

**Geopolitics, State-Formation and Economic Development in
Quebec and Ontario**

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Abstract

This dissertation challenges the prevailing periodization of Quebec and Ontario's economic development in Canadian historiography by contrasting the specificity of capitalist social relations with the non-capitalist forms of social reproduction belonging to French Canadian peasants and Upper Canadian farmers in the colonial period. With a few notable exceptions, existing historical interpretations assume that capitalism was there, at least in embryo, from the colony's very beginning in the guise of the fur trade, manufacturing, or a local bourgeoisie. By contrast, this thesis brings together, through a comparative perspective, different pieces of the interconnected histories of France, Britain, the United States, Ontario, and Quebec in order to show that capitalism did not arrive on the shores of the St. Lawrence River with the first settlers. The dissertation also brings together pieces of the uneven intra-regional histories of these regions, and provides a general reflection on how to systematically integrate the geopolitical dimension of social change into historical sociology, political economy, and comparative politics. As such, the question with which the thesis is concerned is not exclusively that of the transition to capitalism in Quebec or in Ontario, but more broadly the interrelated questions of state-formation and 'late development' in north-eastern North America.

One of the main findings of the dissertation is that only with the development of industrial capitalism in the north-eastern United States were the conditions for the emergence of capital-intensive types of agriculture in rural areas of Quebec and Ontario put in place. American breakthroughs toward industrial capitalism irrevocably

transformed the system-wide conditions under which subsequent agricultural evolution took place in neighbouring regions, generating a new geopolitical configuration in which customary peasant production continued to persist in Quebec alongside petty-commodity farmers in Upper Canada and the development of industrial capitalism in urban areas such as Montreal. These findings bring to the fore the need to directly address the 'peasant question' in order to understand the impact of the continued existence of a large peasantry on state-formation and the long-term economic development of Quebec during the period when industrial capitalism was emerging as a dominant feature of the North American economy.

*À la mémoire d'Eva, décédée alors que la
rédaction touchait à sa fin.*

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Introduction

This dissertation takes as its starting point the observation that no macrohistorical process has had more consequences for early modern social development than the epochal transition from feudalism to capitalism. Uniquely located at the confluence of colonial ventures led by the French and British metropolises on territories occupied by native communities, the European population that settled on the shores of the St. Lawrence River was not spared the disruptive effects of this protracted changeover. The specificity of the Canadian experience, however, is still in want of a geopolitically sensitive and theoretically-informed historical synthesis that goes beyond the ways in which Canadian historiography has traditionally attempted to make sense of capitalist geopolitical expansion in North America.

Represented by historians like Fernand Ouellet and Jean Hamelin, the ‘Quebec School’ of Canadian historiography attempted to explain the slow development of French Canadian society by arguing that the domination of traditional values among the peasantry long proved a powerful obstacle to modernization. Revolving around the historical research of Guy Frégault, Maurice Séguin and Marcel Brunet, the ‘Montreal School’, for its part, tried to explain the slow pace of early modern Canadian development by pointing to the catastrophic effects of the British Conquest on French Canadian society. In the last few decades, a revisionist account led by Jean-Pierre Wallot

and Gilles Paquet has gained popularity. This account denies the existence of ‘delays’ in the socioeconomic development of Quebec in the eighteenth and nineteenth century. It tries to portray the province during this period as modern and dynamic—allegedly similar to any other western society. Meanwhile, debates in political economy have long been dominated by Harold A. Innis’s staple theory and its emphasis on Canada’s economic dependence upon the trade of natural resources, such as fur, fish, wheat, and timber, with the French and British metropolises. This framework continues to have a decisive influence on the way that historians, sociologists, and economists consider the nature of capitalist development in Canada.

In contrast to these approaches, this dissertation builds on the thesis of the economic historian Robert Brenner regarding the agrarian origin of capitalism to examine how capitalism ‘spread’ to the St. Lawrence Valley after it first emerged in the English countryside. The development of agrarian capitalism in Quebec and Ontario, the dissertation contends, must be analyzed as part of what could be referred to as the ‘puzzle of capitalist geopolitical expansion’; in other words, it poses the question of how to theorize the spatio-temporally differentiated historical origins and expansion of capitalism to Canada? Given that no ‘national’ trajectory of development can be understood as separate from the interactions and pressures emerging from broader intersocietal relations, the failure to directly address the puzzle of capitalist geopolitical expansion proves to be a fatal weakness for existing approaches to Canadian economic development. For this reason, the argument of the dissertation will interest not only historians, sociologists, and political economists, but also scholars of the discipline of

International Relations (IR) and comparative politics.

It must be noted at the outset that the particular focus of the dissertation is on the St. Lawrence Valley, where the most fertile land was chosen by the first Europeans to establish themselves in villages that have now become major urban centres—Montreal, Quebec City, Trois-Rivières. Initiated in the St. Lawrence Valley was a political process of European colonization that led to the creation of a Laurentian society whose territory today constitutes the largest Canadian province with the second biggest population of the country—modern-day Quebec. Colonization gradually expanded westward as military considerations and the imperatives of the fur trade brought Europeans deeper into the interior of the continent. Following the American War of Independence in the last quarter of the eighteenth century, a great number of settlers immigrated to the north shores of Lake Ontario and Lake Erie to the southwest of the Valley. This territory became the province of Ontario with the advent of the Confederation in 1867. Today, it is Canada's most populated province. Together, the St. Lawrence Valley and the north shores of Lakes Ontario and Erie long constituted the ecumene of central Canada. They still encompass the most inhabited area of the provinces of Quebec and Ontario.

The choice of the St. Lawrence Valley and the north shores of Lake Ontario and Lake Erie as communities to study is not without some methodological difficulties. As pointed out by the historian Gérard Bouchard, the French 'fact' along the shores of the Valley has been closely linked with the Canadian destiny since the nineteenth century and its history can consequently hardly be separated from the broader Canadian context. This is why the dissertation also ventures into the history of the colonization of modern-

day Ontario. I have attempted to do so by going beyond a comparative perspective that would treat Quebec and Ontario as two separate entities and tried to uncover the interactive dimension of their respective development. This does not mean, however, that French-Canadian history is to be conceived as merely a segment of a single Canadian narrative; rather it is considered in its specificities, as an entity in itself. As historian Gérard Bouchard has aptly pointed out, '[t]he history of the French-speaking community in Quebec and Canada clearly identifies empirically as an object of analysis'.¹ Bouchard claims that '[t]he French/English duality has always been deeply anchored, first in its ethnographic dimension (language, religious traditions, customs, etc.), then in its behaviour and collective representations (ideologies, national identity, memory, political action)'.² The population living in present-day Quebec still perpetuates, among other things, 'an ideological discourse of emancipation [...], a long tradition of constitutional and political struggles, a rooting in the Laurentian territory [...] and a strong sense of belonging'.³

Absent from Bouchard's inventory are fundamental specificities in the historical development of social-property relations in the province. While these relations cannot entirely explain the contours of colonial state-formation or economic development in Quebec, they are crucial to understand the generative grammar of much that is done in terms of forms of appropriation of surplus labour and organization of production in class societies. Social-property relations are at the heart of a theoretical framework first put

¹ *Genèse des nations et cultures du Nouveau Monde* (Montreal: Boréal, 2001), 78. (my translation)

² *Ibid.* (my translation)

³ *Ibid.*, 79. (my translation)

forward by Robert Brenner in the 1970s as an alternative to Althusserian Marxist orthodoxies. Brenner's theory aimed to draw our attention to one of the fundamental dimensions of the ways by which social classes reproduce themselves, namely the relationship of exploitation between direct producers and those that appropriate their surplus. At the centre of this relationship is class struggle, through which human beings 'make their own history'. But as Marx once famously said, 'they do not make it as they please; they do not make it under self-selected circumstances, but under circumstances existing already, given and transmitted from the past'.⁴ With this dissertation, I seek to contribute to our collective understanding of this past by focusing on the differentiated strategies of reproduction of agricultural producers in early modern Quebec and Ontario.

In Quebec, agricultural producers were embedded in the complex set of rights and obligations associated with the seigneurial regime. By contrast, in Ontario, farmers were not politically subjected to another class. Quebec's peasants were consequently non-capitalist in very different ways than Ontario's farmers. The central argument of my thesis is that this difference played an important role in the way agricultural communities in both provinces dealt with the emergence of industrial capitalism, first in the north-eastern United States, and then in Montreal, given its commercial position. I show why, in both provinces, but for different reasons, the widespread creation of a capitalist/wage labour relationship in agriculture was impossible. In Ontario, it is the scarcity of labour that prevented the generalization of this form of appropriation in agriculture. In Quebec, by contrast, it is the seigneurial regime that constituted an

⁴ Karl Marx, *The 18th Brumaire of Louis Bonaparte* (Wildside Press LLC, 2008).

obstacle to the creation of a labour-force composed of people who are juridically free, but devoid of land. Even as the seigneurial regime was abolished, and as land started to become scarce, the abundance of free familial labour acted against the need to hire agricultural wage labourers. And yet, agricultural producers in both provinces were increasingly, but unevenly, forced to conform to the logic of capitalist production even in the absence of wage labour.

An insightful way to understand the uneven development of capitalism in agriculture is to take as starting point the transformation of England's agrarian class structure, which set in motion a historically specific dynamic of social reproduction in which the role of the market in society was profoundly transformed. And I mean so not just in a definitional sense, but in a very concrete sense, as it implied very real changes in the way surplus appropriation was operated when compared to pre-capitalist societies, where there existed extra-economic limits to how production could be transformed. In England, as production was taken out of the hands of custom, the law, and personal domination based on political status, production was 'freed', but only to be subjected to an impersonal economic drive to produce competitively. The commodification of the labour of formally 'free' producers by means of wages became a key means of revolutionizing production to an extent never before seen in history. But wage labour was not the only way by which productivity was improved to serve the ends of constant accumulation and profit-maximization. This was also achieved by the introduction of new tools, machinery, and technologies, what I refer to as more 'capital-intensive' types of production. Given the obstacles to the introduction of the capitalist/wage labour

relationship in agriculture, it was through such ‘capital-intensive’ investment that Quebec’s peasants and Ontario’s farmers faced the challenges presented to them by industrialization, although with different timing and different outcomes.

In the case of Quebec, I insist on the creative role of the Church in shaping these different outcomes, for instance, by participating in the emergence of the cooperative model that facilitated the modernization of the dairy industry. By comparison, neighbouring Upper Canadian farmers, when presented with the fruits of industrial capitalism, could much more easily take advantage of the tremendous possibility for improving productivity then opened up, since they were not politically subjected to another class, nor was production embedded in the complex set of rights and obligations that characterized Quebec’s peasant society. In a context of labour scarcity, Upper Canadian farmers were quick to seize upon the new possibilities offered by new machinery, as testified the rapid adoption of the most up-to-date farm implements developed in the United States. Through this process, Ontario’s farmers ended up market-dependent much earlier than Quebec’s peasants. They ended up ‘capitalist’, one could say, but not in the sense of agrarian capitalism the way it existed in England, nor in the sense of industrial capitalism with its distinctive capitalist/wage labourer class structure. It is why I prefer to speak of ‘petty-commodity producers’ and ‘capital-intensive agriculture’ to grasp the specificities of Ontario’s market-dependent agricultural production.

To shed light on this transformation, it is necessary to bring together, through a comparative perspective, different pieces of the interconnected histories of France,

Britain, the United States, Ontario, and Quebec. It is also necessary to bring together pieces of their uneven intra-regional histories, with different developmental trajectories, for instance, within the United States itself, between the mid-West and the North-east, and also within Quebec, between the countryside and major urban centres, especially Montreal. Here Brenner's theory of social-property relations stands to gain by a general reflection on how to systematically integrate the international dimension of social change into historical sociology and comparative politics. As such, the question that this dissertation is really asking is not exclusively that of the transition to capitalism in Quebec, but more broadly the question of 'late development' in north-eastern North America.

On this matter, one of the main contributions of the dissertation concerns the political economy literature. Looking at how various Western states in the nineteenth century attempted to fill technological and economic gaps separating them from earlier developers, political economists usually insist on the role of private entrepreneurs, banks, and the state. By contrast, my dissertation points to ways in which other sociopolitical forces, like the Church, also play an active role in shaping processes of late development. While many historical accounts, such as Canadian historian Fernand Ouellet's, see in the Church and the peasantry conservative forces of reaction, my focus on open-ended strategies of reproduction, in a context where rural property relations were being radically challenged, allowed me to grasp fundamental elements of the creative process through which both the Church and the peasantry tried to cope with agricultural problems. This dissertation also offers an interesting contribution to

comparative politics, as comparativists rarely pay attention to Quebec in their attempts to understand the persistence or disappearance of the peasantry during the nineteenth century. Yet, a comparative analysis often attracts more attention if it explores a case that seems to escape the general rule. Such is the case of Quebec, as the existence of a non-capitalist peasantry in the province is unique in contrast with other communities of non-capitalist, yet non-peasant, agricultural producers elsewhere in North America.

It is important to note that the dissertation is not an historical work. While I had to constantly take a position on various historical debates at a descriptive level of abstraction, I have not sought to contribute to the microsociological knowledge of historical events themselves. Rather, through my insistence on distinguishing the specific dynamics of capitalism from other kinds of social formations, my contribution aims at a macrosociological level which examines the place of Canada within large inter-regional processes in the Atlantic world.

There are, of course, many limitations to any attempt at providing a macrosociological synthesis of the scope of my dissertation, with three centuries of history covering the territories of two Canadian provinces, and integrating the interconnected histories of France, Britain, and the United States. One of these limitations lays in the many choices I had to make in order to keep this ambitious project doable. Among the objects that I could not discuss in detail was the process of industrialization in Montreal. From the beginning, I selected agriculture as my field of research, and I tried to remain faithful to this choice for reasons of space and time. This implied, for instance, not engaging directly with the literatures of labour studies and industrial relations. I

overlooked too, also for considerations of time and space, important moments of Canadian political history, such as the birth of the Canadian Confederation. Another limitation of my thesis concerns the limited breadth of the literature on which I relied to discuss France, Britain, and the United States, all regions of the Atlantic world that were not the primary focus of my dissertation.

The history of Native peoples also deserves much more attention than I was able to give it in the dissertation. As one reads this dissertation it should be kept in mind that both the displacement of large numbers of people as a result of European colonialism in North America and the insistent reality of Native peoples' local agency are at the heart of the geopolitical processes of state-formation and economic development I sought to describe, even though the primary focus of my research is the population of white settlers that established themselves on the shores of the St. Lawrence River and the Great Lakes. French Canadians were 'colonizers', and I mean it in the full sense of the term—not only a group of settlers in a place, but a group that established political control over it. This is a sharp truth often obscured by a nationalist historiography that tends to forget that if New France was conquered by the British, French Canadians were themselves the agent of a colonial project that paved the way for the displacement, dislocation, and devastation of Native peoples. Recovering the imperial occupation and domination of Quebec's and Ontario's indigenous space remains an urgent task for Canadian historians.

The basis for the first relations between Native peoples and the French—the fur trade—is discussed in Chapter 1 as part of a broader discussion of merchant capital and

capitalism. This chapter provides a discussion of the general theoretical outlook of Canadian historiography and political economy with regard to pre-Confederate Canadian economic development. It does not aim to be comprehensive in breadth, nor exhaustive in depth; the historical reinterpretation of the transition to capitalism in Canada undertaken in subsequent chapters will provide the opportunity to discuss in greater detail many of the theoretical arguments then introduced. Chapter 1 simply attempts to direct our attention to a pitfall shared by the majority of historiographical and economic interpretations of capitalism in Canada: the reproduction of the premises of Adam Smith's model of economic advance—the 'commercialization model'—and its commodity fetishism. The teleological and unilinear view of development underpinning this model posits as the main mover of history the quantitative expansion of international trade and exchange relations. Accordingly, the existing research on Canadian economic development has tended to associate capitalism with the pan-European rise of the bourgeoisie and the development of urban areas, rather than theorizing it as a historically-specific set of social relations that first developed in the English countryside before transforming the international environment constituted of multiple and interactive developmental paths.

Chapter 1 concludes by devoting special attention to Gérald Bernier and Daniel Salée's study of the pre-capitalist structure of early modern Quebec. Bernier and Salée have brought forward an impressive array of evidence supporting the claim that pre-capitalist social relations dominated the life in the St. Lawrence Valley up until at least the mid-nineteenth century. However, despite its important merits and rich contribution,

Bernier and Salée's work is limited by the explicit adoption of an internalist mode of explanation that focuses on domestic class struggles and social relations, but brushes aside the international dimension of early modern Canadian development. Indeed, Bernier and Salée have argued that, in Quebec, capitalism slowly emerged out of the breaking up of the feudal mode of production through the action of feudal society itself, as was the case in England. In doing so, they downplay the international socioeconomic and geopolitical pressures created by early modern English capitalism and the crucial agency of British colonial rulers and settlers in introducing capitalist social relations in North America. This appears to be the result of a fetishization of Brenner's explanation of the *origin* of capitalism in England, as if it provided a model for explaining the *subsequent development* of capitalism elsewhere in the world.

In order to begin uncovering the geopolitical and intersocietal processes dismissed by Bernier and Salée as punctual 'exogenous influences' and conjunctures, Chapter 2 turns its attention to the historiographical debate concerning the nature of the seigneurial regime in New France. It examines the question of whether the society of New France was 'feudal' and reviews Roberta Hamilton's insights about the impact of the differentiated character of the agrarian developmental trajectories of France and England on the process of the colonization of North America. Like Salée and Bernier, Hamilton is one of the rare Canadian historians to have explicitly attempted to overcome the weaknesses of what Brenner has called the 'commercialization model'. Arguing against historical interpretations that see capitalism 'budding' everywhere traces of trade and commerce are to be found, Hamilton has rightly insisted on the absence of capitalist

social relations in the colony under the French regime.

However, while comparing France and New France in order to assess the feudal character of the latter, Hamilton fails to take into account the fact that the French state had long undergone a radical transformation away from feudalism toward absolutism. Building on the contributions of George Comminel and Benno Teschke, Chapter 2 offers a new understanding of the pre-capitalist forms of exploitation that characterized social-property relations in New France. Through the intricacy of the politics and economics of the mercantilist policies that had brought France to the New World, a unique social-property regime, no more akin to French feudalism than to early modern French absolutism, and yet decisively in the orbit of the latter, developed on the shores of the St. Lawrence. After two centuries of existence, this colonial regime experienced a profound upheaval as the British Conquest in 1760 separated it from the European metropolis that had provided it with an absolutist colonial administration and imprinted a particular dynamic upon its social reproduction.

Pursuing my inquiry into the geopolitical and intersocietal processes through which the Laurentian colonial society was constituted, Chapter 3 deals with one of the most dramatic events in the history of the colony: the British Conquest. In order to do so, it recasts the event itself within the broader framework of geopolitical rivalries and mercantilist trade wars that characterized early modern international relations between capitalist Britain and continental absolutist states. I contend that this broader framework allows us to shed a new light on one of the most central issues ever debated by Canadian political scientists and historians, that is, what were the socioeconomic consequences of

the British Conquest? On this matter, Chapter 3 argues that if the Conquest did not decapitate a *grande bourgeoisie capitaliste*—such a bourgeoisie did not exist—it did close the doors of the most lucrative offices within the state to French Canadians. This is an important fact given the primary importance of the state as a means of private appropriation for the colonial ruling class. Meanwhile, military concerns and the need to control the French Canadian population in a geopolitical context characterized by growing dissent in the Thirteen American colonies led the British authorities to preserve the seigneurial regime and reassert the local privileges of the seigneurs and the clergy. Excluded from the state but still enjoying local powers, the seigneurs and clergy redoubled their efforts in exploiting the French Canadian peasantry. The chapter then highlights the obstacles to agricultural innovation placed in way of the French Canadian rural population by the incentives and restrictions that the seigneurial regime imposed on strategic decisions made by economic actors, and how this led to an agricultural crisis during the first half of the nineteenth century.

Chapter 4 deepens our understanding of the consequences of the decision of the British authorities to preserve the seigneurial regime in the St. Lawrence Valley by exploring the implications of Lower Canada's agricultural crisis for the development of the neighbouring province of Upper Canada (modern-day Ontario). Attention is paid to the structure of class relations that developed with Upper Canada's formation following the Constitutional Act of 1791, which introduced the freehold tenure in the new province of Upper Canada, as well as in areas outside of the seigneurial regime within Lower Canada. Examining the strategies of reproduction of the ruling class and the formation

of the colonial 'land/office state', the chapter concludes that while the introduction of the freehold tenure in Upper Canada meant that there would be no socio-legal obstacles to the eventual development of capitalism, in itself the freehold tenure did not automatically generate capitalism. A broader transformation of system-wide conditions and structural opportunities was required before the majority of Upper Canadian farmers would undertake a shift toward a more capital-intensive form of agriculture.

The examination of the conditions under which the emergence of essentially capitalist farming in Upper Canada became possible is the object of Chapter 5. The chapter begins with an exploration of the work of Charles Post on the origins of capitalism in the United States and a conceptual clarification of the differences between independent household producers and petty-commodity producers. It then describes the working of the St. Lawrence/Great Lakes commercial system and how the strategies of the merchant communities contributed to integrate Upper Canada into a broader economic regional reality increasingly transformed by the development of industrial capitalism in the northeastern United States. It is argued that while the development of capitalism there resulted from the threat of dispossession that loomed over farmers in the aftermath of the American Revolution, no such threat was required for Upper Canadian farmers to engage in capital-intensive types of farming.

Finally, Chapter 6 identifies the social conditions under which the development of capital-intensive types of agriculture was initiated in the French Canadian countryside. It shows the persistence of pre-capitalist social relations well into the second half of the nineteenth century and emphasizes the class conflicts that shaped, and

were shaped, by these social relations. Changes in the province's balance of class forces intersected with the development of industrial capitalism in urban centres of the province and of New England in ways that spawned unique problems to be dealt with by the state, the Catholic clergy, and the peasantry. A creative process of adaptation and resistance to market imperatives ensued. It resulted in a unique combination of the 'old' and the 'new', the drawing together of pre-capitalist and capitalist social relations, in the form of the cooperative movement in the dairy industry.

1.

Capitalism beyond the European Heartland

A crucial feature of the contemporary era is that the geopolitical expansion of capitalism across the whole planet is almost complete. Political scientist Ellen Wood has argued that this change is best characterized as the process of the *universalization* of capitalist social relations within the multi-state system. Indeed, the twentieth century has seen the totalizing process of capitalism make colossal advances in geographical areas where other forms of social and economic organization prevailed. As capitalism has expanded geographically, it has also extended into areas of social life, from health care and water to intellectual property, that were previously unaffected (or only partially affected) by its imperatives of competition, profit maximization, commodification, and accumulation.

This process emerged in early modern Europe, with the commodification of land, money and labour-power, and deepened in the following centuries, as the control of capital over both the workplace and daily life intensified. The creation of the Bretton Woods institutions in the aftermath of the Second World War went a long way toward claiming new areas for capitalist imperatives and lowering barriers to international trade between North America, Western Europe and Japan (the so-called 'triad'). The reorganization of the global financial system according to the dictates of neo-classical economics has, since the 1970s, further deepened the international liberalization of trade

and opened new spheres of social life to commodification. The collapse of the Soviet Union, little more than two decades ago, has also been a key factor in the transformation of the bulk of social relations beyond the confines of the economic triad.

Capitalism has certainly travelled a long way since its inception in the early modern epoch. It is little wonder that scholarly debates on the epochal transition from feudalism to capitalism have spilled so much ink over the issue: no macrohistorical process has had a more profound impact on both the social and international structures of modernity. Unfortunately, most attempts at theorizing this transition have relied on Adam Smith's model of economic advance—the 'commercialization model'—to explain how capitalism emerged in early modern Europe and went on to spread worldwide. Within this framework, capitalism's initial 'take-off' of self-sustained growth is theorized as the outcome of a pan-European phenomenon associated with the quantitative expansion of markets and urban areas. Similarly, the social diffusion of capitalism, once it had developed in Europe, is seen as a market-driven phenomenon that takes 'the form of a lava flow evaporating and liquefying the sediments of tradition standing in its path'. This chapter presents Robert Brenner and Ellen Wood's critique of the commercialization model before turning to their alternative account of the emergence of agrarian capitalism in the English countryside. It then asks important questions about how to understand the diffusion of capitalism beyond Europe and explores some of the methodological challenges associated with attempts at grappling with the international dimension of social change.

The Commercialization Model

Brenner and Wood have criticized this model for its individualistic and mechanistic presuppositions, which claim that economic development goes hand-in-hand with the opportunities engendered by the growth of the world market. In the commercialization model, what is considered normal development is assessed against ethnocentric criteria deduced from a reductionist historical narrative of the rise of modern Europe. This model is based on a unilinear concept of social progress that sees the development of productive forces—along with greater specialization and division of labour—as the outcome of naturally expanding markets. In return, the development of productive forces more or less mechanically determines the social relations of class and property, as well as the form of the state. According to Wood, this theory of history implies one generic model of development that associates *capitalism* with *cities*, and *capitalists* with *bourgeoisie*; it assumes ‘that cities are from the beginning capitalism in embryo’.⁵ As an account of how and in what circumstances capitalism developed, the commercialization model leaves unexplained the very thing that requires elucidation: its origin. In fact, the commercialization model presumes capitalism ‘always to *be* there, somewhere’.⁶ The model takes for granted the existence of a natural drive toward the expansion of commercial activities and urban economies, yet one that is delayed until it is released from its feudal, and typically political, fetters.

Because the commercialization model leaves unexplained the origin of

⁵ Ellen Meiksins Wood, *The Origin of Capitalism: A Longer View* (London; New York: Verso, 2002), 13.

⁶ *Ibid.*, 4.

capitalism, any elaboration of its geographical diffusion rests on shaky historical and theoretical foundations. Historically, the way in which the specific origin of capitalism in the English countryside generated economic and geopolitical pressures on the European continent and the rest of the world is lost in the description of the worldwide growth of commercial exchanges. Yet, the historical diversity of relations and permutations that have characterized the contested construction of distinct ‘geo-economic’ regimes fundamentally contradicts the single and linear narrative of the pan-European rise of the bourgeoisie and the quantitative extension of trade networks. In the case of the New World, for instance, ‘different outcomes in the struggle over peasant land tenure’ in the metropolises had important implications ‘for the history of French and English colonization in America’.⁷

The commercialization model’s theorization of the geopolitical spread of capitalism remains locked within a binary opposition of trade and feudalism that assumes feudal property to have been the fetter on capitalist tendencies that existed prior to the transformation of social relations. Capitalism, in this view, is simply conceived as a set of commercial practices, rather than ‘a regional sociopolitical transformation and the concomitant construction of new forms of economic and political subjectivity that would create consequences of world-historical relevance’.⁸ As such, the commercialization model ignores one of Marx’s main contributions to understanding a qualitative distinction of the modern world: ‘[i]n themselves, money and commodities

⁷ Roberta Hamilton, *Feudal Society and Colonization: The Historiography of New France* (Gananoque: Langdale Press, 1988), 58.

⁸ Benno Teschke and Hannes Lacher, “The Changing ‘Logics’ of Capitalist Competition,” *Cambridge Review of International Affairs* 20 (2007): 569.

are no more capital than the means of production and subsistence are. They need to be transformed into capital'.⁹ It is the general contention of this dissertation that the reaffirmation and destruction of old social-property relations outside Europe, once capitalism had first developed in England, were complex processes that went far beyond mere changes in commodity exchanges or trade relations.

This is no denial that Marx's early writings were significantly influenced by Adam Smith's teleological and stagist theory of history: Marx perceived as ineluctable the universal transformation of old social relations of production into capitalist ones under the aegis of the bourgeoisie—a transformation that he thought would everywhere pass through the same 'stages' as those experienced in Western Europe. As George Comninel has pointed out, however, what most observers fail to note is that Marx eventually broke away from Smith's assumptions about the technically-determined evolution of the labour process, in order to theorize modes of production as sets of social-property relations.¹⁰

For the mature Marx, the effect of trade on non-capitalist societies was an open-ended affair, which varies according to the nature of pre-existing social relations: 'what comes out of this process of dissolution, i.e. what new mode of production arises in place of the old, does not depend on trade, but rather on the character of the old mode of production itself'.¹¹ Capitalism's development in the modern world, in fact, was 'itself

⁹ *Capital: Volume 1: A Critique of Political Economy*, trans. Ben Fowkes (London: Penguin Classics, 1990), 874.

¹⁰ *Rethinking the French Revolution: Marxism and the Revisionist Challenge* (London; New York: Verso, 1987).

¹¹ Karl Marx, *Capital: Volume 3: A Critique of Political Economy* (London: Penguin Classics, 1991), 449.

conditioned by quite other circumstances than the development of commercial capital'.¹² The same applies to urban development, which had little to do with the growth of trade in history.¹³ To understand these processes, I argue, one must look to the shape and content of social-property relations, which unquestionably develop along with the non-determined, yet non-contingent, conflictual reproduction of class, gender and race. In the early modern world, this is an open-ended and highly politicized process occurring within a world divided into multiple and interacting polities.

The Agrarian Origin of Capitalism

According to Brenner, Marx aimed at explaining so-called primitive accumulation—the ‘previous accumulation’ of Adam Smith—as ‘the series of social processes by which the fundamental social-property relations that constituted the feudal mode of production were broken up and transformed through the action of feudal society itself’, as lords ‘lost their capacity to take a rent by extra-economic compulsion and the peasants were separated from their possession of the means of subsistence’.¹⁴ This process, Wood emphasizes, had little to do with the breaking-up of obstacles to development by the growth of commerce in cities and urban areas, for ‘even communal constraints, with or without the material limits of peasant property, are not enough to account for the absence of systematic development of productive forces of the kind we

¹² Ibid., 450.

¹³ Ibid.

¹⁴ “Bourgeois Revolution and Transition to Capitalism,” in *The First Modern Society: Essays in English History in Honour of Lawrence Stone*, ed. A. L. Beier, David Cannadine, and James Rosenheim (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989), 273.

associate with capitalism. In fact, it is, on the whole, a mistake to think in terms of *blockages*'.¹⁵

It is, instead, the creation of 'a positive *compulsion*' to alter productive processes that must be accounted for, as changes in social-property relations generated competitive conditions for peasants and tenant farmers who found themselves 'both free to move in response to those conditions and obliged to do so'.¹⁶ While markets have almost always provided *opportunities* for trade exchanges, only in capitalism do they become *obligations*. Such a change in social-property relations first historically occurred in England through the expropriation of the peasantry from the land and the concomitant obligation for tenant farmers to make ever-growing profits in order to maintain access to the land through the commercial lease market, at the same time as English lords were losing their capacity to extract rent by extra-economic compulsion.¹⁷ The result of this epoch-making process was a generalized tendency toward the improvement of agricultural labour productivity associated with 'the presence throughout the economy of a systematic, continuous and quasi-universal drive on the part of the individual direct producers to cut costs in aid of maximizing profitability via increasing efficiency and the movement of means of production from line to line in response to price signals'.¹⁸

Such a systemic tendency toward improvement is made possible 'only when the individual direct producers are not only free and have the opportunity, but also are

¹⁵ "The Question of Market Dependence," *Journal of Agrarian Change* 2, no. 1 (2002): 57.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*

¹⁷ Ellen Meiksins Wood, *Democracy Against Capitalism: Renewing Historical Materialism* (Cambridge University Press, 1995), 289.

¹⁸ Robert Brenner, "The Low Countries in the Transition to Capitalism," *Journal of Agrarian Change* 1, no. 2 (2001): 172–173.

compelled in their own interest, to maximize the gains from trade through specialization, accumulation and innovation, as well as the reallocation of the means of production among industries in response to changing demand'.¹⁹ Capitalism, therefore, cannot be reduced to production for the market, which throughout history has always been entirely compatible with pre-capitalist systems, even if, in these systems, 'it is either unnecessary or impossible, or both, to reinvest in expanded improved production in order to profit'.²⁰ Nascent capitalism did not only imply the market-dependence of wage labourers, but also of landlords and capitalist tenant farmers, forced to improve the means of production to face competition. Without historical precedent, capitalist social domination subjects all classes to an abstract and impersonal, yet 'objective', dependency, which consists of 'social relations which have become independent and now enter into opposition to the seemingly independent individuals; i.e., the reciprocal relations of production separated from and autonomous of individuals'.²¹

The emergence of this historically specific form of social domination was an unintended result of struggles between feudal lords and peasants over rents. Neither of these classes were fully aware of the consequences of their actions as they struggled to reproduce themselves on the basis of strategies that might appear 'irrational' to us but were actually quite rational in the feudal context. Within feudal society, specialization was considered a sub-optimal and highly risky venture from the viewpoint of the

¹⁹ Ibid.

²⁰ Robert Brenner, "The Origins of Capitalist Development: A Critique of Neo-Smithian Marxism," *New Left Review* 104, no. 1 (1977): 32.

²¹ Karl Marx, *Grundrisse: Foundations of the Critique of Political Economy* (Harmondsworth: Vintage Books, 1973), 164; For an in-depth discussion of this insight, see Moishe Postone, *Time, Labor, and Social Domination: A Reinterpretation of Marx's Critical Theory* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993).

peasantry. Specialization meant subjecting oneself to market-dependency and jeopardizing the very conditions of one's subsistence, the price to pay in the case of 'business failure' being nothing short of starvation. This makes what Brenner calls 'safety-first' diversified subsistence agriculture the best strategy in a context in which subsistence crises were both common and unpredictable, often lasting several years.²²

Furthermore, specialization would have undermined the very cultural basis of both peasant communities and landlords' social reproduction. The need to ensure a measure of security in infirmity and old age tended to generate a desire to have many children, resulting in the subdivision of holdings and early marriages, practices that all directly go against the requirements for profit maximization that went with specialization.²³ Inversely, the absence of a market of free tenants or wage labourers that could be subjected to economic exploitation rendered politico-military strategies of accumulation the most favourable to landlords. Direct force was needed, not only to overcome potential resistance from the peasantry when its surpluses were appropriated through coercion, but also to defend one's demesne in the face of other lords' appetite for conquest and plunder.

As a consequence, it was more logical for lords to systematically invest in the acquisition of luxury goods (to keep up their noble standing) and military equipment (to cope with intra-lord and lord-peasant rivalries) than to invest in the means of production. Meanwhile, lords were not able to force peasants to improve the productivity of their lands, for the latter were in general able to remain in possession of their means of

²² "The Low Countries in the Transition to Capitalism," 176.

²³ *Ibid.*, 177.

subsistence. Increased production did not, consequently, directly benefit the lord. Under feudalism, the ‘open-field systems’ of production benefitted from intensive labour. As Comninel has argued, this, concomitantly, resulted in a structural pressure towards higher population which, in turn, profited to the lords because many fines and dues were paid by individuals, not families.²⁴ This demographic bias is evident in the rapid, and unprecedented, growth of population during the feudal era, amounting to something like a three- to four-fold increase in just two centuries.²⁵ Because the open-field systems did not allow for innovation in production, there was no basis for lords to engage in investment in means of production and, with the exception of England, the end result was that ‘definite society-wide (non-capitalist) development patterns’ led to ‘economic (non-) development in medieval and (most of) early modern Europe’.²⁶

It must be stated here that the merchant class not only faced the same difficulties as the lords in improving the means of production on the land, but also faced barriers imposed by guilds in towns. Therefore, they could best make their profits through pursuing trade activities revolving around the age-old principle of ‘buying cheap and selling dear’, rather than through the investment in and reorganization of production. To prevent overtrading and the reduction in profits this would bring, merchants had to secure the control of entry to markets, something that could be done only via political assistance, i.e. via alliances with the monarchy and/or the lordly class.²⁷ This reflects the

²⁴ George Comninel, “Feudalism,” in *The Elgar Companion to Marxist Economics*, ed. Ben Fine, Alfredo Saad-Filho, and Marco Boffo (Cheltenham; Northampton: Edward Elgar, 2012), 131–37.

²⁵ Ibid.

²⁶ Brenner, “The Low Countries in the Transition to Capitalism,” 180.

²⁷ Brenner, “Bourgeois Revolution and Transition to Capitalism,” 289–292; Benno Teschke, *The Myth of*

fact that, in pre-capitalist societies, the appropriation of labour surplus was overtly performed on the basis of ‘extra-economic’ powers, that is, powers drawn from *inter alia*, customs, cultural traditions, legal and political privileges, or the use of violence.

The Transition Debate in the Canadian Historiography

The research program put forward by Brenner, Wood, and Comninel during the 1970s, 1980s, and 1990s focused on elucidating the transition to capitalism in France and England—the European heartland.²⁸ One of its main outcomes was the identification of fundamental differences in the respective development of the two countries, with non-capitalist social relations long continuing to condition the strategies of social reproduction of social classes in France, at the same time as capitalism was consolidated in England. With the work of Hannes Lacher, Benno Teschke, and Frédérick-Guillaume Dufour, a subsequent generation of researchers sought to draw conclusions from Brenner, Wood, and Comninel’s theses for understanding international relations. While the initial focus of this second wave still remained largely on France and England during the medieval and early modern epoch, more recent research has shown a growing interest in processes of agrarian change and industrialization during the nineteenth century.

Regarding Canadian and Québécois historiography, the research of Gérald

1648: Class Geopolitics and the Making of Modern International Relations (London; New York: Verso, 2003).

²⁸ They have also turned their attention, to a lesser degree, to other regions of Europe, such as Catalonia, Holland, and Eastern Europe, as well as to the Yangtze Delta in China.

Bernier and Daniel Salée in the early 1990s has gone a long way to opening new avenues to understand the transition to capitalism in nineteenth century's Quebec. Indeed, they have provided a remarkable collection of facts which point resolutely toward the pre-capitalist character of Quebec up until at least the mid-nineteenth century, and argued that pre-capitalist social practices left their impression on Canadian society long after the abolition of the seigneuries. With their focus on social-property relations and the adoption of a periodization of capitalism informed by Brenner's thesis, Bernier and Salée have avoided several pitfalls of traditional historiography.

More specifically, they have broken away from the presupposition that Canada has been a 'capitalist' society since the early settlements of New France, a claim that rests on the theoretical premises of the commercialization model. As it has tended to take for granted the idea that capitalism emerged almost simultaneously across the whole of Europe and its colonies over the course of five centuries of market expansion and the rise of the mercantile bourgeoisie, Canadian historiography has assumed that European colonies in North America were themselves capitalist from their foundation. The work of three historians of the University of Montreal stands as a case in point. In the 1950s and 1960s, Guy Frégault, Marcel Brunet, and Maurice Séguin, known as the 'Montreal School', sought to explain Lower Canada's long-standing 'backwardness' by reference to the British Conquest. In order to do so, they depicted New France as a dynamic commercial and industrial society. According to these historians, New France was a burgeoning capitalist society, which had developed, until the British Conquest in 1760, as 'any normal society of the period in North America [...]. [It] was dynamic and

progressive. It was a society of the New World that enjoyed fully its collective liberty'.²⁹

French Canadian historians of the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries portrayed New France as a society of peasants. In sharp contrast, the Montreal School put forward the thesis that the commitment of French Canadians to agriculture arose only under British rule, as a direct result of the Conquest. Seen as a catastrophic watershed in Quebec's history, the Conquest 'decapitated' the French Canadian bourgeoisie, as French cadres and wealthy merchants were forced to, or chose to, go back to France. Those who remained were compelled to abandon trading and manufacturing activities, monopolized by English merchants. With the exception of a minority of men eager to serve the new rulers, French Canadians were largely excluded from councils and other positions of authority, as well as networks of favouritism. As a result, Quebec's development was diverted from a 'normal' path of commercial expansion, urbanization, and industrialization and forced back upon agriculture.

An illustrative example of this position is Frégault's attempt at depicting the economy of New France in the two decades preceding the Seven Years' War as a booming case of capitalist development. His work is replete with attempts to prove that during this period 'industry expanded more than agriculture'.³⁰ Pointing out the importance of the fur trade for the economy, the presence of naval construction in the shipyards of Quebec, and the ironwork made at the St. Maurice Forge in Trois-Rivières, Frégault concluded—in a statement that few historians today would endorse—that 'in

²⁹ Michel Brunet, *La présence anglaise et les Canadiens: études sur l'histoire et la pensée des deux Canadas* (Montréal: Beauchemin, 1964), 114. (my translation)

³⁰ *Canadian Society in the French Regime* (Montréal: The Canadian Historical Association, 1954), 11.

times of peace as in times of war, in prosperity as in depression, one factor dominated the economic life as well as political, namely, big business'.³¹ Frégault has overstated the importance of manufacturing activities while overlooking the importance of agriculture. The fact is that manufacturing activities in New France were greatly underdeveloped in comparison with those of New England. Even the St. Maurice Forge, the only establishment of its kind in New France, was not profitable—riddled with debts, it was taken over in 1741 by the government. As for the fur trade, French traders had an increasingly hard time competing with the fur trade of their English neighbours in the few decades preceding the British Conquest.³²

The slow pace of socioeconomic development in New France as compared to its American neighbour is made even more evident when demographics are taken into account. The French state had only the most limited capacities to provide the colony with immigrants. Both France and England began their colonial ventures in North America at the beginning of the sixteenth century. Both waited until the first decade of the seventeenth century to found sustainable settlements—the French at Saint-Croix Island, in 1604, and the British in Jamestown, Virginia, in 1607. The respective populations of the French and English colonies in North America, however, soon showed tremendous disparities. At the time of the Conquest, a century and a half later, the population of New France was barely 70,000 inhabitants, compared to a million and a half in the British American colonies, where industries were also developing at a much

³¹ Ibid., 12.

³² Bruce G. Trigger, *Natives and Newcomers Canada's "Heroic Age" Reconsidered* (Montréal; Kingston: McGill-Queen's University Press, 1985); Louise Dechêne, *Habitants and Merchants in Seventeenth-Century Montreal* (Montreal; Kingston: McGill-Queen's Press, 1993).

more rapid pace.³³

Fur Trade, Merchant Capital and Capitalist Production

Faced with this evidence, a number of historians have abandoned the idea of depicting New France as a booming capitalist society. Yet, even as the ‘backwardness’ of New France’s development when compared with its American neighbour is taken seriously into account, the tendency is still to depict New France as a colony in which capitalism did exist, albeit in a fettered form. This is the case, for instance, of Fernand Ouellet’s ‘culturalist’ approach. A problematic association between the fur trade and capitalism is found in Ouellet’s work, even if the historian insists more than many others on the delay of Quebec’s development and the economic inferiority of French Canadians. Ouellet has maintained that the fur trade was ‘of a capitalist type’ and chastised the French traders for their lack of a capitalistic outlook in managing the business. Such a proposition is problematic, for the fur trade, as Hamilton has pointed out,

dealt only with the circulation of commodities. It did not influence or penetrate the process of production itself. Indeed, that kind of activity, which took advantage of national and regional price differences to secure a profit, had been an aspect of feudal societies for centuries. Ouellet’s apparent equation of

³³ Mason Wade, *The French Canadians 1760-1967*, vol. 1 (Toronto: Macmillan, 1968), 20; Kenneth McRoberts and Dale Posgate, *Développement et modernisation du Québec* (Montréal: Boréal, 1983), 38.

capitalism and profit-making led to a failure to distinguish between the economic systems of France and England as they were unfolding in the seventeenth century.³⁴

An important distinction to be aware of in dealing with the bourgeoisie has been highlighted by Marx, who demonstrated that merchant wealth, whether in the form of commercial capital or of money-dealing capital, differs fundamentally from capital as we find it within the specific capitalist mode of production. The challenge taken up by Marx was precisely to identify the historical specificities of the latter against economists who interpreted every commercial activity, in any society since the beginning of time, as a form of capitalist activity. As such, the special form of capitalist production was, in Marx's words, 'poles apart' from merchant capital.³⁵ According to him, the difficulty that economists have in grasping the distinction between the two is largely due to their 'inability to explain commercial profit and its characteristic features'.³⁶

In the movement of commercial capital, 'the merchant's profit is firstly made [...] simply within the process of circulation, i.e. the two acts of purchase and sale. [...] "Buy cheap and sell dear" is the law of commerce, not the exchange of equivalents. [...] Commercial capital, in the first instance, is simply the mediating movement between extremes it does not dominate and preconditions it does not create'.³⁷ It is otherwise in the capitalist mode of production, which implies a 'reversal' in the way trade and

³⁴ *Feudal Society and Colonization*, 24.

³⁵ Marx, *Capital: Volume 3: A Critique of Political Economy*, 440.

³⁶ *Ibid.*

³⁷ *Ibid.*, 447.

industry interact together: capitalism appropriates unpaid labour ‘in the course of the actual process of production’.³⁸ Because capitalism appropriates surplus-value in the actual process of production, its tendency is to take over the production process, subordinating it to its imperatives and revolutionizing its technological components. This is the process of the real subsumption of production under capital, by which ‘capital takes command of production itself and gives it a completely altered and specific form’.³⁹

As Michael Zmolek has explained, the real subsumption of production under capital ‘entails specialized production for exchange on a competitive basis, which presupposes market dependence and a system of consistently seeking ways of reducing the price/cost ratio of output, which in turn requires further specialization, accumulation of surpluses, and innovation, or the adoption of the best available production techniques’.⁴⁰ On this matter, an important distinction has been sketched out by Ellen Wood between *price-sensitive* producers and *cost-sensitive* ones. Only the latter are forced to improve ‘labour productivity at lower cost, especially by transforming the methods of production, in a competitive market with many producers’.⁴¹ The case of the Low Countries is particularly telling in this regard. Examining the conditions in which the Low Countries’ direct producers engaged with the market in order to obtain basic necessities in a way that did not subject them to the relentless and systematic

³⁸ Marx, *Capital*, 978.

³⁹ Marx, *Capital: Volume 3: A Critique of Political Economy*, 444.

⁴⁰ Michael Andrew Zmolek, *Rethinking the Industrial Revolution: Five Centuries of Transition from Agrarian to Industrial Capitalism in England* (Leiden; Boston: Brill, 2013), 26–27.

⁴¹ Wood, “The Question of Market Dependence,” 57.

development of the productive forces, Wood concluded on the need to establish the *differentia specifica* of capitalism beyond the producers' dependence upon the market for the basic components of their survival and the commercial production of commodities. Briefly summed up, her argument is that as long as access to the factors of production is not dependent upon the market, the need to engage in commercial agriculture to obtain food supplies through the market is not sufficient to set in motion a capitalist logic of development with its characteristic ethos of 'improvement'.⁴² This argument follows closely the logic behind Marx's observation about the forces underlying the need of the producer to increase labour productivity and lower costs.

As political economist Moishe Postone has pointed out in his reinterpretation of Marx's analytical categories, the capitalist drive toward the relentless and systematic development of the productive forces is due to an abstract logic of social domination which imposes the real constraint of unbridled productivity on producers.⁴³ It is possible to sort out the nature of this directional dynamic by insisting on the historical meaning of the analytical categories of 'value' and 'labour' as they are used in the *Grundrisse* and *Capital*: as Postone has explained, 'value' does *not* refer to any form of material wealth, and 'labour' does *not* refer to any productive activity mediating between humans and nature. They are historically specific categories that acquire a unique 'double dimension' in capitalism, which includes both a use value and an exchange value, to which correspond concrete labour and abstract labour. On the one hand, the use value produced by concrete labour consists in this property that objects have to satisfy human needs. On

⁴² Wood, "The Question of Market Dependence."

⁴³ Postone, *Time, Labor, and Social Domination*, 312.

the other hand, the exchange value is constituted by abstract human labour by virtue of the fact that objects produced from the labour of one producer are ‘the means by which goods produced by others are acquired’;⁴⁴ ‘regardless of its specific content, the labour therefore serves the producer’ as a means to acquire the property of others.⁴⁵ Labour is thus the only element common to all goods, which causes it to play the role of ‘general social mediation’ in capitalist societies.⁴⁶

By ‘general social mediation’, Postone seeks to account for the fact that, in the process of capitalist production, the law of value ensures that each particular job must meet the requirements of productivity of all the other particular jobs. In other words, the socially necessary labour time for the production of a good, that is to say, abstract labour (and not, for example, the direct rule of the seigneur in New France), conditions the labour of each producer according to the labour of others. In turn, these other labours are themselves simultaneously conditioned by the labour of the first, and from this relationship between the labours of each producer unfolds the dynamic that give to capitalist production its specificity. This dynamic is unique in that the increase in the number of goods produced is usually accompanied by a decrease of the value contained in each product. This occurs as soon as the improvement of productivity, which in the first place resulted in a greater production of goods in a particular unit of production, is generalized to the entire sector. The increase in productivity therefore generates greater value creation per time unit only during the short period when a producer retains a

⁴⁴ Ibid., 135.

