability in practice, the notion of liberty also proved conceptually problematic. James Steuart and Jacques Necker believed that liberty and the property rights which it seemed to entail could result in a paradoxical condition of slavery for many. They explained this by referring to the structural inequalities of information and dependence, which rendered a beneficent economic outcome next to impossible without certain state interventions. Meanwhile, they viewed the nation state as a relatively new formulation, which needed to take on the formerly feudal responsibility for the welfare of what was now an entire people. This did not lead them to condemn imported manufactures in the same way as the protectionists of the nineteenth century would, because they did not identify wage rates as a core variable in the equation. Instead it

¹ D. Todd, *Free Trade and its Enemies in France, 1814-1851* (Cambridge, 2015), pp. 123-4.

² I. Hont, *Jealousy of Trade* (Cambridge, MA & London, 2005), pp. 30-2.

³ Todd, *Free Trade*, p. 158; J. Viner, 'Power Versus Plenty as Objectives of Foreign Policy in the Seventeenth and Eighteenth Centuries', *World Politics*, 1:1 (1948), p. 26; E.S. Furniss, *The Position of the Labourer in a System of Nationalism* (New York, 1965), pp. 187-9.

meant providing subsistence at a stable and low price, without, however, undermining the profitability of land.

Their reverence for the illiberal structures of the past made both Steuart and Necker suspicious of freedom and uninhibited citizenship. However, Steuart was more prepared to see the force of self-interest harnessed for the national good. He therefore offered a relatively high degree of freedom even to the poor. Necker, meanwhile, understood the poor of France as trapped in a state of unenlightened poverty. They had to rely on a direct relationship with the state, and had the right to protest when it failed to fulfil the role of provider, which had been transferred to the state in lieu of the personal guarantees of the feudal structure. Necker worked personally to enhance the machinery of the state, to the detriment of remnants of feudal privilege, and saw liberty as a naivety that underestimated the structural imbalances which subjects without property faced.

Liberty was not a straightforward notion even for those in favour of *laissez-faire*. Josiah Tucker claimed to be in favour of liberty, however he held the poor in disdain and reproached the rich for their perceived excesses and vice. He therefore saw benefits in the taxation of luxury consumption and in an absolute regime free from the apparent evils of electioneering. If society operated according to the good Christian values of diligence and decency, then well-intentioned self-love would generate a healthy prosperity. However, total liberty was the first step to an immoral condition, and one which government had to work with the forces of nature to prevent.

Meanwhile, although Anne-Robert-Jacques Turgot appreciated the autonomy of the individual perhaps more so than Tucker, he still believed in a system where behaviour was moderated by the proper pursuit of interest. He looked with even greater confidence than Tucker to earthly forces. Here many interests interacted, often apparently in opposition to one another, in order to create conditions amenable to

both producers and consumers of goods. This offsetting of individual interests technically constituted the national interest, and prevented any one individual or group from enjoying a free rein.

However, both supposed that the most reliable judges of good policy were the owners of landed property. This was because the security which property provided to individual owners meant that they were fully independent of the state, and were not to be seduced by the privilege and monopoly which it could offer.¹ Moreover, the interest of the propertied class was apparently inextricably linked to the good of the nation at large. This was clearly demonstrable in the case of the grain trade, where the encouragement of cultivators by way of the apparently dangerous practice of exporting grain, actually meant that a greater plenty was furnished in the domestic market. For this reason, even enlightened despotism, as long as it was advised by a landed oligarchy, could serve as an appropriate system of government in a liberal economic environment. The state itself was expected to take a step back from micromanaging individual interactions and transactions, only tempering the conditions in which they acted.²

Advocates of free trade therefore cherished strong views about the direction in which progress lay. They could not easily sympathise with the pleas of the people, local authorities, and manufacturers because they believed that intervention disturbed the autonomous mechanism of the economy. Even well intentioned interference was prone to mishap either by accident or through the perversion of the process by crafty private interest. The people themselves especially could not be trusted in their state of intellectual darkness, and had to be forced into compliance until they could finally appreciate where their interest lay. It was ironic that, given his sympathy for individual expertise over the ineptitude of government intervention, Turgot should suggest that the poor could not be trusted to find their own interest in the interim.