⁴⁵ Ibid.

⁴⁶ Ibid., 152.

competitive advantage over the others.⁴⁷ When other producers adopt the same technologies or develop methods that generate a similar increase in productivity, the socially necessary labour time to produce a good falls. To maintain the same level of value creation per time unit, producers must therefore constantly boost the means of production and increase productivity at a breakneck pace. Value, therefore, is ‘a form of wealth whose specificity is linked to its temporal determination’.⁴⁸

Prior to the historical subsumption of production under capital, accumulation of wealth was accomplished directly through merchant wealth without control of productive processes, which largely remained, as Marx explained, ‘the production of the producer’s means of subsistence’.⁴⁹ Only when direct producers were dispossessed of their means of subsistence did capital acquire its ‘modern meaning’⁵⁰, becoming ‘capital as capital’⁵¹, ‘capital proper’⁵², ‘capital as such’⁵³, the ‘genuine’ capitalist mode of production⁵⁴, a ‘specific’ and ‘particular’ mode of production. Economists have always confused the two, failing to note that money and commodities ‘become translated into capital only in certain specific circumstances and their owners likewise become capitalists only when these circumstances obtain’.⁵⁵ The elementary forms of capital, or capital in general, should not be confused with ‘capital as such’.⁵⁶

⁴⁷ Moishe Postone, “Critique and Historical Transformation,” *Historical Materialism* 12, no. 3 (2004): 59.

⁴⁸ Postone, *Time, Labor, and Social Domination*, 123.

⁴⁹ Marx, *Capital: Volume 3: A Critique of Political Economy*, 444.

⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, fn444.

⁵¹ *Ibid.*, 445.

⁵² Marx, *Capital*, 1030.

⁵³ *Ibid.*, 975.

⁵⁴ Marx, *Capital: Volume 3: A Critique of Political Economy*, 452.

⁵⁵ Marx, *Capital*, 975.

⁵⁶ It is in an attempt to make this distinction clear, while breaking away from teleological interpretations of

The dynamics of investment and re-investment of the Canadian fur trade correspond in all aspects to the dynamics of merchant wealth, rather than to the dynamics of the capitalist mode of production. Military officers, French Canadian habitants and metropolitan merchants engaged in the trade directly relied on the construction of military forts to access the resource and make an income from it. Settlements in the region to the west of Montreal were for long restricted, not only because of their vulnerability to attacks by Iroquois, but also because the location would have allowed the settlers to illegally compete in the fur trade.⁵⁷ There, as in the greater part of New France outside the St. Lawrence Valley, only forts and trading posts were to be found.⁵⁸ The making of alliances with Native peoples was also a necessary condition to access the resource. These alliances were not purely economic, but also political, military and cultural. Great efforts were put by Frenchmen to maintain Native peoples in good dispositions within a relation that, while unequal, was not just of coercion and domination.⁵⁹ Pointing out that ‘[t]he value accorded to the furs over a large area had little to do with supply and demand’, Dechêne has described the working of the trade in these terms:

[t]raders attracted and retained their clientele through treaties involving a

Marx, that in the dissertation I speak of ‘capitalist’ versus ‘pre-capitalist’ societies, the former applying to societies in which the specifically capitalist mode of production dominates, while the latter applies to societies in which capital exists only in its more usual and general meaning, that is, as any form of wealth.

⁵⁷ Richard Colebrook Harris, *Seigneurial System in Early Canada: A Geographical Study* (Madison; Milwaukee; London: University of Wisconsin, 1968), 10–11.

⁵⁸ Jean Bérenger, Yves Durand, and Jean A. Meyer, *Pionniers et colons en Amérique du Nord* (Paris: Armand Colin, 1974), 217.

⁵⁹ Bruce G. Trigger, “The Historians’ Indian: Native Americans in Canadian Historical Writing from Charlevoix to the Present,” *Canadian Historical Review* 67, no. 3 (1986): 338.

complex interplay of alliances, tributes, and lavish distributions of powder, necklaces, tobacco, and liquor, as well as by manifesting their trustworthiness, personal valour, and dexterity, and, of course, by providing quality goods. With a rifle worth five beavers, anyone hoping for better terms had to search further afield, beyond the purview of the middlemen, but this automatically raised travel costs.⁶⁰

The extra-economic dynamic of the fur trade was further strengthened by the terms of exchange imposed on Europeans by Indians on the basis of political factors and intertribal alliances.⁶¹ As anthropologist Bruce Trigger has argued, these alliances were so embedded in social and political institutions ‘that trade and peace were virtually synonymous and Indian traders scorned to haggle over the price of individual goods. The personal motive for trade was not [...] to possess an inordinate amount of exotic goods but to be able to acquire prestige by giving them away. These features of native economies accord with a nonmarket model of economic activity’.⁶²

To be sure, this does not mean that native traders were indifferent to the possibilities of making substantial profit from their exchanges. ‘The real question’, in fact, ‘is not whether individual traders sought such profits but why they did so and what

⁶⁰ Dechêne, *Habitants and Merchants in Seventeenth-Century Montreal*, 88.

⁶¹ Abraham Rotstein, “Trade and Politics: An Institutional Approach,” *Western Canadian Journal of Anthropology* 3, no. 1 (1972): 1–28; Abraham Rotstein, *Fur Trade and Empire: An Institutional Analysis* (PhD’s Thesis, University of Toronto, 1970).

⁶² Trigger, “The Historians’ Indian,” 192–193.

they did with their gains'.⁶³ On this matter, evidence abounds in the historical literature that Native traders were not reinvesting their profits to improve the means of production. Quite the contrary, they followed non-capitalist strategies of appropriation, usually trying 'to obtain higher values for their goods not to obtain more of the Europeans' wares but to minimize the effort that had to be expended to satisfy their wants. It is also obvious that the goods obtained were not hoarded by individuals but were redistributed in a traditional fashion as a source of prestige'.⁶⁴

For the most part of the seventeenth century, among European settlers and merchants the fur trade was held in monopoly and surrounded by tight regulating practices.⁶⁵ Regulation was reaffirmed by the proclamation of the Royal government in 1663 as it ordained the Superior Council of Quebec to 'regulate the dispersal of all public moneys, the fur trade with the Indians and any commerce involving the inhabitants of the country and the merchants of our Kingdom [...]'.⁶⁶ By the mid-eighteenth century, twenty-five permits, or *congés*, were issued annually giving the legal right to depart with goods to trade with the Indians in the west. As had been the case with chartered companies before, these permits were granted on a political basis in return for past or present services to 'the impoverished nobility, deserving officers, and

⁶³ Ibid., 193.

⁶⁴ Ibid.

⁶⁵ The 'Decree for the Council of New France', proclaimed in 1647, offers a good illustration of the kind of regulations surrounding the fur trade in the colony. Chartered companies having had difficulties to make profit in the face of illegal trade by the inhabitants, his Majesty ordained that 'all goods suitable for the fur trade with the Indians [...] shall be placed in the public stores, and consigned by the merchants or their agents [...], his Majesty most strictly forbidding all merchants, agents and others who shall import the said trade goods, to make any other use of them on pain of confiscation [...]'. In Cameron Nish, *The French Regime, Vol. I* (Scarborough: Prentice Hall, 1965), 38–39.

⁶⁶ "Edict Creating the Superior Council of Quebec, Paris, April 1663", *Édits, Ordonnances Royaux, Déclarations et Arrêts Du Conseil D'état Du Roi, Concernant Le Canada* (Québec: P.E. Desbarats, 1803).

religious communities'.⁶⁷ Most of the recipients would hand over their permits to merchants in exchange for a return on profits. These merchants—all essentially outfitters—would equip the *coureurs des bois* (then called *voyageurs*) with a cargo of goods to be exchanged in the western woods.⁶⁸ The outfitters provided voyageurs with the goods they needed to perform trade with the Indians. Here, the task of voyageurs was separated from the spheres of production between which it mediated, taking a staple—animal fur—from a region where it was worth close to nothing and bringing it to a far distant and much more developed market where its price was high.

In a study of three parishes of the Richelieu Valley, historian Allan Greer has shown that in pursuing commercial activities '[t]he fur barons, the grain traders, and the local shopkeepers drew a profit from the feudal society they found [...] and in certain respects they reinforced the existing exploitation and economic backwardness rather than challenging the dominion of the aristocrats'.⁶⁹ As such, commercial activities in Canada were analogous to other forms of carrying trade that are found in history, as conducted, for instance, by the Venetians, Genoans, Dutch, etc. In these cases, as Marx has explained, 'the major profit was made not by supplying a specific national product, but rather by mediating the exchange of products between commercially—and generally economically—undeveloped communities [...]. Here we have commercial capital in its pure form, quite separate from the extremes, the spheres of production, between which it

⁶⁷ In 1682, for instance, the 'list contained sixteen active or retired officers, two officers' widows, three noblemen and seigneurs, and two congés to the Notre-Dame vestry'. Dechêne, *Habitants and Merchants in Seventeenth-Century Montreal*, 93.

⁶⁸ *Ibid.*, 94.

⁶⁹ Allan Greer, *Peasant, Lord, and Merchant: Rural Society in Three Quebec Parishes 1740-1840* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1985), xiii.

mediates'.⁷⁰

The Geopolitical Diffusion of Capitalist Social Relations

The problematic association of the fur trade with capitalism is far from exclusive to Ouellet. It is found in much of Canadian historiography and political economy. A case in point is Harold Innis's celebrated staple theory, which decades of prolific authorship have drawn upon to produce a framework that focuses on the centrality of the trade of primary goods. Following this framework, a large array of economic historians and political economists have explained Canada's slow development by its dependence upon more developed states and the circuits of international trade. These scholars argue that, within a hierarchical chain established by colonization, European metropolises appropriated the most lucrative natural resources of the colony and hence hindered its development. In addition to this transfer of wealth, periodical shifts from one staple to another created cyclical disturbances that interrupted and slowed down colonial economic activities.⁷¹

A similar argument was put forward by dependency theorists in the 1950s and 1960s. They recognized that, in many instances, the 'capitalist' penetration of less

⁷⁰ Marx, *Capital: Volume 3: A Critique of Political Economy*, 446.

⁷¹ Wallace Clement, *Continental Corporate Power: Economic Elite Linkages between Canada and the United States* (Toronto: McClelland and Stewart, 1977); Donald Creighton, *Canada's First Century 1867-1967* (Toronto: Macmillan and Laurentian Library, 1970); Daniel Drache, "Staple-Ization: A Theory of Canadian Capitalist Development," in *Imperialism, Nationalism and Canada*, ed. Craig Heron (Toronto: New Hogtown Press, 1977), 15-33; Gordon Laxer, *Perspectives on Canadian Economic Development: Class, Staples, Gender, and Elites* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1991); Mel Watkins, "The Political Economy of Growth," in *The New Canadian Political Economy*, ed. Wallace Clement and Glen Williams (Montréal; Kingston: McGill-Queen's Press, 1989), 16-35.

developed societies outside Europe failed to produce self-sustained growth. More often than not, in fact, the expansion of capitalism reinforced the limited basis for economic growth and created new barriers to development.⁷² This insight, it must be noted, was present in Innis's major study of Canadian development, *The Fur Trade in Canada*. Innis conceived of the whole economic and political structure of the colony as geared toward the needs of the imperial metropolis and the transfer of wealth from the former to the latter. In a nutshell, he argued that '[t]he economic history of Canada has been dominated by the discrepancy between the centre and the margin of western civilization [...]. [A]griculture, industry, transportation, trade, finance and governmental activities tend to become subordinate to the production of the staple for a more highly specialized manufacturing community'.⁷³

This view has the merit of systematically taking into account the international dimension of social change beyond the analysis of domestic cultural mentalities and political institutions. It points to the need to look at the relation between developed and underdeveloped societies, for the secret to development—or non-development—does not lay exclusively in domestic political cultures and institutions, but also in the history of colonial relationships. A problem, however, emerges with Innis's theory as individualistic-mechanist presuppositions pervade its focus on the role of staples trade in Canadian economic development. As David McNally has argued, while Innis's view

⁷² Fernando Henrique Cardoso and Enzo Faletto, *Dependency and Development in Latin America* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1979); Andre Gunder Frank, *The Development of Underdevelopment* (Boston: New England Free Press, 1966).

⁷³ *Fur Trade in Canada: An Introduction to Canadian Economic History* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1956), 385.

may well depart from Smith's 'optimistic-liberal' outlook in dismissing the notion that any country integrated into the international division of labour unfailingly experiences economic growth, it nevertheless remains completely compatible with Smith's commodity fetishism.⁷⁴ Innis considered the movement of primary goods—itsself rooted in geographical factors (such as vastness of land and abundance of natural resources) and technological innovations (especially in transportation and communication)—as the prime factor determining development. The resulting neglect of the role of social relations of production in economic life is difficult to surmount within the parameters of the staple theory, for it conceals 'the human, social and historical character of the "things" which seem to govern social life'.⁷⁵

Innis has theorized capitalism as the natural expansion of exchange, rather than considering the origins of capitalist class relations in what Marx termed 'primitive accumulation'. The result is a reification of the 'core' and the 'periphery' which obscures the internal diversity of sociopolitical dynamics that drove the development of different European state/society complexes. On one hand, Innis depicts European metropolises as more or less all the same: economically developed, able to engage in technological innovation, and predatory. On the other hand, he depicts colonies as doomed to underdevelopment, stagnation, and poverty. Even if colonies are deemed as much 'capitalist' as the metropolises because they are part of the international division of labour, they are said to occupy a different 'position' within the capitalist world system

⁷⁴ "Staple Theory as Commodity Fetishism: Marx, Innis and Canadian Political Economy," *Studies in Political Economy* 6 (1981): 4.

⁷⁵ *Ibid.*, 56.

and, as such, are expected to follow a different path of development. Their ‘function’ is to provide natural resources and surplus capital to the core. In that sense, instead of positing one generic model of Smithian development for the whole world—as did, each in their own way, the Montreal and Quebec schools—Innis assumed two generic models: one for core developers and one for dependent developers.

There is a valuable insight in pointing out that peripheral countries in the nineteenth century, developing in a world economy where metropolitan powers had already undergone or were undergoing industrialization, could not possibly replicate the pattern of economic advancement followed by these first developers. Yet, the fact is that there never has been one model of economic advancement, even among European countries, whose diversity of developmental paths was much more pronounced than Innis assumed. In the eighteenth century, for instance, England was the only country where capitalism had developed.⁷⁶ Capitalism was, at that time, well on the way to thoroughly transforming the life of the urban masses with the first Industrial Revolution and the making of the English working-class. Determined to keep its head start, Britain put into place many measures to prevent the industrialization of both its continental rivals and its overseas colonies, passing laws, for instance, that forbade the export of machinery, skilled workers, and manufacturing techniques.

In the first few decades of the nineteenth century, large segments of the continental agrarian elite could content themselves with providing Britain with the grain

⁷⁶ Robert Brenner, “Agrarian Class Structure and Economic Development in Pre-Industrial Europe,” *Past & Present*, no. 70 (1976): 30–75; Robert Brenner, “The Agrarian Roots of European Capitalism,” *Past & Present*, no. 97 (1982): 16–113.

and agricultural products it needed for its rapid development, as this role reinforced their traditional forms of rule and authority. This ‘passing complementarity of differently developing economies’ lasted for a time.⁷⁷ Marx could still, as late as 1870, consider England as the only country that had undergone a full capitalist transformation. It is, he says,

the only country where there are no more peasants and where landed property is concentrated in a few hands. It is the only country where *the capitalist form*, that is to say, combined labour on a large scale under the authority of capitalists, has seized hold of almost the whole of production. It is the only country where the *vast majority of the population consists of wage labourers*. [...] England is the bulwark of landlordism and European capitalism.⁷⁸

By then, however, England’s domination of the world economy was seriously challenged by rival states taking advantage of their backwardness to adopt right away the most up-to-date technologies available without paying the full cost in time, money, and human resources for research and development that the developer did. Among the late developers, Germany provides a remarkable example, as capitalism developed there with such suddenness that ‘the economy was transformed from a largely agrarian, feudal basis in the first half of the nineteenth century to the most modern industrial economy in

⁷⁷ Hannes Lacher and Julian Germann, “Before Hegemony: Britain, Free Trade, and Nineteenth-Century World Order Revisited,” *International Studies Review* 14, no. 1 (2012): 119.

⁷⁸ Original emphasis. Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels, *Marx and Engels Collected Works 1867-70*, vol. 21 (New York: Intl Pub, 1986), 118–119.

the world as the same century drew to a close'.⁷⁹ Clearly, once we start dissociating capitalism from the expansion of trade, the geopolitical expansion of capitalist social relations appears as a much more protracted and diverse process than what has been suggested by either the single narrative of the pan-European rise of the bourgeoisie, or by the binary opposition between core and periphery at the centre of the staple theory.

Pre-Capitalist Social Relations in Early Modern Quebec

Even if one was able to identify the presence of large-scale and standardized manufacturing activities in early modern Quebec, this would not automatically imply the existence of capitalist social relations. As George Comninel has pointed out, manufacture of this kind is found as far back in history as ancient Greece and Rome.⁸⁰ Even huge factories, a concentrated proletariat, and advanced industrial technologies do not in themselves necessarily indicate the presence of capitalist social relations, for they can very well exist in the absence of the specific capitalist discipline of time and labour (in workplaces and beyond) that expresses the generalized subjection of social reproduction to market imperatives. Of course, no date or event allows us to precisely pinpoint the moment in which a society becomes 'capitalist'. It is, nevertheless, important to recognize that the reproduction of modern societies has been gradually, albeit unequally, subjected to market imperatives in a way unprecedented in history.

When one stops assuming that the presence of the fur trade or manufacturing

⁷⁹ Jeremy Green, "Uneven and Combined Development and the Anglo-German Prelude to World War I," *European Journal of International Relations* 20 (2010): 1–24.

⁸⁰ *Rethinking the French Revolution*.

activities meant that capitalist social relations existed in the colony, the fundamental question becomes whether, when, and how direct producers became market dependent and subjected to a capitalist discipline. On this matter, Bernier and Salée have noted that as late as the 1840s, Lower Canada's manufacturing activities were far from market dependent: for the most part, they took place in artisan-owned workshops, where 'the social relations of production rested mostly on a master-servant relationship, a guild-like conception of work and the paternalism so characteristic of the pre-capitalist labour process'.⁸¹ Merchants, moreover, were not progressive agents of change and bearers of capitalist development. As Bernier and Salée have pointed out, merchants played a reactionary role in defending the old order. Many merchants, in fact, were owners of seigneurial titles and seigneurial land.⁸² As such, they had vested interests in the old system and repeatedly demonstrated their support for preserving the agricultural outlook of Lower Canada's economy. They adopted a reserved attitude to the gradual introduction of the free land tenure in the province. The lack of merchants' enthusiasm when the conversion of seigneuries into free and common socage was made possible by constitutional reforms is a case in point:

In 1825, the Canada Tenure Act authorized everyone who so desired to commute their seigneurial property into freehold. Between 1826 and 1836, only twenty-

⁸¹ *The Shaping of Québec Politics and Society: Colonialism, Power, and the Transition to Capitalism in the 19th Century* (New York: Taylor and Francis, 1992), 38. The persistence of similar paternalist relations in Ontario's manufacturing activities in the first half of the nineteenth century has been documented by Bryan D. Palmer in *Working-Class Experience: Rethinking the History of Canadian Labour, 1800-1991* (Toronto: McClelland & Stewart, 1992).

⁸² Bernier and Salée, *The Shaping of Québec Politics and Society*, 42.

one requests in commutation were presented to the Executive Council, less than 10 percent of the total number of seigneuries. None of these requests aimed at converting a whole seignury into free and common socage [...]. Some individuals, such as John Munro and Thomas Bell in Trois-Rivières, even applied for seigneurial land whence they could have just as easily obtained free and common socage land. [...] Clearly, although free land tenure was a possible alternative after 1791 for anyone wishing to own land, the seigneurial system continued to dominate landownership and land management in Quebec until its abolition on 1854.⁸³

A closer examination of the system of freehold tenure also indicates that the strict regulations which were supposed to guarantee a relatively equal access to the land in order to favour the settlement of uninhabited areas were not as rigorously applied as supposed: ‘administrative abuses, monopolization, and speculation by well-to-do merchants and their political associates’ were common practices. These practices had for consequence to limit access to small landed property.⁸⁴ The aftermath of the Conquest was significant in that regard, for the British Crown rewarded many military officers and loyal individuals with large grants of land, establishing networks of patronage and favouritism that facilitated the concentration of land in few hands—especially in the Eastern Townships.

Many of the new owners did not stay in Canada to live on their land but rather

⁸³ Ibid., 42–43.

⁸⁴ Ibid., 51.

went back to their motherland, England, hence becoming *de facto* absentee landlords. ‘These acquisitions’, Bernier and Salée have explained, ‘resulted in the formation of large private domains where immediate exploitation was not a priority. Rather, these lands were to be held for speculative purposes as well as for the social prestige they conferred on their owners because, at that time, landownership still remained the cornerstone of political power’.⁸⁵ On the whole, when acquiring free land tenures in the townships, merchants displayed little enthusiasm in transforming them into productive farming units or manufactures: speculation in land, not improvement, was the motto. It constituted a convenient means of investment in ‘a commodity likely to return a profit. Original grantees of lands who had never entertained the idea of exploiting them were only too happy to sell them to merchants buying them with speculative intentions or to commercialize their natural resources, especially lumber’.⁸⁶

Many regulative systems were implemented in order to curtail the extent of abuses, frauds, and speculation. Among these systems were the ‘Leaders and Associates’ system of land distribution between 1791 and 1826, the location ticket system in 1818, and the New South Wales system in 1825. Merchants and local officials, however, found various (and often ingenious) ways to deprive these systems of their ability to guarantee a fair access to land. Regulations were often actually instrumental in the appropriation of massive amounts of land for speculative purposes. By the 1830s, with demographic pressures and thousands of new British immigrants, the price of land had reached excessive summits, making it impossible for Lower Canadian peasants to buy a plot for

⁸⁵ Ibid., 52.

⁸⁶ Ibid., 53.

themselves. Consequently, many landless peasants and immigrants moved to urban centres, to the United States, or to remote areas recently opened to colonization. Meanwhile, pre-capitalist practices of exploitation did not cease to be exerted on free holding tenures, as dues, charges, and constraints continued to be integrated in deeds of sale, giving the owner the legal power to extract unpaid labour and other means of extortion over surplus labour.⁸⁷

Given the pre-capitalist attributes of Lower Canada, it should not come as a surprise that the debate about Quebec's 'backwardness' has taken on so much importance among Canadian historians and political scientists. Lower Canada's economic development was limited when compared with New England, which had already developed, early in the nineteenth century, capitalist industries along with the expansion of transportation and protective tariffs. While neighbouring Upper Canada was soon to follow the American example as to the pace of development of manufacturing and industrial activities, the case of Lower Canada remains a striking example of arrested development that historians and social scientists have, as of yet, failed to convincingly explain.

Geopolitically Uneven and Socially Combined Development

Building on Salée and Bernier's impressive account of the pre-capitalist character of Quebec up until at least the mid-nineteenth century, my dissertation

⁸⁷ Ibid., 53–56.

endeavours to expand their understanding of how capitalism emerged in Quebec by examining the influence of geopolitical and inter-societal processes on the developmental trajectory of the colonial society. As Bernier and Salée have pointed out, ‘[t]he transition to capitalism in colonies may not be as self-propelled a mechanism as it is in the metropolis’; it proceeds ‘in part from external factors and can thus be precipitated or delayed as a result of metropolitan policies’.⁸⁸ Nevertheless, concerned as they were with responding to the obsession with the metropolis/colony relationship that characterizes Innis’s staple theory, Bernier and Salée did not focus on elaborating on the role played by external factors in the transition. While recognizing the role of colonial economic and administrative policies in the transition to capitalism in Quebec,⁸⁹ they favoured the internal contradictions of the *ancien régime* social framework as the driving force behind the transition.⁹⁰

In this dissertation, I share Bernier and Salée’s conviction that domestic social structures did matter a great deal in shaping the colony’s developmental trajectory. But I also examine how international forces interacted with these structures to influence the transition to capitalism in the province. Here I conceive of the ‘international’ dimension of the transition as including processes that went well beyond the mere relationship with the imperial metropolis to encompass the fact that, once capitalism had given its first

⁸⁸ *Ibid.*, 151.

⁸⁹ “Our boundaries [...] extend into the 1840s, when the precapitalist socioeconomic order is being strongly challenged, and the obstacles that retarded the emergence of the capitalist mode of production in Québec are lifted through changes in colonial economic and administrative policies”. *Ibid.*, x.

⁹⁰ “Between 1760 and 1840, Québec was essentially an *ancien régime* colonial society whose bases of legitimacy were slowly but gradually eroding, not so much because of the influence of ‘international capitalism’ but because the internal contradictions of the socioeconomic order were overwhelming”. *Ibid.*, 10.

revolutionary impulse to production in England, later transitions would inevitably take place in an interstate system radically transformed by geopolitical and economic pressures emanating from Britain and its imperialism. In this sense, Britain can be said to constitute ‘the first and only case of “early” (and thus relatively un-influenced by global factors) industrialization’ and ‘all subsequent cases therefore’ can be considered “late”.⁹¹

Pre-capitalist sets of attitudes and expectations held by lords and peasants under the conditions of coercive ‘extra-economic’ modes of surplus extraction were unable to generate dynamics of self-sustained growth: these sets made it ‘either unnecessary or impossible, or both, to reinvest in expanded improved production in order to profit’.⁹² In this circumstance, it took highly specific and stringent conditions for the first capitalist transformation to emerge out of feudal class struggles in the English countryside. Consequently, it is highly inconceivable that the rare and contradictory form of appropriation that developed in Britain could endogenously develop elsewhere without external influence.

If it had not been for the existence of British capitalism and the changing international environment that it created for other states and societies, one cannot assume that capitalism would have developed at a later point elsewhere in the world. This does not mean that we must conceive of external factors as entirely conducting the development of capitalism in the colonies, for primordial in shaping the process and

⁹¹ Ben Selwyn, “Trotsky, Gerschenkron and the Political Economy of Late Capitalist Development,” *Economy and Society* 40, no. 3 (2011): 429.

⁹² Brenner, “The Origins of Capitalist Development,” 32.

outcomes of late development ‘is how contending social classes shape and respond to development processes through struggles (in order to maximize advantages and displace disadvantages)’.⁹³ Indeed, even when capitalism was introduced to other societies through more or less conscious attempts at emulating features of Britain’s social and economic institutions, these attempts engendered struggles, the outcome of which could not be predicted in advance.⁹⁴

It may thus be more adequate to conceive of late development, not so much in terms of emulation, but in terms of ‘substitute mechanisms’ with which rulers of pre-capitalist societies sought ‘to achieve rapid development without some of the “undesirable” consequences it might yield’.⁹⁵ In this regard, Brenner’s study of the agrarian origins of capitalism is a necessary starting point for understanding processes of late capitalist development. Pointing out the diversity of early modern, regional sociopolitical paths of development and the historical specificity of their spatio-temporal origins, it allows us to break away from teleological and evolutionist readings of history. In itself, however, Brenner’s study reveals little about the historical processes by which capitalism was diffused and the novel nature of agrarian and urban transformations that these helped trigger outside Britain.

One way to look at the puzzle of the geopolitical diffusion of capitalism is

⁹³ Selwyn, “Trotsky, Gerschenkron and the Political Economy of Late Capitalist Development,” 434.

⁹⁴ Justin Rosenberg, “Isaac Deutscher and the Lost History of International Relations,” *New Left Review* 1 (1996); Jamie Allinson and Alexander Anievas, “The Uneven and Combined Development of the Meiji Restoration: A Passive Revolutionary Road to Capitalist Modernity,” *Capital & Class* 34, no. 3 (2010): 469–90; Green, “Uneven and Combined Development and the Anglo-German Prelude to World War I”; Robbie Shilliam, *German Thought and International Relations* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2009).

⁹⁵ Lacher and Germann, “Before Hegemony,” 118; see also Shilliam, *German Thought and International Relations*.

through the notion of uneven and combined development (UCD), originally put forward by Trotsky to ground historical materialism in an understanding of the world economy as an integrated and interactive whole. Trotsky sought to break away from the ‘stagist’ version of Marxism present in most of early twentieth century European Social-Democratic thought and explain why, by the early twentieth century, the international context had evolved in such a way that the possibility of a ‘bourgeois revolution’ in late developing societies had been ruled out. In the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, stagism was so rampant that most social theories ‘tended to believe that societies and history moved through progressive stages until they reached some kind of emancipatory ideal (which they defined very differently), a sort of utopian stasis’.⁹⁶ Against this view, Trotsky argued that historical materialism is a method of social investigation that cannot determine the actual content of what is to be analyzed or provide, in Baruch Knei-Paz’s words, ‘in advance all the possible particular political forms which social relations may give rise to’.⁹⁷ In Trotsky’s perspective, the analysis needs to reflect upon both the universality and the peculiarity of specific paths of development, rather than ‘postulate in advance, or arrive at, an inevitable internal structure for this framework’.⁹⁸

Despite some scattered references to UCD as a universal law—speaking of unevenness, for instance, as ‘the most general law of the historic process’⁹⁹—Trotsky’s critique of stagism must be seen as an early critique of positivism, for it conceives of

⁹⁶ Gabriel Kolko, *After Socialism: Reconstructing Critical Social Thought* (New York: Routledge, 2006), 2.

⁹⁷ *The Social and Political Thought of Leon Trotsky* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1978), 114.

⁹⁸ *Ibid.*

⁹⁹ Leon Trotsky, *The History of the Russian Revolution*, 1930, Chapter 1, <http://www.marxists.org>.

world history as an open, dialectical, and contradictory process, the outcome of which is impossible to predict in advance. As IR theorist Justin Rosenberg has explained, the ‘key’ for Trotsky ‘was quite simply that the development of backward societies took place under the pressure of an already existing world market, dominated by more advanced capitalist powers’.¹⁰⁰ ‘[M]ost of the examples he studied lay within the modern period, leaving undeveloped any claim we might want to make about the transhistorical generality of the phenomenon’.¹⁰¹ Indeed, Trotsky never theoretically considered the universal and transhistorical character of UCD in a systematic fashion; rather, he took as his starting point ‘the straightforward empirical observation that the historical world of capitalism did not appear simultaneously everywhere out of the same social and cultural conditions’.¹⁰²

However, in his efforts to introduce the notion of UCD into debates about International Relations, Rosenberg has himself ‘relaxed the caution’ first shown with regard to the idea of a *law* of UCD, ‘for while the concrete pattern of socio-cultural diversity at any given time is contingent, the fact of this diversity itself is not’.¹⁰³ He has subsequently attempted to make of Trotsky’s metaphors of the ‘whip of external necessity’ and of the ‘advantage of backwardness’ universal (rather than historically specific) mechanisms within a grand theory of UCD understood, at the most general level of abstraction, to specify how the conceptual attributes of ‘unevenness’ and

¹⁰⁰ Rosenberg, “Isaac Deutscher and the Lost History of International Relations,” 1996, 5.

¹⁰¹ Justin Rosenberg, “Why Is There No International Historical Sociology?,” *European Journal of International Relations* 12, no. 3 (2006): 314.

¹⁰² Rosenberg, “Isaac Deutscher and the Lost History of International Relations,” 1996, 6.

¹⁰³ Rosenberg, “Why Is There No International Historical Sociology?,” 317.

‘combination’ provide an explanation of all types of inter-societal relations from the dawn of humanity to the contemporary era. This, of course, could quite hardly be closer to the traditional objective of positivist thought in IR, namely to formulate a true ‘science’ of international relations based on a methodological preference for general theories. Ultimately, Rosenberg postulates that the social world has regularities that can be discovered through the theory of UCD, seen as the basic regularity of human development as a whole.

While positivistic tendencies in Rosenberg’s theory of UCD are highly problematic, the observation that late developers could benefit from the ‘privilege’ of backwardness by subsequently making ‘leaps’ in the compass of social evolution nevertheless raises interesting issues about the international dimension of social change in the modern era. The crux of Trotsky’s notion of UCD was that advanced societies exert decisive influence and pressure on the transformation of less advanced states and societies, for, as Trotsky pointed out, the organization of backward societies ‘under the whip of external necessity [...] is compelled to make leaps’.¹⁰⁴ The whip of external understood by Trotsky as the relentless military pressure of the most powerful societies on other countries, for this ‘is the continued condition under which the backward polity strives to maintain its existence through assimilating the perceived means and sources of the power of its adversaries, turning “the foe into a tutor”’.¹⁰⁵ In that sense, once capitalism had developed in England, revolutionizing the means and conditions of

¹⁰⁴ *The History of the Russian Revolution*, Chapter 1.

¹⁰⁵ Kamran Matin, “Uneven and Combined Development and ‘Revolution of Backwardness’: The Iranian Constitutional Revolution, 1906-1911,” in *100 Years of Permanent Revolution: Results and Prospects*, ed. Bill Dunn and Hugo Radice (London; Ann Arbor: Pluto Press, 2006), 123.

production, continental early modern states subject to geopolitical and economic pressures emanating from England acquired a new and specific historical character in responding to this external influence, without themselves immediately becoming capitalist. 'Combination' thus refers to this drawing together of pre-capitalist and capitalist social relations.

One reason why the establishment of capitalist social relations of production followed a wide variety of paths is that capitalism's expansion beyond England took place within an already-existing interstate system characterized by a much greater heterogeneity than simplistic notions of 'core' and 'periphery', or for that matter 'Europe', account for. As Teschke has pointed out, while France, Austria, Spain, Sweden, Russia, Denmark-Norway, Brandenburg-Prussia, and the Papal States constituted a diverse collection of absolutist regimes, the Holy Roman Empire 'remained a confederal elective monarchy until 1806. The Dutch General Estates established an independent oligarchic merchant republic. Poland was a "crowned aristocratic republic" and Switzerland a free confederation of cantons. [...] Italian merchant republics struggled against being transformed into monarchies'. By contrast, in Britain, the feudal regime was transformed through an 'enclosure' movement in the countryside and the establishment of the first constitutional parliamentary monarchy into the first capitalist economy.

The diverse forms taken by European state/civil society complexes were themselves the long-term result, as Teschke and Lacher have argued, 'of centuries of social conflicts over rights of domination and appropriation over land and people

amongst pre-capitalist classes. These conflicts stretch right back to the dissolution of the Carolingian Empire and finally crystallized in a primarily dynastic multi-state system'.¹⁰⁶ In this regard, it is far from certain that the highly diverse nature of these conflicts and their outcomes can be grasped by UCD formulated as a 'macro-structuralis[t] conceptions of world history, which press[es] the rich variety of historically diverse political geographies into a single covering law'.¹⁰⁷ Specific historical mechanisms such as the 'advantage of backwardness', for instance, may well have operated in the case of some late developers, but for many others, they did not. Similarly, the 'whip of external necessity' understood as military pressures may well have been felt by some states in certain times and certain places (such as the late nineteenth century in Europe), but the same certainly cannot be said of all polities at all times and in all places in history. Ultimately, as Teschke has explained,

UCD contains no theoretical categories to account for change. For the notions of 'advance' and 'backwardness', coupled to the notions of the 'whip of external necessity' and 'the privilege of backwardness', are temporal metaphors for

¹⁰⁶ Teschke and Lacher, "The Changing 'Logics' of Capitalist Competition," 570; See also Teschke, *The Myth of 1648*; Benno Teschke, "Bourgeois Revolution, State Formation and the Absence of the International," *Historical Materialism* 13 (2005): 3–26; Benno Teschke, "Debating 'The Myth of 1648': State Formation, the Interstate System and the Emergence of Capitalism in Europe—A Rejoinder," *International Politics* 43 (2006): 531–73; Hannes Lacher, "Making Sense of the International System: The Promises and Pitfalls of Contemporary Marxist Theories of International Relations," *Historical Materialism and Globalization*, 2002, 147–64; Hannes Lacher, "International Transformation and the Persistence of Territoriality: Toward a New Political Geography of Capitalism," *Review of International Political Economy* 12 (2005): 26–52; Hannes Lacher, *Beyond Globalization: Capitalism, Territoriality, and the International Relations of Modernity* (London and New York: Routledge, 2006).

¹⁰⁷ Benno Teschke, "IR Theory, Historical Materialism and the False Promise of International Historical Sociology," *Spectrum: Journal of Global Studies* 6, no. 1 (2014): 66.

unevenness, which stand themselves in need of explanation. Likewise, the category of development is only a result of social change (a manifestation of social change) and never the cause of change in itself. This suggests that the subject of change has to be re-anchored in a category outside UCD: ‘human practice’.¹⁰⁸

The focus on human practice points out the need to place social conflicts at the centre of our analysis without presupposing the forms they take or the nature of the political spaces in which they take place. After all, it is social agency that always determines the complex ways in which structural conditions are confronted, adapted to, or transformed—for instance, ‘whether or not the “whip of external necessity” holds causally and whether its effects turn into the disadvantages rather than advantages of backwardness’.¹⁰⁹

Concluding Remarks: Bringing in the ‘Peasant Question’

To understand the economic evolution of North America in the colonial period, as well as the eventual development of capitalism on the continent, the social conflicts shaped by and shaping this transformation must be brought to light. In this regard, one of the central issues that needs to be addressed is the ‘peasant question’, also often referred to as the ‘agrarian question’ in political economy. For the purposes of this

¹⁰⁸ Ibid., 33.

¹⁰⁹ Ibid., 36.

research, the peasant question queries the consequences of the continued existence of large peasantries for social and economic development during the period when industrial capitalism was emerging as a dominant feature of the northeastern United States; it demands how peasants in Quebec and commercial farmers in Ontario responded to or resisted the new conditions and imperatives imposed therein. The peasant question is not merely ‘historical’, a question of the past, but one with continuing relevance, dealing as it does with one of the most significant socio-economic transformations still unfolding across the world to this day, that is, the dramatic change in the structure of traditional societies away from agriculture as the primary economic activity to the conditions typical of Global North countries, where only a tiny fraction of the whole labour force is employed in agriculture. As such, the peasant question continues to attract attention in its many variants, taking the form today of an inquiry into the question of ‘whether, and if so, how, the location of small-scale petty commodity food and farm production within contemporary capitalism has been reconfigured during the era of neoliberal globalisation’.¹¹⁰

Among those that debated the question at the turn of the twentieth century was Karl Kautsky, whose concern was with ‘whether, and how, capital is seizing hold of agriculture, revolutionizing it, making old forms of production and property untenable and creating the necessity for new ones’.¹¹¹ Kautsky’s question, I argue, cannot be answered in the abstract, since, in any given historical scenario, different socio-

¹¹⁰ Haroon Akram-Lodhi and Cristobal Kay, “Surveying the Agrarian Question (part 1): Unearthing Foundations, Exploring Diversity,” *The Journal of Peasant Studies* 37, no. 1 (2010): 177.

¹¹¹ Karl Kautsky, *The Agrarian Question* (London: Zwan Publications, 1988), 12.

economic processes operating through different mechanisms and resulting in diverging outcomes can be observed. Understanding the peasant question in England, and the sociohistorical processes by which capitalism revolutionized agriculture there, means understanding the specificities of ‘agrarian capitalism’, a unique, transitional mode of agriculture that was found only in England. It consisted of a three class system—the ‘triad’ of landlords, tenant farmers, and wage labourers—never to be reproduced outside England. While English tenant farmers were required to have sufficient capital to engage in the normal forms of up and down husbandry, the landlords were generally willing to work with such tenants in further improving the land. The tenants were not exploited—they were capitalists.¹¹²

In aiming to theorize the ‘peasant question’ in the colonial context of early modern Canada, this dissertation proposes that it cannot be understood according to the English ‘model’. The conditions under which capitalist tenant farmers were able to take leases in England were very different than the conditions under which tenant farmers in other societies had access to tenancy. Given the predominant agrarian social relations of North American colonies, ‘the explanation of state-variations’ in this context nevertheless requires, like in those of Europe up to the late nineteenth century, ‘an extension of the field of social forces to include, at a minimum, the constitutive role of the peasantry in the differential resolution of class conflicts over the sources and modalities of extraction, property-relations and the power-configurations (state-forms)

¹¹² George Comninel, “English Feudalism and the Origins of Capitalism,” *Journal of Peasant Studies* 27, no. 4 (2000): 1–53.

that institutionalised these conflicts'.¹¹³ The peasantry was not a passive and neutral agent simply responding to structural imperatives imposed from above, but a decisive actor in changing the destiny of North America. There, social conflicts that gave shape to colonial societies had their origins in the multilinear and interactive process of the colonization of the New World. It is in the outcome of these 'conflicts—the reaffirmation of the old property relations or their destruction and the consequent establishment of a new structure—that is to be found perhaps the key to the problem of long-term economic development'.¹¹⁴

From the outset of colonization, European imperial powers faced challenges of a different genre than those faced in Europe, as they had to construct and manage new societies in distant lands. Interpretations that overlook this fact cannot but provide an incomplete account of the contradictions that drove the multiple transitions to capitalism in North America. We must have an appreciation of the nature of colonial-state formation which took place prior to the development of capitalism to be able to properly grasp the sociopolitical twists and turns that the colonial society experienced as it was confronted with British imperialism and integrated within its empire. In Ontario, for instance, as in the northeastern United States, no three class system of agrarian capitalism ever developed. Instead, household-producers who were initially relatively impervious to 'market discipline' became petty-commodity producers as their dependence on the market progressively increased under specific historical conditions.

¹¹³ Teschke, "IR Theory, Historical Materialism and the False Promise of International Historical Sociology," 20.

¹¹⁴ Brenner, "The Agrarian Roots of European Capitalism," 31–32.

Petty-commodity producing farms continued to rely on family labour with no, or only few, and usually occasional, wage workers.

By contrast, in Quebec some aspects of the *ancien régime* were reinforced in the encounter, at the same time as new institutions, identities, and political subjectivities left their imprint on the colony. In other words, we need to understand colonial Canada as part of capitalism's progressive historical development and incorporation of pre-capitalist regions through the geo-territorial configuration of the states-system that existed in Europe, but which needed to be re-created in the North American colonial context. Class struggles therefore should be theorized as something located within the wider structures of the international rather than separated from it. As such, an historical analysis of the socially uneven and geopolitically combined sets of social-property relations of the early modern Atlantic world may well provide the surest starting point to understand some the differences that characterized the colonial development of North America, and particularly the fact that, for centuries, the St. Lawrence Valley was marked by a distinct, society-wide, pre-capitalist developmental dynamic that resulted in a slow pace of agricultural technological progress, whose roots are to be found in the seigneurial regime, understood as a socio-political legacy of French absolutist imperialism.

As I will discuss in what follows, the preservation of the seigneurial regime by British authorities willing to ensure the continuation of many social and political institutions inherited from French absolutism to cope with the difficulties of ruling such a distant colony, in the context of growing unrest in the Thirteen British American

colonies, had fundamental consequences, not only for the development of the province of Quebec itself, but also for the neighbouring province of Ontario. Given the particularity of each province, how capital seized hold of agriculture and revolutionized it in each case can only be understood through a radical historicization that sheds light on the complexity of social, political, and economic forces.

2.

Colonial State-Formation in New France

Building on the composite image of the historiography provided by Yves Zoltvany, forty years ago, Marie-Ève Ouellet has recently noted that the historical studies of the state in New-France still tend to follow one of two tendencies: the first focuses on government structures and institutions; the other on the socio-economic context of government's interactions with the colonial society, in other words, on governance practices.¹¹⁵ The institutional tendency is characterized by its attention to the effectiveness of the system and its different institutional components, especially the governor, the *intendant*, the Sovereign Council and the system of justice. According to Ouellet, because the links between these components are rarely made clear, the result of the institutional approach is 'a fragmented picture of the state'—a picture further fragmented by a reluctance to study the colonial state in relation to the metropolis: '[o]ne searches in vain studies dealing simultaneously with the central government and the colonial administration. This results in two historiographies that are fairly compartmentalized, artificially perpetuating the division between administrative realities'.¹¹⁶

¹¹⁵ "Structures et pratiques dans l'historiographie de l'État en Nouvelle-France," *Bulletin d'histoire politique* 18, no. 1 (2009).

¹¹⁶ *Ibid.* (my translation)

What is more, ‘the question of the existence of a colonial state, and hence the use of the concept, has not been clearly resolved’.¹¹⁷ If this is the case with studies that have focused on institutions, it is perhaps even more so with studies that focus on governance practices. These studies tend to look at the state through a biographical approach of officers in charge without really ‘considering the existence of the state beyond its practitioners’.¹¹⁸ This approach has the merit of bringing attention to the interdependence between the administrators and the population, including issues that remained invisible until recently with regards to ‘policy-making processes, communication imperatives and the political culture’.¹¹⁹ The approach remains limited, however, by a historical periodization that follows the succession of colonial administrators and their policies without an attempt to identify more general tendencies and evolutions in the workings of the state. With the exception of Marxists historians and sociologists whose main contributions date back to the 1970s and the 1980s,¹²⁰ both the institutionalist and the biographical approaches to the study of the state in New France have adopted an empiricist approach that devotes little attention to *theorizing* the state.

This contrasts sharply with the consideration given to theorization of the state in the British historiography, for instance in the work of Philip Corrigan and Derek

¹¹⁷ Ibid. (my translation)

¹¹⁸ Ibid. (my translation)

¹¹⁹ Ibid. (my translation)

¹²⁰ Nicole Laurin-Frenette, *Production de l'état et formes de la nation* (Montréal: Nouvelle optique, 1978); Gilles Bourque, *Question nationale et classes sociales au Québec (1760-1840)* (Montréal: Éditions Parti pris, 1970); Gilles Bourque and Anne Legaré, *Le Québec: la question nationale* (Paris: F. Maspero, 1979); Bernier and Salée, *The Shaping of Québec Politics and Society*; Gérald Bernier, “Sur quelques effets de la rupture structurelle engendrée par la Conquête au Québec : 1760-1854,” *Revue d'histoire de l'Amérique française* 35, no. 1 (1981): 69–95; Lise Pilon-Lê, “Le régime seigneurial au Québec: contribution à une analyse de la transition au capitalisme,” *Les Cahiers du socialisme*, no. 6 (1980): 132–68; Denis Monière, “L'utilité du concept de mode de production des petits producteurs pour l'historiographie de la Nouvelle-France,” *Revue d'histoire de l'Amérique française* 29, no. 4 (1976): 483–502.

Sayer,¹²¹ or in the work of historians immersed in the business of studying ‘history from below’, such as Christopher Hill.¹²² Among the latter, E. P. Thompson studied everyday struggles and political agitation while paying due consideration to the state, which he theorized as a locus of appropriation and exploitation.¹²³ Building on Thompson’s works as well as on Morton Fried’s anthropological definition of the state—as ‘the complex of institutions by means of which the power of the society is organized on a basis superior to kinship’,¹²⁴ a set of ‘formal, specialized instruments of coercion’ that achieves ‘paramountcy in the application of naked force to social problems’¹²⁵—Wood has argued that in performing certain common social functions, the state implies ‘a social division of labour and the appropriation by some social groups of surplus produced by others’.¹²⁶ This definition is broad enough as to be able to encompass the very different forms of politically organized subjection in history without presupposing their nature and their meaning.

Whether or not state institutions were intended from the outset as a means of appropriation and exploitation, they historically developed ‘as a means of appropriating surplus product—perhaps even as a means of intensifying production in order to

¹²¹ Philip Corrigan and Derek Sayer, *The Great Arch: English State Formation as Cultural Revolution* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1991).

¹²² Christopher Hill, *The Century of Revolution, 1603-1714* (London: Routledge, 2001); Christopher Hill, *Change and Continuity in Seventeenth-Century England* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1991).

¹²³ Edward Palmer Thompson, *The Making of the English Working Class* (Rome: IICA, 1963); Edward Palmer Thompson, “Eighteenth-Century English Society: Class Struggle without Class?,” *Social History* 3, no. 2 (1978): 133–65.

¹²⁴ Morton Fried, *The Evolution of Political Society: An Essay in Political Anthropology* (New York: Random House, 1968), 229.

¹²⁵ *Ibid.*, 230. In his efforts to avoid reifying the state as a unified entity endowed with volition, Philip Abrams has preferred to speak of ‘politically organized subjection’ rather than using the term ‘state’ itself. For an interesting reflection on this issue, see “Notes on the Difficulty of Studying the State (1977),” *Journal of Historical Sociology* 1, no. 1 (1988): 63.

¹²⁶ Wood, *Democracy Against Capitalism*, 32.

increase surplus—and as a mode of distributing that surplus in one way or another’.¹²⁷ The division between producers and appropriators entailed by the evolution of a specialized, coercive public authority implies the existence of classes, which should be defined broadly enough to include

all divisions between direct producers and the appropriators of their surplus labour, even cases in which economic power is scarcely distinguishable from political power, where private property remains undeveloped, and where class and state are in effect one. The essential point is the recognition that some of the major divergences among various historical patterns have to do with the nature and sequence of relations between public power and private appropriation.¹²⁸

This constitutes the central premise of my dissertation, one that has been also shared, and expanded in insightful ways, by Benno Teschke in his analysis of *The Myth of 1648*. In a passage worth quoting at length, Teschke has argued that ‘historically and regionally specific property regimes and their associated conflicts over the terms and chances of reproduction between and among classes’ provide a solid foundation on which to lay out the

wider analysis of the constitution, operation and transformation of different forms of rule, different spatial orders and different geopolitical dynamics. The

¹²⁷ Ibid.

¹²⁸ Ibid., 40.

historical construction of different polities in their multilinearity and differential temporalities and the nature of their interactions are grounded in conflicting domestic strategies of reproduction over property and power. Correlatively, the focus on domestic sources of power has to be complemented by the incorporation of the domestic consequences of the international co-existence and mutual co-determination of diverse polities for their respective ‘national’ trajectories—as they are bound together in a wider geopolitical order. In other words, processes of differential class- and state formation have to be interrogated simultaneously in their internal and external dimensions.¹²⁹

In this chapter, I argue that there is a lot to gain from theorizing the state and classes of New France in the light of these definitions, for they provide general starting points to identify the driving forces behind the development of any social formation, that is, the imperatives and constraints associated with specific forms of organization of power. There was no modern notion of strong territoriality or geographically unified sovereign statehood in New France. Nor were there elaborated governmental agencies with personnels of considerable size or efficient means to surveil and rule the population. There nevertheless existed a set of property relations that organized and supported a basic apparatus of administration as well as a complex of political rights and obligations among various classes attempting to reproduce themselves through producing a surplus product or appropriating the surplus product of others. Even in the absence of a highly

¹²⁹ “Debating ‘The Myth of 1648’: State Formation, the Interstate System and the Emergence of Capitalism in Europe - A Rejoinder,” 533–534.

centralized, uniformly administered, and clearly delimited state apparatus with sovereign powers, it is thus possible to speak of a process of ‘state-formation’ in the colony.

Before turning to the process of colonial state-formation, I first examine the process of absolutist state-formation that has occurred in the French metropolis during the fifteenth to seventeenth centuries, for the French absolutist state provides a comparative starting point to identify the similarities and differences of the socio-political institutions that were introduced in New France. Central among these institutions was the seigneurial regime—the mode of land tenure privileged by the French Crown for colonizing New France—which we gain to locate within the broader dynamic of reproduction of the colony taken as a totality. I conclude that if the geographical distance overseas conferred upon state-formation in New France a degree of autonomy that had no equivalent in continental French provinces, the logic of reproduction of the colonial ruling class remained resolutely ‘absolutist’ as it had more to do with access to the state than to the parcellized sovereignty of the seigneurial regime. The fact that only a small surplus could be appropriated from the peasantry in the colonial context softened the competition between the seigneurs and the absolutist state, whose main interests did not lay in the direct political appropriation of the peasant’s surplus as in France, but in commercial activities embedded in the geopolitics of mercantilist rivalries.

From Feudal Rent-Taking Lords to the Absolutist Tax/Office State

Recent contributions of historical sociology to the discipline of International Relations have shown that if territorial statehood consolidated itself in the early modern period, it was not however as a result of the rise of capitalism. Instead, the centralization of state authority and the concomitant differentiation between domestic and international realms was the result of the consolidation of absolutist social relations of sovereignty, which were themselves a product of the logic of political accumulation at the origin of feudal state-building in the late Middle Ages.¹³⁰ When capitalism emerged it had an impact on the territorially defined states-system, but it did not create it. The inter-state system already existed. In this sense, only once the social dynamics that led to the differentiation of diverging and plural paths of state-formation and economic development in the early modern states-system have been identified does it become possible to proceed with the historical reconstruction of the diffusion of capitalism and its logic of political organization within the pluriverse created by absolutist state formation beyond England.

One of the paths of state-formation taken by European states is that of absolutism, exemplified by seventeenth-century France. The society of *ancien régime* was complex and historians have never ceased to argue about whether its form of government was truly absolutist or how far its authority was absolute. French historian Pierre Goubert, for instance, described the society of the *ancien régime* as an intricate

¹³⁰ Teschke, *The Myth of 1648*; Lacher, *Beyond Globalization: Capitalism, Territoriality, and the International Relations of Modernity*; Teschke and Lacher, “The Changing ‘Logics’ of Capitalist Competition.”

society, ‘a conglomeration of mostly centuries-old, sometimes thousand-year-old elements [...] an immense, turbid river carrying dead hulks of trees, rank weeds torn from its banks, and living organisms of all ages and sizes’.¹³¹ The seigneurial system was one component among others within this complicated conglomeration, and its significance for the whole society had long been transformed by the rise of a new nobility. ‘The business affairs of the Grands, the clergy and the king’, Goubert explained, had ‘brought new blood to the French nobility, so that while the ancient feudal nobility tended for the most part to derive their income from landed sources, the total number of the nobility was increased and replenished by altogether different types of revenue’.¹³²

The most outstanding members of the new nobility had backgrounds in commerce and finance, as well as tax-gathering, army provisioning and ‘a whole system of collections, loans, advances and deductions from the revenues of others’.¹³³ Under these conditions at the eve of the French Revolution, seigneurial dues and tithes were part and parcel of a broader critique within which figured prominently the ‘marketing of offices, and the inequality in its taxation, law and concept of man’.¹³⁴ Far from dominating the countryside in the same manner as they had done during the Middle-Ages, the seigneurs were increasingly out-competed by the state. As another historian puts it, the poor continued to produce ‘his main crop for the subsistence of his own family and remained the typical occupier of the soil’, yet he grew ‘overburdened by a

¹³¹ Pierre Goubert, *The Ancien Régime: French Society, 1600-1750* (New York: Harper & Row, 1974), 17.

¹³² *Ibid.*, 191.

¹³³ *Ibid.*

¹³⁴ *Ibid.*, 7.

collection of charges among which national taxation’, not seigneurial dues, ‘might be the heaviest’.¹³⁵

The historical significance of this transformation is such that recent studies have called for theorizing the absolutist state as ‘a *new* structure of class society’ rather than a mere reassertion of feudalism.¹³⁶ To better appreciate this theoretical innovation, one gains by first going back to the considerable differences that existed between manorialism, which succeeded the fall of the Roman Empire, and the diversity of feudal regimes that replaced manorialism around the turn of the millennium. As George Comninel pointed out, what had emerged in France following the post-Carolingian collapse of the Frankish kingdom of Gaul and the transformation of manorial lordship, was the parcellized sovereignty of the *seigneurie*.¹³⁷

The seigneurie increased the authority of the landlords who appropriated the power of the ban, which under Frankish political and territorial institutions represented the power to command men. With their new powers seigneurs were able to impose new ‘duties, levies, and obligations’ as well as a new ‘structure of dependency and surplus appropriation’ upon a collection of estates held as fiefs.¹³⁸ The foundation of the French lordship thus rested more in their jurisdiction over territories than in the personal status of servitude of those inhabiting the seigneuries.¹³⁹ While increasingly associated with territory rather than with personal status, the burden of exactions that had previously

¹³⁵ Ralph Davis, *The Rise of the Atlantic Economies*. (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1973), 121.

¹³⁶ Comninel, “English Feudalism and the Origins of Capitalism,” 21.

¹³⁷ *Ibid.*, 19.

¹³⁸ *Ibid.*

¹³⁹ *Ibid.*

characterized manorialism continued to exist and ‘[i]ts full range of primarily jurisdictional levies—*cens, dîmes, lods et ventes, champarts, banalités*, and the like—remained an important part of the extraction of surplus from the French peasantry right down to the Revolution, though increasingly in conjunction with burdens imposed by the central jurisdiction of the absolutist state’.¹⁴⁰

Like Comninel, Benno Teschke has theorized the French state as a complex structure of exploitation that rested ‘primarily on the French peasantry, whose pre-capitalist and non-market dependent forms of reproduction had to carry the burden of excessive and punitive rates of taxation [...] levied primarily through a more centralized, although still personalized, form of rule’.¹⁴¹ In the process of absolutist state-formation, the means of accumulation of the ruling class had become less and less dependent ‘on autonomous and independent feudal rights’ and more and more ‘on state-sanctioned privileges,’ as the Crown energetically supported the formation of the new *noblesse de robe* endowed with administrative public powers in matters of taxation, justice and war.¹⁴² The creation of this *noblesse de robe* and the centralizing powers of the monarchy appropriating a ‘centralized rent’ that competed with local noble powers of appropriation went directly against the interests of the old feudal class.¹⁴³

¹⁴⁰ Ibid., 20–21.

¹⁴¹ Teschke, “Debating ‘The Myth of 1648’: State Formation, the Interstate System and the Emergence of Capitalism in Europe - A Rejoinder,” 538; See also George Comninel, “Historical Materialist Sociology and Revolutions,” in *Handbook of Historical Sociology*, ed. Gerard Delanty and Isin Engin (London: Sage, 2003), 92.

¹⁴² Teschke, “Debating ‘The Myth of 1648’: State Formation, the Interstate System and the Emergence of Capitalism in Europe - A Rejoinder,” 538, 554.

¹⁴³ Teschke, *The Myth of 1648*, 160–161; William Beik, *Absolutism and Society in Seventeenth-Century France: State Power and Provincial Aristocracy in Languedoc* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1985); Roger Mettam, *Power and Faction in Louis XIV’s France* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1988); Philip

In the process of being integrated within the state, the aristocracy was reorganized and transformed into a patrimonial group comprising office owners and beneficiaries of royal favours. This apparatus had been created by the king in direct competition with the powers, property and privileges of the local seigneurs, who often resisted and rose in rebellion against the court, for instance during the *Fronde*, a series of civil wars that shook France between 1648 and 1653. Despite the opposition of certain groups of nobles, the monarch expanded a unified government by building ‘its own dependent following of politico-military servants through granting them various forms of politically constituted private property—initially, fiefs with seigneurial dues, but, more characteristically, income-yielding offices, dependent on the monarchy’s power to tax land’.¹⁴⁴

France and England: Two Different Patterns of Historical Development

The long-term of pattern of economic evolution of England radically differed from the pattern of economic evolution of France. In England, indeed, the adoption of capitalist strategies of reproduction by the aristocracy set the development of the state on a completely different trajectory, away from the construction of an absolutist tax/office

Hoffman, “Early Modern France, 1450–1700,” in *Fiscal Crises, Liberty, and Representative Government, 1450–1789*, ed. Philip Hoffman and Kathryn Norberg (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1994); David Parker, *Class and State in Ancien Régime France: The Road to Modernity?* (London: Routledge, 1996); Julian Swann, *Provincial Power and Absolute Monarchy: The Estates General of Burgundy, 1661-1790* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003).

¹⁴⁴ Robert Brenner, *Merchants and Revolution: Commercial Change, Political Conflict, and London’s Overseas Traders, 1550-1653* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1993), 654.

state. Not only did the main source of income laid in capitalist agriculture rather than in offices, but the fact that landlords dominated land ownership in England, and also constituted the ‘Parliamentary class’ that determined the tax rates, in the context of there being no permanent land tax, made the idea of heavy taxation much less attractive to the rulers.¹⁴⁵ None of this, of course, was accidental; it all conformed to two different patterns of historical development. In such different social-property regimes, peasant struggles themselves took on distinct forms, as in England peasant revolts continued to directly target the landlords in a desperate attempt to safeguard what was left of their rights to property in the face of capitalist pressures, while ‘[i]n France the target of peasant revolt was, typically, the crushing taxation of the absolutist state’.¹⁴⁶

The *ancien régime* ended up weakened, especially during and after the Seven Years’ War, by ‘a permanent state of fiscal crisis and, finally, to state collapse under the geopolitical pressure exerted by a qualitatively distinct and comparatively superior capitalist state/society complex: post-1688 England’.¹⁴⁷ Here Teschke’s analysis probes the question of the international ‘as a constitutive moment, and not merely as a contingent or residual quantity, into the social dynamics of early-modern revolutions and the developmental trajectories of state formation’.¹⁴⁸ ‘The de-feudalization and de-militarization of the French nobility’, he pointed out, ‘imparted a form of sovereignty

¹⁴⁵ Ibid.

¹⁴⁶ Brenner, “Agrarian Class Structure and Economic Development in Pre-Industrial Europe,” 70–71; Between 1661 and 1789 in France, on 8 528 instances of rebellion, only 5.1% targeted the seigneurial regime, while 39.1% were targeting taxation. See Jean Nicolas, *La rébellion française. Mouvements populaires et conscience sociale, 1661-1789*, Seuil (Paris, 2002), 609.

¹⁴⁷ Teschke, “Debating ‘The Myth of 1648’: State Formation, the Interstate System and the Emergence of Capitalism in Europe - A Rejoinder,” 552.

¹⁴⁸ Teschke, “Bourgeois Revolution, State Formation and the Absence of the International,” 4.

that gave territory a much sharper definition compared to the “parcellized sovereignty” of medieval times’ even if the absolutist sovereignty associated with the tax/office state had nothing to do with capitalist sovereignty because social-property relations continued to be personalized and politically constituted.¹⁴⁹ As he explains,

absolutist-dynastic territoriality was no longer internally fragmented and challenged since the feudal nobility had lost [...] their independent and autonomous territorial bases of power. [...] This internal pacification of royal-aristocratic relations [...] was, however, not matched externally in form of a static geographical scale of territory due to the Crown’s involvement in interdynastic struggles over territory.¹⁵⁰

The result of Teschke’s historical reconstruction is a research agenda insisting on how geopolitical and fiscal pressures emanating from Britain generated a need for ‘modernizing’ projects among continental polities in the context of regionally pre-existing class constellations. The kind of geopolitical and fiscal pressures exerted on distinct polities and the way these various pressures were experienced by different social classes in regionally differentiated sets of social-property regimes resulted in a wide-ranging set of outcomes. In some cases, these outcomes took the form of violent or sudden change disrupting existing class structures and displacing centres of power. The

¹⁴⁹ Teschke, “Debating ‘The Myth of 1648’: State Formation, the Interstate System and the Emergence of Capitalism in Europe - A Rejoinder,” 538.

¹⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, 550.

political tensions and social conflicts that emerged in the process had consequences not only for domestic fault lines but also for interaction at the broader level of international relations: ‘class relations, territorial scales and state forms’ were renegotiated and transformed by power struggles and social conflicts, ultimately resulting in cumulatively connected and internationally mediated combination of the old and the new.¹⁵¹

France, for instance, was caught in a ‘downward spiral of warfare, royal debt-accumulation, office creation, over-taxation and inability to repay loans to an increasingly dissatisfied class of private financiers, both noble and bourgeois, that finally led to intense intra-ruling-class conflict over the form of the French state and the French Revolution’.¹⁵² By contrast, English feudalism underwent a different trajectory as peasant producers ended up ‘neither bound to the soil nor subject to arbitrary will’; they ‘enjoyed rights equal to those of the lords before the judiciary of the king’.¹⁵³ Comninel has stressed the unique character of this development and located its origins ‘directly from the absence of the *seigneurie banale* in the social relations of English manorial lordship, together with the strength of the monarchy’.¹⁵⁴ It is within this peculiar structure of class relationships that an agricultural revolution took place, one that has been flagrantly absent from agricultural development in France and its colonies.

Slowly, beginning with freehold leases of arable land converted to pasture, with little thought at first of long-term implications, the English landlords—and the

¹⁵¹ Teschke, “Bourgeois Revolution, State Formation and the Absence of the International,” 21.

¹⁵² Ibid.

¹⁵³ Comninel, “English Feudalism and the Origins of Capitalism,” 44.

¹⁵⁴ Ibid.

prosperous tenants increasingly driven by market competition in respect of both production and the terms of leases—created an unprecedented social space where all production was virtually completely ‘freed’ from consideration of the immediate community’s needs. In some cases, especially in certain regions, this primarily took the form of a permanent shift from grain crops to pasture. Yet arable farming too was transformed, by combining greatly increased flocks of sheep (producing manure as well as meat, wool and hide) with more intensive corn production (made possible by the sheep)—‘improved agriculture’. Fallow was eliminated entirely, while, over time, new fodder crops made possible still more intensive sheep-corn farming. Other specialisation emerged as well.¹⁵⁵

The English agricultural revolution allowed for the tremendous development of the entire British economy, including ‘higher productivity rates, sustained, if non-linear, aggregate economic growth, higher rates of urbanization and population growth and a discourse of improvement’.¹⁵⁶ No similar agrarian revolution occurred in early modern France, which nevertheless underwent a significant transformation in the course of the early modern period with the development of absolutism. As a result of its struggle with

¹⁵⁵ Ibid., 47.

¹⁵⁶ Teschke, “Debating ‘The Myth of 1648’: State Formation, the Interstate System and the Emergence of Capitalism in Europe - A Rejoinder,” 559; See also Mark Overton, *Agricultural Revolution in England: The Transformation of the Agrarian Economy 1500-1850* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996); David Ormrod, *English Grain Exports and the Structure of Agrarian Capitalism, 1700-1760* (Hull: Hull University Press, 1985); E. L. Jones, ed., *Agriculture and Economic Growth in England, 1650-1815*, Debates in Economic History (London: Methuen, 1967); E.A. Wrigley, “Urban Growth and Agricultural Change: England and the Continent in the Early Modern Period,” *Journal of Interdisciplinary History* 15, no. 4 (Spring 1985); Leandro Prados de la Escosura, ed., *Exceptionalism and Industrialisation: Britain and Its European Rivals, 1688-1815* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004); Zmolek, *Rethinking the Industrial Revolution*.

landlords for the appropriation of peasants' surpluses, the French state had succeeded to increase its own power by offering protection to the peasantry and guaranteeing the hereditability and fixity of the rents. In this process, a form of non-parliamentary taxation without ties with seigneurial exactions was created to provide the Crown with an autonomous and direct source of revenue.¹⁵⁷

Looking at the typical depiction of the French revolution as a 'bourgeois revolution' in light of historical evidences provided by revisionist historians, Comninel concluded against the Marxist orthodoxy that the revolution did *not* oppose a backward (feudal) aristocracy to a progressive (capitalist) bourgeoisie in an attempt by the latter to create a capitalist society. Rather, the French revolution embodied a political struggle over access to and possession of the state, which through the development of absolutism had displaced the seigneurie banale as the primary means of surplus appropriation.¹⁵⁸ In this view, the absolutist state had nothing to do with capitalism without, however, being still 'feudal': seigneurial relations did persist, but 'they were no longer the central relations of class exploitation, being instead subsidiary to the centralised collection of taxes by the state and the exaction of rents through share-cropping and leases'.¹⁵⁹

As the most important means of appropriation of the nobility and the quickest road to social mobility for both the bourgeoisie and the lower noblesse became dependent upon the purchase of state offices—which were systematically used for private enrichment—class distinctions between the bourgeoisie and the aristocracy faded

¹⁵⁷ Brenner, "Agrarian Class Structure and Economic Development in Pre-Industrial Europe," 71.

¹⁵⁸ Comninel, *Rethinking the French Revolution*; George Comninel, "Marx's Context," *History of Political Thought* 21, no. 3 (2000): 467–83.

¹⁵⁹ Comninel, "English Feudalism and the Origins of Capitalism," 26.

away. For those who aspired to join higher ranks among the ruling class, it is through the collection of taxes and fees, financial returns on state loans, and money or gifts bestowed by the King that one's social status could be best reproduced and wealth accumulated. Consequently, it is 'the state itself, and particularly its career opportunities'—not, as it has been often assumed, the establishment of capitalism by a *bourgeoisie triomphante*—that turned out to be main object of the intra-ruling class struggles in the lead to the French revolution.¹⁶⁰ The French bourgeoisie was not a capitalist class and no systematic class difference can be drawn 'between the forms of wealth and income enjoyed by the bourgeoisie and the supposedly feudal nobility'.¹⁶¹

Pressures of geopolitical competition are not foreign to the conditions that led to the French revolution. The French defeat in the Seven Years' War and the financially ruinous campaigns in the Americas left behind 'a militarily weakened and financially bankrupt France [that] was eventually forced, in a period of dramatic class conflicts, to violently alter its internal social property relations'.¹⁶² Beyond Britain, capitalism imposed itself by politically working itself through pre-existing social property regimes and dynastic politics in geopolitically mediated and chronological uneven processes of late development—sometimes protracted, as in France, or shockingly rapidly, as in Germany. 'More often than not', Teschke concluded, 'it was heavy artillery that battered down pre-capitalist walls'.¹⁶³ How these walls were reconstructed through new state

¹⁶⁰ George Comninel, "Quatre-Vingt-Neuf Revisited: Social Interests and Political Conflict in the French Revolution," *Historical Papers* 24, no. 1 (1989): 52; Comninel, *Rethinking the French Revolution*.

¹⁶¹ Comninel, "Historical Materialist Sociology and Revolutions," 92.

¹⁶² Teschke, *The Myth of 1648*, 263.

¹⁶³ *Ibid.*, 265.

strategies cannot be derived theoretically but requires a radical historicization of the ways ‘states responses [...] were refracted through respective class relations in national contexts, including class resistance’.¹⁶⁴

The Seigneurial Regime in New France

Many studies of social property regimes have contributed to provide a still tentative, yet much clearer picture of the geographically combined and socially uneven development of capitalism in continental Europe.¹⁶⁵ As shown by Charlie Post’s study of the social roots of capitalism in the United States and the impact of its development on the Civil War, the combination of a comparative perspective with developmental explanations in the analysis of social property regime is also ideally placed to study colonial state-formation processes and the diffusion of capitalism beyond the European heartland. One lesson of Post’s study is that, contrary to what has often been assumed, capitalism certainly did not come with the first ships to the North-American colonies.¹⁶⁶ More than one specialist on Africa, India, Southeast Asia, the Middle East, and the Americas have drawn similar lessons from their studies of forms of political rule, land

¹⁶⁴ Ibid., 265–266.

¹⁶⁵ Xavier Lafrance, “Citizens and Wage-Labourers: Capitalism and the Formation of a Working Class in France” (Doctoral Thesis, York University, 2013); Green, “Uneven and Combined Development and the Anglo-German Prelude to World War I”; Lacher and Germann, “Before Hegemony”; Eren Duzgun, “Class, State and Property: Modernity and Capitalism in Turkey,” *European Journal of Sociology* 53, no. 02 (2012): 119–48; Frédérick Guillaume Dufour, “Social-Property Regimes and the Uneven and Combined Development of Nationalist Practices,” *European Journal of International Relations* 13 (2007): 583–604; Clemens Hoffmann, “The Eastern Question and the Fallacy of Modernity. On the Premodern Origins of the Modern Inter-State Order in Southeastern Europe” (Doctoral Thesis, University of Sussex, 2010); From a theoretical perspective that shares many insights of the theory of social property relations, see also Shilliam, *German Thought and International Relations*.

¹⁶⁶ Charles Post, *The American Road to Capitalism* (Leiden; Boston: Brill, 2011), 39.

policies and labour issues in colonial contexts.¹⁶⁷

One has to be careful not to take for granted the desire of the European agents who carried colonization out to introduce capitalism in the colonies. Not only were European metropolises embarking upon colonial ventures in the New World not all capitalist—only Britain, as discussed previously, was capitalist—but even capitalist Britain did not necessarily succeed, or even attempt, to introduce capitalist social relations in its colonies. To understand how colonizers administered their rule one has to take seriously the fact that strategies for maintaining control were potentially powerfully influenced by open-ended political conflicts between colonizers and between them and the colonized in complex settings involving both colonial and metropolitan cultures.¹⁶⁸ Much is to be gained from probing the mode of existence of native communities that came in interaction with European settlers and the manner in which they shaped and influenced colonization.¹⁶⁹ A lot can also be learnt by studying the interaction between European metropolises and the population of white settlers that crossed the Atlantic to establish themselves permanently on the new continent. In the process, these settlers,

¹⁶⁷ Anne Phillips, *The Enigma of Colonialism: British Policy in West Africa* (London: James Currey, 1989); Simon Bromley, *Rethinking Middle East Politics* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1994); Eric Wolf, *Europe and the People Without History* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1990).

¹⁶⁸ Frederick Cooper and Ann L. Stoler, “Tensions of Empire: Colonial Control and Visions of Rule,” *American Ethnologist* 16, no. 4 (1989): 609; Lauren Benton, “Colonial Law and Cultural Difference: Jurisdictional Politics and the Formation of the Colonial State,” *Comparative Studies in Society and History* 41, no. 03 (July 1999): 543; Partha Chatterjee, *The Nation and Its Fragments: Colonial and Postcolonial Histories*, vol. 11 (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1993); Nicholas Thomas, *Colonialism’s Culture* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1994).

¹⁶⁹ On these interactions within the fur trade, see Wolf, *Europe and the People Without History*, 158–194; Trigger, *Natives and Newcomers Canada’s “Heroic Age” Reconsidered*; For broader explorations of the relation between indigenous social formations and European imperialism in North America, see Michael Witgen, *An Infinity of Nations: How the Native New World Shaped Early North America* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2011); Allan Greer, “Commons and Enclosure in the Colonization of North America,” *The American Historical Review* 117, no. 2 (2012): 365–86.

individually and collectively, developed new repertoires of experiences and identities resulting in complex relationships with the metropolises, which rule and authority they sometimes welcomed, sometimes contested, within processes of colonial state-formation. Central to the distinctive character of the process of colonial state-formation in New France was that the land appropriated from Native peoples by the colonizers was held under the terms of the ‘seigneurial’ tenure, to which I now turn.

The process of state-formation in New France was directly ‘colonial’ in that it consisted in the implantation of settlements on a distant territory. This implantation resulted in specific forms of cultural, political, and economic exploitation of the Native peoples that inhabited the lands with sets of social, political, and economic relations, as well as cultural and spiritual worldviews, radically different than those of the European settlers.¹⁷⁰ For reasons of time and space, when discussing colonial state-formation in this chapter it is the process of settlement itself on which I focus—‘colonialism’—rather than on ‘imperialism’, its flip-side according to Edward Said who conceives of the latter as ‘the practice, the theory, and the attitudes of a dominating metropolitan centre ruling a distant territory’.¹⁷¹ To understand the specificities of French colonial settlements in

¹⁷⁰ Barbara Alice Mann, *Iroquoian Women: The Gantowisas* (Peter Lang International Academic P, 2006); Bruce Johansen and Barbara Alice Mann, *Encyclopedia of the Haudenosaunee* (Westport, Conn: Greenwood, 2000); Trigger, *Natives and Newcomers Canada’s “Heroic Age” Reconsidered*.

¹⁷¹ Edward Said, *Culture and Imperialism* (New York: Vintage Books, 1993), 8. Said’s dichotomy has important limitations. As George Steinmetz has shown from a perspective of comparative sociology, imperial ideologies and practices of settlement are co-constitutive of each others in complex historical settings that give way to significant differences across major instances of colonialism. More specifically, he identifies four determining structures in the definition of colonial native policy: ‘(1) precolonial ethnographic discourses or representations, (2) symbolic competition among colonial officials for recognition of their superior ethnographic acuity, (3) colonizers’ cross-identification with imagos of the colonized, and (4) responses by the colonized, including resistance, collaboration, and everything in between’. George Steinmetz, *The Devil’s Handwriting: Precoloniality and the German Colonial State in Qingdao, Samoa, and Southwest Africa* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2007), 2.

New France, it is necessary to look at the seigneurial regime in which crucial dimensions of French settlers' political subjectivities and understanding of property were embedded.

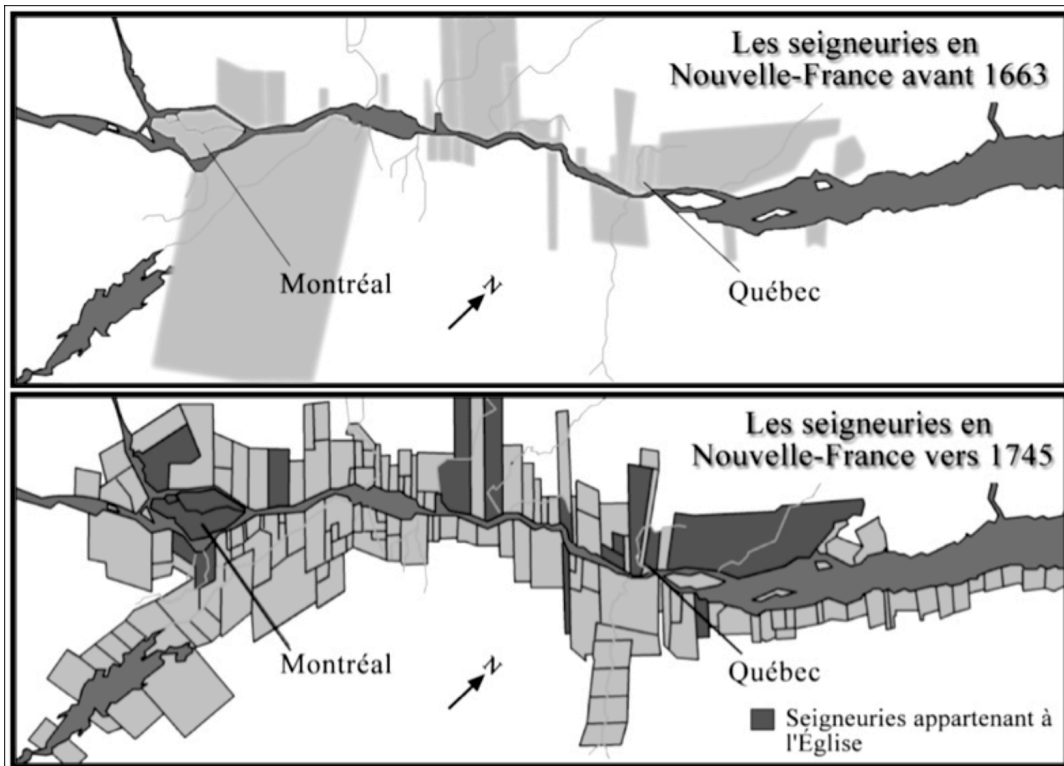
The seigneurial regime was first introduced in 1624 with a baronie granted to Guillaume de Caën. Two other seigneuries were granted in 1626 to Louis Hébert and the Jesuits, respectively.¹⁷² More significant for the introduction of the seigneurial system in New France was the creation of the Company of One Hundred Associates in 1627, for it received the whole territory of New France—from Florida to the Arctic—under seigneurial terms, including the powers to

improve and arrange the said lands as they will deem it to be necessary, and distribute them to those who will live in the said land [...]; give and attribute to them such titles and honours, rights, powers, and options that they will judge to be good.¹⁷³

1.1. Maps of the organization of seigneuries in New France before 1663 and in 1745

¹⁷² Benoît Grenier, *Brève histoire du régime seigneurial* (Montréal: Boréal, 2012), 55.

¹⁷³ “Acte pour l'établissement de la Compagnie des Cent Associés pour le commerce du Canada, April 29, 1627”, quoted in Harris, *Seigneurial System in Early Canada: A Geographical Study*, 22. As Grenier points out, the first mention of the power to distribute fiefs and seigneuries is dated of 1541, ‘when the sieur La Rocque de Roberval receives from François Ier a commission to establish a colony of settlement in New France’. *Brève histoire du régime seigneurial*, 54. (my translation) No duchies or marquisates were ever created in New France, but a few baronies and counties were (e.g. the baronies of Longueuil and Portneuf, the county of Saint-Laurent).



Note: Before 1663, the seigneurie granted by the King of France in New France are very large but the boundaries are not clearly delineated.

Source: Service national du RÉCIT de l'univers social, maps adapted from Serge Courville. *Le Québec. Genèse et mutation du territoire*, Québec, Presses de l'Université Laval, 2000, p.115. License: Creative Commons (by-nc-sa)

From then on, all those who owned a company's concession that could be further subgranted were 'seigneurs'.¹⁷⁴ Seigneurs could grant *arrière-fief*, a sort of 'subseigneurie' within their concession, and those who owned these *arrière-fief* were

¹⁷⁴ Following Harris' usage of the term, in this study "seigneur" usually refers to one of the group who held land directly from one of the companies or, after the proprietary periods, directly from the king; and "seigneurie" refers to the land so held. Unless otherwise indicated "seigneur" and "seigneurie" are not intended to include the king, the companies, the holders of small *arrière-fiefs*, or their concessions'. *Seigneurial System in Early Canada: A Geographical Study*, viii.

also considered seigneurs.¹⁷⁵ Soon, several hundred seigneuries and *arrière-fiefs* were granted in New France.¹⁷⁶ The acquisition of a seigneurie, however, did not give the owner a noble rank or title, even if the land itself was considered ‘noble’. This was no different than in France, where, as Goubert has noted, ‘[a]nybody can buy a seigneurie, as long as he is rich: in addition to its revenues it will confer upon him a measure of dignity which will help him gradually to project the illusion of nobility in the eyes of the naive, the apathetic and the forgetful’.¹⁷⁷ The fact remains that in the colony like in the metropolis, nobles and ecclesiastic seigneurs held most seigneurial lands. Few in number (a little less than 2% of the population)¹⁷⁸, the nobility of New France was well endowed in fiefs: in the first half of the eighteenth century, nobles owned nearly half of the seigneuries and a third of the seigneurial superficies.¹⁷⁹ Two third of these seigneuries are owned by military officers.¹⁸⁰ The clergy also possessed a considerable portion of the seigneurial land: a third of the seigneurial land and one sixth of the number of fiefs in the first half of the eighteenth century.¹⁸¹

Seigneuries were settled by peasants, who, by paying the *cens*—a nominal but highly symbolic annual levy—were acknowledging that the land could not be further subgranted. By paying the *cens*, the peasantry was also acknowledging the legitimacy of

¹⁷⁵ Ibid.

¹⁷⁶ At the beginning of the eighteenth century, there were almost seventy *arrière-fiefs* in New France belonging to twenty-six seigneuries. Grenier, *Brève histoire du régime seigneurial*, 58.

¹⁷⁷ Goubert, *The Ancien Régime: French Society, 1600-1750*, 82.

¹⁷⁸ Lorraine Gadoury, *La Noblesse de Nouvelle-France: familles et alliances* (Québec: Éditions Hurtubise HMH, 1991).

¹⁷⁹ Grenier, *Brève histoire du régime seigneurial*, 119.

¹⁸⁰ Alain Laberge, *Portraits de campagnes: la formation du monde rural laurentien au XVIIIe siècle* (Québec: Les Presses de l’Université Laval, 2010), 77.

¹⁸¹ Grenier, *Brève histoire du régime seigneurial*, 116.

a complex set of feudal responsibilities and obligations, among them the obligation of *tenir feu et lieu*, that is, the requirement of clearing and ‘developing’ their plot of land. If New France’s peasants—or *censitaires*, as they were called—neglected to respect this requirement, the seigneur had the right to join their plots to the seigneurial domain.¹⁸²

The peasant therefore imperfectly owned his land, which was part of a large and complex network of formal and informal rights and obligations including, in some cases, an access to communal grazing grounds under seigneurial control for which an annual fee had to be paid on an individual basis¹⁸³, as well as ‘vaine pasture, or the right of pasturing animals on the fallow’.¹⁸⁴ The creation of commons by the seigneur was not an obligation, however, and by 1700, only a third to a half of all settled seigneuries had commons.¹⁸⁵ Frequently made out of wetlands on the shores of the St. Lawrence, these communal lands were smaller in size than in France or England during the same epoch.¹⁸⁶ This is perhaps attributable to the fact that in New France most seigneuries came off the St Lawrence, giving a strikingly consistent pattern to land use that was not the case in France. The close proximity of the river and of forests also meant that many of the needs that commons were intended to meet in France did not require such land in

¹⁸² To appreciate the scope of the phenomenon, it is useful to recall with Grenier that “[t]he historian Jacques Mathieu has counted 400 reunions of censives to the domain between 1730 and 1759 on Canadian seigneuries”. Ibid., 94. My translation; See also Dechêne, *Habitants and Merchants in Seventeenth-Century Montreal*, 161–162.

¹⁸³ Such “droit de commune”, for instance, “was demanded of all Sorel inhabitants until the late eighteenth century and of the residents of the St. Lawrence section of St. Ours until the end of the seigneurial tenure”. Greer, *Peasant, Lord, and Merchant*, 125. (my translation)

¹⁸⁴ Dechêne, *Habitants and Merchants in Seventeenth-Century Montreal*, 176; See also Greer, *Peasant, Lord, and Merchant*, 125.

¹⁸⁵ Harris, *Seigneurial System in Early Canada: A Geographical Study*, 71.

¹⁸⁶ Grenier, *Brève histoire du régime seigneurial*, 77.

New France.¹⁸⁷

Where there were no commons, fields were never enclosed, like in France.¹⁸⁸ As Dechêne has noted, this allowed the children to lead animals ‘on to the wasteland at the edge of the woods, on to the fallow, or along the roads. [...] There were no hedges along the ditches’.¹⁸⁹ If the soil was rocky enough, censitaires would sometimes try to use rocks to bank their plots as they cleared them. But ‘[o]nly the gardens, meadows, and the front of concessions that abutted on the commons were fenced in with cedar stakes. The properties themselves were almost never separated by fences’.¹⁹⁰

An obligation associated with the seigneurial regime of New France was the payment of the yearly *rente*, introduced in concession contracts and eventually joined with the *cens in confuso*. Like the *cens*, the *rente* was fixed: it could not be changed, was forever associated with the land, was transferred with it, and could not be redeemed once and for all by the censitaires with a lump sum. The average value of the *rente* is difficult to establish, for it varied with each seigneurie and each region. The estimate is also complicated by the fact that it often included payments in both kind and money.¹⁹¹ Censitaires were also responsible for giving the priest a *dîme*, a yearly tithe. In 1663 a royal edict fixed it at one/thirteenth of the grain harvested, but it was clear to the governor and the intendant that this was too high: the rate they established for the colony

¹⁸⁷ I owe this point to George Comminel.

¹⁸⁸ In France too, there were usually no fences on the land, other than a few small parcels that were late clearances, or associated with a special tenant. The commons were not, generally, closed off, and the main fields never were (outside the bocage country of Brittany and a few other areas of Western France).

¹⁸⁹ Greer, *Peasant, Lord, and Merchant*, 33.

¹⁹⁰ Dechêne, *Habitants and Merchants in Seventeenth-Century Montreal*, 176.

¹⁹¹ Grenier, *Brève histoire du régime seigneurial*, 80; Laberge, *Portraits de campagnes*, 115.

was of one/twenty-sixth, plus an exemption for the first five years.¹⁹²

The seigneurs had personal rights such as the *banalités*, among the most important was the seigneur's monopolistic rights to oblige its censitaires to use its mill and pay a fee on ground wheat. This fee was fixed at one/fourteenth of the bushel, significantly more than in France, where it varied typically between one/sixteenth and one/twenty-fourth of the bushel. Other monopolies abounded, including, for some seigneurs, the exclusive right to trade fur on their fiefs. As a result of these monopolies, seigneurs could impose levies for a wide array of activities ranging from fishing and gathering wood to the use of the commons. In the eighteenth century, the increasing number of seigneurs reserving for themselves the right to take rock and sand from the censives led Dechêne to conclude that the seigneurie had become 'rigid and invasive'.¹⁹³

There were also many restrictions on land transfers. The *retrait lignager* allowed the wife and children of a seigneur who was deciding to sell his land to reimburse the purchaser and have the seigneurie for themselves. The children's *légitime* was 'an individual's right to half his original inheritance', which gave to any son and heir the right to interfere and invalidate any transaction.¹⁹⁴ Finally, the *retrait seigneurial* allowed the seigneur 'to expropriate lands which changed hands [...] on indemnifying the buyer for his purchase price plus expenses'.¹⁹⁵ Mutation fines were also collected on estate transactions: the *lods and ventes*, which were requested by the seigneur during the

¹⁹² Louise Dechêne, "L'évolution du régime seigneurial au Canada. Le cas de Montréal aux XVIIe et XVIIIe siècles," *Recherches sociographiques* 12, no. 2 (1971): 160.

¹⁹³ Quoted in Grenier, *Brève histoire du régime seigneurial*, 94. (my translation)

¹⁹⁴ Harris, *Seigneurial System in Early Canada: A Geographical Study*, 46.

¹⁹⁵ Greer, *Peasant, Lord, and Merchant*, 95.

sale of a peasant's plot (called a *censive*)—a twelfth of its value as in France—and the *quint*, which was collected by royal agents during the sale of a seigneurial domain—a fifth of its value. These mutation fines constrained the movement of estate, limited its concentration, and contributed to prevent the commodification of land.

The 'Rates' of Exploitation

Most of the elements that had prevented sustained economic growth in pre-capitalist France had thus been imported in New France: 'the feudal rent', which 'itself limited the funds available for accumulation'; 'restrictions on peasant mobility', which 'tended to limit the development of a free market in labour'; and 'feudal restrictions on the mobility of land', which 'tended to prevent its concentration'.¹⁹⁶ Yet it is difficult to assess whether these constraints were more important in the metropolis than in the colony. As Roberta Hamilton has pointed out, to start with, the context of the metropolitan background is 'complex, highly variable, and often quite unknown (at least in any precise sense)'.¹⁹⁷ Regional differences in particular make the amount of seigneurial dues, taxes and tithes levied in France extremely difficult to estimate. 'It is little wonder that comparisons with New France vary so greatly', Hamilton proclaims, for 'one can simply choose the numbers that accord with one's argument!'¹⁹⁸

¹⁹⁶ Brenner, "Agrarian Class Structure and Economic Development in Pre-Industrial Europe," 50.

¹⁹⁷ Hamilton, *Feudal Society and Colonization*, 53; See also Christian Dessureault, "L'évolution Du Régime Seigneurial Canadien de 1760 À 1854," ed. Alain Laberge and Benoît Grenier (Québec: Centre interuniversitaire d'études québécoises, 2009), 23–38.

¹⁹⁸ Hamilton, *Feudal Society and Colonization*, 53.

Around 1730 in Basse-Provence alone tithes ranged from 1/8 (in one community) through 1/16 (in thirty-six) to 1/24-1/50 (in eight). [...] State taxation also varied throughout the country. While the ‘pays d’État’—provinces still possessing their own estates—were taxed at a lower rate, the average rate was perhaps “1/8 or 12,5% of the gross yield of the first course”. Again, however, there is “bewildering variety”. The direct tax—the *taille*—functioned very differently in different parts of the country. In some places it was a tax on individuals, in other places, on land’.¹⁹⁹

French historian Pierre Goubert offered, in Hamilton’s words, ‘a most educated guess’ about the proportion of peasant production ‘garnered in one way or another by others’:²⁰⁰ ‘The inroads made into gross peasant production by this spate of rents, very unevenly distributed, can never be assessed at less than one fifth and must often have reached twice that amount (some historians have suggested even higher rates [...]).²⁰¹ As for New France, Hamilton’s own estimation of the rate of exploitation of the peasantry is inspired by Denis Monière’s calculation: ‘The tithe represented 4 per cent of production, and the seigneurial rent—when it was collected—11%’.²⁰² This estimation is close to the one provided by Dechêne, who estimated that ‘in the form of cens and rentes, tithes and milling rights, it is about 10% to 14% of the gross revenue of the

¹⁹⁹ Ibid., 53. The quote within Hamilton’s citation is from Pierre Goubert.

²⁰⁰ Ibid., 53.

²⁰¹ Goubert, *The Ancien Régime: French Society, 1600-1750*, 134.

²⁰² Monière quoted in Hamilton, *Feudal Society and Colonization*, 51–52.

habitant that is given to the seigneur'.²⁰³

Part of what accounts for this considerable difference (20% to 40% in France vs 10% to 15% in New France) are the initial conditions of settlement, which made it difficult for seigneurs to make high demands on a peasantry that could hardly pay dues and tithes given the time needed to clear the land, build basic shelters, and establish productive crops.²⁰⁴ As agriculture developed and made possible the appropriation of a larger surplus by the seigneurs, counter-powers emerged out of the bonds of solidarity that developed over time among peasants despite the distance that, in this vast land, often physically separated each habitant from the other.²⁰⁵ To be sure, communal life in New France was not regulated by official local assemblies of peasants as it was the case in many regions of France, but 'key people'—typically militia officers, churchwardens and the 'anciens'—nevertheless often stood up for the whole group of habitants and contested the authority of the seigneur when his behaviour was deemed inappropriate.²⁰⁶ Even if the ability of seigneurs to impose financial obligations and other duties on rural inhabitants was often strengthened by their role as primary notables of local communities, before clergymen and militia captains,²⁰⁷ seigneurs could not 'without worrying stop offering these services for which the censitaires pay a portion of their

²⁰³ Dechêne, "L'évolution du régime seigneurial au Canada. Le cas de Montréal aux XVIIe et XVIIIe siècles," 180. (my translation)

²⁰⁴ Dechêne, *Habitants and Merchants in Seventeenth-Century Montreal*, 138.

²⁰⁵ Benoît Grenier, "Pouvoir et contre-pouvoir dans le monde rural laurentien aux XVIIIe et XIXe siècles: sonder les limites de l'arbitraire seigneurial," *Bulletin d'histoire politique* 18, no. 1 (2009).

²⁰⁶ *Ibid.*

²⁰⁷ Benoît Grenier, "Seigneurs résidants et notabilité dans la vallée du Saint-Laurent (XVIIe-XIXe siècle)," *Annales de Bretagne et des Pays de l'Ouest* 110, no. 2 (2003): 62.

income or their harvest'.²⁰⁸ Coalitions among peasants were often created 'to ensure that the mills are maintained, that the flour is of good quality, that chores associated with road maintenance are not abusive, etc. [...] Clearly, just about everywhere in the seigneuries that have been studied, there was a series of conflicts in which the upper stratum of the local peasantry was particularly active'.²⁰⁹

Struggles between censitaires and seigneurs also had a juridical dimension, the censitaires being, according to Richard Harris, 'at their creative best' in the use of courts.²¹⁰ By the 1680s peasants could make use of the royal courts established in Quebec, Trois-Rivières, and Montreal, as well as the Sovereign Council. The intendant was also solicited for appeals of seigneurial judgment. Of course, the cost of recourse to royal or seigneurial justice was considerable.²¹¹ Administrative decisions and edicts from the king and colonial administrators did not always favour seigneurial powers, as illustrated by the fact that the religious seigneurs of Montreal—the Sulpicians—lost their rights to *haute* and *moyenne* justice in 1693, when the state used the Sovereign Council to undermine their court and replaced their baillage by a royal court.²¹² The loss of high and middle justice from one of the most important seigneuries of the colony strengthened the absolutist regime.

Historians have long debated the role of the state in regulating the seigneurial

²⁰⁸ Grenier, "Pouvoir et contre-pouvoir dans le monde rural laurentien aux XVIIIe et XIXe siècles" (my translation)

²⁰⁹ Ibid. (my translation)

²¹⁰ Harris, *Seigneurial System in Early Canada: A Geographical Study*, 66; See also Jean-Claude Dubé, *Claude-Thomas Dupuy: Intendant de la Nouvelle-France, 1678-1738* (Montréal: Fides, 1969), 221.

²¹¹ Dechêne, *Habitants and Merchants in Seventeenth-Century Montreal*, 207.