¹ J.G.A. Pocock, *Virtue, Commerce, and History* (Cambridge, 1985), p. 66.

² A. Skornicki, *L'Économiste, la Cour et la Patrie* (Paris, 2011), p. 213.

However, he blamed former misguided regulation and the entrenchment of these ideas in the popular mind-set for their resistance to change. Adam Smith came to similar conclusions.

Tucker, Turgot and Smith understood their own role as that of observers and interpreters of a natural system, and their science as akin to that of Isaac Newton. Their devotion to this conjectural science meant, however, that they repudiated those, such as Steuart and Necker, who presumed to build their own systems of political economy on observation and experience. Turgot and Smith especially argued that the reality of the economy, and the many interactions which constituted it, was too complex to be observed, let alone managed. In this sense, the state was required to withdraw again, and ignore the immediate practical implications of measures such as the free trade in grain. Its role was not to intervene in the present strife of individuals, but to furnish a commercial environment where there could be no strife.¹ Although economics began to be understood as a science in the eighteenth century, for the time being it required an enormous leap of faith, which defied practical observation and multiple conceptual paradoxes.

The idea of liberty naturally provoked thought about constitution and government processes. In France, local authorities also ultimately objected to the deregulation of the grain trade because it limited their ability to control the movement of grain and to raise revenue from its transportation and sale. There is an even stronger sense in the French case than in the British that local institutions were challenging the competence of central government when it came to the grain trade. This is most explicit in the case of the Rouen parlement, which construed the deregulation of the grain trade in terms of liberty. It was an ironic twist, therefore, that this self-proclaimed bastion of liberty should, in the end, oppose *libéralisation*.

¹ E. Rothschild, *Economic Sentiments* (Cambridge, MA, & London, 2001), pp. 69-70.
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However, the sort of liberty enshrined in the deregulation of the grain trade was, for the time being, the creature of the state. Only later did it slip its chains to become French liberalism. For now the liberalisation project was supposed to undermine privileged strongholds, such as the Rouen parlement.¹ Its failure seemed to reassure this institution, and local police institutions in Tours and other places, that the administration of the grain trade belonged with them. They therefore vied with central government over this piece of legislative turf. Where Norwich authorities liaised with the national legislature in order to protect local interests, the highest of authority at Rouen, and representatives of authority on a somewhat lower level at Tours, simply defied orders and reinstated officially or unofficially the superannuated legislation. The word of the Parliament of Westminster was law, but it could be swayed by petitioning. Meanwhile, the parlements of France battled to inform legislation. Successful cases such as the reinstatement of grain regulation in 1771 gave them ammunition for the continuing onslaught.

It is this institutional element which is possibly the most fertile ground that this study of the grain trade has raked over. Like Michael Kwass's work on taxation, the study of the grain trade can help to reveal the 'human interaction' behind political frictions.² This thesis has raised questions about how people, including grassroots rioters and businesspeople as well as elite members of parochial government, interacted with the central state and legislature. This was clearly a matter for contemporary reflection also. For problems of subsistence were closely linked with puzzling questions about how to govern a country, and which opinions mattered therein.

These questions were treated very formally in France, where the issue of representation seems to have been growing more and more urgent

¹ Skornicki, *L'Économiste*, p. 28; J. Miller, *Mastering the Market* (Cambridge, 1999), p. 60.

² M. Kwass, *Privilege and the Politics of Taxation in Eighteenth-Century France* (Cambridge, 2000), p. 15.

over the course of the second half of the eighteenth century. Reformulating local government and representation had been a point of interest for the physiocrats, which Turgot was drawn into, and which even the anti-physiocratic Necker inherited.¹ However, governmentality also perplexed the likes of Tucker, who was searching for new sources of constraint in a seemingly godless and borderline anarchic society.