²¹² Ibid., 206.

system of justice since its establishment in New France.²¹³ However, less attention has been paid to the role of the state within the broader dynamic of reproduction of the colony taken as a whole. In order to get to the roots of the difference between the rate of exploitation of the peasantry of New France and its counter-part in France, one has to look beyond the seigneurial regime and pay due consideration to the absence of a centralized taxation system by the French absolutist state, for in *ancien régime* France, the centralized taxation was such that the *taille* (a tax levied on the French peasantry and non-nobles) was in fact the ‘greatest single source of revenue for the Crown’.²¹⁴ There was no equivalent in New France, where the administrative costs of the colony were paid by a 10% duty on wines, spirits, and tobacco entering the colony and a deduction of 25% of the value of the beaver pelts sold (known as the *quart*). These constituted ‘the only taxes the people in Canada paid and, compared to their counterparts in France who were taxed almost out of existence, they had little to complain about’.²¹⁵ The collection of this revenue was facilitated by the fact that there was only a single port through which the colony was received exports and imports by sea.²¹⁶

²¹³ For instance, Jean-Philippe Garneau, “Réflexions sur la régulation juridique du régime seigneurial canadien,” in *Cheminement. Le régime seigneurial 150 ans après*, ed. Alain Laberge and Benoît Grenier (Québec: Centre interuniversitaire d’études québécoises, 2009), 61–78.

²¹⁴ Hamilton, *Feudal Society and Colonization*, 60.

²¹⁵ William Eccles, *Canada Under Louis XIV 1663-1701* (Toronto: McClelland and Stewart Limited, 1964), 16; Also, William Eccles, *The Government of New France*, 18 (Ottawa: Canadian Historical Association, 1971), 17.

²¹⁶ Catherine Desbarats has further sorted out the details of the revenues collected in New France and paid directly into the Naval Treasuries at Quebec and Louisbourg. As she explains, they ‘made only marginal contributions to the colonies’ revenue needs, and in some cases amounted to little more than accounting artifices. To begin with, no direct taxes were collected in either colony. Royal *corvées*, especially for road-building, and militia service were relied upon routinely in Canada, but they left no traces in the government’s financial accounts. From 1717 onward, the inhabitants of Montreal did contribute several thousand *livres* towards the building of stone fortifications. Participants in Canada’s fur trade, in turn, either bought permits (*conges*), which in total typically produced 6,250 *livres* for the Naval

Why the absolutist state did not import centralized taxation in New France can be explained by the slow pace of settlement in the seigneuries, which made them rarely profitable for their owners. If few settlers meant few seigneurial dues to collect, it also meant that the taxation basis for the state would long remain weak. The crude reality of the overwhelming and hard work needed for bare subsistence in the first years of the settlement made taxation by the French state almost impossible, especially since the Crown wanted to attract settlers despite the hostility of the climate and the land.²¹⁷ No wonder that the French state did not decide to pursue colonial ventures in New France to conquer large populations that could provide it with new revenues to extract from taxation. The first exploratory voyages of Jacques Cartier to the Kingdoms of Stadacona and Hochelaga in 1534 and 1535 had revealed a land of harsh climate populated by native people described with contempt as ‘savages’ by Europeans rather than the fabulous wealth of the kind found by the Spanish in South America. The idea that a passage to Asia could be found quickly vanished and originally the only attractive commodity discovered was the fish of Newfoundland’s Grand Banks. Hence the little interest initially showed by Europeans in northern America. Efforts at colonizing the region in the early seventeenth century occurred only after New France started to generate interest as a source of beaver pelts.²¹⁸ Fur remained the major Canadian export

Treasury, or leased trading posts. As with the *Domaine* trade duties, these entry fees to the fur trade dwindled to nothing in wartime. In years of peace, however, private fur traders contributed more than the government's *bordereaux* suggested: those who traded at garrisoned posts in the Great Lakes region were compelled by the terms of their leases to carry canoe loads of supplies free of charge from Montreal'. Catherine M. Desbarats, "France in North America: The Net Burden of Empire during the First Half of the Eighteenth Century," *French History* 11, no. 1 (1997): 15.

²¹⁷ Hamilton, *Feudal Society and Colonization*, 56.

²¹⁸ Wolfgang Reinhard and Kate Sturge, *A Short History of Colonialism* (Manchester: Manchester

for the whole seventeenth century, with the cargoes going back to France being filled about four-fifths of beaver.²¹⁹

With the English and the Dutch establishing themselves not so far down the Atlantic coast, pressures increased on France to establish a fort at a narrows of the St. Lawrence in an attempt to control fisheries and fur trading networks. Quebec was founded. Like Jamestown and Plymouth, the new settlement suffered from the harshness of the cold winter and from scurvy. Of its initial 25 inhabitants, only nine survived the first year.²²⁰ From then on, in good and bad times the colony developed basic governing institutions as its population slowly grew. For half a century beginning with the creation of the Compagnie de Rouen under the auspices of Samuel de Champlain in 1614 and up to the establishment of the Royal Government in 1663, the task of organizing the distribution of land and facilitating settlement was entrusted to chartered merchant companies. The first half of the seventeenth century was thus characterized as a proprietary period in which monopolistic chartered companies succeeded each other in the colonization process. As Dechêne has asserted, New France was initially a trading colony, one in which '[t]he network between native producers and merchants had been operating for well over a century when the first wheat-field ripened on the Island of Montreal'.²²¹ Fur remained the major Canadian export for the whole seventeenth century, with the cargo ships going back to France filled about four-fifths with beaver

University Press, 2011), 86.

²¹⁹ Dechêne, *Habitants and Merchants in Seventeenth-Century Montreal*, 72.

²²⁰ Bérenger, Durand, and Meyer, *Pionniers et colons en Amérique du Nord*, 161.

²²¹ Dechêne, *Habitants and Merchants in Seventeenth-Century Montreal*, 63.

pelts.²²²

If the fur trade was of primary importance for merchant companies, one needs to be careful not to exaggerate its importance for the general population. As Dechêne has pointed out, earlier historians have depicted the *habitants* as invariably lured by the profits of the trade and ready, at the first occasion, to abandon their land and leave their family behind in order to roam the forest as *coureurs des bois*. The fact is that the vast majority of the *habitants* took up land on seigneuries and tilled it for their primary subsistence; only a tiny minority left for the woods to engage in the fur trade.²²³ This agriculture was only minimally commercialized, since towns were too small to represent a significant domestic agricultural market and surpluses could often not be sold, a situation that discouraged attempts at improving the techniques of production. Even if some peasants were going to Montreal in order to sell their produce, its market never developed into a regional centre of distribution of grain.²²⁴

Foreign outlets for grain were also not very significant. In the seventeenth century, '[o]ne could hardly find two ships a year to convey a bit of the surplus to the West Indies, where Canadian flour was not appreciated and could not compete with equally cheap metropolitan flour, which cost less to transport'.²²⁵ Twice as distant from the West Indies than Boston, and with a port closed a third of the year because of the winter, the population of New France was at a disadvantage to export anything other

²²² Ibid., 72.

²²³ As Dechêne estimated, '[f]or every Etienne Brûlé [who led the life of a *coureur des bois*] one could probably find twenty inhabitants who never ventured beyond the Lachine rapids and another score whose experience of the wilds was a brief and painful campaign endured rather than welcomed', in Ibid., 5.

²²⁴ Ibid., 192.

²²⁵ Ibid.

than fur to the metropolis. France itself, with its peasant economy, was in little need of foreign grain and its mercantilist policies even denied New France the right to feed the military troops stationed in the colony.²²⁶

The self-sufficient character of agriculture was strengthened in the second half of the seventeenth century as most habitants retreated away from the fur trade, which became increasingly concentrated into the hands of a few merchants and professionals. ‘Voyageurs had to be experienced and good credit risks, so that country boys who chose such occupations tended to make them lifelong’.²²⁷ This phenomenon was further intensified between 1690 and 1719, as the colony underwent a credit crisis that saw a significant inflation in prices, accentuating the gap between domestic production and essential imports so that after this crisis, ‘despite faster and more regular land clearance, crop production sags and aligns itself to that of the population, as if the settlers had given up producing beyond their needs and those of the town’.²²⁸ The same applies to animal husbandry, for which ‘there is little indication of any specialized production for the market [...]. Some families had more animals than others because some families were larger or more comfortable than others, but all had essentially the same complement of livestock [...] conditioned primarily by domestic consumption needs’.²²⁹ Peasant families ‘normally run their own affairs, supporting, maintaining, and reproducing themselves mainly with the fruits of their own collective labour with land

²²⁶ Ibid.

²²⁷ Ibid., 94.

²²⁸ Ibid., 194.

²²⁹ Greer, *Peasant, Lord, and Merchant*, 41.

and equipment under their own immediate control'.²³⁰

If there was little 'connection' between commerce and agriculture, as Dechêne has stated it, there was, however, a close connection between merchants, seigneurs and individual officers who all benefited from interrelated military and commercial activities associated with mercantilist dynamics. These activities provided the principal means of accumulation to New France's ruling classes in a context where seigneurial dues did not typically amount to more than a secondary income.²³¹ Seigneuries indeed constituted only one form of investment among many others: 'One who makes no investment, who leaves to chance the collection of fees and farm rents, derives almost nothing from it'.²³² This is true not only of the pioneer period of settlement, when 'a seigneurie can not even guarantee the subsistence of a seigneurial family', but also of the later period of the French regime, when 'as a general rule [...] the seigneurs are not rentiers on the land. [...] During the seventeenth and eighteenth century, the "seigneurial" part of the income of the seigneurs constitutes more or less an extra revenue'.²³³ Consequently, seigneuries were caught up in what Grenier describes as a 'vicious circle': since the 'seigneurial' portion of the revenues of seigneurs constitutes a type of secondary income, most of the seigneur's energies and resources were put in other, more lucrative activities outside the seigneuries.²³⁴ It would not be exact however to say that little investment were made to improve seigneuries, even if, as revenue drawn from demesne farms declined in

²³⁰ Ibid., 88.

²³¹ This does not mean, to be sure, that seigneurs have neglected to develop their seigneuries or dedicate large portions of their reserved lands to agricultural production. Laberge, *Portraits de campagnes*, 120.

²³² Dechêne, "L'évolution du régime seigneurial au Canada. Le cas de Montréal aux XVIIe et XVIIIe siècles," 179. (my translation)

²³³ Grenier, *Brève histoire du régime seigneurial*, 95. (my translation)

²³⁴ Ibid., 95.

importance over time.²³⁵ As Alain Laberge has demonstrated with his detailed analysis of the *aveux et dénombrements* of 177 seigneuries in 1725: ‘investment of various nature were made to develop seigneuries. However, the seigneurial objectives are woven in a framework that is not exclusively rural: investment on most seigneuries are not an end in themselves, they participate in a larger process of socio-economic positioning’.²³⁶

Inheritance Rights

The clergy—who possessed a considerable portion of the seigneurial land (a third of the seigneurial land and one sixth of the number of fiefs in the first half of the eighteenth century)²³⁷—typically fared better than lay seigneurs. The grant of seigneuries was used by the King to support certain religious groups and their missions in New France in a time when the Counter-Reformation pervaded the politics of the French Crown.²³⁸ Historians of New France who have studied ecclesiastic seigneuries have shown that religious seigneurs often asserted assiduously both their spiritual and temporal powers to collect tithes and seigneurial dues from censitaires.²³⁹ In this pursuit ecclesiastic seigneuries had some advantages over lay seigneuries beyond their moral appeal: they displayed much more rigour in collecting information on their

²³⁵ Greer, *Peasant, Lord, and Merchant*, 11.

²³⁶ *Portraits de campagnes*, 137.

²³⁷ Grenier, *Brève histoire du régime seigneurial*, 116.

²³⁸ John Boshier, *Business and Religion in the Age of New France, 1600-1760: Twenty-Two Studies* (Toronto: Canadian Scholars' Press, 1994), 17–55.

²³⁹ Grenier, *Brève histoire du régime seigneurial*, 116–117.

seigneuries—generally in the form of *censiers* and *papier-terriers*²⁴⁰—and they did not suffer from the fragmentation that threatens lay seigneurial estates at the death of the seigneur.²⁴¹ To be sure, the transmission of lay seigneuries to the heirs rarely implied their actual divisions, as the beneficiaries would usually sell their ‘inheritance rights’ to one of the heir so that the ‘cession of the shares restored the original holding’.²⁴² This did not prevent, however, the multiplication of ‘co-seigneurs’ on many seigneuries: as Grenier has explained, ‘[t]oward 1725, almost half lay seigneuries have only one seigneur, but in the other half we witness a multiplication of co-seigneurs whose number varies depending on the size of the family: from one to thirty’.²⁴³

Under the Custom of Paris prevailing in New France, both seigneurial and commoners’ land risked division (‘always theoretical’, Dechêne has argued²⁴⁴) at the death of the heads of household. In the case of the seigneurie, inheritance was governed by the feudal hereditary right of primogeniture. This right allowed the elder son to receive, at the seigneur’s death, half the land of the estate, while other brothers and sisters would receive equal portions of the remainder estate. If the seigneur’s death preceded the wife’s, she would receive half of the estate in usufruct, the eldest son receiving half of the second half, while the rest would be divided equally among other brothers and sisters.²⁴⁵ Grenier has recently highlighted one of the consequences of these inheritance patterns for gender relations, documenting the fact that it is not rare, in New

²⁴⁰ The *censier* is a register that takes the form of a list of censitaires while the *papier-terrier* is a register that takes the form of a list of the plots of land held in censives. Ibid., 218, 222.

²⁴¹ Ibid., 116–117.

²⁴² Dechêne, *Habitants and Merchants in Seventeenth-Century Montreal*, 166.

²⁴³ Grenier, *Brève histoire du régime seigneurial*, 125. (my translation)

²⁴⁴ Dechêne, *Habitants and Merchants in Seventeenth-Century Montreal*, 167.

²⁴⁵ Harris, *Seigneurial System in Early Canada: A Geographical Study*, 46.

France, to see women, mainly widows, managing and being responsible for seigneuries. A seigneurie could thus end up in the hands of a 'seigneuresse', at least for a time: '[t]his feminine seigneurial power occurs generally during periods of transition, but these periods of transition can be very long'.²⁴⁶

The ownership of a seigneurie could also be end up in the hands of a dozen co-seigneurs, and even more, in the space of only two generations. These fragmented rights on seigneurie could themselves potentially be further divided among wives, sons and daughters at the death of each of the new co-seigneurs.²⁴⁷ As Harris has noted, '[o]ccasionally the ownership of a seigneurie became so complicated that a special investigation was required to unravel the tangle'.²⁴⁸ The case is well illustrated by property disputes on Île Bizard, where a *mémoire instructif* had to be prepared to help the arbiters sorting out who were 'the seigneurs of the island after three eldest sons had died in quick succession leaving so many inheritors that, even with this mémoire, it is clear neither who the several dozen seigneurs were, nor what fraction of the seigneurie each of them controlled'.²⁴⁹

The embeddedness of seigneurial property rights in a complex system of hereditary rights and familial ties had consequences for the particular patterns of seigneurial investments, the greater part of seigneurial revenues being shielded from

²⁴⁶ Grenier, *Brève histoire du régime seigneurial*, 108. My translation; See also Benoît Grenier, *Marie-Catherine Peuvret, 1667-1739: veuve et seigneuresse en Nouvelle-France* (Sillery: Septentrion, 2005); Benoît Grenier, "Réflexion sur le pouvoir féminin au Canada sous le Régime français: le cas de la « seigneuresse » Marie-Catherine Peuvret (1667–1739)," *Histoire sociale/Social history* 42, no. 84 (2009): 299–326.

²⁴⁷ "Eighteen or twenty children were relatively common in Canada, and an average family included five or six." Harris, *Seigneurial System in Early Canada: A Geographical Study*, 46–47.

²⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, 47.

²⁴⁹ *Ibid.*

market imperatives. Since seigneurs did not need to compete in markets to maintain their ownership of land, few incentives existed to encourage seigneurs to put back in the land the dues they appropriated from the censitaires. The division of the ownership of seigneuries between co-seigneurs made investment in estates extremely difficult to orchestrate, and very rarely profitable for any of them. The main seigneur of a seigneurie,

unless he was willing to pay the bills, could not make general improvements to the seigneurie without consulting his coseigneurs. Should he build and pay for a mill without an agreement, each of the coseigneur could claim a share of its revenue; and to persuade half a dozen widely scattered coseigneurs to renounce their shares in a projected mill or to contribute to its construction was a troublesome, time-consuming business. Usually the principal seigneur did not bother, and the necessary new mill or repairs to the old one were neglected until a clamour from the censitaires led to an intendant's ordinance.²⁵⁰

To be sure, seigneurs could buy co-seigneurs' parcels of land or whole seigneuries owned by other seigneurs, but these purchases were highly complicated matters that could easily take decades to be achieved.²⁵¹ Overall, '[s]eigneurs had trouble enough to acquire the exclusive control of one, much less of two or three seigneuries, and these

²⁵⁰ Ibid., 54–55.

²⁵¹ The eldest son, for instance, would often try to acquire back his sisters and brothers' parcels to maintain the integrity of the "vieux bien" (the parents' estate), see *ibid.*, 50–51.

few blocks of seigneuries controlled by single seigneurs were always broken up when they died'.²⁵²

The fragmentation of seigneuries' ownership had important consequences for the way seigneurs handled their responsibility to build a mill, often the only significant improvement that a seigneur would make on land during his lifetime: 'With depreciation, repairs, and a miller's salary, the yearly expenses for the simplest mill must have been in the order of 500 livres a year. Assuming an average price for wheat of approximately two and one-half livres a minot, the seigneur had to take in two hundred minots in some combination of his own and his censitaires' grain [...] to break even on his mill'.²⁵³ In general, as Harris has explained, 'the gristmill was a liability to a seigneur until there were at least twenty-five families in his seigneurie, or more than twice that many during the first years of settlement. Settlers in Canada were seldom easily come by, and only a few seigneuries ever attracted even twenty-five families within fifteen years'.²⁵⁴ As a result, '[t]hroughout the seventeenth century there were complaints that seigneurs were not building or maintaining mills. A surprising number of mills were built years before they could be profitable, but most seigneurs procrastinated because of the debts they knew a mill in a sparsely settled seigneurie would incur'.²⁵⁵ Everything considered, Harris concluded that the seigneurial regime constituted at best a secondary income for seigneurs, profitable only when they

²⁵² Ibid., 56.

²⁵³ Ibid., 73.

²⁵⁴ Ibid., 74.

²⁵⁵ Ibid., 75.

numbered at least forty or fifty families.²⁵⁶

In order to attract and keep families in their seigneuries, seigneurs had to offer relatively advantageous tenurial terms. Lots were conceded by seigneurs to censitaires ‘under terms which, in principle, made them the perpetual property of the recipient [...]. [The censitaires] could not in theory be evicted and their tenure was therefore much more permanent and secure than, for example, that of an English copyholder’.²⁵⁷ Together with the need for seigneurs to have a maximum of households settled on censives to make the seigneurie profitable, the tenurial terms of the seigneurial regime made peasants of New France able to retain the possession of their parcels without having to compete on the market. The situation of the peasant of New France therefore presents similarities with that of the French peasant, who, unlike the English tenant, ‘did not have to provide a level of rent equal to what the landlord might get from any other tenant—or else be evicted at the expiration of his lease’.²⁵⁸

Colonial State-Formation, Geopolitics and Mercantilist Rivalries

The responsibility to protect censitaires from seigneurial abuses and assure the hereditary character of peasant tenure was largely assumed by the intendant, who was asked in French provinces to protect rural communities ‘from intemperate exploitation by their landlords’.²⁵⁹ The zeal with which the intendant Raudot tried to curb the power

²⁵⁶ Ibid., 87.

²⁵⁷ Greer, *Peasant, Lord, and Merchant*, 94–95.

²⁵⁸ Brenner, “Agrarian Class Structure and Economic Development in Pre-Industrial Europe,” 72–73.

²⁵⁹ Marc Bloch, *French Rural History: An Essay on Its Basic Characteristics* (London: Routledge &

of seigneurial interests in New France is illustrative of a similar role in the colony; his recommendation to reform the seigneurial system to tip the scales in favour of the colonial peasantry was not entirely followed, but the promulgation of the Edicts of Marly in 1711 addressed some of his concerns.²⁶⁰

The French state could also count to a certain extent on militia captains to counter-balance seigneurial power. Introduced shortly after the Royal government, '[m]ilitia captains, as officers of the government obeying orders from the governor and intendant and answerable to them, exercised an authority that was entirely delegated and of a completely different order from that of a seigneur'.²⁶¹ According to Eccles, militia captains 'did much to integrate the administration with the general mass of society. This also ensured that the seigneurs as a group or class could not become too powerful and oppress the habitants or pose a threat in any way to the royal authority [...]'.²⁶² While the authority of the King's officials in colonial affairs should not be overstated, the existence of counter-powers such as militia captains and state officials combined with the fact that peasants of New France could, in principle, have recourse to the King's courts offer a major contrast with forms of French feudal lordships during the Middle Ages, when lords had immunities on matters regarding their estates and their

Kegan Paul, 1966), 134.

²⁶⁰ In his struggle against the growth of seigneurial abuses in New France, Raudot focused among other actions to be taken on the need to increase the number of contracts made in legal form in order to assure peasant property rights. See the report that he wrote to the King on November 10, 1707, in William Bennett Munro, *The Seigneurial System in Canada: A Study in French Colonial Policy* (New York: Longmans, Greens and Co., 1907), 70–80.

²⁶¹ Greer, *Peasant, Lord, and Merchant*, 99.

²⁶² Eccles, *Canada Under Louis XIV 1663-1701*, 37.

dependants.²⁶³ Even if there are some evidence that the royal justice tended to favour seigneurs in their decisions, the fact that seigneurs needed to have recourse to them shows some of the limits of the authority of the demilitarized seigneurial class that was established in the colony.²⁶⁴

But the role of the state in shaping the ruling class' strategy of reproduction goes well beyond seigneurial justice to encompass most of the colony's commercial activities. To secure the command of trade routes, merchants, seigneurs and officers indeed had to access the state and engage in various diplomatic activities related to dynastic alliances, constitutional struggles and even warfare. This made investments in manufacturing and industry particularly difficult to secure since political authority over territories was never guaranteed in time. The political terms on which private property, ruling status, commercial privileges and the definition of territories rested could change overnight entirely following dynastic intrigues, patronages or outright conquest from competitors or foreign powers. In fact, three times within less than a century and a half did Quebec city switch hands between France and Britain, an exemplification of the volatile nature of territories in the early modern international context. Without a significant population the territory was highly vulnerable to foreign conquest.

In the conflicts that drew early modern European polities into constant clashes with each other and eventually led them to compete outside Europe for colonies in the New World, militarized individual feudal lords had long lost their role as the main

²⁶³ Marc Bloch, *Feudal Society* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1961), 245; Georges Duby, *The Early Growth of the European Economy: Warriors and Peasants from the Seventh to the Twelfth Century* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1978), 90f.

²⁶⁴ Garneau, "Réflexions sur la régulation juridique du régime seigneurial canadien," 63–65.

protagonists. Centralized states now occupied the front scene at the same time as new compromises had to be devised with trading companies and military officers which in the case of New France constituted the main agents on the ground. The French Crown indeed used its rights to dispense trading monopolies charters to towns and merchant companies as a way to encourage the latter to become its partnering agents in colonial ventures. Royal military protection at sea was also offered in what developed as a class alliance which resulted in what Teschke as described as

gigantic military-commercial machines whose vessels, though sailing under the royal flag and on a royal commission, were owned and commanded by private entrepreneurs who shared costs and profits with the Crown. As joint-stock companies, trading companies were private enterprises; as chartered companies, depending upon royal trading concessions and privileges, they were public agencies, carrying rights of sovereignty.²⁶⁵

As merchant companies would try to gain access to trade routes and to monopolize access to commodities, territorial expansion and the conquest of vast territorial lands could not be avoided. The exploitation of natural resources and market monopolies, the establishment of colonies and the access of circuits of exchange by joint-stock companies unavoidably generated politico-military competition backed by rival polities

²⁶⁵ Teschke, *The Myth of 1648*, 202; See also Jan De Vries, *Economy of Europe in an Age of Crisis, 1600-1750* (Cambridge, New York: Cambridge University Press, 1976), 128–146.

in efforts to exploit extra-economic advantages of various kinds.²⁶⁶ Absolutist imperial expansions thus implied ‘the dispersal of political and economic power bound up with private property, governed by an imperial state from a very great distance’.²⁶⁷ When European colonial ventures led to settlement, ‘it tended to be for the purpose of enhancing trade, whether by establishing trading posts or by means of more wide-ranging territorial occupation. This kind of settlement might have little to do with production, or production might be for the purpose of provisioning the imperial power’s merchant ships.’²⁶⁸ Competition was ‘primarily “extra-economic”, involving piracy and retaliation, diplomacy and alliances, trade embargoes, and outright armed struggle against rival merchants and towns’.²⁶⁹ This directly resulted, Teschke has noted, ‘into almost permanent maritime trade wars between political rivals—the dominant logic of interaction between seafaring international actors in period’.²⁷⁰

Teschke has argued that mercantilism was not an early form of capitalism, but rather a ‘politically constituted unequal exchange prolonging medieval practices into the early modern world’.²⁷¹ The result was the pursuit of ‘militarily protected maritime geo-commerce’ that fostered aggressive and competitive yet counterproductive long-term development tendencies.²⁷² The search for power and wealth were intimately linked,

²⁶⁶ Teschke, *The Myth of 1648*, 202.

²⁶⁷ Ellen Meiksins Wood, *Empire of Capital* (London; New York: Verso, 2005), 38.

²⁶⁸ Wood, *The Origin of Capitalism*, 150–151.

²⁶⁹ Quoted in Teschke, *The Myth of 1648*, 202.

²⁷⁰ *Ibid.*

²⁷¹ *Ibid.*, 197–198; See also Maurice Dobb, “Capital Accumulation and Mercantilism,” in *Studies in the Development of Capitalism* (London: Routledge, 1946), 177–220; Mettam, *Power and Faction in Louis XIV’s France*.

²⁷² Teschke, *The Myth of 1648*, 197–198.

‘[s]ecurity and reproduction were inseparable’.²⁷³ It is in this broader geopolitical framework that commercial competition systematically fuelled politico-military hostility pushing ‘nations into one war after another’ and imprinting upon ‘all wars a turn in the direction of trade, industry, and colonial gain, such as they never had before or after’.²⁷⁴ North American colonies were no exceptions. Since their inception they were indeed associated with the dynamics of mercantilist trade wars between European powers vying for the political control of long-distance commercial roads and vast territories bursting with natural resources.

In this geocommercial setting, the aims of chartered companies were far from being exclusively commercial. In addition to the tasks of building and settling colonies, chartered companies had to work at the conversion of Native peoples and ensure the defence of the territory. It is, for instance, the Company of Adventurers to Canada founded by the Kirke family and several London merchants that financed and led the military expedition which, during the Thirty-Years War, succeeded in capturing Quebec in 1629—the biggest French settlement in New France at the time. In exchange, the Company was expecting to receive from the English Crown the letters patent that would give it a monopoly of right to trade and settle in Canada along the St. Lawrence. The Company’s hopes were frustrated three years later when the colony was restored to the French authority with the Treaty of Germain-en-Laye. While merchant companies were public-private ventures, the interests of the king were clearly not always compatible with those of the individuals engaging in these ventures for the sake of private enrichment.

²⁷³ *Ibid.*, 208.

²⁷⁴ Schmoller quoted in *ibid.*, 202.

The opposite is also true, especially since the fur trade was not even profitable for the French monarchy.

As Catherine Desbarats has shown in her analysis of New France's finances and what it represented in terms of burden for the French empire, together with the Canadian portion of the *Domaine d'Occident*, the fur trade 'proved a fiscal disappointment. In contrast with the taxes collected in the West Indies and in France, rights to the Canadian beaver monopoly and to the trade duties falling on selected fur exports and on incoming spirits and tobacco barely covered the modest ordinary expenditures assigned to them even in peacetime'.²⁷⁵ Actually, they 'did not even cover the costs of cultivating the native alliances on which not just the trade, but New France's military capacity depended'.²⁷⁶

That said, for individual members of the colonial administration and the merchants and seigneurs who associated with them, the fur trade could be remarkably profitable. Nobles and office-holders—not only merchants—were taking part in chartered companies, as illustrated by the Company of One Hundred Associates, chartered in 1627 with the participation of Cardinal Richelieu, principal minister of the king and one of the masterminds behind absolutist state-making.²⁷⁷ The Company was used by him and his associates as one more way to exploit offices in government to accumulate private riches instead of pursuing policies of *raison d'État*, a dynamic that

²⁷⁵ Desbarats, "France in North America: The Net Burden of Empire during the First Half of the Eighteenth Century," 6.

²⁷⁶ *Ibid.*, 28.

²⁷⁷ Gervais Carpin, *Le réseau du Canada: étude du mode migratoire de la France vers la Nouvelle-France, 1628-1662* (Paris: Presses Paris Sorbonne, 2001); Helen Dewar, "Souveraineté dans les colonies, souveraineté en métropole: le rôle de la Nouvelle-France dans la consolidation de l'autorité maritime en France, 1620-1628," *Revue d'histoire de l'Amérique française* 64, no. 3-4 (2011): 68-70.

had been reinforced by the creation of the French absolutist state tax/office and the widespread practices of selling and buying state offices.²⁷⁸ In order to make war, the king needed money, and in order to obtain money, the king was willing to alienate its property by selling public offices to private individuals who were allowed to accumulate wealth in their duties of public officers. The ruling class of the *ancien régime* comprised both nobles and bourgeois who shared common economic interests in the state, a conflictual situation at the roots of the French Revolution itself, when aristocrats and bourgeois within the ruling class fought to gain access to the state: ‘aristocrats had an interest in preserving and extending the political privileges of noble status within the state which the unprivileged bourgeois had an interest in limiting or reducing.’²⁷⁹

As the difficulty created by the distance had made it uneasy for the king to keep in check the behaviour of local administrators and chartered companies, the king successively withdrew the right to trade fur from the Compagnie de Rouen (1614-1621) and the Compagnie de Montmorency (1621-1627) because they had failed, as promised, to establish significant numbers of Frenchmen in Canada. The Company of One Hundred Associates that was formed to replace the previous venture never came close to fulfilling its charter obligations. Instead, it tried to devolve the responsibility of settling the colony to others by subgranting the land to both lay and ecclesiastic seigneurs, among whom the Société de Notre de Dame pour la conversion des Sauvages de la Nouvelle-France received the island of Montreal. Unsatisfied with the result of the colonization, the king withdrew the charter of the Compagnie in 1663, giving it, a year

²⁷⁸ Teschke, *The Myth of 1648*, 173.

²⁷⁹ Comminel, “Historical Materialist Sociology and Revolutions,” 93.

later, to the Company of the West Indies, whose unsuccessful administration ended in 1674. Levies that had been collected by the Company were then relinquished to the Crown who leased it out to another financial intermediary, the *Domaine d'Occident* tax farm.²⁸⁰ Already in 1663, the king, his advisors, and his appointees had started to take a much closer look at the affairs of the colony through the establishment of the Royal government and the arrival of the first intendant in New France.

Politically Constituted Property in the Colony

Devised to regain control of the colony against the growing independence of local administrators, the Royal government was established in 1663 to direct more tightly the settlement of New France. The Custom of Paris was introduced to the exclusion of any other and an intendant was nominated.²⁸¹ In France, the creation of ‘[t]hese revocable royal commissioners, equipped with extraordinary powers to supervise the collection of taxes and the administration of justice in the provinces’ had been ‘immediately seen by most patrimonial officers as a direct attack on their prerogatives.’²⁸² The situation was no different in New France, as testified by the many conflicts that opposed New France’s intendants to governors, religious congregations

²⁸⁰ Desbarats, “France in North America: The Net Burden of Empire during the First Half of the Eighteenth Century,” 6.

²⁸¹ Written in 1510, the Custom of Paris was the compilation and systematization of the civil and customary law that was in vigour in the *prévôté* and *vicomté* of Paris. It contained 16 titles and 362 articles relating, among others, to seigneuries, matrimonial relationships and the rights of inheritance. Grenier, *Brève histoire du régime seigneurial*, 75–76, 219.

²⁸² Teschke, *The Myth of 1648*, 175–176.

and local administrators.²⁸³ While one should be careful not to see in the institutions of the Royal Government the activities of a modern civil bureaucracy—their members were no less than other officers inclined to use their powers to further their personal commercial interests²⁸⁴—they nevertheless allowed the metropolis to exert a significant control on the fur trade as well as on other colonial economic activities.

By 1680, regulatory social and political institutions had developed to such an extent that these institutions were often determining the price of merchandise and the number of craftsmen allowed in each craft. Dechêne has given the examples of butchers and bakers, who ‘were regulated by the judge, assisted by a few chosen citizens [*prudhommes*] who determined their number, the quality of their products, and their prices’.²⁸⁵ On some occasions, the intendant himself decided the number of bakers allowed to sell and retail bread under specific conditions.²⁸⁶ The sale and retail of alcohol were also regulated, as was the number of cabaret-hotels in Montreal and their opening hours.²⁸⁷ All in all, by the mid-eighteenth century, as one historian puts it, ‘[e]fforts of the Minister of Colonies to check extravagance, and to enquire into the accounting methods of colonial governmental officials, threatened to destroy what had developed as the most important economic enterprise in the colony—the business of

²⁸³ In New France, the governor had the task of managing the army and matters of diplomacy, while the intendant was the chief of the civil life, including law and finance, as well as the president of the Sovereign Council established in 1663.

²⁸⁴ This is the conclusion to which come Jean-Claude Dubé in his detailed study of the intendants of New France. *Les intendants de la Nouvelle-France* (Montréal: Fides, 1984), 257.

²⁸⁵ Dechêne, *Habitants and Merchants in Seventeenth-Century Montreal*, 223.

²⁸⁶ “Price of Bread, February 15, 1677”, *Jugements et délibérations du Conseil souverain de la Nouvelle-France*, vol. II (Québec: A. Côté et cie, 1885), 109–110.

²⁸⁷ “Ordonnance Ruling Cabaret-Hotels, Montreal, June 23, 1710”, *Complément des ordonnances et jugements des gouverneurs et intendants du Canada* (Québec: E.R. Fréchette, 1856), 429–430.

diverting public funds into private hands'.²⁸⁸

Bosher has investigated this confusion of 'public' and 'private' means of appropriation.²⁸⁹ Like other historians before him, he showed that 'the great majority of government officials [...] have used their power or positions for promoting their own private money-making ventures', but he has also pointed out some of the problems with the typical interpretation made of these ventures. More specifically, he argued that the label of 'corruption' is particularly ill-suited to describe the fact that the fusion of private enterprise and government administration 'was commonplace and generally tolerated in the *ancien régime*', for this labelling 'usually implies a moral judgment on the times. [...] [A] more satisfactory explanation might be found in answer to a sociological question: what sort of an administrative system was it which tolerated the intrusion of personal or private interests on such a large scale?'²⁹⁰ Bosher's answer to the question is that '[t]here was an ambiguity in the royal financial administration of New France, indeed of the entire French kingdom. The system was almost as much a private enterprise as a public function'.²⁹¹

One of the rare attempts at making sense of this ambiguity in the case of New France has been made by Michael Stewart, who has interpreted the fusion of political and economic power in the colony as a form of what Robert Brenner refers to as

²⁸⁸ S. D. Clark, *Movements of Political Protest in Canada, 1640-1840* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1968), 37.

²⁸⁹ It is, properly speaking, anachronistic to use the categories of 'public' and 'private' here. These categories are valid only as they are used retrospectively, to shed light on, precisely, the absence of a differentiation between them.

²⁹⁰ John Bosher, "Government and Private Interest in New France," *Canadian Public Administration* 10 (1967): 248.

²⁹¹ *Ibid.*

‘politically constituted property’, that is, the ‘power to accumulate dependent on non-market factors, such as military coercion, state privilege, and juridical authority’.²⁹² In a passage worth quoting at length, Stewart has pointed out to the abundant colonial expressions of extra-economic means of appropriation for the colony’s top administrators, who ‘controlled the fur, fish and lumber trades for their own profit’:

Especially in the absence of a tax system based on appropriation of the agrarian surplus, it was expected that the colony’s officials would profit by their administrative functions. The colony’s governing cadre determined the numbers and recipients of fur-trading licenses, attached levies on furs delivered to trading entrepôts and those leaving ports, and retained fines collected from illegal participation. As nobles they were also given free shipping on all royal naval vessels. And their authority not only lead to direct revenues but to myriad reciprocations deriving from patronage relations. [...] [T]he same must be said for the fish and timber trades. Officials reaped exceptional profits here, not only by repeating their tactics in administrating the fur trade, but also because, as seigneurs—and all of them were seigneurs under the French regime—they held rights of *banalité* over lumber and fish harvested from their lands, which gave them a monopoly over production. [...] [T]he victualling trade for the civilian populace [...] [and] the military proved valuable as well [...].²⁹³

²⁹² Michael Stewart, “The Question of Capitalism in Pre-Confederation Quebec,” *Problématique*, no. 9 (2003): 73.

²⁹³ *Ibid.*, 80.

While offices never became venal or hereditary in New France as they were in France, the colonial ruling class nevertheless reproduced itself through occupations and offices within the state, the access to which was of primary importance for the lucrative fur trade. On this matter, absolutist social-property relations in New France reproduced key dynamics of the social reproduction of the ruling class in France. As Dechêne has pointed out, in the colony ‘[a]ll officials of whatever rank had a hand in the trade [...] [This] can be said of most governors, intendants, judicial officers, and other agents of the Crown. [...] [T]his is not a question of “corruption” but part and parcel of the administrative system of *l’Ancien Régime*, where private enterprise and the public sector overlapped’.²⁹⁴ The same applies to seigneurs. Jean de Lauson, Sieur de Lisé, successively director of the Company of One-Hundred Associates and governor of New France, offers an illustrative example: in the mid-seventeenth century, Lauson’s family ‘held more land than anyone else’ and yet, its principal short-term goal was, like other landholders, ‘to participate in, better still to control, those commercial activities from which substantial profits could be made’.²⁹⁵

Examples of this kind can be multiplied almost infinitely, for the systemic logic of social reproduction of the colony restricted the ruling class to quite specific strategies centred on pre-capitalist forms of surplus extraction without direct control on the production process itself in order to maintain or improve their socio-economic positions.

²⁹⁴ *Habitants and Merchants in Seventeenth-Century Montreal*, 92, fn; See also William Eccles, *Frontenac* (Toronto: McClelland and Stewart Limited, 1959); Boshier, “Government and Private Interest in New France.”

²⁹⁵ Trigger, *Natives and Newcomers Canada’s “Heroic Age” Reconsidered*, 329–330.

As Boshier has explained, '[a]s a basic feature of the monarchy, rank and place were fundamentally social, whether administrative, military or ecclesiastical, and the most rapid and profitable advancement lay open to those who could marshal the most support. Rank and place, once gained, opened further avenues to personal advancement'.²⁹⁶ Seen in this way, it becomes easier to understand that with the exception of a few colonial shopkeepers exclusively dedicated to commercial activities, those controlling the fur trade were almost always state officers and landowners. Nor should we be surprised that Jean Talon's plan to diversify the economy came to a halt as soon as he left the colony in 1672, for local administrators got back to their previous obsession with the fur trade and showed, again, their lack of interest in populating the country and developing its industry.²⁹⁷

The change of tone after Talon's departure is well illustrated by the behaviour of Count Frontenac, Governor General of New France from 1672 to 1682 and again from 1689 until his death in 1698. At the core of Frontenac's policy of expansion was the construction of Fort Frontenac on the shores of Lake Ontario. A military establishment officially aiming at protecting Native allies against Iroquois, the Fort was in fact owned by a seigneur, Cavalier de la Salle, who partnered with Frontenac in the fur trade.²⁹⁸ Like chartered companies before the establishment of the Royal government, Frontenac was far more interested in appropriating private wealth from the fur trade than in

²⁹⁶ John Boshier, "Government and Private Interests in New France," *Canadian Public Administration* 10, no. 2 (1967): 255.

²⁹⁷ Jean Talon was the first intendant of New France after Louis Robert, who was intendant from 1663 to 1665 but never came to the colony.

²⁹⁸ Nish, *The French Regime, Vol. I*, 63.

satisfying the royal will of populating the country. In this regard, Frontenac's behaviour is no different than other *officiers d'épée* of the navy and the colonial regular troops in that age, who were, as Boshier has pointed out, 'accustomed to profiting [...] from naval prizes and other wartime booty'.²⁹⁹

Many military officers were also able to trade: 'The ships, forts, and companies of men under their command afforded opportunities to those with the right connections. Warships commonly took cargoes across the Atlantic. [...] [I]t would be a surprise to discover that a naval captain in that age did not use his authority to trade on his own account'.³⁰⁰ In the colonial regulars, the trade of army officers is even more evident: 'Their best opportunities lay in the fur and supply trades at Canadian forts, especially the western outposts where a number of well-known military families had established monopolies [...]. The commanders of some forts farmed the trade out to merchants [...] [b]ut certain military names recur in the records of transatlantic trade'.³⁰¹

Conclusion

In this chapter, it has been shown that in spite of the conflicts that opposed the absolutist state to the seigneurial class in the French metropolis, the seigneurial regime was established by the Crown as the mode of land tenure in New France. This strategy of socio-territorial organization was chosen by the French state as it drew on the repertoires of social relations existing in the metropolis to design a strategy of

²⁹⁹ John Boshier, *The Canada Merchants, 1713-1763* (Oxford; New York: Oxford University Press; Clarendon Press, 1987), 78.

³⁰⁰ *Ibid.*, 78–79.

³⁰¹ *Ibid.*, 79.

territorialization of New France that would remain compatible with the workings of the absolutist regime and the authority of the king, geographically distant from colonial rule. In the colonial context, where only a few tax-gathering offices could be established in the absence of a sufficient taxation base to permit the collection of a direct centralized colonial tax on household and land, the social-property regime that developed on the shores of the St. Lawrence River did not take the form of a tax/office regime. Nevertheless, New France remained in the orbit of the specialized instruments of control of the French metropolis and its absolutist dynamic of development, since the state remained the primary means of appropriation in the colony—whether in the form of commercial connections and privileges, the manipulation of credit, or the possession of the military and administrative offices of the state. If not exceptionally prestigious or lucrative, grants of seigneuries in New France were themselves used as a way to reward deserving individuals, not the least because seigneuries provided indispensable local territorial roots to pursue lucrative commercial activities, such as the fur trade. The grant of seigneuries to merchants companies, individuals, or ecclesiastic communities played a central role in building the king's dependant following of servants in the colony, contributing to attaching favoured individuals and their clan of retainers to the political interests of the Crown in a way similar to other *grâces* bestowed by the king, such as offices in the justice system, the army and the administration, nominations of religious officers of high rank (e.g. archbishops), support to religious congregations, grants of nobles titles, and preferential treatment at his royal court. The logic of social reproduction of the colonial ruling class of New France was resolutely more 'absolutist'

than 'feudal'; it had more to do with access to the state than to the parcellized sovereignty of the seigneurial regime.

3.

The British Conquest and its Consequences

The cession of Canada to England by France took place under the reign of Louis XV as part of the Treaty of Paris which, in February 1763, together with the Treaty of Hubertusburg, ended the Seven Years' War begun in 1754. On the European continent, the conflict had opposed Austria and its allies France, Saxony, Sweden, and Russia, on one side, against Prussia and its allies Hanover and Britain, on the other. In North America, the war that opposed England to France, assisted by Spain, on colonial questions, is known as the French and Indian War. In New France, the hostilities ended in 1760, with the military conquest of Canada, but war continued for three more years against Native peoples on the borders of the Great Lakes and in the Ohio Valley, as well as elsewhere in Europe, Africa, India, South America, and the Philippines.

In the eyes of the Secrétaire d'État de la Marine in charge of French colonial policy at the end of the war, Canada 'was not only commercially barren, but also, far from contributing to the defence of more productive colonies such as those in the Caribbean, a drain on imperial military resources'.³⁰² As one historian puts it, during the negotiation of the Treaty of Paris, 'the French had one last chance to try to get Canada

³⁰² Phillip A Buckner and John G Reid, "Introduction," in *Revisiting 1759: The Conquest of Canada in Historical Perspective*, ed. Phillip A Buckner and John G Reid (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2012), 8. The thesis is vindicated by François-Joseph Ruggiu in Chapter 4 of the same book.

back’, but ‘[t]hey chose to trade Canada for Guadeloupe, a Caribbean sugar island’.³⁰³ Meanwhile, a majority of ministers on the British side ‘appear to have been less concerned by the prospect of American independence than by the possibility that a continuing French military presence in Canada would mean that the British colonies remained vulnerable to attack’.³⁰⁴ Hence Canada officially became a British colony, an event with long-lasting socioeconomic and political consequences for its inhabitants.

In this chapter, I argue that the changes that occurred in the public sector as a result of the change of metropolis directly affected the means of reproduction of the French Canadian ruling class. Under the French regime, this ruling class drew the bulk of its wealth from commercial and administrative privileges associated with state offices. With the change of colonial administration, this method of reproduction was blocked, or at least seriously limited, by the closure of access to the state for French Canadians. In this context, it became more rational for those who owned a seigneurie to revert back to their rights over censitaires and annuities, either tithes or rents, as the main source of their revenue. This was made possible by the decision of the British authorities to preserve the seigneurial regime in Lower Canada after the Conquest. In order to better control the French Canadian population, and for geostrategic reasons having to do with American revolutionary aspirations, the pre-capitalist agrarian class structure and social-property relations characteristic of New France was indeed

³⁰³ D. Peter MacLeod, *Northern Armageddon: The Battle of the Plains of Abraham* (Vancouver: Douglas & McIntyre, 2011), 295; See also Marjorie G. Reid, “Pitt’s Decision to Keep Canada in 1761,” *Canadian Historical Association Report*, 1926, 21–27.

³⁰⁴ Stephen Conway, “The Consequences of the Conquest: Quebec and British Politics, 1760-1774,” in *Revisiting 1759: The Conquest of Canada in Historical Perspective*, ed. Phillip A Buckner and John G Reid (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2012), 144.

preserved. Because this regime provided no incentive to invest in the improvement of the means of agricultural production, by the early nineteenth century, the colony experienced an agricultural crisis: the fertility of the soil had been exhausted while limits had been placed on the seigneurial territory by the British authorities. Before exploring this agricultural crisis in the second half of the chapter, I first sketch out the geopolitical framework of mercantilist trade wars that eventually led to the final demise of the French North American empire during the Seven Years' War.

Mercantilist Trade Wars in Northeastern North America

Territorial expansion beyond the shores of the St. Lawrence placed France and New France in conflict with Britain and its American colonies. As the fur trade expanded westward toward the Great Lakes and the Ohio Valley, the prolonged struggle with the British colonies intensified, culminating in the French and Indian War, the North American theatre of the larger Seven Years' War. Historian Zenab Esmat Rashed has depicted the immediate cause of the conflict in these terms:

Having made themselves masters of the Canadian colonies on the St. Lawrence, and of Louisiana on the Mississippi, the two Northern and Southern colonies of America, the French aimed at connecting them by a chain of forts along Lake Champlain, the Ohio, and the Mississippi. This procedure by the French presented a menace to the English colonists, who, with that encircling chain,

would not be able to extend their possessions beyond it.³⁰⁵

The French, for a time, arguably had the upper hand in the conflict. Among the feats of the French troops, figures the destruction of Forts Oswego and William Henry under the order of Montcalm in 1757 and 1758. The French also successfully repelled the British army that threatened Canada's Lake Champlain frontier in 1758, 'smashing it into fragments', to use one historian's expression, at the Battle of Carillon.³⁰⁶ A year later, however, English troops were besieging the city of Quebec. Three months of siege had already left the city in ruins when the General James Wolfe decided to debark at L'Anse-au-Foulon, a cove situated southwest of the city. Soon after, on the Abraham Plains, English troops faced French troops in a surprisingly short confrontation: 'Eight minutes of gunfire', one historian says, 'that shaped a continent'.³⁰⁷

Since then, French and English Canadians have never ceased to quibble over the historical meaning of the event and recast it in the light of hypothetical scenarios. Would, for instance, the outcome of the Battle of the Plains of Abraham have been any different, if the French metropolis had sent more troops to North America? The subject is left to speculation. Over the long-term, however, there is little doubt that Britain had a decisive upper hand in the affairs of the continent. A few hundreds miles away, south of the St. Lawrence Valley, British American settlers had long developed much more populated and thriving colonies, veritable economic powerhouses during that epoch. In

³⁰⁵ Zenab Esmat Rashed, *The Peace of Paris, 1763* (Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 1951), 4.

³⁰⁶ MacLeod, *Northern Armageddon*, 292.

³⁰⁷ This is the subtitle of Macleod's study, *Northern Armageddon*.

the eyes of Peter Kalm, the Swedish explorer who wrote, in the 1750s, the first detailed study of natural history in North America, British American colonies ‘have increased so much in number of inhabitants, and in their riches, that they almost vie with Old England’.³⁰⁸ In the lively words of historian Peter MacLeod,

French strategists saw a swarming, acquisitive mass of humanity, marching relentlessly forward with all of the awful inevitability of a horde of army ants, converting First Nations homelands into productive units of the British empire. [...] [None of the French triumphs] ever came close to threatening British America, whose strength lay in its coastal cities and countryside and its transatlantic link to Britain, not in its frontier forts and settlements. Every French victory only made British America stronger as a humiliated Britain reacted to defeat by sending more regulars, more ships, and more money to North America. As their resources increased and their regular army adapted to local conditions, British goals in North America changed from securing dispersed territory to the invasion and conquest of Canada. With this shift in policy, the war in North America became a war for Quebec.³⁰⁹

Metaphors aside, these observations hold true. By 1628, New France had seventy-six permanent inhabitants in the settlement of Quebec, the biggest French settlement in Canada at that date, while British North American colonies had already almost 5,000

³⁰⁸ Quoted in *ibid.*, 289.

³⁰⁹ *Ibid.*, 289–292.

inhabitants.³¹⁰ As of 1690, there were 12,000 French settlers in New France, compared to the 250,000 inhabitants of the British North American colonies.³¹¹ At the beginning of the Seven Years' War, in 1754, the population of New France averaged 70,000, while that of the British American colonies had surpassed the million.³¹² Historian Emile Salone had good reason to be astonished: 'Seventy thousand French in Canada! After one hundred and fifty years of effective domination, it is, for the nation which, in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries was often the most powerful, and always the most civilized and populous in Europe an absurdly low result'.³¹³

As Hamilton has noted, what is surprising here is not so much the weak development of the French settlement venture, but the incredibly strong development of the English one.³¹⁴ Indeed, England was exceptional among all European powers in the massive scope of its emigration. This distinctive trait has everything to do with the development of specifically *agrarian* capitalism: as a result of the enclosure movement, the peasantry was dispossessed from direct access to the land, which was appropriated by the aristocracy and increasingly subjected to market competition, at the same time as the feudal tenure progressively wore away. As the number of dispossessed peasants grew, many of them ended up barely able to sustain themselves, even when they found tenant farmers to whom to sell their labour power. 'In this context', Hamilton has explained, 'the idea of sending the country's surplus population overseas gained

³¹⁰ Nish, *The French Regime, Vol. I, 2*.

³¹¹ Bérenger, Durand, and Meyer, *Pionniers et colons en Amérique du Nord*, 189.

³¹² Wade, *The French Canadians 1760-1967*, 1:20; McRoberts and Posgate, *Développement et modernisation du Québec*, 38.

³¹³ Quoted in Hamilton, *Feudal Society and Colonization*, 33.

³¹⁴ *Ibid.*, 31–35.

currency. Men of capital began to find it lucrative to export emigrants across the Atlantic; once established in America, the settlers became the most promising markets for the growing array of British manufactured goods'.³¹⁵ France did not experience a similar enclosure movement and therefore lacked both the surplus population and the surplus capital for full-scale colonization. French peasants had resisted landlords' attempts at dispossessing them; as they preserved their means of subsistence, the conditions for systematic improvement and specialization did not exist. Even when France explicitly wished to have more settlers in New France, its peasant majority at home had not generated a surplus population of the scope generated in England by agrarian capitalism and its dispossessed.³¹⁶ From the beginning, therefore, more people and capital could be sent from England to the thirteen American colonies than could be sent to New France from France.

At the end of the seventeenth century, New France 'does not have industry or marine, all its wealth resting on subsistence agriculture and exportation of beaver pelts. Here already appears the contrast that will grow during the eighteenth century: French America has vast land while English America has men'.³¹⁷ American industries developed at a much more rapid pace than in New France, a fact that, I argue, has to be accounted for by examining variations in social-property relations and the consequences of these variations for patterns of settlement and socioeconomic development. Historians who have pointed out the low pace of development of New France and described

³¹⁵ Ibid., 33.

³¹⁶ Wood, *Empire of Capital*, 92–93.

³¹⁷ Bérenger, Durand, and Meyer, *Pionniers et colons en Amérique du Nord*, 189–190. (my translation)

Quebec's development until the mid-twentieth century as 'backward' or 'laggard' are, therefore, not off the mark in comparative terms. New England unquestionably experienced a more powerful and rapid industrial growth than New France. Part of this economic superiority was based on its close ties with England, whose agriculture in the eighteenth century had been subsumed under the specifically capitalist mode of production, and developed to such an extent that the Industrial Revolution was about to unfold, giving the English state and its imperialist aims an unprecedented power.³¹⁸

By then, England had the most remarkable war machine in the world, and could align four times more vessels and five times more men than France.³¹⁹ Furthermore, William Pitt the Elder, the British Whig statesman who led Britain during the Seven Years' War, obtained from the Parliament eighty million sterling pounds in war credits—the equivalent of one billion six hundred million French pounds, that is, credits *twenty-five* times superior to the funds devoted to the war by France.³²⁰ Furthermore, England was endowed with a credit system so efficient that, at the end of the eighteenth century, it was characterized by Immanuel Kant as an 'ingenious invention', 'a dangerous means of pecuniary power, a treasure of war, higher than that of all other countries taken together'.³²¹ Without understanding the full implication of the transformation of social-property relations occurring in England, Kant, nevertheless,

³¹⁸ Zmolek, *Rethinking the Industrial Revolution*.

³¹⁹ Jean Hamelin and Jean Provencher, *Brève histoire du Québec* (Montréal: Boréal, 1987), 233.

³²⁰ *Ibid.*

³²¹ Immanuel Kant, *Projet de paix perpétuelle: texte intégral*, ed. Olivier Dekens (Paris: Bréal, 2002), 44. (my translation) Contemporaries were also well aware of the gap: François Crouzet, "The Sources of England's Wealth: Some French Views in the Eighteenth and Nineteenth Century," in *Shipping, Trade and Commerce: Essays in Memory of Ralph Davis*, ed. P. L. Cottrell and Derek H. Aldcroft (Leicester: Leicester University Press, 1981), 71–72.

identified one of the main peculiarities of this transformation: as a class represented in Parliament, landowners were able to raise taxes upon themselves, which resulted in the strongest European financial system and conferred upon the British ruling class an unrivaled capacity for collective action.³²² As Cain and Hopkins have argued, ‘Britain was able to borrow extensively and efficiently because investors had confidence that their money would be returned, whereas France was forced to rely much more heavily on taxation’.³²³

In this sense, British victories during the Seven Years’ War—including the Conquest of Canada—were largely based on the greater productivity of capitalist social relations.³²⁴ So dominant, in fact, were British forces that, by the end of 1762, they had taken control of ‘French colonies and outposts in India, Africa, and the West Indies’, as well as ‘raided the coast of France, and landed in Germany to support their Prussian allies. Immediately after Spain entered the war, on the side of France, the British captured Manila and Havana, key Spanish ports on opposite sides of the globe’.³²⁵ By

³²² The peculiarities of the English fiscal system are discussed in John Brewer, *The Sinews of Power: War, Money and the English State, 1688-1783* (Cambridge: Harvard university press, 1990); See also Colin Peter Mooers, *The Making of Bourgeois Europe: Absolutism, Revolution, and the Rise of Capitalism in England, France, and Germany* (London; New York: Verso, 1991), 161–164; Julian Hoppit, “Attitudes to Credit in Britain, 1680–1790,” *The Historical Journal* 33, no. 02 (1990): 305–22; Peter George Muir Dickson, *The Financial Revolution in England: A Study in the Development of Public Credit, 1688-1756* (Aldershot; Brookfield: Gregg Revivals, 1993).

³²³ P. J. Cain and Anthony G. Hopkins, *British Imperialism: Innovation and Expansion, 1688-1914* (London and New York: Longman, 1993), 64.

³²⁴ Of course, much of Britain’s military superiority rested on geostrategic decisions and war tactics made by policy-makers in particular historical contexts, these decisions and tactics not being determined by capitalism itself, even if it provided the dynamic material basis. The ‘balance of power’ doctrine at the core of British foreign policy, for instance, crucially pitted Prussia against France on the European continent during the Seven Years’ War, draining France’s resources which could otherwise have been used in the French and Indian War. Teschke has set out how the balance of power was an outgrowth of specific social classes’ interests in early modern international relations, in *The Myth of 1648*, 233–248.

³²⁵ MacLeod, *Northern Armageddon*, 294.

contrast, the French absolutist regime, racked by internal contradictions, was on the brink of a collapse which was to be accomplished less than three decades later, with the French Revolution. By then, ‘the fiscal-military superiority enjoyed by capitalist Britain [had] undermined absolutism’s ability to engage in successful geopolitical competition, exhausted its tax basis and state finances, and sharpened the domestic social conflicts over redistribution’.³²⁶

Changes in the Geo-Territorial Configuration

By theorizing the Conquest as a geopolitical confrontation between polities that were the theatre of class struggles rooted in fundamentally different social-property regimes, I argue that it is possible to grasp some of the consequences of the British Conquest for the transition to capitalism in English Canada, while accounting for the long-term economic ‘backwardness’ of the French Canadian countryside. Without being the catastrophe depicted by the Montreal School,³²⁷ the change of metropolis did result in a profound reorganization of political rule in the St. Lawrence. This political reorganization had significant repercussions on the processes of colonization that had shaped the socio-territorial organization, economic development, and class structure of Laurentian society over the two preceding centuries.

When the British Conquest occurred, many members of the colonial ruling class had no choice but to go back to France, for they were tied to the absolutist state through

³²⁶ Teschke and Lacher, “The Changing ‘Logics’ of Capitalist Competition,” 573.

³²⁷ See Chapter 1.

military offices or administrative duties which were rendered obsolete, or through commercial and clientelist connections that would have been of no use within the British empire.³²⁸ An additional incentive to return to France were the domains that many held on the old continent, which were often worth more than their North American possessions. The return to France after the Conquest was, nevertheless, quite challenging, for the Canadian nobility was generally held in low esteem by its metropolitan counterpart.³²⁹ It is now estimated that approximately 5% of the colonial population, that is, 4,000 people, left the colony between 1754 and 1770.³³⁰ The sociopolitical background of those who left was varied: sword and robe officers, with their family and their domestics, were hoping to

be reused or rewarded for their loyal service to Canada. Other, lower in the social hierarchy but also at the king's service, like midwife 'maintained by the King', pilot and surgeon of the king, militia major, etc. also left with their families for the same reasons. Some of them would later be reused in Guyana: career officers, ex-soldiers of Canada, specializing former employees of the shipyard, etc. Others moved to France to pursue their professional activities: traders wanting to reorganize their trade within colonial mercantilism, sailors making their living on

³²⁸ Roch Legault, *Une élite en déroute: les militaires canadiens après la Conquête* (Montréal: Athéna, 2002).

³²⁹ Gadoury, *La Noblesse de Nouvelle-France*, 52.

³³⁰ Grenier, *Brève histoire du régime seigneurial*, 142; Robert Larin, "L'exode de Canadiens À La Conquête. De La Mémoire Sélective À La Mémoire Retrouvée... En Guyanne," *Bulletin Mémoires Vives*, no. 22 (2007), <http://www.cfqlmc.org/bulletin-memoires-vives>.

ships which could not come back to Canada [...].³³¹

The members of the ruling class that left New France after the Conquest were not *grands bourgeois capitalistes*, but a mixture of pre-capitalist bourgeois and nobles who had had, in New France, a central interest in the colonial administration. The Conquest deprived them of their access to the state and, as a result, their primary means of surplus extraction. Many important seigneurial families stayed nevertheless, such as the Boucher de Niverville, Chartier de Lotbinière, Chaussegros de Léry, Juchereau Duchesnay, Saint-Ours and others. Most of those members of the ruling class who stayed behind were however non-noble seigneurs or noble seigneurs of low rank, who could continue to accumulate private rents without being directly tied to the new British administration, as long as this administration recognized their seigneurial rights and status quo, which it did in order to secure the cooperation of what remained of the French Canadian elite in dealing with the recently conquered, and potentially hostile people, in a broader Atlantic context marked by American revolutionary agitation.

Undoubtedly, British administrators first considered abolishing the seigneurial regime and imposing the English traditional system of tenure on the entire territory of New France, on which more than 250 seigneuries existed at the time.³³² Among a series of important measures proposed by the new administrators, also featured the elimination of customary law, the disappearance of the French language, and the conversion of

³³¹ Larin, "L'exode de Canadiens À La Conquête. De La Mémoire Sélective À La Mémoire Retrouvée... En Guyanne," (my translation)

³³² Grenier, *Brève histoire du régime seigneurial*, 139.

Catholics to Protestantism. Measures of outright assimilation were, however, quickly abandoned. The view of the newly appointed governor, James Murray, prevailed:

En bonne politique, it [the colony] should be perhaps destroyed, but there may be reasons why it should remain, as it is a guarantee for the good behaviour of its neighbouring colonies. [...] The Canadians [...] begin now to be astonished with our conduct, will soon be convinced that there was no deceit in it, and hardly will hereafter be easily persuaded to take up arms against a nation they admire.³³³

Had the British administrators abolished the seigneurial regime and replaced it by the free and common socage, they would have provoked the general indignation of what was left of the French Canadian elite. Religious communities, which controlled over a quarter of the land in 1760, and seigneurs fiercely opposed the first measures envisaged, for the implementation of the free and common socage would have stripped them of their only source of income and the basis of their local power.³³⁴ As Grenier has pointed out, the new rulers also realized that they could themselves take advantage of the seigneurial tenure and, in 1762, before the Treaty of Paris was even signed, the governor James Murray granted seigneuries to two Scottish officers. The others seigneuries acquired by Englishmen or Scots in the second half of the eighteenth century were purchased, rather than granted.

³³³ Quoted in A. L. Burt, *The Old Province of Quebec* (Montreal; Kingston: McGill-Queen's Press, 1968), 13–14.

³³⁴ Colette Chatillon, *L'histoire de l'agriculture au Québec* (Montréal: L'Étincelle, 1976), 12–13.

Of the forty-four seigneuries sold by nobles and bourgeois who left for France between 1760 and 1766, twenty-nine were purchased by the British, among whom featured Murray himself, as well as many military officers. Some of the new seigneurs were also merchants who had accompanied the army during the military campaign.³³⁵ This was only the beginning, as Grenier has noted, of a tendency that was to reinforce itself to the point that, by the mid-nineteenth century, more than half of the seigneuries were owned by non-French Canadians:

The acquisition of seigneuries by the British is a gradual but steady process [...] [that] continues in the nineteenth century [...]. It is the bourgeois, and in particular the English bourgeois, who have an increased interest in seigneurial property, to the extent that it can play a role in their economic activities while ensuring a enviable social position. Several areas can benefit from the seigneurial property, starting with the production of flour.³³⁶

The interest of anglophone merchants in seigneuries peaked, according to Fernand Ouellet, ‘when agriculture was at its most prosperous’, that is, between 1782 and 1802. During this period, the British bought fifty-five seigneuries, but only forty-two between 1802 and 1840.³³⁷ Not only had British administrators and merchants realized that they could take advantage of the seigneurial regime for their own personal enrichment, but

³³⁵ Grenier, *Brève histoire du régime seigneurial*, 146–149.

³³⁶ *Ibid.*, 156–157. (my translation)

³³⁷ Fernand Ouellet, *Economy, Class & Nation in Quebec: Interpretive Essays* (Mississauga: Copp Clark Pitman, 1991), 79.

they were also aware of the need to preserve the seigneurial regime in order to gain the support of the French Canadian seigneurial class in preventing the spread of the revolutionary agitation blowing from New England.³³⁸

Many of the provisions of the Royal Proclamation of 1763 intended to implement the British system of law and government in the colony of Quebec were never applied, or not in full, and many fundamental traits of the French regime persisted. Four months after the Boston Tea Party, the Quebec Act of 1774 reasserted the political and juridical privileges of seigneurs, while officially keeping the *Coutume de Paris* in function. The Act reasserted the application of the French civil law in the colony, allowing seigneurs to continue to play a central role in the management of the habitants' domestic affairs, such as testaments and legacies. The Act also abolished the 'Serment du Test,' which had been imposed after the Conquest to exclude Catholics from state and judicial offices, and it reaffirmed the clergy in its powers while confirming its right to receive tithes. In addition, seven Catholic Canadians, chosen from the minor nobility and the seigneurial class, were appointed among the seventeen members of the legislative council.³³⁹

The contrast with the strategy of deportation adopted during the Seven Years' War to deal with French Acadians—one of the gloomiest chapters in Canadian history—could hardly be larger. As Louis-Philippe Lavallée has argued, the new military and geopolitical situation was largely responsible for this radical change in attitude: 'at the

³³⁸ Fernand Ouellet, "French-Canadian Nationalism: From Its Origins to the Insurrection of 1837," in *Society and Conquest: The Debate on the Bourgeoisie and Social Change in French Canada, 1700-1850*, ed. Dale Miquelon (Toronto: Copp Clark Pub., 1977), 175.

³³⁹ Gustave Lanctôt, *Canada and the American Revolution, 1774-1783* (Toronto: Harrap, 1967), 72.

beginning of the war, French Catholics were perceived as enemies rather than subjects: let's recall here the thousands of Acadians who were expelled and dispersed among British colonies with the goal of assimilating and anglicizing them'.³⁴⁰ Given the war with France, the British were afraid of leaving behind a population of French settlers that could take arms against them at any time and assist French and Canadian troops in their fights against the British American empire. These strategic considerations changed with the end of the war. By that point, imperial rulers had modified their stance toward the recently conquered population, 'modulating exclusion policies into an approach that sought "to bring" order and justice to a "backward" society and a willingness to make of French Canadians good and true British subjects'.³⁴¹

No wonder that, excepting the writings of nationalist historians, so many accounts of the British rule in the St. Lawrence have insisted on its benevolent and compassionate character.³⁴² For one thing, the size of the population of New France—which, while small in comparison with that of New England, was more than four times that of Acadia—would have made highly difficult a forced removal of the kind practiced in Acadia. For another, the defeat of France had been decisive, and the French Crown showed little sign of willingness to reconquer Canada. In the new context, rebellious British American colonies represented a more substantial politico-military threat than the newly conquered French Canadian population. It even became possible to envision

³⁴⁰ Louis-Philippe Lavallée, "Sociologie historique internationale de l'impérialisme: le cas de l'empire britannique dans la province de Québec et en Acadie" (Master's thesis, Université du Québec à Montréal, 2011), 96. (my translation)

³⁴¹ Ibid. (my translation)

³⁴² See, inter alia, Burt, *The Old Province of Quebec*; Arthur Reginald Marsden Lower, *Colony to Nation: A History of Canada* (Toronto: Longmans, Greens and Co., 1947); Thomas Chapais, *Cours d'Histoire du Canada: 1760-1791* (Montréal: J.-P. Garneau, 1919).

French Canadians as allies in dealing with rebellious British American colonies to the South.

Back in 1732, James Logan, Pennsylvania's chief of justice, could confidently deduce that as long as Canada was so near, American colonies would not rebel.³⁴³ Kalm shared a similar opinion: 'As the whole country which lies along the seashore is unguarded, and on the land side is harassed by the French, these dangerous neighbors in times of war are sufficient to prevent the connection of the colonies with their mother country from being broken off'.³⁴⁴ Once ceded to Britain, however, 'Canada was just as close, but no longer a threat [to American colonies]. Some British soldiers, among them James Murray, had thought all along that a British Canada would be less a conquered colony than an incitement to American rebellion. [...] With the French threat eliminated, the American colonies no longer needed British protection'.³⁴⁵ Relieved as they were of the acutely felt menace of fortified French holdings to the north and west, and gaining an ally in the French metropolis, American colonies could now push toward greater autonomy and expansionist ideas.³⁴⁶ 'In this context, the Quebec Act reflected the primary objective of British policy after 1765: to gain the support of the seigneurs and the clergy so as to a secure military base on the continent which could be used to

³⁴³ Joseph E. Johnson, "A Quaker Imperialist's View of the British Colonies in America: 1732," *Pennsylvania Magazine of History and Biography* 60, no. 2 (1936): 128.

³⁴⁴ Pehr Kalm, *The America of 1750: Peter Kalm's Travels in North America*, vol. 1 (New York: Dover Publications, 1966), 140.

³⁴⁵ MacLeod, *Northern Armageddon*, 298.

³⁴⁶ Stephen Brumwell, "La guerre de Sept Ans à l'échelle mondiale," in *La Guerre de Sept Ans en Nouvelle-France*, ed. Laurent Veyssière and Bertrand Fonck (Québec: Septentrion, 2012), 55; Marc Egnal, *A Mighty Empire: The Origins of the American Revolution* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2010).

suppress if necessary too strong a spirit of independence within the English colonies'.³⁴⁷

Not only had victory in the war against France 'brought to the English colonies an enormous confidence in their own strength',³⁴⁸ it had also generated debt for the British state. As a result, the latter was determined to strengthen its grasp on the mainland colonies in order to raise revenues and 'limit the independent economic development of the colonies'.³⁴⁹ The mercantilist regulations imposed on the North American colonies in the aftermath of the French-Indian War disappointed the expectations of the colonists, who, rather than being rewarded for their loyalty during the war, saw a series of direct and indirect taxes (the Sugar Act, the Currency Act, the Stamp Act, the Townsend duties, the Tea Act, etc.) imposed on them.³⁵⁰ The mix of favourable concessions given to the French Canadian population, together with the annexation of the vast Ohio territory to the province of Quebec, made the First Continental Congress, held in Philadelphia in October 1774, look upon the Quebec Act as yet another Intolerable Act. A few months later, the American colonies took arms against Britain in the first military act of the American Revolution.

The Cooptation of French Canadian Elites

In Quebec itself, the Act displeased the British merchants that had established

³⁴⁷ Clark, *Movements of Political Protest in Canada, 1640-1840*, 43.

³⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, 39.

³⁴⁹ Cain and Hopkins, *British Imperialism*, 94; Jack Greene, "The Seven Years' War and the American Revolution: The Causal Relationship Reconsidered," in *The British Atlantic Empire Before the American Revolution*, ed. Peter Marshall and Glyn Williams (London: Frank Cass, 1980), 90-95.

³⁵⁰ Cain and Hopkins, *British Imperialism*, 94; Robert Armstrong, *Structure and Change: An Economic History of Québec* (Toronto: Gage, 1984), 53.

themselves in Montreal and Quebec after the Conquest. It refused them the assembly that had been promised in the Royal Proclamation of 1763 and thwarted their ambition to establish their commercial and political hegemony on the colonies: '[i]ndignant at the generosity of the metropolis to "papists", [English merchants] considered themselves stripped of their rights as British subjects, namely their rights to the representative system, to the Habeas Corpus, the Common Law and the jury trial'.³⁵¹ While fanning the flame of the American rebellion, the Quebec Act was successful in ensuring the cooperation of French Canadian elites: the clergy and the seigneurs combined their efforts in an attempt to recruit militia and secure the loyalty of the French peasantry to England in the face of the imminent American invasion. Yet, the support of the French Canadian elite did not translate into the conquest of the hearts and minds of the rural population. Despite zealous exertions of the gentry and the clergy, the French Canadian population remained reluctant to fight the American rebels, 'to the great disappointment of the governor and those he believed to be their natural leaders'.³⁵²

Marked class antagonisms operated between the French Canadian *habitants* and their leaders, the former unwilling to fight on behalf of the seigneurs who had exploited them, or the British rulers who had conquered the territory. As such, the Quebec Act was not warmly welcomed by everyone among the French Canadian majority. The latter, according to one British merchant in Montreal, 'is greatly alarmed at being put under their former laws, of which they had long severely felt the ill effects; though the French

³⁵¹ Hamelin and Provencher, *Brève histoire du Québec*, 262–263. My translation; See also Lanctôt, *Canada and the American Revolution, 1774-1783*, 30–42.

³⁵² Hamelin and Provencher, *Brève histoire du Québec*, 263. (my translation)

Noblesse and gentry, indeed, are very pleased with the new Act, which restores the old, as they expect to lord it over the industrious farmer and trader, and live upon their spoils, as they did before'.³⁵³ The following year, a letter written from Quebec by Francis Maseres, English lawyer and attorney general of the Province of Quebec, similarly stated that '[i]f we dare to apply to the Canadians for an union with us to petition the King or an amendment of the Quebec bill, we should find the tradesmen, most of the merchants, and all the country-inhabitants, unanimous in our favour'.³⁵⁴

Other correspondence during the years following the Quebec Act point toward a similar discontent and displeasure among French Canadians.³⁵⁵ Canadians 'declared that it was not at their desire or solicitation that it was passed [...]. They said that the persons, who had signed that petition, consisted principally of their ancient oppressors, their Noblesse, who wanted nothing more than, as formerly, to domineer over them'.³⁵⁶ French Canadians had 'greatly preferred the situation before the passing of the Quebec Act where the priests had no means of enforcing the payment of tithes and events during the summer and autumn of 1775 clearly revealed that the habitants had had no wish to see restored to the seigneurial class the privileges and powers they had enjoyed before the British conquest'.³⁵⁷

In this context, it became extremely difficult for British authorities and Canadian seigneurs to recruit militias among the francophone population. Even those recruited

³⁵³ Peter Force, ed., *American Archives*, vol. I, 4th Series (Washington, 1837), 853.

³⁵⁴ Francis Maseres, *Additional Papers Concerning the Province of Quebec* (London, 1776), 91.

³⁵⁵ Many examples are given by Clark, *Movements of Political Protest in Canada, 1640-1840*, 90–92.

³⁵⁶ Maseres, *Additional Papers Concerning the Province of Quebec*, 101–102.

³⁵⁷ Clark, *Movements of Political Protest in Canada, 1640-1840*, 100; See also Maseres, *Additional Papers Concerning the Province of Quebec*, 111–152.

refused to fight when the army of the American Richard Montgomery reached the Canada-US border on the Richelieu.³⁵⁸ Resistance to martial law and the calling out of the militia was such, in fact, that '[i]mmediately there developed a widespread movement of resistance on the part of the habitants which amounted almost to rebellion against the state'.³⁵⁹ In many parishes, residents assembled in armed mobs of many hundreds, and even thousands, to resist enlistment, threatening to burn and destroy the possessions of those willing to cooperate with seigneurs and British officers. One of the mobs went as far as making two seigneurs prisoners in Ste-Anne.³⁶⁰ When the American troops arrived in the St. Lawrence Valley, they were supplied with food by the peasantry, advancing fairly easily through the countryside and onto the invasions of Montreal and Trois-Rivières.³⁶¹ Quebec City, however, withstood the siege, and there ended the American military adventure on Canadian soil, as the troops left the territory upon the arrival of a British fleet commanded by General Burgoyne. Following the announcement of the Franco-American alliance and the hopes that France would want to take back its old colony, many French Canadians considered joining the Americans in their rebellion against Britain, but little action was taken.³⁶²

Due to the reliance of British administrators on the seigneurs and clergy to control the French Canadian population, the aftermath of the Conquest provided the French Canadian elites with renewed opportunities to appropriate surplus labour from

³⁵⁸ Hamelin and Provencher, *Brève histoire du Québec*, 263; Clark, *Movements of Political Protest in Canada, 1640-1840*, 92-93.

³⁵⁹ Clark, *Movements of Political Protest in Canada, 1640-1840*, 93.

³⁶⁰ *Ibid.*, 93-94.

³⁶¹ *Ibid.*, 100-101.

³⁶² Lanctôt, *Canada and the American Revolution, 1774-1783*, 199.

peasants. It became ‘the deliberate policy of the local governors, and more particularly of Carleton, to restore as far as possible that whole system of special privileges which had secured the close identity of the colony with the interests of old-world empire’.³⁶³ In the words of one historian, by 1774 ‘[t]he strengthening of Quebec as a military [...] base, the restoration to the seigneurs of the privilege of calling up the inhabitants for military service, and the effort to make of the whole western region a preserve of the fur trade under the close control of Quebec’ had led to ‘a structure of government and a system of economic, social, and ecclesiastical control [...] more authoritarian in character and extensive in sweep than anything that had existed under French rule’.³⁶⁴

The Reinforcement of the Seignorial Regime

At the same time as they were losing their privileged position in the colonial state in favour of a foreign class of British and American merchants, the French Canadian seigneurs and the clergy were given opportunities to reinforce their local power within seigneuries. This was a limited yet significant power, given that the growth of the population had finally made it possible, as Ouellet has pointed out, ‘to live from rents. In 1765, 42 percent of settlements had more than seventy-five resident families, which exceeded the minimum number of censitaires necessary to support their lords (about 100 censitaires); in 1790, this rose to 75 percent. [...] [A] great many seigneurs could draw

³⁶³ Clark, *Movements of Political Protest in Canada, 1640-1840*, 44.

³⁶⁴ *Ibid.*

substantial revenues from their fiefs for the first time'.³⁶⁵ Seigneurs also adopted 'more archaic forms of exploitation: reinforcement of banalities, careful collection of *lots et ventes*, monopolies on fishing, on energy providing watercourses, on forest resources, reappearance of *corvées*, of the *droit de retrait*, etc'.³⁶⁶

More severe obligations with regards to banal rights on grain had important consequences for the life of censitaires, whose alimentation relied heavily on bread. As Greer has argued, '[i]n the seventeenth century, only grain used for home consumption had to be ground at the seigneur's mill' and the fine for processing flour elsewhere was relatively small.³⁶⁷ By the 1790s, however, 'the formula in concession deeds subjected all grain grown to the *banalité*, whether it was consumed at home or sent abroad, and piled penalty on top of penalty: not only would a fine equal to the milling toll be exacted, the illicit flour could also be seized and additional arbitrary fines imposed'.³⁶⁸ Seigneurs also succeeded in significantly increasing rents themselves. They could not do so in old seigneuries, since the *cens* et *rentes*, even those set in the seventeenth century, were not 'subject to change, even after several decades or centuries'.³⁶⁹ They could increase rents, however, when new concessions were granted in newer parts of the seigneuries or fiefs.³⁷⁰ 'The movement [...] accelerates at the end of the century and

³⁶⁵ Ouellet, *Economy, Class & Nation in Quebec*, 62.

³⁶⁶ Louise Dechêne, "Coup d'œil sur l'historiographie de la Nouvelle-France," *Études canadiennes* 3 (1977): 55. My translation; See also Jean-Pierre Wallot, *Un Québec qui bougeait: Trame socio-politique du Québec au tournant du XIXe siècle* (Montréal: Boréal, 1973), 232; Greer, *Peasant, Lord, and Merchant*, 133; Grenier, *Brève histoire du régime seigneurial*, 178; Dessureault, "L'évolution Du Régime Seigneurial Canadien de 1760 À 1854."

³⁶⁷ Greer, *Peasant, Lord, and Merchant*, 130.

³⁶⁸ *Ibid.*, 130–132.

³⁶⁹ Grenier, *Brève histoire du régime seigneurial*, 174. (my translation)

³⁷⁰ *Ibid.* (my translation)

explodes after 1815 [...]. This is manifested by higher rents, but also by an increase in other expenses of concession contracts and the use of a variety of sampling strategies'.³⁷¹

Part of the movement toward higher rents was facilitated by the absence of the French intendant to protect the peasantry. Until the Conquest, the intendant had, among other things, rendered evictions of peasants for failure to occupy the land or pay rents an exceptional phenomenon, as he would generally allow recalcitrants 'a year or more grace period in which to pay arrears and fulfil settlement duties before ordering repossession. [...] Repossession became easier after the British Conquest, however, as no official filled the functions of intendant and seigneurs seem to have proceeded on their own authority to evict negligent habitants'.³⁷²

Not only had the strategy adopted by British rulers given French Canadian seigneurs the means to reinforce their hold on censitaires, it had also given them the reason to do so. In what José Igartua has described as the new 'climate' of the post-Conquest',³⁷³ French-speaking merchants no longer had access to the lucrative military and government contracts that had been so important for their living under the *ancien régime*.³⁷⁴ After the war, the British rulers were naturally suspicious of the participation of the defeated in the military affairs of the new colony, so that, for a time, military careers were out of the reach of most French Canadians. To be sure, some seigneurial

³⁷¹ Ibid. (my translation)

³⁷² Greer, *Peasant, Lord, and Merchant*, 96.

³⁷³ José Igartua, "A Change in Climate: The British Conquest and the Merchants in Montreal," in *Readings in Canadian History: Pre-Confederation: Sixth Edition*, ed. R. Douglas Francis and Donald B. Smith (Toronto: Nelson, 2002), 211–25.

³⁷⁴ Louise Dechêne, *Habitants et marchands de Montréal au XVIIe siècle* (Plon, 1974), 182–183.

families received the favour of the new governors and managed to do well in the new circumstances.³⁷⁵ Yet, French Canadians were ‘generally absent from the ranks of those [colonial administrators] with salaried and highly lucrative positions’.³⁷⁶ Moreover, ‘their access to the markets and credit facilities of France was now useless as London had taken on primary importance’.³⁷⁷ In these circumstances, they ‘were slowly squeezed out of the fur trade by English speakers, most notably by the establishment of the North West Company in 1779’.³⁷⁸

Historians Dale Miquelon, Louise Dechêne, and Peter Moogk have attempted to demonstrate that French Canadians, because of their expertise in the fur trade and a thorough knowledge of regional realities, would not have been at a real disadvantage in the fur trade and the import-export sector if they had been willing to continue in the business. A good knowledge of the territory was indeed essential to succeed in the business. However, more was at work than old habits in the inability to compete with English merchants and seigneurs, for the political basis of French Canadians’ access to trade networks and territories through close links with state and army officers had been profoundly damaged. French Canadians were largely excluded from positions of authority and, by extension, the networks of favouritism that were so important to anyone looking to enrich oneself. Furthermore, importers and exporters were deprived of their contacts in the French empire, where the greatest proportion of international trade

³⁷⁵ Examples are discussed in Grenier, *Brève histoire du régime seigneurial*, 142–144.

³⁷⁶ Donald Fyson, “The Conquered and the Conqueror: The Mutual Adaptation of the Canadiens and the British in Quebec, 1759-1775,” in *Revisiting 1759: The Conquest of Canada in Historical Perspective*, ed. Phillip A Buckner and John G Reid (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2012), 198.

³⁷⁷ Ronald Rudin, *The Forgotten Quebecers: A History of English-Speaking Quebec, 1759-1980* (Québec: Institut québécois de recherche sur la culture, 1985), 72–73.

³⁷⁸ *Ibid.*

by French Canadian merchants had been done until the Conquest. By 1777, English merchants were powerful enough ‘to command the majority of investments in the fur trade’.³⁷⁹ The retail trade was also affected by the flood of English manufactured goods with which French Canadian retailers could hardly compete.³⁸⁰ Ultimately, the integration of New France into the extensive commercial and industrial circles of Britain (and America) represented a move away from absolutism, a transition in the dominant form of class relations, since the English were more decisively and successfully engaged in trade, but did not seek to maintain absolutist social relations.

At the same time as the most lucrative positions of the state were monopolized by the new British rulers and opportunities for the French Canadian seigneurs to make a living in trade were seriously hampered—leaving them with little choice but to fall back upon land-holding and the labour of censitaires to reproduce themselves as a class—a whole range of second order positions within the colonial administration and justice system were opened to the French Canadian bourgeoisie. Donald Fyson has recently shed new light on the complexity of this situation in his study of the possibilities and limits of mutual adaptation between French Canadians and British newcomers. He has pointed out, for instance, that far from disappearing from the public sphere and the colonial administration, as historians have long assumed, French continued to be the language of everyday administration, ‘at least at the level experienced by the colony’s

³⁷⁹ Igartua, “A Change in Climate: The British Conquest and the Merchants in Montreal,” 211; See also Clark, *Movements of Political Protest in Canada, 1640-1840*, 39.

³⁸⁰ “In 1760 alone, the first year of British occupation, 60,000 pounds worth of trade goods had been brought in Canada”. Igartua, “A Change in Climate: The British Conquest and the Merchants in Montreal,” 216.

population'.³⁸¹ He has also shown that, while only Protestants were entitled to be justices of the peace, many positions of court clerks and court bailiffs, along with judicial auxiliaries, such as notaries and lawyers, were actually opened up to French Canadians out of mutual interest and pragmatism. This was also the case with participation in juries and employment in the lower ranks of the civil administration.³⁸²

Historians have often interpreted the rise of the French Canadian professional petty bourgeoisie in the second half of the eighteenth century in Smithian terms, that is, as the consequence of the diversification of activities and social groups assumed to more or less automatically unfold from increasing commercialization of agriculture.³⁸³ It must, rather, be attributed to the traditional strategy of reproduction of the French Canadian rural elite seeking social status and to take advantage of the new range of careers opened up to professionals within the colonial state. As Finlay has pointed out,

[t]he farmers who were the main beneficiaries of the boom conditions [...] did not use their growing purchasing power to consolidate their newly won positions and to move on to higher levels of economic organization. Rather, they consumed their surplus in buying status, sending their sons to school and college and having them enter the professions. Notaries, advocates, doctors, pharmacists, surveyors—all increased their ranks in the opening years of the nineteenth

³⁸¹ Fyson, "The Conquered and the Conqueror: The Mutual Adaptation of the Canadiens and the British in Quebec, 1759-1775," 200.

³⁸² *Ibid.*, 190–217. The highest levels of the colonial administration, such as the Executive and Legislative Councils, also had their share of French Canadians, but one fairly unrepresentative of the size of the vastly majoritary French Canadian population.

³⁸³ See, for instance, Ouellet, *Economy, Class & Nation in Quebec*, 33–34.

century. The swing was mirrored in the composition of the assembly; whereas the professions were but 18 percent in 1792, they were 29 percent by 1800 and 35 percent by 1810. On the other hand, the merchant element had declined from 59 percent through 37 percent to 31 percent.³⁸⁴

In terms of its consequences, the Conquest also laid the ground for the introduction, in 1791, of a form of free land tenure unknown to French Canadians in territories outside seigneuries: the ‘free and common socage’. Grenier sees in the introduction of this new tenure—more than in the Conquest itself—the beginning of the slow process of abolition of the seigneurial regime in Canada, for ‘after 1790 it will become increasingly difficult to justify the co-existence, within the same province, of two systems of land tenure’.³⁸⁵ From then on, with a few exceptions, all new grants of land from took the form of townships: ‘Ninety-five townships were established in the South-West part of Quebec, and many more later in the regions newly opened to colonization (Outaouais Laurentides, Saguenay-Lac-Saint-Jean, Gaspésie, Côte-Nord, Abitibi)’.³⁸⁶ Those lands

were not turned or subdivided into capitalist farms. In the overwhelming majority of cases, they remained undeveloped, a fact that provoked a welter of complaints from the burgeoning peasant population. Grantees preferred to speculate on their land’s future worth [...]. In so doing, they barred peasant families from renting or

³⁸⁴ John L. Finlay, *Pre-Confederation Canada: The Structure of Canadian History to 1867* (Scarborough: Pearson Education Canada, 1990), 219.

³⁸⁵ Grenier, *Brève histoire du régime seigneurial*, 152. (my translation)

³⁸⁶ *Ibid.*, 153. (my translation)

purchasing small plots, leading to many peasants fleeing to the US'.³⁸⁷

The population was increasing rapidly in these decades: from 70,000 people in 1760, it reached 511,000 in 1831, and 890,000 in 1851. As Grenier has explained, '[t]his growth, given the absence of new concessions of fiefs, had for result to lead to the saturation of agricultural land in the seigneurial world. [...] From 1815, access to land begins to pose serious problems for Canadians'.³⁸⁸

The Pattern of Agricultural Development in Lower Canada

One of the main historiographical debates about early nineteenth century Lower Canada's agricultural development is whether it experienced an 'agricultural crisis'. The thesis of the agricultural crisis was initially put forward by Fernand Ouellet in the 1960s. According to Ouellet, the first signs of the agricultural crisis appeared in the 1800s. The few preceding decades constituted a period of relative prosperity for French Canadian wheat producers, since the fuller integration of Lower Canada into the imperial market following the American Revolution resulted in new economic opportunities for Lower Canada's agricultural surpluses. As historian Peter Russell has recounted with regard to this early boom, the statistical basis of Ouellet's argument rests on the quantity of wheat and flour exported from the port of Quebec, adjusted to take account of Upper Canadian and American shipping: '[t]he export records show a rising trend from the early 1770s to

³⁸⁷ Stewart, "The Question of Capitalism in Pre-Confederation Quebec," 87.

³⁸⁸ Grenier, *Brève histoire du régime seigneurial*, 155. (my translation)

a peak in 1820'.³⁸⁹ This led Ouellet to conclude 'that habitants responded to strong if occasionally uneven demand within the British Empire [...]. First peace in North American and then war in Europe and a long string of poor British harvests successively stimulated British demand and restricted competing European wheat producers'.³⁹⁰

Central to Ouellet's argument is the claim that French Canadians responded to the opportunities offered by the British market 'by accelerating the clearing of their lands rather than by any improvement in their farming techniques of practices'.³⁹¹ The lumber trade also became a major economic activity in the colony as the Napoleonic Wars forced Britain to turn toward the imperial market in order to find its supply. It is '[a]gainst that backdrop of shifting commercial opportunities', Russell has specified, that Quebec's agriculture, according to Ouellet, 'went from prosperity to crisis. While Lower Canada continued to export wheat in substantial quantities up to the War of 1812, Ouellet argued that a longer-term trend of declining production set in after the bumper harvest of 1801-1802'.³⁹²

Chief among the factors that help to explain the longer-term trend of declining production are demographic pressures due to large families. As colonization reached the natural limits of the land suited for agriculture in the St. Lawrence Valley, as well as the territorial limits politically imposed on the seigneurial system by the British administration, '[i]ncreasingly, the new generation had to either see the subdivision of

³⁸⁹ Peter Russell, *How Agriculture Made Canada: Farming in the Nineteenth Century* (Montréal; Kingston: McGill-Queen's University Press, 2012), 38–38.

³⁹⁰ Ibid.

³⁹¹ Ibid., 38.

³⁹² Ibid., 39.

their parents' land or be forced onto less fertile (and more distant) lands as colonists. In either case—on small farms already too frequently cropped for years or on new farms cut from marginal lands—the habitants practised the traditional techniques of extensive cultivation that now produced falling yields'.³⁹³ On this issue, Ouellet repeatedly criticized French Canadian peasants for not having adopted more efficient farming techniques available at the time. In his view, improved techniques would have mitigated the demographic and land pressures and prevented yields from falling.

Wheat production declined so much that, by the 1820s, Lower Canada became a net importer of grains from Upper Canada. In other words, a 'crisis' struck the Lower Canadian countryside, where inhabitants continued to work the land with traditional techniques within a pre-capitalist framework of social relations. As Russell summed up, the soil was not 'adequately drained', was not 'harrowed thoroughly before planting', was not 'kept clear of weeds when in fallow'; crop rotation was primitive, without the use of forage crops 'to vary the demands made on the soil's capacities and enhance those capacities where possible'; herds of livestock were small and not 'improved by careful breeding and attentive feeding with the forage crops'; finally, animal manure was not 'regularly returned to the soil to enhance its fertility'.³⁹⁴ It must be added that '[e]ach of these processes called for farm equipment beyond the rude tools of clearing, planting, and harvesting'.³⁹⁵ This portrait of the state of agriculture in the province echoes the analysis and recommendations put forward by the 1816 Agricultural Committee of

³⁹³ Ibid., 40.

³⁹⁴ Ibid.

³⁹⁵ Ibid.

Lower Canada, which ‘reported that a considerable agricultural progress since the conquest was marred by defects in cultivation, carelessness regarding seed—particularly in wheat—and deficiency of manures; by the fact that “the instruments of agriculture now used, are the same as were in use before the conquest”; by the failure to rear good livestock’.³⁹⁶

The most vocal critics of Ouellet’s thesis have been Jean-Pierre Wallot and Gilles Paquet, who have tried to show that early nineteenth century Quebec was a dynamic society advancing along the path of modernity. As Russell has pointed out, to criticize Ouellet, they attempted to provide ‘a rough view of the general plausibility’ of Ouellet’s thesis concerning the apparent retreat from the market of Lower Canadian peasants towards subsistence agriculture in the early nineteenth century. The rest of Wallot and Paquet’s analysis, Russel contends, lay ‘more in logic than evidence,’ and failed ‘to recognize the differences in soil quality’.³⁹⁷ Moreover, the post-mortem inventories that they used to assess the increase in living standards did not represent a universal reality. It tended toward

disproportionately recording the success of the successful, the achievements of the wealthier habitants and their heirs in [...] expanding their landed patrimonies. But rural Quebec contained another reality: the increasing numbers of landless children of the poorer habitants, some working part-time as farm labourers, in the

³⁹⁶ Vernon C. Fowkes, *Canadian Agricultural Policy: The Historical Pattern* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1978), 83.

³⁹⁷ Russell, *How Agriculture Made Canada*, 46, 48.

forests, or at trades, others renting land in the hopes of regaining their old independent status.³⁹⁸

In 1974, T. J. A. Le Goff, a European social historian, reviewed the debate and assessed the strengths and weaknesses of the two sides. While pointing out that many of the claims on both sides were lacking supporting evidence, Le Goff was particularly sceptical of Wallot and Paquet's attempt to show the betterment of French Canadians' standard of living on the basis of the price indices that they created with fragmentary data.³⁹⁹ Following Wallot and Paquet's reply to his criticism, Le Goff re-examined the case again and concluded once more

[t]hat he considered the economists' model of export price relations to be meaningless; that they had still not made a case for sufficient domestic demand to account for the fall in exports; that the scarcity of *good* land had to be addressed, not just any sort of unallocated land; and the indices used in their standard-of-living argument remained defective. He chided them for not paying attention to problems of supply (as well as demand). He concluded that Lower Canada had experienced a 'structural crisis'—the onset of a long-term decline in the productivity of Quebec agriculture—rather than a 'sharp, sudden crisis', which Wallot and Paquet seemed to think Ouellet had identified.⁴⁰⁰

³⁹⁸ Ibid., 68–69.

³⁹⁹ Ibid., 51.

⁴⁰⁰ Ibid., 53–54.

Le Goff's own contribution not only favoured Ouellet's argument about the decline in wheat exports and the fall in wheat productivity, but also added weight to it by introducing into the debate birth and death rates which contradicted the idea of rising standards of living for the majority of the rural population.⁴⁰¹ As Russell has pointed out, recent studies of specific localities in the seigneurial territory, including the Montreal District, have also added 'a measure of support' to Ouellet's analysis.⁴⁰²

In all, evidence suggests that even the larger and most commercially-oriented farms of the province were not of the capitalist kind: they 'were not specializing commercial farmers but large-scale farms that sought to be as self-sufficient as possible, ready to sell onto the market whatever they had in excess of their own needs'.⁴⁰³ As a long-term pattern of economic development, the productivity of Lower Canada's agriculture in the second quarter of the nineteenth century declined so much that direct producers became unable to compete on foreign markets, even with the advantage of transportation that the proximity of the transatlantic trade through the St. Lawrence River had given them over their Upper Canadian counterpart.

⁴⁰¹ *Ibid.*, 51.

⁴⁰² Christian Dessureault's master's thesis on the seigneurie of Lac des Deux-Montagnes (from the 1790s to the 1820s) and his doctoral dissertation on St-Hyacinthe (1760-1815); Allan Greer's doctoral dissertation on the lower Richelieu Valley (1740-1840); and J.-S. Piché's master's thesis on Soulanges (from the 1760s to the mid-nineteenth century).

⁴⁰³ Russell, *How Agriculture Made Canada*, 80; See also Christian Dessureault, "Les fondements de la hiérarchie sociale au sein de la paysannerie: Le cas de Saint-Hyacinthe, 1760-1815" (Université de Montréal, 1985), 386-387; Christian Dessureault, "Fortune paysanne et cycle de vie. Le cas de la seigneurie de Saint-Hyacinthe (1795-1844)," *Histoire et sociétés rurales*, no. 7 (1997): 73-96.