The *libéralisation* of the French grain trade therefore had grave implications for the interconnected ideas of liberty and citizenship, as well as for the notion of government itself. This thesis has begun to probe the issue, however, there is more left to be understood about how grand new schemes of regulation were translated into practice on a day to day basis, and how resistance to change was interpreted and dealt with. The deregulation of the grain trade in France offers a prime example of legislation that failed largely for practical infrastructural reasons, but also at least in part because it was rejected on ideological grounds by the popular orders of society. Similarly, the riot that struck Norwich in 1766 precipitated a petition in Parliament which sought a ban on exports. Exploring the grain trade offers a line into extra-parliamentary activity, which saw those excluded from formal government nevertheless become involved therein.² By examining the relations between central and provincial government, the thesis has therefore touched on processes of government and a sort of informal representation.

The notion of ‘public opinion’, especially in France, was in a state of transformation in this period. Keith Baker has shown how the character of the concept was transformed from ‘the flickering lamp of “opinion” ... into the unremitting light of “public opinion”, the light of the universal tribunal before which citizens and governments alike must now

¹ Ibid, p. 260.

² J. Hoppit and J. Innes, ‘Introduction’ in J. Hoppit (ed.), *Failed legislation, 1660-1800* (London, 1997), p. 21.

appear'.¹ Initially a doubtful authority, which was linked to private interest and subjectivity, opinion took on a new sense of collective wisdom. Though in the English language the meaning was fixed by 1730, in French the connotations of the term remained uncertain. However, in the hands of Necker at least, it garnered a 'nebulous' quality and stood for the public spirit or good.² Baker argues that the term was a political invention, a new source of authority to counterbalance the absolute authority of the monarch, which, though only an intellectual construct, made the French revolution 'thinkable'.³

Jürgen Habermas sought the origins of this emerging intellectual force in the coffee house culture of the bourgeoisie, who resented the central state's intervention in their affairs and the appropriation of their private goods.⁴ Kwass has elaborated on this by looking at privilege as part and parcel of those private goods that came under threat from a centralising fiscal military state. He looks beyond the republic of letters and printed literature for the origins of the public sphere. Ultimately he argues that the constitutional strife, which universal taxation exacerbated, helped to generate a highly politicised public sphere.⁵ This thesis has tried to show that privilege was also sometimes nestled in a sense of autonomous activity and responsibility, and that 'constitutional strife' could include even those who were not part of the fragmented government in an obvious way. It is suggested that this also helped to inform the notion of a public sphere which opposed the state.

This can be viewed as the ghost of the moral economy, which had apparently returned to haunt modernising governments in Britain and France. Subsistence matters had evidently constituted one of the issues

¹ K.M. Baker, *Inventing the French Revolution* (Cambridge, 1990), p. 168.

² M. Ozouf, 'L'Opinion Publique' in K.M. Baker (ed.), *The French Revolution and the Creation of Modern Political Culture, I: The Political Culture of the Old Regime* (Oxford, 1987) p. 420.

³ Baker, *Inventing the French Revolution*, p. 199.

⁴ J. Habermas, *The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere* (Cambridge, 1989), pp. 23-4.

⁵ Kwass, *Privilege*, pp. 322-3.

deemed within the remit of crowd action.¹ And yet, this patrician society and plebeian culture was apparently in the midst of a process of reformulation for a non-feudal, non-rural setting. Urban rioting could and did influence policy on a local and eventually national level, and in this sense the input of the rioting poor was justified. Popular protest was functioning as a means of offering advice or opinion on government policy.²

Here there is scope especially for further case studies and research scrutinising this notion in relation to the composite nature of the state in Britain. Britain's Corn Laws were applicable to the whole composite nation. However, it might be worth exploring the extent to which they were obeyed, enhanced or subverted in different parts of the country when they seemed to be failing. In Norfolk we saw that local authorities appealed to the Parliament at Westminster, deeming parliamentary petitioning an appropriate recourse for this kind of economic grievance. Given, however, that the legislative authority of parliament in economic matters was not yet utilized in the eighteenth century in the same way in England, Wales, Scotland and Ireland, an issue such as the regulation of grain could make for an interesting further point of comparison for continuing research into the way that government functioned in the past.³

¹ E.P. Thompson, 'Patrician Society, Plebeian Culture', *Journal of Social History*, 7:4 (1974), p. 405.

² J. Nicolas, *La Rébellion Française* (Paris, 2002), p. 435.

³ J. Hoppit, 'The Nation, the State, and the First Industrial Revolution', *Journal of British Studies*, 50:2 (2011), p. 308.

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