Social Roots of the Agricultural Crisis

Having discussed how Ouellet's *description* of the crisis offers the most persuasive account of the state of Lower Canada's agriculture in the first half of the nineteenth century, it is time to examine his *explanation*. In this regard, Ouellet's narrative is highly unsatisfactory. Ouellet portrayed Lower Canada as a society with specific cultural traits: it was an agricultural society centred on its Catholic religion, its French language and the absolutism of its political institutions. Absent among French Canadians was a particular set of values associated with liberalism and capitalism. Compared with Englishmen, they lacked the attributes characterizing successful entrepreneurs, such as a concern for efficiency, a meticulousness discipline in affairs, the ability to assess the risks, anticipate the possibilities, and seize the opportunities of investment, and the quality of being economical with money and food. The French Canadian habitant 'disliked the routine of farm work. Without disciplining himself, he nevertheless had an innate propensity for authoritarian attitudes'.⁴⁰⁴ French merchants, for their part, 'prefer[ed] prestige and lavish spending to more rational economic pursuits'.⁴⁰⁵ The problem, here, is that while some of the differences between French Canadians and English-speaking settlers identified by Ouellet might reflect reality to some extent, they say little in themselves about the social relations in which these cultural traits were embedded.

The judgemental stereotypes underlying Ouellet's explanation of French

⁴⁰⁴ Fernand Ouellet, *Economic and Social History of Quebec, 1760-1850: Structures and Conjunctures* (Toronto: MacMillan of Canada, 1980), 562.

⁴⁰⁵ *Ibid.*, 7.

Canadians' backward agrarian techniques are hardly new. In the mid-nineteenth century, Lord Durham, the commissioner sent by Britain to study and identify the source of discontentment among the Canadians, already saw in Lower Canada 'two nations warring in the bosom of a single State'. Each nation was different not only in its language, its race, and its religion, but also in its degree of evolution. According to Durham, French Canadian society was inherently stagnant and doomed to remain so, while the English Canadians were much more responsive to the new realities of the early modern epoch and the rise of capitalism. Many French Canadian historians, such as Thomas Chapais and Arthur Maheux, also put espoused similar stereotypes in the first decades of the twentieth century, but in no work other than Francis Parkman's is the disgust for French Canadian culture most blatant.

Parkman saw the Conquest of New France as nothing less than deliverance, for the action of British merchants and colonial rulers, he argues, uprooted the *ancien régime* and freed economic activity from its shackles. Until then, French Canadians had been '[a]n ignorant population, sprung from a brave and active race, but trained to subjection and dependence through centuries of feudal and monarchical despotism [...]—the condition, in short, of a child held always under the rule of a father'.⁴⁰⁶ What is deemed 'normal' in Parkman's narrative is epitomized by the English liberal culture—considered 'superior' when compared with the French one. In Parkman's view, alternative forms of social development cannot but be symptoms of deviance and anomaly. While using a language less coarse than Parkman's, Ouellet continued to

⁴⁰⁶ *The Old Régime in Canada* (Toronto: G.N. Morang, 1906), 462.

identify the culprit of Lower Canada's delayed development in the cultural traits and social mentalities of French Canadians, said to be unsuited to business activities and impermeable to liberal ideas of progress and economic *laissez-faire*.

Ouellet departs from Parkman on one crucial point: while the latter saw the Conquest as a liberation, Ouellet thought that it had little impact on the French archaic *mentalité*, which he argued, survived in the St. Lawrence Valley up until the mid-twentieth century.⁴⁰⁷ Yet, this position only makes sense, as Roberta Hamilton has pointed out, if one disregards land tenure and class relations. Ouellet, indeed, 'was referring to a society which, in his opinion, clung to old ways of life, preferred authority to freedom, poverty to risk-taking, and ignorance to knowledge'.⁴⁰⁸ He never really asked why French Canadian peasants and merchants behaved the way they did and held to their habits, somehow content to blame the peasantry on moral grounds. In this sense, the argumentative logic of Ouellet's explanation, opposing as it does a liberal British culture to an autocratic French culture, rests on normative assumptions about the 'superiority' of the British, and fails to explain the historically specific trajectory of Canadian socioeconomic development. As Charles Post has pointed out, '[t]he attempt to make "economic culture" or *mentalités* a determinant of economic relations and actions tends to ignore how the structure of social-property relations places limits on all individual economic actions'.⁴⁰⁹

Ouellet was right to insist that the members of the colonial merchant bourgeoisie

⁴⁰⁷ "La formation d'une société dans la vallée du Saint-Laurent: d'une société sans classes à une société de classes," *Canadian Historical Review* 62, no. 4 (1981): 443.

⁴⁰⁸ *Feudal Society and Colonization*, 23.

⁴⁰⁹ Post, *The American Road to Capitalism*, 53–54.

were recruited from two different societies: ‘the French Canadian merchant comes from a society that is increasingly ruralising and the English-speaking immigrant, arriving from England, comes from a society engaged in the industrial process’.⁴¹⁰ Yet, he failed to point out the sets of social relations underpinning these different developmental dynamics and ended up presenting *mentalités* as the products of given, fixed, or free-floating cultural essences. Differences in *mentalités* between French Canadians and English-speaking settlers were rooted in different sets of social-property relations, and they changed over time according to the pressures, incentives, and constraints that informed how classes in their struggles to reproduce themselves made choices and adopted various strategies of accumulation, territorialisation, and social reproduction, with diverging outcomes.

Here, it is not a question of opposing the disembodied ontology of Ouellet’s interpretation to a crude materialism that would treat ideas, culture, and politics as simple reflections of an economic infrastructure. Historian Gérard Bouchard has recognized part of the challenge, which is to develop ‘an analytical framework that respects more the complexity of the social object and its interactions by integrating the analysis of demographic, economic and social dimensions’.⁴¹¹ It seems to me that the theory of social-property relations offers such a framework, as it endeavours to inscribe the ‘rationality of social agents in their relational and historically specific context’.⁴¹² By

⁴¹⁰ Fernand Ouellet, *Le Bas-Canada: 1791-1840* (Ottawa: Éditions de l’Université d’Ottawa, 1976), 16. (my translation)

⁴¹¹ Gérard Bouchard, *Quelques arpents d’Amérique* (Montréal: Boréal, 1996), 152. (my translation)

⁴¹² Sébastien Rioux and Frédérick Guillaume Dufour, “La sociologie historique de la théorie des relations sociales de propriété,” *Actuel Marx*, no. 1 (2008): 127. (my translation)

putting the emphasis on the historical analysis of substantive class struggles, rather than the conceptual dichotomy ‘agency/structure’ or the metaphor between ‘base’ and ‘superstructure’, the theory of social property regimes provides an alternative to cultural essentialism without returning to the structuralism of orthodox Marxism.⁴¹³ As Frederick-Guillaume Dufour has explained, the historical method at the heart of the theory of social property regimes is one of synchronic and diachronic comparisons of social relations that rejects structuralist explanations in terms of ‘modes of production’ and focuses instead on the historical analysis of class relations.⁴¹⁴

The theory does not define class relations in economic terms: it considers political, legal, and military institutions as fully constitutive of relations of production, since these are relations of domination, rights of property, and power to organize and govern production and appropriation⁴¹⁵. Social relations of production cannot be considered independently of the legal, political, and military forms that determine their configuration: the establishment and maintenance of a production system, while economic, is equally political. A mode of production, therefore, is ‘not only a technology, but a social organization of production’ in which ‘the relationship of power that determines the nature and scope of operation is a question of ‘political organization within and between the contending classes’.⁴¹⁶ This means that, ‘from an *historical* point of view even political institutions like *village* and *state* enter directly into the

⁴¹³ Dufour, “Social-Property Regimes and the Uneven and Combined Development of Nationalist Practices,” 589.

⁴¹⁴ Ibid.

⁴¹⁵ Ellen Meiksins Wood, *Separation of the Economy and the Politics in Capitalism*, p.77.

⁴¹⁶ Ellen Meiksins Wood, “The Separation of the Economic and the Political in Capitalism,” *New Left Review* 127 (1981): 79.

constitution of productive relations and are in a sense prior to them [...] to the extent that relations of production are historically constituted by the configuration of political power that determines the outcome of class conflict'.⁴¹⁷ Gender relations and the question of families and social reproduction in the feminist sense must also be theorized as constitutive of social relations of production.⁴¹⁸

Within this framework, French Canadians do not appear as backward-looking or apathetic peasants, as Ouellet has claimed they were, but animated by a distinctive logic and rationality that are intelligible when understood in relation to the constraints and incentives provided by social-property relations. In Chapter 1, I have argued that the traditional relationship of the peasant to the land was not 'irrational', but made plenty of sense in pre-capitalist contexts, given the risks presented by strategies aimed at the pursuit of profit maximization through specialization. Traditional rural economies, even as they were opening themselves to external markets, 'remained largely tributary of the imperatives of familial reproduction, following a model that was long refractory to capitalist values'.⁴¹⁹ 'Safety-first' strategies were at work in the French Canadian case, as peasants, faced with increasing economic hardship during the agricultural crisis, responded to their own impoverishment in a typically pre-capitalist fashion: they withdrew from the cultivation of wheat, rather than increasing labour productivity and

⁴¹⁷ Ibid., 80.

⁴¹⁸ Gary Blank, "Gender, Production, and the 'the Transition to Capitalism': Assessing the Historical Basis for a Unitary Materialist Theory," *New Proposals: Journal of Marxism and Interdisciplinary Inquiry* 4, no. 2 (2011): 6–28; Thomas Dublin, "Rural Putting-Out Work in Early Nineteenth-Century New England: Women and the Transition to Capitalism in the Countryside," *New England Quarterly* 64, no. 4 (1991): 531–73; Christopher Clark, "Household Economy, Market Exchange and the Rise of Capitalism in the Connecticut Valley, 1800–1860," *Journal of Social History* 13, no. 2 (1979): 169–89; Maurice Godelier, *The Mental and the Material* (London; New York: Verso, 1988).

⁴¹⁹ Bouchard, *Quelques arpents d'Amérique*, 82. (my translation)

transforming the methods of production in a competitive way. Instead, they fell back upon the production of subsistence crops—potatoes, oats, peas and barley—intended for domestic consumption or local markets, rather than for export.⁴²⁰ Within two decades, this transformation took on dramatic proportions: while, in the early 1820s, wheat was still, by far, the most dominant crop, in 1831, the volume of oats reported in the province surpassed that of wheat (3.2 million bushels of wheat compared to 3.4 million bushels of oats); in 1844, the volume of wheat diminished to less than one million bushels, while that of oats rose to 7.2 million bushels.⁴²¹ According to Ouellet, potatoes—‘the subsistence crop par excellence, not just in Lower Canada but, most famously and disastrously, in Ireland’⁴²²—had replaced wheat in the agriculture of most *censitaires* by 1827-1831, when it constituted 46% of their agricultural production.⁴²³ Only in the 1870s was ‘the vacuum created by the collapse of the wheat production [...] really filled [...] with the new dairy specialization. Dairy activities appear in the eyes of many as the new driving output of the agricultural sector’.⁴²⁴

Key among the events that led to the agricultural crisis was the Constitutional Act of 1791, which specified the territorial limits of the seigneurial regime while

⁴²⁰ Robert Leslie Jones, “French-Canadian Agriculture in the St. Lawrence Valley, 1815-1850,” in *Approaches to Canadian Economic History*, ed. W. T. Easterbrook and Mel Watkins (Toronto: McClelland and Stewart, 1967), 117–119; Raoul Blanchard, *Le Centre du Canada français* (Montréal: Librairie Beauchemin, 1947), 80–82.

⁴²¹ Régis Thibeault, “Périodisation et spatialisation des débuts de l’industrie laitière au Québec, 1871-1911,” *Histoire sociale/Social History* 29, no. 57 (1996): 136 fn.

⁴²² Russell, *How Agriculture Made Canada*, 75.

⁴²³ Ouellet, *Economic and Social History of Quebec, 1760-1850*, 342.

⁴²⁴ Thibeault, “Périodisation et spatialisation des débuts de l’industrie laitière au Québec, 1871-1911,” 136. My translation; See also Normand Perron, “Genèse des activités laitières, 1850-1960,” in *Agriculture et colonisation au Québec: aspects historiques*, ed. Normand Séguin (Montréal: Boréal Express, 1980), 115.

introducing the free and common socage tenure outside these boundaries. During the 1800s, demographic pressures, due to population growth, the increasing scarcity of fertile land within the seigneurial territory, and the inefficient techniques of extensive farming traditionally associated with French Canadians' strategies of agricultural production, combined to trigger a crisis in the countryside. As the crisis deepened, French Canadians increasingly came to see British immigration in the Eastern townships as a conspiracy to assimilate them and take their land away.⁴²⁵ In Montreal, the British immigration that followed the War of 1812 also contributed an 'ethnic' colouration to the growing discontentment of French Canadian urban workers, who increasingly had to compete with Irish immigrants in Montreal for jobs. In seigneuries, the crisis was further deepened by the behaviour of some seigneurs, who tended to slow down the rhythm of concession of new plots in order to speculate on the value of land. Seigneurs also sought to benefit from the development of the trade in lumber by keeping for themselves the wood found on seigneuries, clearing plots before selling them, or imposing easement rights on new concessions.

The agricultural crisis, therefore, is best understood as a result of the distinctive strategies for developing production imposed upon French Canadians by the preservation, upon a delimited territory, of French civil law and the seigneurial tenure in the few decades following the British Conquest. These strategies encouraged farming practices which led to soil-exhaustion and a decline in agricultural productivity.⁴²⁶

⁴²⁵ Fernand Dumont, *Genèse de la société québécoise* (Montréal: Boréal, 1996), 166.

⁴²⁶ The Hessian fly, the wheat midge and 'rust' (a fungus) are frequently mentioned by critics of Ouellet's 'agricultural crisis' thesis as an explanation for declining yields. Yet, the destructive impact of these pests

When demographic, political, and ecological factors converged to push agriculture to the limits of its specific ways of reproduction in the 1820s and 1830s, French Canadians gradually abandoned wheat farming and fell back upon subsistence farming.⁴²⁷ It is difficult not to see in this tendency—toward the long-term decline in labour productivity resulting in agricultural crisis—pre-capitalist mechanics of economic evolution similar to those that characterized the pre-industrial European economy. These mechanisms

was irregular, the Hessian fly, for instance, destroying a great quantity of the wheat crop in some regions of Lower Canada between 1805 and 1816, and the wheat midge in 1834, 1835 and 1836. Their impact on wheat yields during other years is far from evident. Ouellet, however, has shown that the decline in wheat yields was a relatively steady, continuous tendency during the first half of the nineteenth century as a whole. Moreover, the insistence on the destructive impact of pests on agriculture does not discharge us of the need to pay due attention to the broader conditions that made wheat crops vulnerable: soil-exhaustion, such as created by poor farming practices, helps to explain the unhealthy state of wheat plants and why they were not strong enough to resist attacks from pests. This was recognized by agricultural commentators of the epoch. Also telling is the differentiated response of Lower Canadian peasants and Upper Canadian farmers to the existence of similar pests. Lower Canadian peasants never systematically changed their practices in a way that would allow them to deal successfully with these pests. Rather, they progressively gave up on wheat. By contrast, Upper Canadian farmers innovated by introducing new cultivars of wheat, most famously the Red Fife, more suited to a diversity of growing conditions. They also improved drainage techniques, so that they could more successfully plant winter wheat, which was less vulnerable to insect pests, as these appeared to be most destructive during dry summers. Insights on these matters can be found in Charles Louis Flint, “Progress in Agriculture,” in *Eighth Year’s Progress of the United States, to Which Are Annexed Articles on Canada*, ed. New National Publishing House (Chicago: J.N. Whidden, 1864), 70–71.

⁴²⁷ The issue of how French Canadians were able to pay for imported grains and flour while they reverted to subsistence farming has been sketched out by Marvin McNis, who suggests that timber became the staple that provided the province with the cash it needed for commercial exchanges. See *Perspectives on Ontario Agriculture: 1815-1930* (Gananoque: Langdale Press, 1992), 38–39. It is important to note that the presence of casual wage-labour in the timber industry is not an index of the existence of capitalism in Quebec’s peasant society. One must consider the extent to which the relation between seigneurs and peasants, as well as non-market access to land, restricted the form and extent of wage-labour. On this matter, family-labour long remained the predominant productive force. As Wood has pointed out, ‘[h]ired labour has, after all, never been the predominant form of surplus appropriation, until the very recent and localised predominance of capitalist appropriation. Where wage-labour has existed in precapitalist or non-capitalist economies, it has generally been an adjunct to other forms of labour and surplus-appropriation, often as a means of supplementing the incomes of smallholders whose land—whether owned or held conditionally—has been insufficient for subsistence. In such cases, wage-labour has tended to be casual or seasonal [...]. Wage-labour as a predominant form presupposes a labour-force composed of people who are juridically free, but devoid of land or any other property essential to production [...] and therefore dependent for their livelihood upon the sale of their labour-power for a wage on a regular, continuous basis’. *The Ellen Meiksins Wood Reader*, ed. Larry Patriquin (Chicago: Haymarket Books, 2013), 85–86.

imposed upon the members of the major social classes [...] strategies for reproducing themselves which, when applied on an economy-wide basis, were incompatible with the requirements of growth. In particular, reproduction by the lords through surplus extraction by means of extra-economic compulsion and by peasants through production for subsistence precluded any widespread tendencies to thorough specialization of productive units, systematic reinvestment of surpluses, or to regular technical innovation.⁴²⁸

Once the limits of the seigneurial territory had been reached in Lower Canada, there was no more fertile land onto which to simply expand extensive agriculture. The associated decline in the productivity of labour resulted in an agricultural crisis that rendered French Canadian peasants unable to compete on grain markets, and forced them to revert to subsistence agriculture in order to survive. As I discuss in the next two chapters, the opposite trend can be observed in the neighbouring province of Upper Canada, where farmers had more in common with the farmers of the United States, who engaged in commercial wheat farming to maintain their economic independence. It will be argued that neither in Upper Canada nor in the United States is there truly capitalist agriculture at this stage, nor the agrarian capitalism that had been characteristic of England down to the nineteenth century. Yet, the distinctive social relations of the *farmers* (who were in no position of political subordination) by contrast to the *peasants* (who were), made it structurally easier for the former to shift their methods of farming away from the mix of

⁴²⁸ Brenner, "The Agrarian Roots of European Capitalism," 17.

subsistence agriculture and extensive wheat farming characteristic of the pioneer period toward an extensive capital-intensive type of commercial wheat farming.

Conclusion

In this chapter, I recast the specific process of colonial state formation in New France as a spatial result of conflicts over territories and their resources between the French pre-capitalist absolutist state and the capitalist British state at a time when the need to delineate boundaries was making itself felt strongly on imperial powers. After two centuries of existence, the process of state-formation in New France experienced a profound upheaval as the British Conquest in 1760 separated the colony from the French metropolis, which had hitherto administered it according to strategies of territorialization shaped by absolutist social relations. Since the strategies of social reproduction within the colony were strictly limited by pre-capitalist property relations that tended to encourage 'extra-economic' means of appropriation through access to the state, rather than investment in production, the transformation of the public sector which occurred with the change of metropolis deeply transformed the road to private enrichment of the French Canadian ruling class.

With the change of administrative and military personnel, and the concomitant loss of access to state offices and commercial networks, the foundation of the specific strategies, which had permitted the French Canadian colonial ruling class to maintain itself in its established socio-economic positions and seek profitable advancement,

crumbled. It thus became all the more rational for French Canadian merchants, administrators, and religious communities who owned a seigneurie to revert back to their rights over censitaires and annuities, either tithes or rents, as sources of revenue. This was made possible by the decision of the British imperial authorities to preserve the institutions on which rested the local power of the French Canadian traditional elites with the Quebec Act of 1774. The preservation of the seigneurial regime and patterns of inheritance associated with French civil law in the aftermath of the Conquest discouraged French Canadian peasants from adopting the most efficient agricultural techniques available at the time, which over time, led to an 'agricultural crisis'. I concluded the chapter by offering a reinterpretation of Fernand Ouellet's thesis in order to show how the strategies of reproduction of French Canadian peasants were rooted in the generative grammar of a distinctive set of social-property relations, rather than in *mentalités* whose essence lays in stereotyped and fixed cultural traits.

4.

Land Settlement and Agrarian Class Structure in Upper Canada

The Constitutional Act of 1791 divided the old Province of Quebec into two separate political entities. The eastern polity was given the name of 'Province of Lower Canada'. It encompassed the southern portion of modern-day Quebec and the Labrador region. Lower Canada was populated mainly by French Canadians and retained the seigneurial regime as the predominant mode of tenure. The western polity, originally made up of a few Loyalist settlements whose estates were converted to the free and common socage tenure, was given the name of 'Province of Upper Canada'. It included all of modern-day Southern Ontario and the territory west of the Ottawa River to the Northern outskirts of Lake Superior. Having examined, in Chapter 3, the transformation of Lower Canada's agrarian class structure after the British Conquest and its long-term consequences for the economic development of the province, I now turn to the distinctive agrarian class structure that was established during Upper Canada's formation in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries.

My argument is that the absence of a peasantry that could be expropriated to create a class of market dependent tenant farmers and a mass of rural wage labourers forced to work for others, precluded the reproduction, in Upper Canada, of the agrarian capitalist class structure of Britain—the 'triad' of landlords, tenant farmers, and wage

labourers. Unlike the British ruling class, whose primary means of appropriation rested on commercial rents paid by tenant farmers who sought to maximize surplus value through the improvement of labour productivity, the Upper Canadian ruling class was forced to fall back on speculative land practices for the reproduction of their wealth and their power. The conditions of social reproduction of Upper Canada's ruling class also differed from those of the British ruling class in the way they accessed land.

In Britain, by the nineteenth century, land had been very much commodified and the bulk of the population had become market dependent. By contrast, in Upper Canada, access to land was dependent on the state, which rewarded services and loyalty with the only asset of the Crown that could be made valuable in the absence of centralized property taxation—land. The primary means of appropriation of Upper Canada's dominant propertied class therefore laid within a network of clientelism and patronage which I theorize as a colonial 'land/office state' based on the geopolitically constituted process of dispossession of Native peoples. While this network of clientelism and patronage has received considerable attention by standard texts on Canadian political development,⁴²⁹ and while speculative land activities have also been extensively

⁴²⁹ Hugh Aitken, "The Family Compact and the Welland Canal Company," *Canadian Journal of Economics and Political Science*, 1952, 63–76; Graeme Patterson, *History and Communications: Harold Innis, Marshall McLuhan, and the Interpretation of History* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1990); William Stewart Wallace, *The Family Compact: A Chronicle of the Rebellion of Upper Canada* (Toronto: Glasgow and Brook, 1915); Alison Ewart and Julia Jarvis, "The Personnel of the Family Compact," *Canadian Historical Review* 7, no. 3 (1926): 209–21; S. F. Wise, "Upper Canada and the Conservative Tradition," in *Profiles of a Province: Studies in the History of Ontario*, ed. Edith Firth (Toronto: Ontario Historical Society, 1967), 20–33; Robert Saunders, "What Was the Family Compact?," *Ontario History* 49 (1957): 165–70; Gerald Craig, *Upper Canada: The Formative Years 1784-1841* (Toronto: McClelland and Stewart, 1963); Aileen Dunham, *Political Unrest in Upper Canada, 1815-1836* (Toronto: Longmans, Greens and Co., 1927).

examined,⁴³⁰ my point is that the literature has overlooked the extent to which the strategies of land access and land use adopted by the dominant propertied class in Upper Canada contrasted with the strategies favoured by the dominant propertied classes in British agrarian capitalism.

To explore this contrast, the chapter is divided into four sections. In the first, I give a general account of how the ‘free’ land-granting system at the core of the process of colonial state-formation resulted on the creation of a landowning ruling class made up of a minority of influential individuals endowed with political or military appointments. In the second section, I show how the land-granting system created a class of independent household producers composed of smallholders and tenant farmers whose existence precluded the formation of a pool of wage-labourers large enough to allow the reproduction of the British agrarian capitalist class system in Upper Canada. In the third section, I explore how, as a result of the absence of rural wage labourers to work permanently on farms, the uses that could be made of the land in the possession of this landed ruling class were limited to speculative activities whose success relied on the colonial land/office state. In the last section, I sketch out some of the long-term consequences of this structure of appropriation for the development of agriculture in the province, especially how it made difficult the improvement of estates toward greater land productivity. On this matter, even ‘gentlemen farmers’ eager to introduce in Upper

⁴³⁰ John Clarke, “The Role of Political Position and Family and Economic Linkage in Land Speculation in the Western District of Upper Canada, 1788–1815,” *Canadian Geographer* 19, no. 1 (1975): 18–34; David Gagan, “Property and Interest: Some Preliminary Evidence of Land Speculation by the Family Compact in Upper Canada 1820–1840,” *Ontario History* 70, no. 1 (1978): 63–70; Randy Widdis, “Speculation and the Surveyor: An Analysis of the Role Played by the Surveyors in the Settlement of Upper Canada,” *Histoire sociale/Social History* 15 (1982): 443–58; John Clarke, *Land, Power, and Economics on the Frontier of Upper Canada* (Montreal; Kingston: McGill-Queen’s Press, 2002).

Canada the most up-to-date agrarian technologies and management principles in use in Britain failed to derive a large income from agricultural activities.

The Making of Upper Canada's Dominant Propertied Class

In the aftermath of the British Conquest of New France, the British government had no serious intention of populating the territories west of the St. Lawrence River. Prominent members of the Board of Trade thought that, isolated as inland colonies would be, they 'would not find it profitable to export their produce to Great Britain or the West Indies. Being unable to sell, they would be unable to buy, and therefore would begin to establish manufactures of their own to the detriment of their trade with the mother country'.⁴³¹ In other words, the peninsula between the upper St. Lawrence and Lake Huron was destined to remain the preserve of Native peoples, fur traders, soldiers, and a few merchants. The outbreak of the American Revolution, however, was game-changing, as thousands of Loyalists were forced by the circumstances to move north of the border. Between 1775 and 1795, recent research estimates that 32,000 Loyalists took refuge in Nova Scotia and New Brunswick, 6,000 in the territory of the old province of Quebec that became Lower Canada in 1791, and 8,000 in the territory that became Upper Canada.⁴³²

In Upper Canada, '[t]he Tories were convinced that a strong and loyal gentry was essential for maintaining a peaceful colonial population; had this existed in the Thirteen

⁴³¹ Lillian Gates, *Land Policies of Upper Canada* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1968), 9–10.

⁴³² Jerry Bannister and Liam Riordan, *The Loyal Atlantic: Remaking the British Atlantic in the Revolutionary Era* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2012), xxii.

Colonies, they argued, the American Revolution would not have occurred'.⁴³³ As a consequence, British authorities sought to create a landowning aristocracy by distributing land to Loyalists according to status and rank. While every single man was entitled to 50 acres, the head of a family would receive 100 acres, plus 50 for each member of the household. Non-commissioned officers were given 200 acres. Far larger grants of land were given to officers: 500 acres for subalterns, staff officers, and warrant officers, 700 acres for captains, and 1000 acres for field officers.⁴³⁴ A further distinction existed between 'official' grantees (namely loyalists, military officers, and government officials), who would be granted land free of patent fees and settlement duties, and 'non-official' grantees, who would receive land by payment of fees without statutory right.⁴³⁵ Non-official grantees also needed to fulfil the duties described in the location tickets that were given to them by the Land Commissioner's Office at York, the land boards, or the magistrates.⁴³⁶

Interestingly, instructions were first given to grant land on seigneurial terms. The aim was 'to restore the feudal system in Canada as a means of keeping the colony under control through its seigneurs, who would be bound to the Crown by the ties of self-interest'.⁴³⁷ The grant of land in fief and seigneurie, however, irritated Loyalists, unused

⁴³³ Catharine Anne Wilson, *Tenants in Time: Family Strategies, Land, and Liberalism in Upper Canada, 1799-1871* (Montreal; Kingston: McGill-Queen's Press, 2008), 30; Bruce Curtis, "Representation and State Formation in the Canadas, 1790-1850," *Studies in Political Economy* 28 (1989): 63-64.

⁴³⁴ Craig, *Upper Canada*, 5-6.

⁴³⁵ Leo Johnson, "Land Policy, Population Growth and Social Structure in the Home District, 1793-1851," *Ontario History* 63, no. 1 (1971): 42-43.

⁴³⁶ Certain tickets, for instance, stated "that five acres were to be cleared and cropped, half the road in front of the lot cleared [...] and a house erected [...] within two years." Edwin Clarence Guillet, *The Pioneer Farmer and Backwoodsman*, vol. I (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1970), 292.

⁴³⁷ Gates, *Land Policies of Upper Canada*, 8; Burt, *The Old Province of Quebec*, 154, 163.

to French customs and laws. The settlers immediately raised strong objections. As historian Randall Keith White has explained, '[i]n contrast to the French, the Loyalist settlers saw land not as a feudal obligation but as a "freehold" commodity that could be bought and sold'.⁴³⁸ Among the many petitions made to the King on behalf of Loyalist settlers, one written in 1785 by a group of officers expressed the hope to see his Majesty establish a new district encompassing the Loyalist settlements under 'a liberal system of Tenure, Law, and Government' of the kind expected to rule the lives of British subjects.⁴³⁹ To appease some of the discontentment, in 1788, four new districts were created, each of them endowed with a land board and a court of common pleas.⁴⁴⁰ With these new boards, land granting schemes became even more generous: those who had fought during the American Revolution would now be granted 300 acres or more, according to their rank, and other Loyalists were to receive initial grants of 200 acres.⁴⁴¹ Grants to field officers were raised to the amount promised in the Royal Proclamation of 1763, that is, 5,000 acres, while captains were to get 3,000, and subalterns 2,000.⁴⁴²

By 1791, the number of Loyalists in the Great Lakes region had grown to about 10,000.⁴⁴³ 'It consisted of discharged soldiers of the regular army, the "original"

⁴³⁸ Randall Keith White, *Ontario 1610-1985: A Political and Economic History* (Toronto & London: Dundurn, 1985), 63.

⁴³⁹ Adam Shortt and Arthur G. Doughty, eds., *Documents Relating to the Constitutional History of Canada, 1759-1791*, vol. II (Ottawa: King's Printer, 1918), 773-776.

⁴⁴⁰ Craig, *Upper Canada*, 12, 30.

⁴⁴¹ *Ibid.*, 12.

⁴⁴² *Ibid.*; Adam Shortt and Arthur G. Doughty, eds., *Documents Relating to the Constitutional History of Canada, 1759-1791*, vol. I (Ottawa: King's Printer, 1907), 166.

⁴⁴³ In the first few decades of settlement, a great number settled around the new capital at York (Toronto), 'then expanding generally inland away from the St Lawrence River and the Great Lakes in the 1820s and 1830s, and finally foundering at the limits of good land along the Canadian Shield edge and at the Bruce Peninsula by the 1850s'. David Wood, *Making Ontario Agricultural Colonization and Landscape Re-Creation Before the Railway* (Montreal; Kingston: McGill-Queen's University Press, 2000), 24.

loyalists, comprising under that term loyalist regiments and their families, the associated loyalists who had come from New York, loyalists who were refugees from the rebellious colonies, and “late” loyalists, some of whom were suspected of being mere land seekers’.⁴⁴⁴ As the population grew in importance, demands for British laws and institutions loomed increasingly larger in the strategic considerations of imperial statesmen, who sought to ensure the settlers’ cooperation in ruling what was left of the British North American empire. French Canadians were no longer the only group whose support was vital to ease the governing of inland regions. To reward Loyalist settlers for their loyalty and discourage rebellion, British rulers acquiesced to dividing the old province of Quebec in two with the Constitutional Act of 1791, which was one the demands of the Loyalists. In the newly created province of Upper Canada, the seigneurial tenure was abolished.⁴⁴⁵

Speaking about the two new provinces, the Colonial Secretary, Lord Grenville, made explicit the conservative design behind the new constitutional arrangement: ‘The Object of these regulations is both to give the Upper branch of the Legislature a greater degree of weight and consequence than was possessed by the Councils of the old Colonial Governments, and to establish in the Provinces a Body of Men having that motive to attachment to the existing form of Government, which arises from the possession of personal or hereditary distinction’.⁴⁴⁶ How this ‘Body of Men’ would

⁴⁴⁴ Gates, *Land Policies of Upper Canada*, 22.

⁴⁴⁵ Craig, *Upper Canada*, 8–11.

⁴⁴⁶ John Johnson, “The Petition of Sir John Johnson, Bart. and Others in Behalf of the Loyalists Settled in Canada. Dated London 11th April 1785,” in *Documents Relating to the Constitutional History of Canada, 1759-1791*, ed. Adam Shortt and Arthur G. Doughty, vol. II (Ottawa: J. de L. Taché, 1918), 989.

concretely be created was to follow a different design in each province. In Lower Canada, given the majority of French-Canadians, French civil law and the seigneurial land tenure was retained, while the ‘free and common socage’ became the tenure prevailing in Upper Canada. There, English-speaking settlers were expected to create a bulwark of Protestant Loyalism and keep popular impulses in check, especially republican aspirations.⁴⁴⁷

John Graves Simcoe, the first Lieutenant-Governor of Upper Canada, sought to further the erection of a pro-monarchical Anglican gentry to counter-balance the influence of republican ideas from the United States by reserving, for the Executive Council and the Church of England, one-seventh, respectively, of all surveyed Crown lands. The idea was that the value of land locked in this way would increase as the colony developed and could eventually be sold to provide a revenue outside the control of the elected Legislative Assembly. Meanwhile, Crown and Clergy reserves would be leased to tenants, so that a regular income would be obtained from rental arrangements to help pay the costs of the Church and the provincial administration.⁴⁴⁸ The reserves could also be used to reward those who performed public and military services.⁴⁴⁹

In 1794, as an additional measure to support the creation of a landed aristocracy, Simcoe authorized new grants of land to members of the Executive and Legislative

⁴⁴⁷ Bannister and Riordan, *The Loyal Atlantic*, 21–22; See also Christopher Bayly, *Imperial Meridian: The British Empire and the World, 1780-1830* (London; New York: Longman, 1989); Linda Colley, *Britons: Forging the Nation, 1707-1837* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2009); J. C. D Clark, *English Society, 1660-1832: Religion, Ideology, and Politics during the Ancien Regime* (Cambridge; New York: Cambridge University Press, 2000), 300–301; Jane Errington, *Lion, the Eagle, and Upper Canada: A Developing Colonial Ideology* (Montreal; Kingston: McGill-Queen’s Press, 2012).

⁴⁴⁸ Gates, *Land Policies of Upper Canada*, 159.

⁴⁴⁹ Shortt and Doughty, *Documents Relating to the Constitutional History of Canada, 1759-1791*, 1918, II:946.

Councils, as well as to other 'leading families' among the Loyalists of the 1780s, and a few gentile families close to the King's army or arrived from England to fill government jobs.⁴⁵⁰ Anxious to avoid the 'Convulsions' that had shaken the United States, Simcoe insisted that '[t]here are inherent Defects in the Congressional form of Government, the absolute prohibition of an order of Nobility is a glaring one. The true New England Americans have as strong an Aristocratical spirit as is to be found in Great Britain; nor are they Anti-monarchical'.⁴⁵¹ His hope 'to have a hereditary Council with some mark of Nobility'⁴⁵² was never fulfilled, but his successor, Peter Russel, continued to support the creation of a dominant propertied class. Like Simcoe before him, Russel believed that 'in the new province, where democratic and republican winds blew so strong from across the border, the bounty of the Crown could not be better exercised than in the creation of a class of landed gentry who would maintain those social gradations found in older and better established societies'.⁴⁵³

At the dawn of the nineteenth century, the interests of a group of settlers, drawn from the rank of British military officers and expected to serve the British Crown with utmost loyalty, had been well entrenched in the region. In accordance with the wish of the British Authorities, the most predominant among these men soon organized themselves, together with influential merchants, into an oligarchy that came to be commonly known as the 'Family Compact'. Ideologically, the Family Compact shared a

⁴⁵⁰ White, *Ontario 1610-1985: A Political and Economic History*, 69.

⁴⁵¹ Ernest Alexander Cruikshank, ed., *The Correspondence of Lieut. Governor John Graves Simcoe: With Allied Documents Relating to His Administration of the Government of Upper Canada*, vol. I (Toronto: Ontario Historical Society, 1923), 18.

⁴⁵² *Ibid.*

⁴⁵³ Gates, *Land Policies of Upper Canada*, 66.

deeply conservative outlook.⁴⁵⁴ Supported by the Colonial Office until after the rebellions of 1838, key to the ability of the Compact to maintain itself in power for so long was its ability to draw strong support from the population of settlers despite political divisions and political opposition. The distribution of land to immigrants played an instrumental role in achieving this purpose.

‘Here We Are Laird Ourselves’

Land grabs have a long history in North America—as old, in fact, as America itself. Since the first attempts at settling the continent in the early seventeenth century, Native peoples have seen their land appropriated by white settlers and their governments. Native peoples in territories where Upper Canada was created were not spared by the North American land rush. Their title on territories west of the established colonies was recognized by the Royal Proclamation of 1763, but their land was nevertheless gradually acquired by British authorities in subsequent decades.⁴⁵⁵ As historian John Clarke has put it, ‘within a few years the British would be eager to keep the tribes apart, to divide and rule, to inculcate clientage, to foment jealousy, so that [...] the price of land could, in this way, be kept low’.⁴⁵⁶ By the late 1790s, through treaties

⁴⁵⁴ R. D Francis, Richard Jones, and Donald B Smith, *Origins: Canadian History to Confederation* (Toronto: Nelson Education, 2009), 283.

⁴⁵⁵ John Borrows, “Wampum at Niagara: The Royal Proclamation, Canadian Legal History, and Self-Government,” in *Aboriginal and Treaty Rights in Canada: Essays on Law, Equality and Respect for Difference*, ed. Michael Asch (Vancouver: University of British Columbia Press, 1997), 155–72; Hamar Foster, “Indian Administration’ from the Royal Proclamation of 1763 to Constitutionally Entrenched Aboriginal Rights,” in *Indigenous Peoples’ Rights in Australia, Canada, & New Zealand*, ed. Paul Havemann (Auckland: Oxford University Press, 1999), 351–77.

⁴⁵⁶ Clarke, *Land, Power, and Economics on the Frontier of Upper Canada*, 145.

and surrenders, the process of dispossession of Native peoples was well under way along the shoreline of Lake Ontario.⁴⁵⁷ It continued in the first quarter of the nineteenth century: ‘[b]etween 1815 and 1825, nine Indian treaties were concluded which extinguished the Indian title to practically the entire peninsula between Lakes Ontario, Erie, and Huron’.⁴⁵⁸ In the New World, it is Native peoples—not peasants—who have been subjected to dispossession by displacement.

Land was to be settled anew with British subjects under the aegis of the colonial administration charged with redistributing Native homelands to white settlers. Given the abundance of land and the need to populate the country, it was first decided by the administration to give the land for ‘free’ to common people, creating a class of rural freeholders with no equivalent in Europe. To be sure, to speak of the grants of land to ‘non-officials’ is, ‘in any event a misnomer’⁴⁵⁹, since they had to pay fees which doubled many times over the first quarter of the nineteenth century. These fees were such that even in the early days of the province, a significant portion of new immigrants opted for tenancy as their means to make their first steps in the province. Rental conditions, however, bore very little resemblance with the rental conditions of English tenant farmers.

Anne Catherine Wilson’s rigorous studies of tenancy in Upper Canada have shown that tenants’ leasing conditions in the first half of the nineteenth century had

⁴⁵⁷ Donald B. Smith, “The Dispossession of the Mississauga Indians: A Missing Chapter in the Early History of Upper Canada,” in *Historical Essays on Upper Canada: New Perspectives*, ed. James Johnson and Bruce G. Wilson (Montréal; Kingston: McGill-Queen’s University Press, 1989), 23–51.

⁴⁵⁸ Gates, *Land Policies of Upper Canada*, 152.

⁴⁵⁹ Craig, *Upper Canada*, 139.

much to attract settlers, even if land could be acquired for ‘free’ through the land-granting system. Rental arrangements were, in fact, extremely various, the least secure of them being those of ‘tenants “at will” who were obliged upon notice to quit the land at any time. Following them were yearly tenants who were subject to removal at the end of the year. More secure were tenants who held “leases” for a specified number of years, anywhere from one to nine hundred and ninety-nine, for life or in perpetuity’.⁴⁶⁰ As Wilson has explained, ‘[w]ithin this hierarchy of arrangements those at the bottom had the least security and faced the greatest risk of rack-renting (frequent rent increases), distraint (having their cattle or goods seized to satisfy rent arrears), or eviction’.⁴⁶¹ There were also ‘squatters’ who occupied the land illegally without any kind of lease or rental arrangement.

That said, the most common length of tenure on land held by private individuals was three to seven years. ‘From an agricultural point of view, [...] leases of this length still promoted a short-sighted policy regarding land maintenance. There was little incentive to improve the property if the rent was going to be raised at the end of the term or if a new tenant was going to move in’.⁴⁶² On land owned by the government or by land companies, longer leases were more frequent: ‘The Canada Company leased lots for ten- to twelve-year terms. The Crown and clergy reserves were let for twenty-one-year terms’.⁴⁶³ ‘By British and North American standards, the twenty-one-year lease

⁴⁶⁰ Wilson, *Tenants in Time*, 62.

⁴⁶¹ *Ibid.*

⁴⁶² *Ibid.*, 67.

⁴⁶³ *Ibid.*

[...] was very advantageous to tenants'.⁴⁶⁴ Fixed by the government rather than by the market, rents levels on the reserves were also very advantageous. Even if they were raised in 1811, 1819, and 1846, during the whole period examined by Wilson (1799-1871) they 'remained some of the lowest available'.⁴⁶⁵

Low rents and long, legally secured, leases help to explain why '[e]ven in the free-grant days immigrants found it less expensive and more expedient to rent than take a government grant and pay all the associated fees and the cost of inland travel and scouting'.⁴⁶⁶ In addition to the survey fee imposed in 1796, patent fees were imposed on land grants in order to raise a revenue that could be used by the civil government to pay for its expenses.⁴⁶⁷ The aggregate fee was so high as to impede poor settlers' ability to obtain land in Upper Canada.⁴⁶⁸ As a result 'they could not get land on any terms unless they would take a Crown Reserve on lease or be content to labour on other people's land'.⁴⁶⁹ Among these immigrants were many young people newly arrived in Upper Canada, eager to establish families but lacking the financial means to become proprietors and without the possibility of inheriting land from already-established parents. More generally, it 'made good sense for immigrants to avoid buying land in the backwoods, where they would face immediate toil and privation, and instead rent a partially cleared farm near town'.⁴⁷⁰

Even without owning a piece of land, Upper Canadian tenant farmers were much

⁴⁶⁴ Ibid., 80.

⁴⁶⁵ Ibid., 81.

⁴⁶⁶ Ibid., 56.

⁴⁶⁷ Gates, *Land Policies of Upper Canada*, 65, 80.

⁴⁶⁸ Ibid., 67–68.

⁴⁶⁹ Ibid., 69.

⁴⁷⁰ Wilson, *Tenants in Time*, 58.

better-off than tenants in the British Isles. Rather than living under the threat of dispossession, Upper Canadian tenants could hope to amass, with a few years of hard work and privation, the means to a standard of living ‘considerably higher than most could have realized in anything like an analogous social position in England, Scotland, or Ireland’.⁴⁷¹ Even poor immigrants had some chance of climbing the ladder of social mobility and accessing the coveted status of freeholder. Trying to convince his brother to join him in Upper Canada, George Forbes, the son of a tenant farmer from Aberdeenshire, Scotland, illustrated this aspiration in evocative terms: ‘We in Canada have this glorious privilege that the ground whereon we tread is our own and our children’s after us. [...] No danger of the leases expiring and the laird saying pay me so much more rent, or bundle and go, for here we are laird ourselves’.⁴⁷² Free from exploitation by the old feudal power of political surplus extraction, freeholders and tenant farmers constituted themselves as a class of independent household producers.

Family Labour and Commercial Wheat Farming

This is not to say that life was easy. The pioneer family ‘had to make a new start in a country where great virgin forests came everywhere down to the water’s edge, defying the settler to find space to plant his seeds or even for his cabin’.⁴⁷³ Most houses

⁴⁷¹ Kenneth Norrie and Owsam Douglas, *A History of the Canadian Economy*, 2nd ed. (Toronto: Harcourt Brace Canada, 1996), 130–131.

⁴⁷² George Forbes to John Forbes, 20 April 1850, George Forbes Papers, Scottish Public Record Office, Edinburgh, cited in the introduction of Peter Russell, *Attitudes to Social Structure and Mobility in Upper Canada, 1815-1840: “Here We Are Laird Ourselves”* (Lewiston: E. Mellen Press, 1990).

⁴⁷³ Craig, *Upper Canada*, 7.

were, for a time, ‘simply rough shanties’ with, for fences, only the ‘trees felled in line along the edge of the cleared land and roughly trimmed. Because harvests were small, there were no real barns’.⁴⁷⁴ The first task of the settler, after having cleared a first parcel of land, was to sow those crops—wheat and vegetables—which would allow the family to survive. A small field was enough to do so, as ‘[a]n acre or so in vegetables and one to one and a half acres of wheat met the crop needs of a family of four’.⁴⁷⁵ On the fringes of inhabited areas, the life of settlers would continue to resemble this picture until late into the second half of the century. There, ‘in general life was just as crude and primitive as that experienced earlier by hundreds of thousands’.⁴⁷⁶

Even if local markets provided by the small urban nucleus or local garrisons were sometimes available to procure basic products, keeping part of the land dedicated to subsistence agriculture long remained important. Most of the labour was done by household family-members, rather than by wage-labourers: rural families ‘expected to supply most of their own needs from within the farm. [...] The responsibility for subsistence fell largely to the women in the household and the children working under their direction. The wife and older daughters produced and processed the food to feed the family and the textiles to clothe them’.⁴⁷⁷ Taking the family as the primary production unit, Marjorie Griffin Cohen has insisted that ‘[t]he imperatives of a pioneer

⁴⁷⁴ Historical geographer Kenneth Kelly quoted in White, *Ontario 1610-1985: A Political and Economic History*, 62.

⁴⁷⁵ Kenneth Kelly, “Wheat Farming in Simcoe County in the Mid-Nineteenth Century,” *Canadian Geographer* 15, no. 2 (1971): 107.

⁴⁷⁶ Edwin Clarence Guillet, *The Pioneer Farmer and Backwoodsman*, vol. II (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1970), 117.

⁴⁷⁷ Russell, *How Agriculture Made Canada*, 24. For a more detailed account of how the multiple strategies pursued by farm families were structured by gender, see Marjorie Griffin Cohen, *Women’s Work, Markets, and Economic Development in Nineteenth-Century Ontario* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1988).

economy, characterized by poor transportation, underdeveloped local markets, and an unstable staple-exporting market, made women's subsistence-oriented labour crucial to the success of the agricultural unit.⁴⁷⁸ Women took part in clearing the land, stifling the recolonization of cleared land by invasive weeds, and stumping. In this context, farm families 'could allocate relatively little to actual farming operations. This was one reason why an extensive type of agriculture was mandatory during the early years of settlement'.⁴⁷⁹

The clearing of the land, together with the fencing and the erection of a few rudimentary agricultural buildings (a house and a barn, for instance), were often referred to by contemporaries as 'improvements'. Here, however, the term 'improvement' does not have the same connotation as it had in Britain since the seventeenth century, where it designated the adoption of capital-intensive methods of mixed-farming and the rationalization of agrarian labour-processes directed at increasing productivity. Except for a minority of improving landlords familiar with British mixed-farming and its improved management techniques designed to maintain long-term soil fertility, 'improvement' was generally understood as the simple geographical extension of the cleared superficies of farmland. Generally, a family was able to clear between one and half to three acres per year.⁴⁸⁰

Reliance on family labour was not a choice. Given 'free' grant policies in such a vast country as was Upper Canada, only the most desperate immigrant would end up

⁴⁷⁸ Cohen, *Women's Work, Markets, and Economic Development in Nineteenth-Century Ontario*, 59.

⁴⁷⁹ Kelly, "Wheat Farming in Simcoe County in the Mid-Nineteenth Century," 102–103.

⁴⁸⁰ Peter Russell, "Upper Canada: A Poor Man's Country? Some Statistical Evidence," *Canadian Papers in Rural History*, no. 3 (1984): 136–137.

becoming a permanent wage labourer, the majority of settlers preferring by all means to remain ‘free of the constraint of having to exchange labour for subsistence on the local market’.⁴⁸¹ Undoubtedly, settlers did engage in various practices that would bring cash into the household in order to pay for debts and essential supplies: ‘the need to provide subsistence to their family, and possibly also some of the “conveniences” of life, frequently led pioneer farmers (and others much longer on the land) to seek out what we might call parallel occupations to supplement what the farm itself could provide’.⁴⁸² Where it constituted a significant regional industry, lumbering offered such an occupation to farmers during the winter time. Farmers would also, *occasionally*, offer their labour to other farmers in exchange for a wage. Ultimately, however, when a considerable parcel of the farmer’s land had been cleared, a surplus crop—usually wheat—was produced beyond the subsistence needs of the family to bring cash into the household.⁴⁸³

Settlers of little means needed credit to start up their new lives in the bush and purchase provisions, seeds, livestock, tools, off-farm articles (i.e. salt and iron), and farm implements. According to Catherine Anne Wilson, it took ‘one hundred pounds to set up a workable farm unit with cleared fields, house and barn, yoke of oxen, wagons, seed, implements, and enough livestock to support a family’.⁴⁸⁴ Even settlers who had

⁴⁸¹ Russell, *How Agriculture Made Canada*, 17.

⁴⁸² *Ibid.*, 14.

⁴⁸³ While most of the province’s wheat was grown in the ‘wheat belt’ that extended from the Bay of Quinte to London around the head of Lake Ontario, it could be found nearly everywhere, accounting for 70% of the total marketable surplus of the province. Marvin McNinnis, “Marketable Surpluses in Ontario Farming, 1860,” *Social Science History* 8, no. 4 (1984): 413–415.

⁴⁸⁴ *Tenants in Time*, 57. Wilson makes this estimation on the basis of the following sources ; Robert Ankli and K. I. Duncan, “Farm Making Costs in Early Ontario,” *Canadian Papers in Rural History* 4 (1984):

received their land for free could thus quickly end up with debts for which cash was needed,⁴⁸⁵ something the culture of wheat, one of the only resources for which there was a ready market, could provide. Of course, local urban markets and recently settled areas demanded a variety of farm products, but even ‘[w]here there was no American competition [...], the marketing procedures were so cumbersome and time-consuming that most farmers did not feel it worth their while to produce for them’.⁴⁸⁶ Barter and exchange were the norm for farm produce other than wheat.

By contrast, ‘[t]he demand for wheat was large and payment was both immediate and in cash. Furthermore, grist millers acted as intermediary marketing agencies in the wheat trade, paying cash for wheat and arranging for the transportation of flour to the ports’.⁴⁸⁷ This cash was attractive to settlers who had direct access to their means of subsistence—food and land—but little capital. It was also a necessity for tenants in old settled districts close to urban areas, where cash rents were common.⁴⁸⁸ Here, the War of 1812 seems to have played a role in shifting payments from crops to cash, as merchants

39–48; Clarence H. Danhof, “The Farm Enterprise : The Northern United States, 1820-1860s,” *Research in Economic History* 4 (1979): 317–359; Russell, “Upper Canada: A Poor Man’s Country? Some Statistical Evidence,” 144; Patrick Shirreff, *A Tour Through North American* (Edinburgh, 1835), 362–365; Thomas Rolph, *A Brief Account, Together with Observations Made during a Visit in the West Indies, and a Tour through the United States of America in Parts of the Years 1832–33; Together with a Statistical Account of Upper Canada*. (Dundas, Upper Canada: G. Heyworth Hackstaff, 1836), 108; H. J. Johnston, “Immigration to the Five Eastern Townships of the Huron Tract,” *Ontario History* 54, no. 3 (1962): 210–211.

⁴⁸⁵ Clark, *Movements of Political Protest in Canada, 1640-1840*, 429–430; Gates, *Land Policies of Upper Canada*, 43; Gary Teeple, “Land, Labour and Capital in Pre-Confederation Canada,” in *Capitalism and the National Question in Canada*, ed. Gary Teeple (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1972), 57; Leo Johnson, “The Settlement of the Western District 1749-1850,” in *Aspects of Nineteenth-Century Ontario*, ed. F. H. Armstrong, H. A. Stevenson, and J. D. Wilson (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1974), 23.

⁴⁸⁶ Kelly, “Wheat Farming in Simcoe County in the Mid-Nineteenth Century,” 106.

⁴⁸⁷ *Ibid.*, 107.

⁴⁸⁸ Wilson, *Tenants in Time*, 62.

increasingly insisted on being paid with cash during the war.⁴⁸⁹ That said, many rental agreements long kept the form of ‘share tenancy’ that did not require tenants to pay rents in cash. Instead, these tenants had to concede to the landlord between one-third and more than two thirds of their crop, depending on the amount of capital and farm implements the landlord provided.⁴⁹⁰

In any case, the quest for financial autonomy led a great number of Upper Canadian farmers to engage in growing ‘wheat as largely, and to repeat the crop as frequently, as any decent return could be obtained’, without attempts to improve the quality of the soil.⁴⁹¹ These ‘wheat-mining’ practices appeared as an irrational habit—the fruit of ignorance and lack of education—in the eyes of agriculturalists. While mixed-farming aimed at cost-cutting, specializing, accumulating surpluses, and innovating, wheat-mining consisted of extracting the most from the soil by planting the same crop year after year in the same plots, without rotation or the use of lime and manure. Dr. William Dunlop, an army officer and surgeon who eventually became member of the Parliament, ‘said he had known farmers to take twenty-seven consecutive wheat crops from their land’.⁴⁹²

As historian Edwin Guillet has explained, ‘this obviously wasteful habit of growing nothing but wheat is not hard to excuse, though difficult to defend’.⁴⁹³ ‘Not hard to excuse’ because new settlers had rarely enough means to establish and operate a

⁴⁸⁹ Douglas McCalla, *Planting the Province: The Economic History of Upper Canada, 1784-1870* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1993), 33.

⁴⁹⁰ Wilson, *Tenants in Time*, 112.

⁴⁹¹ Adam Fergusson, quoted in Guillet, *The Pioneer Farmer and Backwoodsman*, 1970, II:37.

⁴⁹² *Ibid.*, II:36.

⁴⁹³ *Ibid.*

mixed farm beyond their immediate needs.⁴⁹⁴ By contrast to grain farming, mixed-farming of the kind practiced in the English countryside called for large investments in buildings, livestock, and labour.⁴⁹⁵ Improved techniques such as ‘breaking chalk into the soil to sweating it with slowly dissolving lime’, for instance, required the hiring of wage labourers that were not easily found in Upper Canada.⁴⁹⁶ As another example, ‘to pull a dung cart through the heavy bottom land’, horses were needed, an investment that farmers of limited means could not make.⁴⁹⁷ Applying manure, in fact, cost the farmers not only horses, but also extra labour, as more cattle and hogs were required: these animals needed to be fed, fenced in, and protected from the winter cold by a barn. To allow for mixed-farming, significant changes had to be made in the layout of the farm, in the equipment, as well as in the allocation of labour inside and outside the farm.

Since labour was scarce and dear, but land plenty and cheap, time and money were better spent on clearing the land and sowing larger areas than on better tillage and fertilization.⁴⁹⁸ A few more acres logged and burned each year in anticipation of wheat farming yielded more wheat than the extra wheat produced by adding manure to the soil. As the land became less and less productive over the years, yielding ever smaller marginal returns, new clearings, instead of more manuring, provided farmers with rich soil in which to sow. The Honourable Adam Fergusson, author of two books on the state of Upper Canadian agriculture in the early 1830s, and ‘improving farmer’ who

⁴⁹⁴ Robert Leslie Jones, *History of Agriculture in Ontario, 1613-1880* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1977), 60–61.

⁴⁹⁵ Kenneth Kelly, “Note on a Type of Mixed Farming Practiced in Ontario During the Early Nineteenth Century,” *Canadian Geographer* 17, no. 3 (1973): 213.

⁴⁹⁶ Lois Darroch Milani, “Robert Gourlay: Gadfly,” *Ontario History* 63, no. 2 (1971): 234.

⁴⁹⁷ *Ibid.*

⁴⁹⁸ *History of Agriculture in Ontario, 1613-1880*, 90.

contributed much to introducing veterinarian knowledge and improved stock in Upper Canada, thus excused wheat-mining practices by pointing out that the ‘system was perfectly natural if not perfectly wise’.⁴⁹⁹ Indeed, ‘[w]heat was found to be always less or more in demand, commanding a cash payment, while most other articles of farm produce were only to be disposed of in barter or in trade. Land was cheap and abundant, and when fields began to exhibit unequivocal symptoms of exhaustion a new clearing was commenced’.⁵⁰⁰

Wheat-mining offered high yields for the first few years, allowing settlers to obtain sound currencies from the sale of their crops, without having to invest the sums required to adopt the more up-to-date technologies and principles of mixed-farming. Clearing land also considerably increased the value of a lot, since arriving middle- and upper-class immigrants were often willing to pay significantly more for land that had been cleared instead of starting their farm from scratch in the bush.⁵⁰¹ For this reason, even owners of leased land could see the extensive wheat farming of their tenants as a good thing, for it implied that a greater area of land would be cleared every year, the value of the land increasing accordingly, even if the soil was impoverished. There even existed ‘clearing leases’—unknown to Europe—according to which the requirements of the rent were to be fulfilled neither by a sum of cash or by crops, but by clearing a certain number of acres every year.⁵⁰² Tenants with this form of agreement had little incentive to improve the means of farming, but all the more reason to engage themselves

⁴⁹⁹ Quoted in Guillet, *The Pioneer Farmer and Backwoodsman*, 1970, II:37.

⁵⁰⁰ Quoted in *ibid.*

⁵⁰¹ Wilson, *Tenants in Time*, 87.

⁵⁰² *Ibid.*, 63.

in ‘chopping down trees, removing underbrush, [and] burning logs’.⁵⁰³

The Sales System of Reserve Lands

Advantageous conditions of access to land were to be found in other British colonies where land was abundant. In Australia, for instance, ‘innumerable settlers with little cash or credit participated in the great land rush and derived earnings from farming or selling out.’⁵⁰⁴ Much like in Upper Canada, this meant that little rural wage labour was available to work for capitalists, a problem which became ‘a fairly common theme in British mercantile literature’.⁵⁰⁵ Marx himself had noted that capitalism could not be directly exported to white settler colonies, for, there, ‘the bulk of the soil is still public property and every settler on it can therefore turn part of it into his private property and his individual means of production, without preventing later settlers from performing the same operation’.⁵⁰⁶ The expropriation of the mass of the people from the soil would thus be inevitably precluded by local conditions, as a consequence of which wage labour would be scarce and dear—in other words, unprofitable to employ in agriculture. In Upper Canada, ‘[t]he difficulty [...] was caused by the fact that [...] land was so cheap and plentiful that even the poorest emigrants [...] could obtain their own means of production and therefore would not be forced, except on their own terms, to work for

⁵⁰³ Ibid.

⁵⁰⁴ John C. Weaver, *The Great Land Rush and the Making of the Modern World, 1650-1900* (Montreal; Kingston: McGill-Queen’s University Press, 2003), 17.

⁵⁰⁵ Michael Perelman, *The Invention of Capitalism: Classical Political Economy and the Secret History of Primitive Accumulation* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2000), 327.

⁵⁰⁶ Marx, *Capital*, 934.

wages'.⁵⁰⁷

Aware of this issue, influential individuals like John Elmsley and Robert Gourlay argued for the need to terminate the 'free' land granting system and replace it with a sales system. They made the case that labour would become more plentiful if land was made dearer. The logic was that, as land would be sold instead of given, only people of some means—those said best-positioned to put the land into productive use—would become owners. The others—the majority of new immigrants—would be forced to engage in wage labour, at least for the time necessary to accumulate an amount of wealth sufficient to the purchase of property.⁵⁰⁸ By disposing of Crown reserves through a sales policy, the hope was to provide the local conditions for the development of a capitalist agrarian class structure in which landlords and tenant farmers would have access to the means—labour—necessary to make improvements to produce more at better cost: 'they considered this the only effective method of fostering colonial economic development'.⁵⁰⁹

A series of measures inspired by the theories of the proponents of the sales system were adopted in the late 1810s and early 1820s to curb speculation and absenteeism. A new tax, for instance, was imposed on wild land, and settlement duties

⁵⁰⁷ Leo Johnson, "Independent Commodity Production: Mode of Production or Capitalist Class Formation?," *Studies in Political Economy* 6 (1981): 102.

⁵⁰⁸ Gates, *Land Policies of Upper Canada*, 229ff; John Howison, *Sketches of Upper Canada, Domestic, Local, and Characteristic* (Edinburgh: Oliver & Boyd, London: G. & W.B. Whittaker, 1821), 119, 179; Perelman, *The Invention of Capitalism*, 321–339.

⁵⁰⁹ Peter Burroughs, *British Attitudes towards Canada, 1822-1849* (Scarborough: Prentice Hall, 1971), 35; The same ideas were later methodically articulated by British politician Edward Gibbon Wakefield in his theory of "systematic colonization". On the influence of Wakefield's theory on the Colonial Office, see Craig, *Upper Canada*, 140–141; Peter Burroughs, *The Colonial Reformers and Canada* (Toronto; Montreal: McClelland and Stewart, 1969), 43–79.

were revised. One had to wait until 1826, however, to see the ‘free’ land-granting system finally abolished.⁵¹⁰ It was replaced by a sales policy on Crown land that gave no other choice to new settlers than to buy or rent their plots on the market to access ownership. As such, it represented a landmark in the commodification of land: ‘the vacant Crown Lands in each district were evaluated and a sale of minimum prices in each was established. Lands available for sale were then advertised in the newspapers, and by other means, with the minimum (or ‘upset’) price stated, and to be sold to the highest bidders’.⁵¹¹ With the exception of grants to Loyalists and ‘a provision for grants to poor settlers on a quit-rent basis [...] all lands would henceforth be sold, with the proceeds to go into the provincial treasury’.⁵¹²

Those aspiring to create a pool of wage labourers in the province had not been the only ones demanding the end of the free land-granting system. Settlers themselves had long complained about vacant land owned by absentee owners and the way that Crown reserves were dispersed in settlements following a checkered layout that had for effect to isolate settlers from one another and create inutile obstacles to the development of roads and farms.⁵¹³ To give a sense of proportions, by 1825, about 62% of all land granted was held by absentee owners.⁵¹⁴ The sales policy, however, failed to put an end to speculation and absenteeism, for much of the land, including 1.1 million of acres in what came to be known as the Huron Tract, was sold to the Canada Company in return

⁵¹⁰ With the exception of grants to loyalists claimants and their sons, cancelled only in 1853. Gates, *Land Policies of Upper Canada*, 282–283.

⁵¹¹ Craig, *Upper Canada*, 139.

⁵¹² Ibid.

⁵¹³ Johnson, “Land Policy, Population Growth and Social Structure in the Home District, 1793-1851,” 50; Gates, *Land Policies of Upper Canada*, 129–131, 154–155.

⁵¹⁴ *Land Policies of Upper Canada*, 342.

for annual payments.⁵¹⁵ The Canada Company was denounced by Reformers as ‘a group of favoured absentee speculators’⁵¹⁶ which had privileges not granted to other landowners, holding huge amounts of Crown reserve lands received at a low price fixed by the government. Moreover, the unpatented and unoccupied land it possessed was not subject to the wild land tax.⁵¹⁷

The effects of the new sales system on the ability of young settlers and new immigrants to access land does not, however, unequivocally point out in the direction of a restriction of acquisitions. For one thing, the Canada Company made vast areas of land available to purchase in more remote and newly developing regions, where prices were lower, hence relieving poor settlers of the obligation of purchasing land in established areas, where it was more expensive.⁵¹⁸ For another, public reserves that were sold to settlers through auction had to be paid for by instalment, easing the credit problem of poor settlers.⁵¹⁹ Moreover, not all grants of land had been abolished with the end of the free land-granting system—‘the Crown continued to give away land as pauper lots or for settlement roads’.⁵²⁰ While the sales system may have favoured speculation and absenteeism in some aspects, it is thus far from certain that it met success in creating the pool of wage labourers that many wished to constitute in the colony: ‘[t]he vast amount of uncleared land already in private hands and the allowance of credit by speculators, such as the Canada Company, continued to make land readily available to poor able-

⁵¹⁵ Clarke, *Land, Power, and Economics on the Frontier of Upper Canada*, 428 .

⁵¹⁶ Gates, *Land Policies of Upper Canada*, 225.

⁵¹⁷ *Ibid.*, 226.

⁵¹⁸ Clarke, *Land, Power, and Economics on the Frontier of Upper Canada*, 265.

⁵¹⁹ *Ibid.*, 264–265.

⁵²⁰ Russell, *How Agriculture Made Canada*, 143.

bodied immigrants'.⁵²¹

The context of economic depression of the 1830s and the political turmoil that culminated in the Canadian Rebellions in 1837-1838, retarded immigration, so that the rise of land prices that would have rendered access to free holdings more difficult was delayed.⁵²² That said, the sales policy did help public authorities achieve at least one their objectives: to provide the government with a revenue to pay for its expenses, among which were compensation to civilians for the destruction of their property in the War of 1812.⁵²³

This search for revenues was decisive in the Executive Council's decision to adopt the sales policy in a context in which the Executive Council could not turn toward taxation without jeopardizing its relative power within the government. Here, it is well to recall that the imposition of direct taxes on the Thirteen American Colonies by the British Parliament to pay for military expenses incurred during the French and Indian Wars played a central role in the series of events that led to the American Revolution. In a vain effort to address the primary grievance of the British colonists in the Thirteen Colonies concerning taxation by the Parliament of Great Britain in the Colonies, the *Colonial Tax Repeal Act*, adopted in 1778, declared illegal the imposition of taxes by the King and Parliament on any of the Colonies, Provinces, and Plantations in North America and the West Indies (with the exception of duties intended to regulate commerce). From that time on, direct taxation from London would contravene the

⁵²¹ Johnson, "Independent Commodity Production," 104.

⁵²² Ibid.

⁵²³ Weaver, *The Great Land Rush and the Making of the Modern World, 1650-1900*, 220.

widely-held principle of ‘no taxation without representation’, according to which only the elected representatives in each British colony had control over the appropriation of local revenues.

This principle having been reasserted during Upper Canada’s formation under the terms of the Constitutional Act of 1791,⁵²⁴ taxation raised by provincial legislation would be controlled by the representative body of Upper Canada—the Legislative Assembly. This was considered as an extremely liberal gesture by the Colonial Office.⁵²⁵ The Governor, nevertheless, controlled certain revenues—among which were export duties and transfers from the British government—that allowed him to ‘carry on the administration without consulting the Assembly on financial matters’.⁵²⁶ Since the British Treasury had decided to limit, in 1817, its financial assistance to the annual Parliamentary grant for the salaries of the chief officers of government, the financial independence of the Governor and the Executive Council was seriously threatened.⁵²⁷ The other principal source of revenue—export duties—were collected in Lower Canada before being shared between the governments of the two provinces. They had always been the object of acrimonious disputes between the two governments. In this context, the Governor and the Executive Council had limited options to increase their revenue since they could not raised direct taxation.

⁵²⁴ Olga Bernice Bishop, *Publications of the Province of Upper Canada and of Great Britain: Relating to Upper Canada, 1791-1840* (Toronto: Ontario Ministry of Citizenship and Culture, 1984), 174.

⁵²⁵ Curtis, “Representation and State Formation in the Canadas, 1790-1850,” 64.

⁵²⁶ Bishop, *Publications of the Province of Upper Canada and of Great Britain*, 2.

⁵²⁷ Gates, *Land Policies of Upper Canada*, 165–167; Clarke, *Land, Power, and Economics on the Frontier of Upper Canada*, 93, 427–428.

The Colonial Land/Office State

The impossibility of the Executive Council to have direct recourse to taxation had fundamental consequences for Upper Canada's state-formation and the reproduction of its ruling class. For one thing, it delayed the establishment of a representative government and hindered the functioning of modern political institutions, undermining the creation of a modern bureaucracy and the economic development of the province by renouncing the public revenue that could have been used to pay the salaries of the magistracy and local governmental officials⁵²⁸ or spent on badly needed infrastructure.⁵²⁹ At the same time, by imposing an inescapably low threshold on taxation and limiting the financial means with which public officers could be rewarded, the restricted possibilities of taxation of the Executive also blocked the establishment of a tax/office state of the absolutist type. In these circumstances, the desire of the Governor and the Executive Council to retain their independence from the Assembly by selling the Crown reserves intensified their political dependency on a network of speculative landowners (corporate and individual) that impeded the production of the agrarian economy.

While the sale of Crown reserves constituted an important landmark in the

⁵²⁸ Neither were salaried. Curtis, "Representation and State Formation in the Canadas, 1790-1850," 65.

⁵²⁹ This does not mean that taxation was inexistent. As historian J. I. Little has pointed out, Upper Canada's Legislature financed roads, but it was 'a system of turnpikes and annual property taxes levied by the district commissioners of the peace (in court of quarter sessions)' that 'helped to ensure their maintenance'. In this sense, 'Upper Canadians had been forced to accept a limited amount of local taxation by these centrally appointed officials as early as 1793'. "Colonization and Municipal Reform in Canada East," *Histoire sociale/Social History* 14, no. 27 (1981): 96. Bruce Curtis has further specified that '[l]ocal powers of taxation and administration were mainly in the hands of appointed justices, who exercised such power either individually or together when assembled for Quarter Sessions'. Curtis, "Representation and State Formation in the Canadas, 1790-1850," 65.

commodification of land, it did so in a way that did not depart fundamentally from the structure of social reproduction that had been established in the early days of Upper Canada's formation. This social structure, I suggest, can be understood as a colonial 'land/office state' within which power and wealth rested on the appropriation of public land and the preservation of business relations dependent on aristocratic pretensions and loyalty to the British Empire. Much like the absolutist tax/office state, the colonial land/office state precluded the modern differentiation between the political and economic.⁵³⁰ The reproduction in Upper Canada of the fusion of domination and exploitation characteristic of pre-capitalist societies was expressed through the consolidation of a 'quasi-official coalition' of central and local elites 'for the purpose of distributing honours and rewards to the politically deserving'.⁵³¹ One thing that distinguished it from the absolutist tax/office state was, however, the centrality of land, rather than taxation, for social reproduction.

Within the colonial land/office state, the ruling class managed to appropriate great amounts of public land through a network of patronage whose scope was 'beyond the wildest imaginings of English domestic politics', due to the 'truly enormous quantities of fertile land' that had to be disposed of 'in the span of a few brief decades'.⁵³² 'To find a comparable moment in English history', as one historian puts it,

⁵³⁰ For a discussion of this differentiation, see Benno Teschke, *The Myth of 1648: Class Geopolitics and the Making of Modern International Relations* (Verso, 2003); Ellen Meiksins Wood, "The Separation of the Economic and the Political in Capitalism," *New Left Review* 127 (1981): 66–95.

⁵³¹ Wise, "Upper Canada and the Conservative Tradition," 27.

⁵³² Sidney Noel, *Patrons, Clients, Brokers: Ontario Society and Politics, 1791-1896* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1990), 62.

‘it is necessary to go back to the period of the Norman conquest’.⁵³³ One John Clarke’s succinct formulas also helps to grasp the essence of the logic of appropriation at the core of Upper Canada’s state-formation: ‘Those who served received land and those with land qualified to serve and so received more’.⁵³⁴ The result was the creation of a dominant propertied class organized by a system of clientelism in which the possession of land and the access to the highest public offices gave, in Lord Durham’s words, ‘all powers of government’.⁵³⁵

These powers allowed members of the ruling class to fill ‘the bench, the magistracy, the high offices of the Episcopal church, and a great part of the legal profession’, as well as ‘the large number of petty posts which are in the patronage of the government all over the province’.⁵³⁶ This system of clientelism ‘hardened into a complex network joining officials at the capital to interest groups in every locality, in a bewildering maze of inter-relationships. As early as the 1820s, and probably well before then, each community had a local oligarchy—in effect, a party machine—through which the provincial government dispensed its favours’.⁵³⁷ Admittance to this network was reliant upon, and gave access to, land, making speculation one of the main roads to become rich and rise to a position of social prominence. Having dedicated thirty-five years of his life to studying Upper Canada’s political culture, environment, and government land policy, historian John Clarke has concluded that ‘[t]his nexus of

⁵³³ Ibid.

⁵³⁴ Clarke, *Land, Power, and Economics on the Frontier of Upper Canada*, 420.

⁵³⁵ Lord Durham, *Lord Durham’s Report*, ed. Gerald M Craig (Ottawa: Carleton Library, 1968), 79.

⁵³⁶ Ibid.

⁵³⁷ Wise, “Upper Canada and the Conservative Tradition,” 27.

interconnection was not just how land speculators proceeded, it seems to have been how the very society worked, with networks of influence organized from the local to the larger scale'.⁵³⁸

Already in Upper Canada's early formative years, the logic of the colonial land/office state can be observed. Membership on a land board was then one of the surest roads to achieve prominence. For one thing, it conferred interpretative powers in regard to policy directives that could be used to one's own and one's friends' advantage. More generally, members of land boards 'decided who would become landowners and thereby determined social status. It [the membership] also gave access to a great deal of information which could be beneficial to one's own business'.⁵³⁹ The land boards were, in that sense, perhaps the first instance of a long-term process of colonial state-formation that 'required loyal agents at the local level who could gather and transmit specified elements of intelligence. This intelligence would enable the central authority to monitor local provision, to identify sources of conflict, to discover and generalize administrative innovation, and to intervene to overcome barriers to the realization of policy or the success of police'.⁵⁴⁰

Of course, membership in land boards was limited to a privileged elite. To be recommended, candidates had to have 'already begun to establish their positions in the social hierarchy either through prior military service or acquired wealth or both'; they also had to be 'right-minded and had proven themselves committed to British colonial

⁵³⁸ Clarke, *Land, Power, and Economics on the Frontier of Upper Canada*, 422.

⁵³⁹ *Ibid.*, 103–104.

⁵⁴⁰ Curtis, "Representation and State Formation in the Canadas, 1790-1850," 63.

society'.⁵⁴¹ In this way, 'the process of selection reflected the personal, hierarchical character of the society' rather than any qualifications based on competence or experience in land administration.⁵⁴² In 1794, the replacement of land boards by a petitioning process to the Executive Council (directly or through the local agency of the magistrates) did not significantly alter the principles of favouritism at the core of the process of land-acquisition established during the time of the land boards.⁵⁴³ Land boards were, moreover, re-established in local districts in the years following the War of 1812, 'so that immigrants need not attend at York'.⁵⁴⁴ For decades, most of the business of the Upper Canadian state would revolve around surveying, mapping, and dividing the landscape into lots and concessions, as well as administering the Crown reserves, a permanent object of contention in the colony.⁵⁴⁵

Clarke has suggested that Upper Canada's system of offices mirrored in fundamental aspects the system of clientelism prevailing in early nineteenth century Britain. After all, there, too, public offices conferred 'the capacity to dispense patronage. [...] [T]he few dribbled out offices of state to reward loyalty in friends, family, and clients or to buy off the disaffected. There, too, marriage and personal connections were the mechanisms used to secure the profits and perquisites of the state'.⁵⁴⁶ While correct, this comparison fails to acknowledge that, with the development of agrarian capitalism in England, the landed ruling class had turned the land into a productive asset which

⁵⁴¹ Clarke, *Land, Power, and Economics on the Frontier of Upper Canada*, 106.

⁵⁴² *Ibid.*

⁵⁴³ The detail of the petitioning process is given by Clarke, in *ibid.*, 156.

⁵⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, 174.

⁵⁴⁵ Wilson, *Tenants in Time*, 7–8.

⁵⁴⁶ Clarke, *Land, Power, and Economics on the Frontier of Upper Canada*, 382.

now constituted, together with economic rents derived from leasing agreements with tenant farmers forced into the competitive improvement of land, the basis of its wealth and power at a distance from state offices. In Upper Canada, this strategy of reproduction was blocked by the scarcity and dear cost of wage labour: the dominant propertied class had to find other ways of reproducing themselves. Appropriating land from Native peoples

far more land than they could put into productive use, Upper Canadian ruling class members saw their holdings primarily ‘as sources of valuable timber or as desirable locations from which they hoped to profit as land values rose’.⁵⁴⁷ Their strategic use of land consequently rested on various sorts of speculative activities—constantly on the outlook for land whose value was expected to rise, in the hope of a capital gain at the time of resale.

Crucially, the success of these speculative ventures was less dependent on competitive production than on factors associated with the political ability to get land in the best physical environment, which meant access to road systems and rural infrastructure, a proximity to towns, quality soil, the presence of exploitable natural resources, and regional monopoly privileges. The simple fact of holding large tracts of land was not sufficient in itself to make land speculation profitable. Accessing public monies to improve local roads and rural infrastructure was also essential in making an area attractive to settlement and concomitantly raising the price that could be obtained from land sales. While they locked up land in anticipation of future sales, speculative

⁵⁴⁷ Ibid., 425–426.

owners also looked to rent lots of land to tenant farmers in order to make an additional revenue. As discussed above, this appropriation of surpluses from direct producers, while partly relying on commercial leases, was nevertheless almost always on terms which were advantageous to tenants.

Absentee speculators could also sell the land to the tenants, whenever the value of land became interesting enough. If improvements had been made over the years by enterprising tenants, it was all the better for the speculator, who could obtain a better price without having laboured the land or provided the capital to achieve improvements. Land was also often sold 'to poor immigrants at inflated prices. Profits of 50 to 100 percent were not uncommon, although most received returns around 2 to 8 percent'.⁵⁴⁸ In all, the social reproduction underpinning the colonial land/office state departed considerably from the ways rural land was made profitable in England, where peasants had been driven off their land, their holdings being consolidated and leased out to large capitalist tenants who employed wage-labour to farm commercially.⁵⁴⁹ Appropriation thus became directly 'economic' as opposed to the 'extra-economic' forms of appropriation that had characterized pre-capitalist societies.

By contrast, the general pattern of investment found in Upper Canada revolved around speculative practices that relied on geopolitical forms of appropriation whose basis was, at its most fundamental level, the process of dispossession of Native peoples.

⁵⁴⁸ Francis, Jones, and Smith, *Origins*, 271; On the profitability of speculation, see Clarke, *Land, Power, and Economics on the Frontier of Upper Canada*, 354–374.

⁵⁴⁹ For more on this dynamic in England, see Brenner, "Agrarian Class Structure and Economic Development in Pre-Industrial Europe"; Brenner, "The Agrarian Roots of European Capitalism"; Wolf, *Europe and the People Without History*, 120–121; Teschke, *The Myth of 1648*, 251–252; Comninel, "English Feudalism and the Origins of Capitalism."

Like other cases of European colonization in the New World, this appropriation occurred through the displacement and removal of indigenous peoples from traditional lands by the encroachment of colonizing and invading agricultural farmers—the ‘pioneers’. Although the land appropriated was held under different tenurial arrangements, this geopolitical form of appropriation made state-formation in Upper Canada and New-France/Lower Canada *colonial* processes of state-formation different from processes of state-formation in Europe. Colonial state-formation in North America extended the reach of European rule into the ‘New World’, supported the establishment of white farming communities on Native homelands, and imposed a new property settlement on settled areas of the continent, areas whose moving frontier line ceaselessly expanded Westward.⁵⁵⁰

Gentlemen Farmers and the Emulation of ‘Improved’ Farming

Members of Upper Canada’s dominant propertied class were not impervious to the possibilities of increasing income through greater production on lands appropriated from Native peoples. In fact, the spirit of improvement had gained much popularity among better-off Lowland Scotch and English ‘half-pay’ officers who were not dependent upon immediate cash returns on their land.⁵⁵¹ While most members of the dominant propertied class left the land idle in the expectation of making profits along the principle of ‘buying cheap and selling dear’ on markets separated by a temporal (rather

⁵⁵⁰ Bill Ashcroft, Gareth Griffiths, and Helen Tiffin, *Postcolonial Studies: The Key Concepts* (New York: Routledge, 2013), 87.

⁵⁵¹ Jones, *History of Agriculture in Ontario, 1613-1880*, 62.

than geographical) distance, some officers carried out plans for adopting improved farming practices with the capital it required and the considerable risks it entailed. They experimented, invested in specialization, and could afford to wait while cattle were reared.⁵⁵² As they tried to emulate British agriculture and improve agrarian techniques, these officers, however, could hardly get around the fact that labour was not available in the colony to sustain capitalist farming.

Half-pay officers had started to emigrate in Canada as early as 1776, but most did so only after peace had been concluded with the United States, in 1783. By then, there were a few hundreds of Loyalist troops, together with some civilians, who had established themselves and started to cultivate the land in the Niagara region, at Detroit, and near Cataraqui.⁵⁵³ Reports on the high quality of the soil led the colonial administration to favour the Great Lakes region as the location to welcome the first wave of Loyalist immigration drawn from disbanded regiments and rangers that had been recruited, for the most part, from farming communities in the hinterland of New York and Pennsylvania.⁵⁵⁴ As historian James Johnson has explained, many of them

had served as officers of British Loyalist regiments—the King’s Royal Regiment of New York, the 84th Regiment, Butler’s Rangers—or had been attached to the Indian Department or other units during the American Revolution. When their

⁵⁵² Wilson, *Tenants in Time*, 72–80; See also Catharine Anne Wilson, *A New Lease on Life: Landlords, Tenants and Immigrants in Ireland and Canada* (Montreal; Kingston: McGill-Queen’s University Press, 1994).

⁵⁵³ Stuart R. J. Sutherland, Pierre Tousignant, and Madeleine Dionne-Tousignant, “Haldimand, Sir Frederick,” *Dictionary of Canadian Biography* (Toronto: University of Toronto/Université Laval, 2003).

⁵⁵⁴ Craig, *Upper Canada*, 8.

units were disbanded, these men qualified for half pay, which, depending on rank, entitled the recipient to some £50 to £150 per year. Compared to the very little or no liquid assets enjoyed by the ordinary struggling settler, half pay of necessity bestowed a substantial advantage on those who received it.⁵⁵⁵

Prior to the War of 1812, a great number of 'late' Loyalists had arrived in Upper Canada, many of them having not fought the republicans during the American Revolution, and some of them even openly hostile toward the Crown. They were considered by many early Loyalists as mere 'land-hunters' trying to take advantage of the free land-granting system of Upper Canada, and by the authorities as a potentially disloyal group, suspected of republican sympathies. The British government thus wanted to encourage emigration from the mother country, or from the British army, surer sources of loyal subjects than the republican United States.⁵⁵⁶ Upper Canada was indeed 'in a state of permanent siege if not from American troops then from American ideas. This made "loyalty" the crux of the conservative vision'.⁵⁵⁷ Various measures were adopted by the government to make it difficult for Americans to engage in Upper Canadian politics, at the same time as it put in place a series of schemes to assist would-be emigrants of British origin to settle in British North America. These schemes typically provided several hundred emigrants at a time with lots of land and ratios, as

⁵⁵⁵ James Johnson, *Becoming Prominent: Regional Leadership in Upper Canada, 1791-1841* (Montreal; Kingston: McGill-Queen's Press, 1989), 38.

⁵⁵⁶ Gates, *Land Policies of Upper Canada*, 85.

⁵⁵⁷ *Land, Power, and Economics on the Frontier of Upper Canada*, 40; See also Wise, "Upper Canada and the Conservative Tradition," 30.

well as farming implements, for a few months.⁵⁵⁸

Among the assisted emigrants, were thousands of soldiers and officers to whom were offered special terms to take land in Upper Canada, many having fought in the Napoleonic Wars. Among the military personnel who accepted this opportunity of settling in Canada, there were a large number of half-pay officers who came ‘some fifteen or twenty years after Waterloo, when financial depression and changing conditions had greatly circumscribed the opportunities for a genteel, idle, or sporting life in the Old Land’.⁵⁵⁹ Could such a life be reproduced in Upper Canada? In any case, the agrarian class structure of British capitalism could certainly not, which put a limit on the income associated with rents and greater production. In the absence of a pool of wage labourers readily available to work on farms, half-pay officers had to labour the land themselves if they hoped to make a good living out of their farms—engaging ‘in the business *practically*’ by relying on the labour of the family, ‘the price of labour being so high, and that of produce so low, that the agriculturalist cannot derive much profit from the returns made by the soil, if he employs hired men to work it’.⁵⁶⁰ Gentlemen farmers often attempted to solve their labour problems by leasing part of their farms to tenants who would improve—meaning clear—the land for them.⁵⁶¹

These obstacles did not prevent half-pay officers from becoming the agents of a cultural transfer of more up-to-date farm technologies and implements in the colony: ‘these Britons were foremost in introducing better crop rotations, pure-bred stock, and

⁵⁵⁸ Norrie and Douglas, *A History of the Canadian Economy*, 129.

⁵⁵⁹ Guillet, *The Pioneer Farmer and Backwoodsman*, 1970, II:343.

⁵⁶⁰ Howison, *Sketches of Upper Canada, Domestic, Local, and Characteristic [microform]*, 258–259.

⁵⁶¹ Wilson, *Tenants in Time*, 90.

labour-saving machinery'.⁵⁶² By the early nineteenth century, the existence of agricultural societies as well as farm journals and newspapers testified of the spirit of improvement that was gaining popularity among Upper Canadian 'would-be gentleman farmers' or 'investing farmers',⁵⁶³ some of whom even attempted to introduce certain traits of the British class system in the Upper Canadian countryside by bringing capital to the land and renting it to tenants who provided labour to work the soil. They 'spent fortunes to transmute their Upper Canadian wildlands as rapidly as possible into English country seats that would become income-producing dynastic holdings'.⁵⁶⁴ In their hands, 'improved' farms did develop, albeit rather marginally, during the first half of the nineteenth century. The social foundations of the British model of capitalist agriculture with its three classes was not, however, reproduced beyond some of its technical aspects.

In the 1820s and the 1830s, gentlemen farmers started to employ 'their land more intensively than the great majority of agricultural settlers, making higher investments per cleared acre in labour, livestock, and buildings, and employing lengthier and more complex rotations'.⁵⁶⁵ The new farm methods and techniques they introduced included experimental crops, the raising of a considerable number of animals, and the systematic application of manure to the soil, all techniques informed by British systems of land management, which emerged out of several centuries of social transformation in the English countryside. There, as Comninel has explained, rural productive activities and

⁵⁶² Jones, *History of Agriculture in Ontario, 1613-1880*, 62.

⁵⁶³ Guillet, *The Pioneer Farmer and Backwoodsman*, 1970, II:129.

⁵⁶⁴ Wilson, *Tenants in Time*, 74.

⁵⁶⁵ Kelly, "Note on a Type of Mixed Farming Practiced in Ontario During the Early Nineteenth Century," 206.

the terms of leases between English landlords and tenant farmers had been altogether ‘increasingly driven by market competition’.⁵⁶⁶ This ‘created an unprecedented social space where all production was virtually completely “free” from consideration of the immediate community’s needs’.⁵⁶⁷ In certain regions, this transformation was accompanied by

a permanent shift from grain crops to pasture. Yet arable farming too was transformed, by combining greatly increased flocks of sheep (producing manure as well as meat, wool and hide) with more intensive corn production (made possible by the sheep)—‘improved agriculture’. Fallow was eliminated entirely, while, over time, new fodder crops made possible still more intensive sheep-corn farming. Other specialisation emerged as well.⁵⁶⁸

The development of the revolutionary up-and-down husbandry in England allowed, as Brenner has insisted, ‘the interdependent growth of both animal and arable output’, an essential condition for improving agriculture, since animal production had ‘to provide manure and ploughing to counter the tendency to declining fertility of the soil’.⁵⁶⁹ Yet this was not ‘a thing any one could do. It took boldness, patience, and plenty of capital’.⁵⁷⁰ The up-and-down husbandry was, therefore, not a type of farming that every

⁵⁶⁶ Comminel, “English Feudalism and the Origins of Capitalism,” 47.

⁵⁶⁷ Ibid.

⁵⁶⁸ Ibid.

⁵⁶⁹ Brenner, “The Agrarian Roots of European Capitalism,” 97–98.

⁵⁷⁰ Kerridge, quoted in *ibid.*, 98.

Upper Canadian settler could engage in, only the minority of improving farmers who applied manure from enclosed livestock and mineral fertilizer, especially lime and gypsum, on the land. After a few years of work, their farms ‘could approach more closely to the best of the British systems of land management’.⁵⁷¹ Because initial investment outstripped the profits that could be made from mixed farming during many years, the possibility of increased output from individual holdings was seen, at best, as a distant and uncertain prospect, rather than a generally accepted value.⁵⁷² As a result, the emulation of British improved farming in Upper Canada long remained the exception rather than the rule.

Admittedly, gentlemen farmers did try to diffuse ideas about improvement through agricultural fairs and associations. In the County of Northumberland, for instance, on the north shore of Lake Ontario, an agricultural society

had been holding annual agricultural fairs, cattle shows, and ploughing matches since 1828. The best farms were reported to be experimenting with drainage; they had commodious and well-arranged barns, good stock, high yields, and gardens and orchards. These farms may have been using reapers, revolving hay rakes, and threshers as these new machines made their appearance in the county.⁵⁷³

⁵⁷¹ Kelly, “Note on a Type of Mixed Farming Practiced in Ontario During the Early Nineteenth Century,” 206.

⁵⁷² Kelly, “Wheat Farming in Simcoe County in the Mid-Nineteenth Century.”

⁵⁷³ Wilson, *Tenants in Time*, 172.

Agricultural societies contributed to the diffusion of more up-to-date technologies and management methods among the larger population: many who assisted fairs and meetings found inspiration in what they saw, joining ‘in the progress when they could see at fairs what their neighbours were doing’.⁵⁷⁴ That said, agricultural societies were generally seen as the domain of gentlemen farmers, and often described by journals as ‘clubs’ that ‘had little of value to teach ordinary farm folk’.⁵⁷⁵ In the words of one historian, ‘the majority came to fairs to gamble and to be amused’.⁵⁷⁶ Of the nearly 100,000 people who occupied lots of ten acres or more at the middle of the century, ‘the great majority were undoubtedly [...] averse to agricultural advances engendered by lectures or reading’.⁵⁷⁷ The agriculture they practiced was designed to generate ‘the greatest immediate profit from a very small investment of labour and capital’.⁵⁷⁸

Most farmers, for instance, kept little cattle. They also tended to stay away from improved breeds, even if available: many settlers ‘considered it preferable not to purchase large and high-priced oxen for bush use; for they needed more food and care but they were not proportionately more useful. In addition to miserable treatment in the Canadian backwoods, they were as well subject to all sorts of accident’.⁵⁷⁹ ‘Livestock-raising, except as part of a self-sufficient economy, scarcely existed in Upper Canada in the eighteen-thirties’.⁵⁸⁰ Early nineteenth century Upper Canadian agriculture was,

⁵⁷⁴ Guillet, *The Pioneer Farmer and Backwoodsman*, 1970, II:146.

⁵⁷⁵ Wilson, *Tenants in Time*, 172.

⁵⁷⁶ Guillet, *The Pioneer Farmer and Backwoodsman*, 1970, II:146.

⁵⁷⁷ Ibid.

⁵⁷⁸ Kelly, “Note on a Type of Mixed Farming Practiced in Ontario During the Early Nineteenth Century,” 205.

⁵⁷⁹ Guillet, *The Pioneer Farmer and Backwoodsman*, 1970, II:76.

⁵⁸⁰ Jones, *History of Agriculture in Ontario, 1613-1880*, 126.

therefore, characterized by the quasi-absence of the revolutionary up-and-down husbandry—an absence many times noted by European travellers, especially Scots and Englishmen, who were likely to consider the agrarian techniques of Upper Canadian farmers ‘backward’ and inefficient in comparison to those of Britain. The Englishmen John Howison, having spent two and a half years travelling in Upper Canada—visiting Glengarry County, Prescott, and Kingston en route to York (Toronto), from 1818 to 1820—observed that Canadians

are very bad farmers. They have no idea of the saving of labour that results from forcing the land, by means of high cultivation, to yield the largest possible quantity of produce. Their object is, to have a great deal of land under *improvement*, as they call it; and, consequently, they go on cutting down the woods on their lots, and regularly transferring the crops to the soil last cleared, until they think they have sufficiently extended the bounds of their farms. They then sow different parts of their land promiscuously, without any attention to nicety in the tillage, or any regard to rotation of crops. There is hardly a clean or a well ploughed field in the western part of the Province; nor has any single acre there, I believe, ever yielded nearly as much produce as it might be made to do under proper management.⁵⁸¹

Howison was not alone in condemning the farming practices of Upper Canadian settlers,

⁵⁸¹ Howison, *Sketches of Upper Canada, Domestic, Local, and Characteristic [microform]*, 193–194.

who were in the habit of ‘letting manure accumulate around the barn in huge quantities, preferring to remove the building rather than carting the manure to the fields’.⁵⁸² In his *Journal of a Tour* (1832), another observer, Thomas Fowler, noted that ‘farmers appear to have little knowledge of the use of dung, and scarcely anyone thinks of putting a single load upon the fields; so that, at any farmer’s barn or stable, one may see a dunghill as old as the building’.⁵⁸³ The fact is that extensive wheat monoculture was inefficient only in the long run, as it exhausted the soil; in the short run it could do extremely well—better, actually, than improved farming, which required the investment of great amount of capitals and could only be implemented over a relatively long period of time.

After a few years of ‘wheat-mining’, the soil, of course, would be depleted of its nutrients by the crop succession of wheat-fallow-wheat farming or the continuous cropping of a succession of grains without the presence of enough livestock to provide manure to put nutrients back into the soil.⁵⁸⁴ But farmers had their own ways to cope with soil exhaustion. A common practice was to sell the land to new immigrants, happy to buy land that was cleared from trees without realizing that the soil had already been exhausted. The phenomenon was so widespread that the agricultural literature of the time

⁵⁸² Guillet, *The Pioneer Farmer and Backwoodsman*, 1970, II:47–50.

⁵⁸³ Quoted in *ibid.*; See also James Johnston, *Notes on North America*, vol. I (Boston, 1851), 272.

⁵⁸⁴ The pattern was not exclusive to Upper Canadian farmers. In the Northern United States, American farmers too were tempted to get their share of the wheaten loaf by ‘mining’ the soil. Clarence H. Dunhof, *Change in Agriculture: The Northern United States, 1820-1870* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1969), 13–14.

warned settlers against buying cleared land in any part of Ontario. [...] Agricultural writers urged Ontario farmers to learn from the experience of others and frequently noted with regret that while in Europe soils were being built up, in Ontario they were being destroyed. [...] The literature frequently warned the would-be immigrant that he would find few signs of the fruits of the agricultural revolution in Ontario.⁵⁸⁵

Similar denunciations are found in agricultural periodicals of the time.⁵⁸⁶ Yet, '[d]espite the barrage of criticism heaped upon them, very few wheat-fallow-wheat farmers had intensified their agriculture as late as 1850 and fewer still had turned to cash crops other than wheat. The farm journals repeatedly pleaded with farmers to at least try the smothering crop as a preparation for wheat, but apparently with little result'.⁵⁸⁷

Conclusion

Interestingly, even if Upper Canadian farming techniques were a far cry from the kind of agricultural revolution that had occurred in England, the agricultural sector seems to have been dynamic in comparison to the state of crisis that blighted the Lower Canadian countryside. It could be tempting to assume that this dynamism of Upper

⁵⁸⁵ Kenneth Kelly, "The Transfer of British Ideas on Improved Farming to Ontario during the First Half of the Nineteenth Century," *Ontario History* 63, no. 2 (1971): 104–105; For an example, see William Dunlop, *Statistical Sketches of Upper Canada for the Use of Emigrants*, 3rd ed. (London, 1833), 26–27.

⁵⁸⁶ Kelly, "Wheat Farming in Simcoe County in the Mid-Nineteenth Century," 98; Jones, *History of Agriculture in Ontario, 1613-1880*, 61.

⁵⁸⁷ Kelly, "Wheat Farming in Simcoe County in the Mid-Nineteenth Century," 102.

Canada's booming agricultural sector was associated with capitalist imperatives to improve labour productivity, but in the light of what has been shown in this chapter, up until the 1840s, it is the geographical expansion of a type of extensive wheat farming based on family labour that characterized Upper Canada's agricultural dynamism.

As for the ruling class, it had, through the colonial land/office state that was established with Upper Canada's formation, others means to reproduce itself than capital-intensive agriculture. To be sure, a minority of 'gentlemen farmers' attempted to practice an improved form of agriculture. However, given the absence of a pool of rural wage labourers large enough to provide the labour needed to intensify productive processes on farms, and in the dearth of a class of market dependent tenant farmers forced to produce competitively in order to retain access to land, they met with limited success. Since most Upper Canadian farmers refused capital-intensive developments and remained profoundly sceptical of what they perceived as 'book-farming', a handful of improved farms long remained surrounded by multitudes of farms managed according to traditional methods of extensive agriculture. Things, however, changed in the 1840s, as Upper Canadian rural producers started to switch away from extensive types of agriculture toward capital-intensive types of agriculture. It is to the this change that I turn in the next chapter.

5.

The Development of Capital-Intensive Agriculture in Upper Canada

The adoption of capital-intensive agriculture on an extensive scale of production became a defining characteristic of Upper Canada's agricultural economy from the 1840s onwards. Revolutionizing, labour-saving implements developed by American industries during this period, including cast iron ploughs, revolving hay rakes, seed drills, and Hussey and McCormack reapers, found their way across the border where they were welcomed by Upper Canadian farmers. First developed in the north-eastern United States, where the agrarian population, subjected to the imperatives of market competition by the burden of taxation, mortgages, and other debts resulting from the American Revolution, was impelled to intensify agricultural production, these farm implements were readily sought and willingly applied by Upper Canadian farmers not subject to the same conditions. '[B]y 1871 there were 37,874 reapers and mowers in Ontario and 5149 in Quebec. Agricultural machinery was originally imported from the United States, but increasingly it came to be made in rural Ontario as domestic demand rose. By 1870 value added in this industry was \$1.5 million in non-metropolitan Ontario and less than \$300,000 in non-metropolitan Quebec'.

This transformation, in the seeming absence of the discipline of market imperatives, requires explanation. What compelled Upper Canadian farming families to

adopt capital-intensive means of production at almost the same pace as their American counterparts? A comparative perspective, which considers the American and Canadian societies as each characterized particular sociohistorical conditions but, nevertheless, far from insular, is necessary to make sense of this problematic.

Canada experienced no event of its own similar the American Revolution in its scope and consequences during this period. As discussed in greater depth below, this epoch-shaping event resulted notably in public and private debt, which changed the relationship of farmers to the means of production, and therefore, of social reproduction. Indeed Charles Post's incisive analysis of the origins of American capitalism has made it clear that north-eastern and mid-west American farmers in the nineteenth century were *compelled* to adopt more efficient methods of production to compete on the market, because failure to do so would result in 'the loss of effective possession of the main means of production in agriculture, *land*'.⁵⁸⁸ By contrast, Upper Canadian farmers, not obliged by debt and the resultant threat of dispossession to revolutionize production and/or procure their means of reproduction through market competition, nevertheless sought to adopt capital-intensive means of production. How they were able to do so, and for what reasons, is the subject of the analysis that follows. As we shall see, the American Revolution had consequences for Canada as well, in so far as it created a new set of conditions, not limited by political boundaries, in which subsequent trade, development, and political decision-making on the continent would unfold.

The argument of this chapter is that once the revolutionary transformation that

⁵⁸⁸ Post, *The American Road to Capitalism*, 91.

heralded industrial capitalism had occurred in the north-eastern United States, Upper Canadian farmers were able to adopt capital-intensive types of agriculture, taking advantage of the technical developments provided by the 'early developer' without progressing in a linear fashion through the same 'stage' as their northern American counterparts. While not faced with the peril of dispossession under the burden of taxation, mortgages, and debts, Upper Canadian farmers, nonetheless, confronted new economic pressures stemming from the United States. They also had a new interest in seeking to transform agricultural practices for the purposes of efficiency and profit-making: the novel opportunity to participate in the material culture opened to them by a burgeoning American industrial capitalism, which was beginning to radically transform consumption and production patterns, as well as cultural norms and expectations. In this sense, Upper Canadian farmers were 'late developers' benefiting from the 'advantage of backwardness'. This allowed them to take advantage of the new implements designed by their 'early developer' neighbours south of the border to undertake the transformation of the agriculture of the province, under the decisive influence and pressure generated by the development of capitalism in the northern United States. In this sense, the 'compulsion' to eventually adopt capital-intensive agricultural practices in Upper Canada was not an internal one, but rather an external one, intimately bound up with a shifting international context to which a variety of social actors, including farmers, merchants, and policy-makers, were forced to respond.

To substantiate this argument, I first review Post's analysis of the origins of capitalism in the United States in order to draw out the specific mechanisms by which

independent household-producers in the northeast and mid-west were made market dependent for their economic survival. In the second section, I sketch out the features of international trade between the US, Canada, and Britain at that time by examining the competitive conditions that existed within and between the St. Lawrence/Great Lakes commercial system, which organized trade in Upper Canada, and the Hudson-Mohawk commercial route, which was dominated by New York, and the role of local merchants from Montreal and Upper Canada within the system. Following this is an examination of Canadian merchants' dual commercial strategy in their struggle for competitiveness with American merchants and the consequences of this strategy for the integration of Upper Canada's pre-capitalist commercial agriculture into the orbit of the American industrial sector of the northeast. In the fourth section, I highlight, through a comparison with the American Revolution, the limited impact of class struggle on the social structure of Upper Canada's agricultural economy during the 1830s. Finally, I explore how, in the absence of a palpable threat of dispossession, Upper Canadian independent household-producers were, nonetheless, presented with both economic pressures and incentives to intensify agricultural production. Capitalism's transformation of agricultural practices, along with the rise of industrial capitalism, in the north-eastern United States profoundly altered the conditions for subsequent economic transformations elsewhere in North America and opened up an alluring material culture.

The American Road to Capitalism

Charles Post has theorized the transformation of the north-eastern American countryside between 1776 and 1861 as the transition from independent household-production, which he defines as ‘a social-property form relatively impervious to market-forces’, to petty-commodity production, ‘a social-property form dependent upon competitive markets’.⁵⁸⁹ This transformation, he suggests, was the outcome of social conflict between household producers, who held and cultivated small landed estates, and the merchant class, composed of ‘local storekeepers, larger town and urban wholesales, land-speculators, etc.’.⁵⁹⁰ The decisive issue at stake in these class struggles was land—the principal means of production in agrarian society.

Due to the sheer abundance of land and the inability of absentee owners to effectively enforce their property rights, poor and ‘middling’ settlers were, up until the American Revolution, able to take possession of unoccupied land in the northern colonies and retain their autonomy from ‘market-discipline’ by producing for subsistence.⁵⁹¹ Undoubtedly, this situation, complicated as it was by the predatory activities of urban merchants and land speculators, far from corresponded to Frederick Jackson Turner’s utopian vision of an egalitarian ‘frontier society’ constituted by independent free-holding pioneers with unobstructed access to land. Indeed, the access of the ‘yeomanry’ to small landed estates was far from guaranteed: it required ongoing struggle to resist merchants and land speculators’ attempts at creating a social monopoly

⁵⁸⁹ Ibid., 73.

⁵⁹⁰ Ibid.

⁵⁹¹ Ibid., 74.

of land. Through illegal occupations and ‘rent-wars’, which frequently took the form of armed uprising (for instance, in the case of Shays’ Rebellion in Massachusetts), farmers and rural artisans managed to ‘establish, maintain and expand their landholding without extensive commodity-production’.⁵⁹² This independence from market imperatives did not mean that the ‘yeomanry’ refrained from engaging in exchange-relations with local and regional merchants⁵⁹³; they did so, however, in a way that did not jeopardize their ability ‘to produce the bulk of their own subsistence’.⁵⁹⁴ In the north-eastern United States, what Marxist economics refers to as the ‘independent household mode of production’ was successfully established by farm families free from the obligation to ‘compete or go under’.

While the ‘independent household’ mode of production, based on self-sufficiency, is unregulated by the law of value, the ‘petty-commodity’ mode production, as ‘a form of household-based production is subject to the operation of the law of value’. The law of value is introduced as households come to depend ‘upon production for the market for their survival as small property owners’, for in doing so, ‘a dynamic of specialisation, competition, accumulation and technical innovation similar to capitalism ensues’.⁵⁹⁵ Independent household-producers are thereby subjected to market imperatives which reorient their production away from subsistence practices. In other words, what distinguishes the latter from petty-commodity producers is that their economic survival—especially ‘their ability to obtain, maintain, and expand their

⁵⁹² Ibid.

⁵⁹³ Ibid.

⁵⁹⁴ Ibid.

⁵⁹⁵ Ibid., 45.

possession of landed property’, that essential ingredient of their social reproduction—is not dependent ‘upon the profitable sale of agricultural goods’.⁵⁹⁶

[N]orthern-colonial farm-households were able to devote the bulk of their land and labour to production for their own consumption, providing the basis for the dense web of kinship and communal relations that structured neighbourly exchange of goods and labour among households. Households and communities, secure in their possession of landed property, could pursue safety-first agriculture—producing food, livestock and crafts for their own and their neighbours’ consumptions and marketing only surpluses.⁵⁹⁷

It is important to emphasize that independent household-production ‘was neither stagnant nor without distinctive social dynamics’.⁵⁹⁸ The familial nature of farm labour, for instance, together with parents’ need to provide some security for themselves in old age, encouraged the rearing of many children. Through squatting or accessing land ‘at non-market-determined low prices’, north-eastern household-producers were able to escape, for a time, the threat of population growth exceeding production, without transforming productive capacities.⁵⁹⁹

⁵⁹⁶ Ibid., 181.

⁵⁹⁷ Ibid., 182; See also James Henretta, “Families and Farms: Mentalite in Pre-Industrial America,” *The William and Mary Quarterly: A Magazine of Early American History*, 1978, 3–32; Allan Kulikoff, *From British Peasants to Colonial American Farmers* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2000); Christopher Clark, *The Roots of Rural Capitalism: Western Massachusetts, 1780-1860* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1992).

⁵⁹⁸ Post, *The American Road to Capitalism*, 138.

⁵⁹⁹ Ibid., 139–140.

Since independent household-producers were under no direct ‘compulsion to specialise, innovate, or accumulate’,⁶⁰⁰ they initially engaged in extensive methods of agriculture, which sought to put greater quantities of land under cultivation—thereby geographically expanding the limits of this practice through ‘the multiplication of technically unchanging family-farms into the frontier’⁶⁰¹—rather than introduce new techniques to intensify agricultural production on existing parcels of land. While preserving their independence from market-compulsion through subsistence production, northern farmers simultaneously produced large agricultural surpluses (of grains and meat) that could be sold ‘to the northern ports of Boston, New York and Philadelphia and to the growing sugar-plantations of the Caribbean’.⁶⁰² This changed, however, during the American Revolution: the revolutionary-war effort demanded that farmers direct much of their labour to the production of commodities destined to supply state governments and the Continental Army—ultimately to the detriment of their self-sufficient way of living.⁶⁰³

The manifold socio-economic and political consequences of the American Revolution eventually undermined independent household production. Forced to purchase many essential goods from merchants for domestic consumption, northern farmers quickly amassed debts that were difficult to pay off once the war was over. The war also generated large public debts, which were dealt with by state governments through the levy of heavy taxes imposed on smallholders. At the same time, land

⁶⁰⁰ Ibid., 140.

⁶⁰¹ Ibid.

⁶⁰² Ibid., 185.

⁶⁰³ Ibid., 75.

speculators took advantage of new state institutions created on the heels of the war to secure their property rights on the frontier, the result of which was an increase in inequality on the frontier and rising land prices throughout the northeast. All of these circumstances contributed to render unfeasible the extensive production methods that had formerly met farmers' basic needs. As Post has explained, '[b]y the mid-1780s, farmers and rural artisans found themselves needing "to sell to survive"—to participate successfully in competitive markets in order to keep their farms'.⁶⁰⁴ Hard pressed, the least efficient farmers were faced with the hitherto unimaginable possibility of losing their land through foreclosure.⁶⁰⁵

Farmers fought back in a series of vigorous class-conflicts against 'tax-collectors, merchant-creditors and land speculators over the conditions of their economic survival'.⁶⁰⁶ Ultimately, however, they lost. The Constitutional Settlement of 1787 'established the political dominance of the mercantile capitalists and created state-institutions (a corps of tax-collectors and a federal army) capable of implementing pro-merchant state-policies'.⁶⁰⁷ These state institutions aided absentee landowners in enforcing their legal claims to land in the interior against those of independent farmers and 'squatters'.⁶⁰⁸ As such, access to cheap or inexpensive land on the frontier was increasingly impeded by legal and institutional mechanisms. Combined with burdensome taxes and the intransigent demands of the merchants to be paid in specie,

⁶⁰⁴ Ibid., 76.

⁶⁰⁵ Ibid., 77.

⁶⁰⁶ Ibid.

⁶⁰⁷ Ibid.

⁶⁰⁸ Ibid., 185.

farmers were soon forced to sell on the market ‘both the “surplus” and portions of their “subsistence”-output. In other words, the farmers became dependent upon successful market-production for their economic survival—they became agrarian petty-commodity producers’.⁶⁰⁹

During the first two decades of the nineteenth century, the north-eastern ‘yeomanry’ attempted ‘to meet the new conditions for the acquisition, maintenance and expansion of landholding’ by increasing and reorganizing ‘labour devoted to the production of marketable “surpluses”,’ while, at the same time, attempting to continue production of the bulk of their ‘subsistence’.⁶¹⁰ In the mid-Atlantic region, many households responded to the new pressures by introducing ‘improved’ techniques of farming into their fields. “Up and down husbandry”, the crop-rotation method between fields, pastures and meadows that allowed the interdependent growth of animal- and arable output associated with the development of capitalist agriculture in England in the seventeenth century, radically increased labour and soil-productivity in the north-eastern US in the early nineteenth century’.⁶¹¹

By the 1830s, the ‘yeomanry’ had decisively been compelled to specialize its agricultural production according to the needs of urban markets. Members of the farming household were, furthermore, increasingly pressured to engage in ‘capitalist

⁶⁰⁹ Ibid., 78.

⁶¹⁰ Ibid.

⁶¹¹ Ibid.; Joyce Appleby, “Commercial Farming and the ‘Agrarian Myth’ in the Early Republic,” *The Journal of American History* 68, no. 4 (1982): 838–844; Paul E. G. Clemens and Lucy Simler, “Rural Labor and the Farm Household in Chester County, Pennsylvania, 1750-1820,” in *Work and Labor in Early America*, ed. Stephen Innes (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1988); James Henretta, “The Transition to Capitalism in America,” in *The Origins of American Capitalism: Collected Essays* (Boston: North-Eastern University Press, 1991).

domestic outwork’, by which ‘[t]he capacity to work of women and children in poorer rural families’ was made ‘available to merchants and manufacturers who organised a verlag-system of ‘proto-industrialisation’ in the northeast’.⁶¹² Crucially, the rural household’s growing reliance on the market for its subsistence fuelled the development of ‘a massive home-market for industrially produced capital- and consumer-goods, sparking the US industrial revolution of the nineteenth century’.⁶¹³

The St. Lawrence/Great Lakes Commercial System

In the period following the American Revolution, permanent settlements were established in the Ohio Valley and Great Plains southwest of the Great Lakes. For a time, pioneer settlers there were able to develop and maintain independent production,

as Native Americans were ‘removed’ and white settlers occupied land at little or no cost. Even when the federal public land-system gave legal title to land companies, ‘squatters’ were able to organise ‘claims-clubs’ to force landowners to sell the land to the settlers well below market-prices. As a result, most farmers in the north-west prior to the 1820s were able to market only physical surpluses and produce most of their own food, clothing and simple tools.⁶¹⁴

A similar situation prevailed in Upper Canada, where independent household-production

⁶¹² Post, *The American Road to Capitalism*, 79.

⁶¹³ *Ibid.*, 192.

⁶¹⁴ *Ibid.*, 232.

was established with the arrival of the first Loyalist settlers. Most white settlers that came to Upper Canada between 1785 and 1826 continued to secure non-market access to their means of subsistence, including land, and avoided becoming dependent upon the market for their economic survival. This is undoubtedly the case of Loyalists and other ‘official’ grantees who were given possession of land at no cost. ‘Non-official’ grantees could also obtain free and common socage grants without having to purchase land on the market, but, in addition to paying patent fees, they needed to fulfil the duties described in the location tickets that were given to them by the Land Commissioner’s Office at York, the land boards, or the magistrates.⁶¹⁵

The increase in patent fees during the first two decades of the nineteenth century constituted a significant barrier to full legal possession of land for many immigrants arriving in the province without capital. Yet, smallholders could work around this obstacle by postponing the patenting of their land, contenting themselves with the security of ownership conferred by location certificates and tickets. If these documents were not as secure legal instruments as patents, they nevertheless conferred on the possessor a basic recognition of ownership that could be used as a basis to sell and transfer land.⁶¹⁶ While for speculators, ‘whose acquisitive nature required constant trading’, the certificate was not secure enough, for ‘[f]or those seeking to enter the world of farming and seeking permanency, this was no problem’.⁶¹⁷

⁶¹⁵ Certain tickets, for instance, stated “that five acres were to be cleared and cropped, half the road in front of the lot cleared [...] and a house erected [...] within two years.” Guillet, *The Pioneer Farmer and Backwoodsman*, 1970, I:292.

⁶¹⁶ Clarke, *Land, Power, and Economics on the Frontier of Upper Canada*, 163.

⁶¹⁷ *Ibid.*

Even in the days of the ‘free’ land-granting system, many settlers chose to become tenants. A number of them leased lots on public reserves, where rents were kept low by the government in order to attract settlers who would provide the Crown with rental revenues. In general, rental arrangements outside public reserves also offered advantageous terms to tenants, albeit not quite so advantageous as reserve leases.⁶¹⁸ For settlers who were discouraged by the cumbersome process of acquiring land, but who did not want—or could not afford—to rent, access to land was still possible through ‘squatting’ the reserves or speculators’ land.⁶¹⁹ The practice was illegal but widely tolerated. Public authorities even recognized pre-emption privileges for squatters, and ‘usually upheld the deserving squatters’ claims to be paid for their improvements’ if they were dislodged.⁶²⁰ In many instances, squatters ‘successfully petitioned for legal possession of the lots they occupied’.⁶²¹ In sum, Upper Canadian pioneer settlers had a wide range of options at their disposal to access a parcel of land—the primary means of subsistence—without having to buy it on the market.

This is not to say that life was easy. I have already described in Chapter 4 how settlers of limited means had to find the credit necessary to purchase the provisions, seeds, livestock, tools, and farm implements required to create a farm in the bush. In need of capital, Upper Canada’s pioneer farmers were driven to cultivate wheat, the only cash crop for which there existed a ready market. Much like north-eastern household-

⁶¹⁸ Wilson, *Tenants in Time*, 80–82.

⁶¹⁹ Clarke, *Land, Power, and Economics on the Frontier of Upper Canada*, 157, 161.

⁶²⁰ Russell, *How Agriculture Made Canada*, 126; See also Clarke, *Land, Power, and Economics on the Frontier of Upper Canada*, 159–161.

⁶²¹ Clarke, *Land, Power, and Economics on the Frontier of Upper Canada*, 158.

producers before the American Revolution and pioneer settlers in the Ohio Valley and the Great Plains until the 1830s, Upper Canadian farmers' easy access to their means of subsistence meant that they were not compelled to produce competitively, even when they actively participated in market-exchanges. Upper Canadian households availed themselves of the abundance and low cost of land by growing large cash crops according to extensive methods of farming—for instance, 'wheat-mining'—without relinquishing independent homespun production and subsistence farming. How this was possible has been perceptively sketched out by Marjorie Griffin Cohen in her feminist analysis of the farm as a familial unit: men attended to capital formation activities (especially the clearing of land) and the production of cash crops, while women's labour was primarily subsistence-oriented. This subsistence labour, in turn, mitigated the risk associated with commercial farming and enabled men to concentrate their labour on cash cropping.⁶²²

While the gendered familial division of labour was the backbone Upper Canadian households' social reproduction, the so-called 'transportation revolution' of this period, which involved the building of roads, canals, and railways, contributed to its viability and eventual transformation by facilitating participation in the St. Lawrence/Great Lakes commercial system. On the frontier, Upper Canadian settlers were isolated in the backwoods, where importing equipment and supplies was expensive.⁶²³ Carrying their agricultural products to the St. Lawrence navigation road to access the Lower Canadian and British markets was also challenging. Roads and canals were required to connect

⁶²² Cohen, *Women's Work, Markets, and Economic Development in Nineteenth-Century Ontario*, 59.

⁶²³ To illustrate this problem, Norrie and Douglas have pointed out that around 1800 'the cost of shipment of British goods from Montreal to Prescott, the head of navigation on Lake Ontario, was greater than the cost of shipment from Liverpool to Montreal'. *A History of the Canadian Economy*, 120.

pioneer settlements to each other and to larger commercial networks. The transportation network thus became an important object of political struggles early on. Clashes over the financing and improvement of transportation were frequent, and intensified with the canal projects that emerged in the 1820s, and by the 1850s covered some 3,321 miles.⁶²⁴

Americans began the construction of the first major canal, the Erie Canal, in 1817. To counter the advantage of this new transportation development for New York, and to retain their share of transborder trade, Canadian merchants engaged in their first canal building project in 1819, with works on the Welland Canal, between Lake Erie and Lake Ontario. As Norrie and Douglas have explained, the ambitious project, ‘once completed, would overcome one of the longer portages in the Great Lakes system. At the other end of the system, a group of Montreal businessmen had begun work on the Lachine Canal near Montreal’.⁶²⁵ With few sources of finance capital existing in Upper and Lower Canada, the funding of these projects was arduous. In the construction of both the Welland and Lachine canals, private investors ran out of funds well before the canals were finished, forcing provincial governments to intervene, up to the point where they took over the projects entirely.⁶²⁶

Canals opened up new opportunities for farmers to sell what had previously been unsalable, or to sell existing goods at better rate of profit, due to the lower cost of transportation. The immediate result was to increase, rather than threaten, Upper

⁶²⁴ Dunhof, *Change in Agriculture: The Northern United States, 1820-1870*, 5.

⁶²⁵ Norrie and Douglas, *A History of the Canadian Economy*, 134.

⁶²⁶ The Lachine canal had already become a government operation by 1821, while the Welland canal became so later on, in 1839. Canada’s third canal project—the Rideau Canal—was designed for military purposes and funded by the government from the start. See *Ibid.*, 134–135.

Canadian farmers' ability to earn an income without having to improve agrarian techniques. Besides, no pressures to improve were directly imposed on them by merchants, whose operations consisted, for the most part, in gathering local wheat surpluses and conveying them to distant markets, dictating neither the amount of wheat produced nor the conditions of its production. Merchants' primary interest, indeed, lay in the sphere of circulation: they had been 'drawn northward', as historian Donald Creighton puts it, 'by the promises of the river; and they came with the single, simple objective of making money by trade'.⁶²⁷ The Laurentian business class must be comprehended, in the words of one of Creighton's followers, 'as a mercantile one, accumulating wealth through circulation rather than production' in a way that could hardly lead to independent capitalist development.⁶²⁸

There is no need to agree with Creighton's romanticized depiction of the merchant class or with the staple approach that informs his analysis to take seriously the fact that, in the first half of the nineteenth century, the profits of Upper Canadian merchants came primarily from transportation activities (circulation) rather than investments in productive facilities or the revolutionizing of agriculture (production). Here, it may be useful to be reminded that, historically, commercial activities were not the 'natural' outgrowth nor instigator of capitalist production. In a passage worth quoting at length, Ellen Wood insists that

⁶²⁷ Donald Creighton, *The Empire of the St. Lawrence: A Study in Commerce and Politics* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2002), 22.

⁶²⁸ R. T. Naylor, "The Rise and Fall of the Third Commercial Empire of the St. Lawrence," in *Capitalism and the National Question in Canada*, ed. Gary Teeple (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1972), 1.

even specialized production does not change simply because profit-seeking middlemen, even highly developed merchant classes, intervene. Their strategies need have nothing to do with transforming production in the sense required by capitalist competition. Profit by means of carrying trade or arbitrage between markets has strategies of its own. These do not depend on transforming production, nor do they promote the development of the kind of integrated market that imposes competitive imperatives. On the contrary, they thrive on fragmented markets and movement between them, rather than competition within a single market, and the links between production and exchange may be very tenuous.⁶²⁹

During the eighteenth century, we witness a classic pattern of rivalry between the merchant middlemen of the St. Lawrence/Great Lakes and the Hudson-Mohawk commercial routes, dominated by Montreal and New York respectively, for control of the fur trade and its profits. As the fur trade began to wane in economic importance, Montreal merchants, forwarders, and bankers increasingly sought profits in the trade of agricultural products, maintaining their control of commercial activities in Lower Canada, but shifting the focus of their affairs to Upper Canada.⁶³⁰ Montreal merchant houses also established the Ottawa River timber trade, which immensely benefited from

⁶²⁹ Wood, "The Question of Market Dependence," 67.

⁶³⁰ Among the well-established and widely accepted accounts of the decline of the fur trade in the early nineteenth century reigns Innis's *The Fur Trade in Canada* and Creighton's *The Commercial Empire of the St. Lawrence*. A condensed interpretation along similar lines can be found in R. T. Naylor, *Canada in the European Age, 1453-1919* (Vancouver: New Star Books, 1987), 186–196, 214–215.

the Napoleonic blockade, as Great Britain had to turn toward its colonies to acquire the natural resources no longer available from the European continent (especially the Baltic).

Under the Montreal merchants' hegemony, the St. Lawrence River remained the major transshipment point for Upper Canada's wheat and timber: 'Everything Upper Canada bought and sold had to pass through the hands of middlemen in Montreal. The province was an outlying hinterland of a vast commercial empire [...]. To the extent that the province contributed to trade it was to the advantage of the exporting and importing houses of Montreal'.⁶³¹ Behind Upper Canadian country retailers and middlemen based in Montreal were lines of credit and trade running from Glasgow, Liverpool, and London. As historian Douglas McCalla has explained, it was through this system that 'imported textiles, groceries, iron and hardware' were imported and that 'most of the exports that Upper Canada was able to produce and sell' were handled.⁶³² This commercial system was also 'often directly involved in the exchange of local produce' and 'in physical processing, such as sawing, grinding, carding and fulling, distilling, and potash boiling'.⁶³³ Until the 1840s, sawmills, grist mills, flour mills, and distilleries in Upper Canada existed, however, only on a limited scale, 'complementing the agricultural economy by sawing its lumber, grinding its grain, manufacturing agricultural equipment, and producing the beer and whiskey needed to sustain life on a

⁶³¹ Clark, *Movements of Political Protest in Canada, 1640-1840*, 225–226.

⁶³² Douglas McCalla, "Rural Credit and Rural Development in Upper Canada, 1790-1850," in *Patterns of the Past Interpreting Ontario's History*, ed. Roger Hall, William Westfall, and Laurel Sefton MacDowell (Toronto: Dundurn Press, 1988), 37–38.

⁶³³ *Ibid.*

fast-changing but still difficult frontier'.⁶³⁴ The scope and the pace of production within these industries was largely dependent on the rhythms of rural producers' patterns of production and consumption.

Merchants' Dual Commercial Strategy

In their pursuit of competitiveness, merchants solicited British diplomats for the commercial unity of the St. Lawrence on the basis of a dual trade policy.⁶³⁵ On the one hand, they defended *continental inland* free trade with the Americans.⁶³⁶ Their hope was that American goods and agricultural products would enter Upper Canada by the Great Lakes without facing high duties, before then going into circulation on the St. Lawrence River, where they would become of 'Canadian' origin in principle, and thus be exempted from heavy taxes on the imperial market. This wish was granted in 1831, with the Colonial Trade Act, by which the British government eliminated all duties on American agricultural products entering Canada, to the benefit of Canadian merchants and forwarders, whose interests did not lay primarily in production, but in trade.⁶³⁷ As a consequence, wheat and flour produced in the United States could be imported into Britain as Canadian produce without any distinction, as long as it first passed through

⁶³⁴ Clarke, *Land, Power, and Economics on the Frontier of Upper Canada*, 443.

⁶³⁵ Creighton, *The Empire of the St. Lawrence*.

⁶³⁶ Ibid.

⁶³⁷ As a combined result of American shipment through Canada and the expansion of Upper Canadian land 'under culture', 'the movement of western wheat through Montreal increased from an 1817-22 mean of 281,000 bushels to an 1824-31 mean of 534,000 bushels. In 1831, more than 1 million bushels of wheat from the west moved down the St. Lawrence'. Norrie and Douglas, *A History of the Canadian Economy*, 135.

Canada, and therefore through the hands of middlemen, for export.⁶³⁸

Montreal merchants hoped to reap the benefits of carrying goods, whatever their origin—‘it mattered little whether the products came from a domestic or a foreign hinterland’.⁶³⁹ Upper Canadian merchants ‘wanted to ensure that it was *they* who shipped American wheat to England and supplied the growing back-country population of both British North America and the United States with the latest luxuries and manufactures from the United Kingdom’.⁶⁴⁰ In allowing American competitors to enter the British imperial market with both their agricultural and manufactured products at the same cost as Canadian products, at a time when Canadian producers faced high tariffs and duties when entering the American market, this mercantile strategy had adverse effects on Upper Canadian farmers. The advantages previously conferred upon these farmers by British mercantilist policies were thus undermined to the benefit of merchants.

On the other hand, for their commercial strategy to function, merchants needed protective measures to shield Upper Canada’s commerce with Britain from American *seaborne* competition. Only such a measure could guarantee Americans’ dependence on the St. Lawrence commercial empire to access the imperial market at lower costs. In this regard, the competition between the St. Lawrence commercial empire—with Montreal at its core—and New York’s Hudson-Mohawk trading network bears resemblance to the competition that characterized pre-capitalist European trade networks in the early

⁶³⁸ Jones, *History of Agriculture in Ontario, 1613-1880*, 124–125.

⁶³⁹ Fowkes, *Canadian Agricultural Policy: The Historical Pattern*, 90.

⁶⁴⁰ Norrie and Douglas, *A History of the Canadian Economy*, 133. Italics added.

modern epoch. Examining the case of mercantile competition between of the Netherlands and the Hanse, as well as within the Dutch Republic itself (between Amsterdam and rival commercial cities), Wood has shown that these rivalries were, first and foremost, about dominating the supply of a particular commodity for domestic producers in what was ‘an essentially “extra-economic” contest. It had less to do with the methods and costs of production than with either politically enforced restrictions and privileges or with superiority in the instruments, methods and range of commercial activity, to say nothing of superiority in shipping and navigation, and military might’.⁶⁴¹

The wheat market, which ‘accounted for nearly three-quarters of net exports from the Canadas’ in the 1830s,⁶⁴² operated according to similar principles. Specialization in wheat-farming was, indeed, neither the cause nor the symptom of market dependence. Upper Canadian farmers did not specialize, at least not at first, because they were economically compelled to adopt more efficient methods of agricultural production to face cost-competition under threat of dispossession, but rather to take advantage of high prices during the War of 1812, which had reduced the food supply at the same time as hungry British garrisons had increased demand. Later on, in the 1820s and 1830s, the demand for wheat created by the agricultural crisis in Lower Canada became a large and secure market for Upper Canada’s wheat.

As historian Marvin McNinnis has shown, even with the preference given to colonial over foreign imports, the tariff and transport costs took ‘such a large bite out of the price’ that ‘much of the time it was just not profitable to produce wheat in Canada

⁶⁴¹ Wood, “The Question of Market Dependence,” 57–58.

⁶⁴² Norrie and Douglas, *A History of the Canadian Economy*, 131.

for exports to Britain'.⁶⁴³ Exports destined for the Lower Canadian population were more important: '[t]he quantities of wheat coming into Montreal from the west were greater, on average, than the total exports from the St. Lawrence system'.⁶⁴⁴ With agricultural difficulties plaguing the Lower Canadian countryside, yield there decreased so much that, by the 1830s, imports from Upper Canada became a vital source of grain to feed the peasant population. '[F]rom 1838 to 1847, the annual consumption of wheat and flour from the West was equivalent for Lower Canada to 190,000 barrels of flour. This was a reality which had existed since 1833, but whose permanent character could no longer be denied. [...] Through it, the destiny of Lower Canada was linked to that of the West'.⁶⁴⁵

In this sense, the Upper Canadian wheat 'boom', like most commercial 'Golden Ages' in pre-capitalist Europe, was 'a period of growing market *opportunities* for more total output with more or less guaranteed sale, rather than a period of market *imperatives* requiring the systematic improvement of labour productivity to meet the demands of competition'.⁶⁴⁶ Upper Canadian independent household-producers took advantage of these opportunities for sale by engaging in 'wheat-mining', thus availing themselves of the abundance of good arable land in the production of agricultural surpluses, without initially seeking to improve labour-productivity or output per capita. Extensive wheat production on family farms in Upper Canada during the early-nineteenth century was a pre-capitalist commercial form of agriculture, distinct from commercial agriculture in a

⁶⁴³ McInnis, *Perspectives on Ontario Agriculture*, 28–30.

⁶⁴⁴ Norrie and Douglas, *A History of the Canadian Economy*, 131.

⁶⁴⁵ Ouellet, *Economic and Social History of Quebec, 1760-1850*, 516.

⁶⁴⁶ Wood, "The Question of Market Dependence," 59.

capitalist context or from capitalist agricultural production in an industrial capitalist society. In the absence of improved farms worked by wage labourers and supervised by capitalist tenant farmers under competitive pressures to produce efficiently, family farming in Upper Canada was in no way akin to ‘agrarian capitalism’, the distinctive, three-class system of agriculture that developed in England.

Class Struggle in the Colonies: A Comparison

A more immediate point of comparison with the situation of Upper Canadian household producers is provided by American farmers. While north-eastern independent household-producers had been gradually transformed into petty-commodity producers in the aftermath of the American Revolution, mid-western farmers in the Ohio Valley and the Great Plains managed to retain their independence from market-discipline for a time. Yet, their independence did not last long, for class struggle in the mid-west was not impervious to the activities of the state institutions created in the aftermath of the American Revolution which sought to enforce property rights. Acting as a mechanism of market subordination, by supporting land-speculation and raising the cost of landed property, were ‘the federal laws administering the distribution of the vast “public domain” stretching from the Appalachian mountains westward’⁶⁴⁷. As Post has explained, these ‘federal land-policies radically altered the relationship of rural households to landholding, making the appropriation, maintenance and expansion of

⁶⁴⁷ Post, *The American Road to Capitalism*, 83.

land dependent upon successful commodity-production'.⁶⁴⁸

Class struggle in Upper Canada took a significantly different course. Unlike American merchants, whose independence from British merchants and the British empire had grown as they organized the inter-colonial, coastal trade, during the eighteenth century,⁶⁴⁹ the English Canadian merchants controlling the St. Lawrence/Great Lakes commercial system did not seriously seek independence from the empire in the late-eighteenth or early-nineteenth centuries. On the contrary, in Montreal, the economic hegemony established by English Canadian merchants after the Conquest of New France rested entirely on British political support, given the small size of the English-speaking population in the province. In Toronto (known as York before 1834), the capital of Upper Canada, the interests of the merchant class were tightly linked to the colonial land/office state—a network of patronage and clientelism that rested in large part on expressions of loyalty to the British Empire.

In such conditions, while in the Thirteen American colonies '[t]he development of an independent, pre-capitalist colonial economy laid the foundation for the settler-colonists' bid for independence, under the leadership of the merchants',⁶⁵⁰ Upper Canada's colonial economy long remained decisively harnessed to the British Empire. The movement for independence consequently remained weak for a protracted period. It was composed mainly of American *émigrés* who had been exposed or sympathetic to American republican ideology and politics before settling in Upper Canada. Upon

⁶⁴⁸ Ibid.

⁶⁴⁹ Ibid., 185–186.

⁶⁵⁰ Ibid., 186.

arrival, they were accused of being ‘land-seekers’ and regarded with suspicion by Tory Loyalists, who made of the ‘Alien Question’—the problematic of the rights and naturalization of non-Loyalist American-born Upper Canadians—one of the major political debates of the 1820s.⁶⁵¹ Unfairly treated, American-born settlers’ resentment grew, together with their contempt for the Family Compact’s Tory outlook. As such, it is not surprising that American-born settlers constituted the core of the Rebellion that shook the province in 1837 and 1838.

William Lyon Mackenzie, the leader of the Upper Canadian rebellion, though not American-born, had strong sympathies for the republic and was greatly influenced by American democratic ideals. His political views had been buttressed by visits to the United States and a meeting with President Andrew Jackson. As Wilson has explained, ‘[I]ike other agrarian idealists and civic humanists of his age, such as proponents of Jeffersonian republicanism, Jacksonian democracy, and English radicalism, Mackenzie’s philosophy rested on the belief that the most healthy, natural, and unified society was based on agriculture and a widespread freeholding farm population’.⁶⁵² Gathering support from male smallholders in the western and central parts of Upper Canada, Mackenzie and other rebel leaders sought to take advantage of the fact that the province’s troops had been dispatched to Lower Canada since October of 1837 to repress the rebellion there, to launch their own armed uprising in December. Their outlook, as Allan Greer has pointed out, was no different than the outlook of many American revolutionaries, ‘labelled for shorthand purposes, [...] masculine-democratic-

⁶⁵¹ Craig, *Upper Canada*, 111–123.

⁶⁵² Wilson, *Tenants in Time*, 37–38.

republican'.⁶⁵³ It was an outlook promoting 'the rights of the people (read propertied men), the dangers of corruption, and the need to defend the independence and prerogatives of the colonial Assembly'.⁶⁵⁴

The Upper Canadian rebellion saw the same fate as the Lower Canadian rebellion that occurred around the same time: after throwing the colony into turmoil for two years, it was militarily crushed. In Lower Canada, skirmishes and battles during the months of November and December 1837, as well as in February and November 1838, resulted in a few hundred casualties. In Upper Canada, the rebels were, however, too poorly armed and organized to offer any serious resistance to loyalist militias. While the rebellion temporarily disrupted the economy of a few localities in Lower Canada, where the rebels were violently repressed, the same cannot be said of Upper Canada, given the limited scale of the armed uprising there. In all, the Upper Canadian rebellion had little immediate impact on the agricultural economy of the province.

Politically, however, the results of the Rebellions were considerable. The Special Council which governed Lower Canada between 1838 and 1841 introduced the free tenure in Montreal and created new institutions for the urban working classes. It also recognized and reaffirmed the social role of the Roman Catholic Church, according it 'new corporate powers and reinforced property rights. [...] New Catholic orders were permitted into Lower Canada; rights of religious institutions to hold property without taxes (in mortmain) were clarified; seigneurial lands held by religious orders were to be

⁶⁵³ Allan Greer, "1837-38: Rebellion Reconsidered," *The Canadian Historical Review* 76, no. 1 (1995): 10.

⁶⁵⁴ *Ibid.*

fully compensated in their transformation to freehold tenure; and male religious communities like the Sulpicians were permitted to expand their numbers'.⁶⁵⁵ As a result of the Rebellions, the British authorities also decided upon the political union of Canada West (Upper Canada) and Canada East (Lower Canada) in the new Province of Canada in 1841. Significant efforts were now devoted to developing educational infrastructure and the province was granted responsible government a few years later, in 1848, as a means of facilitating rule: 'direct socialization in habits and beliefs congenial to bourgeois hegemony was to be provided in schools [...]. On the other hands, participation in the management of limited agencies of local government [...] would practically train "the people" (adult male proprietors) to conduct aspects of their own governance in limited representative forms'.⁶⁵⁶ The introduction of responsible government also considerably modified the workings of the colonial land/office state by putting an end to the reign of the Family Compact and changing the conditions in which patronage and clientelism would now operate.⁶⁵⁷

There is no evidence, however, that the rebellion significantly impacted the social structure of the province's agricultural economy in the short term—at least not in any way that came close to the impact that the American Revolution and the birth of the American republic had on the north-eastern countryside of the United States. Unlike the Upper Canada Rebellion, the American Revolution was a full-scale revolution and a war

⁶⁵⁵ Brian J. Young and John Alexander Dickinson, *A Short History of Quebec: A Socio-Economic Perspective* (Toronto: Copp Clark Pitman, 1988), 151–153.

⁶⁵⁶ Curtis, "Representation and State Formation in the Canadas, 1790-1850," 62.

⁶⁵⁷ Colin Read, "The London District Oligarchy in the Rebellion Era," *Ontario History* 62 (1980): 195–209.

between, on the one side, a colony and its foreign ally (France), and, on the other, Britain, the most powerful imperial power of the time. The revolutionary war lasted eight years. It claimed the lives of tens of thousands of soldiers and civilians, and involved enormous government expenditures that generated debts to repay in its aftermath. In the north-eastern United States, the weight of these debts came to rest heavily on independent household-producers' shoulders, as governments decided to raise property taxes on smallholders. The disruption of the agricultural economy caused by the war also forced independent household-producers to contract debts with merchants in order to buy a greater amount of basic goods. On the frontier, land-speculators reinforced their advantageous position and benefited the most from the auction of public lands.

In Upper Canada, too, land-speculators were quite active in the first few decades of the nineteenth century. Speculation was one of the principal roads to riches in the province. Settlement, however, was in the early stages of its development, which meant that land prices never rose to the point where access was jeopardized. As I have explained in Chapter 4, even the thorough commodification of the land that accompanied the sales policies of the mid-1820s did not amount to a threat of dispossession for direct producers who failed to produce competitively. Cheap or inexpensive land was still being opened on the frontier, and credit was easily available to new immigrants. For their part, well-established Upper Canadian independent household-producers remained firmly in possession of their farms in older settlements, without being threatened with dispossession if they failed to produce efficiently: the

scale of farms worked with extensive types of farming long allowed the profitable sale of ‘surplus’ products without putting into peril the subsistence basis of the family.

In these circumstances, the adoption of new machinery and farm implements by Upper Canadian farmers, from the 1840s onward, was spawned by a different logic than the threat of dispossession so central to the switch in north-eastern America toward more capital-intensive types of farming. In Upper Canada, it seems, the market did not ‘threaten’, but ‘attracted’ farm families, who rather willingly operated a reallocation of their labour toward greater commercial activities to be able to pay for the ‘goods for consumption and production’ that ‘could not be obtained except through foreign markets’.⁶⁵⁸

A Different Path to Market Dependence

One crucial aspect of Upper Canada’s long-term pattern of development that the comparison with the United States helps to highlight is the absence of a radical shift in the rural class struggle that would have made household-producers dependent on the market for their access to land. Another aspect is the different set of conditions in which Upper Canada’s economic development took place. By creating a massive, rural home market for manufactured goods, the American Revolution fanned the industrialization of

⁶⁵⁸ Cohen, *Women’s Work, Markets, and Economic Development in Nineteenth-Century Ontario*, 36; Leslie Page Moch et al., “Family Strategy: A Dialogue,” *Historical Methods: A Journal of Quantitative and Interdisciplinary History* 20, no. 3 (1987): 113–25; Theo Engelen, “Labour Strategies of Families: A Critical Assessment of an Appealing Concept,” *International Review of Social History* 47, no. 03 (2002): 453–64; Jan Kok, “The Challenge of Strategy: A Comment,” *International Review of Social History* 47, no. 03 (2002): 465–85.

the northeast, creating a revolution in production and consumption practices that fundamentally and forever transformed the conditions in which other regions of North America would subsequently undergo economic development.

By the 1820s, the industrial sector in the northeast was already ‘fairly extensive’.⁶⁵⁹ Given its commercial connections and geographical proximity, Upper Canada’s agricultural economy was then presented with a novel opportunity: the opportunity to access the fruits of capitalist industrialization without having to undergo industrialization. American industries were quick to innovate, ceaselessly producing new machinery and farm implements for petty-commodity agricultural production in what was resolutely becoming an industrial capitalist society. Labour-saving implements, such as cast iron ploughs, revolving hay rakes, seed drills, and reapers, became characteristic of American agriculture during this period, and were almost immediately transferred to Upper Canada. Rural households there quickly adopted the new technologies, which had begun to be produced by American industries at a time when many Canadian farms ‘were at or near their peak in terms of having more than enough land cleared to support a family’.⁶⁶⁰

As historian Edwin Clarence Guillet has pointed out, ‘[w]ithin twenty or thirty years pioneer methods were hardly more than a memory in long-settled districts [of

⁶⁵⁹ Jeremy Atack, “America: Capitalism’s Promised Land,” in *The Cambridge History of Capitalism*, ed. Larry Neal and Jeffrey Williamson, vol. 1 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2014), 554.

⁶⁶⁰ Russell, discussing McCallum’s argument. In *How Agriculture Made Canada*, 85; John McCallum, *Unequal Beginnings: Agriculture and Economic Development in Quebec and Ontario until 1870* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1980), 20.

Upper Canada]'.⁶⁶¹ With the help of the diary kept by Walter Riddell, of Hamilton Township, Guillet has described the gradual introduction of machinery in Ontario:

all grain was cut by hand until 1843, when Daniel McKyes imported a Hussey Reaper from Rochester, believed to be the first in the province. We hear of the first one in Scarborough Township in 1851 [...]. Hand rakes were in universal use until 1840, but Riddell says that revolving wooden horse-rakes were introduced that year. [...] About 1850, mowing machines were being imported [...]. [M]achine introduction was often the occasion of celebration. This was particularly the case in mass deliveries, as for example in 1854, when seventeen wagons, each with a reaper, passed in procession from Toronto to Scarborough. [...] By the eighteen-seventies the average Ontario farmer might have one of a large variety of ploughs, but the rest of his equipment was more stereotyped.⁶⁶²

The 'stereotyped' equipment likely included a wheel-cultivator, a set of harrows, a hand- or horse-drawn seeder, a few iron rollers ('but more generally found was the "pioneer roller" of logs'), the 'Buckeye' Mower and, on some farms, a tedder.⁶⁶³ 'Horse-power was usual [...]. A portable steam engine was first used near Cobourg in 1861, but the need to draw water for them and the possibility of fire [...] made them unpopular for a time. By 1880 the steam thresher was being generally accepted as more efficient than the

⁶⁶¹ Guillet, *The Pioneer Farmer and Backwoodsman*, 1970, II:281–282.

⁶⁶² *Ibid.*, II:157–166.

⁶⁶³ *Ibid.*, II:166.

old method'.⁶⁶⁴ If, at that time, 'the day of the gasoline tractor and electric power on farms was still far off',⁶⁶⁵ steam threshers, mechanical reapers, and the combined harvester-thresher had made it 'possible for a two-male household, such as that constituted by a father-son team, to carry on successful wheat farming on 200-acre farms. These were not peasants aiming at subsistence, but commodity producers buying their means of production in the market and selling their product into a market in turn'.⁶⁶⁶

By the 1840s, capital-intensive agriculture was thus emerging as a defining feature of Upper Canada's agrarian economy, which was 'comparing favourably with the most productive part of the United States at the time'.⁶⁶⁷ As historian David Wood has pointed out, the decade proved 'to be a period of great activity and innovation on many fronts—a kind of fusion of many credible ideas with increasingly available capital, much of it foreign. Such capitalization had not been possible in previous decades of locally focused and poorly connected interests. Industries more sophisticated than saw and grist mills began to appear'.⁶⁶⁸ Among the factors that intensified this technological revolution of the 1850s was the Treaty of Reciprocity signed with the United States (1854-1866), which redirected large parts of agricultural exports toward the South and offered many opportunities for technical exchange. By that time, market dependency had become a tangible reality for most Upper Canadian rural households.

⁶⁶⁴ Ibid.

⁶⁶⁵ Ibid.

⁶⁶⁶ Wolf, *Europe and the People Without History*, 319; Harriet Friedmann, "World Market, State, and Family Farm: Social Bases of Household Production in the Era of Wage Labor," *Comparative Studies in Society and History* 20 (1978): 545–86.

⁶⁶⁷ Wood, *Making Ontario Agricultural Colonization and Landscape Re-Creation Before the Railway*, 7.

⁶⁶⁸ Ibid., 4.

Interestingly, while debts, taxes, and mortgages were the financial mechanisms that forced north-eastern American farmers to adopt capital-intensive means of production, the inverse is true in Upper Canada: it was the adoption of capital-intensive means of production that forced Upper Canadian farmers into debt. The purchase of machinery and farm implements required specie and credit, so that full participation in market-exchanges became more and more unavoidable for those hoping to participate in the new material life that was opened to them by the Erie Canal and the St. Lawrence/Great Lakes commercial system, by ‘purchasing not only the necessaries but also the conveniences of life locally’.⁶⁶⁹ As a result, family farms needed to reallocate an ever-growing portion of their resources away from subsistence agriculture and home manufacturing toward the cultivation of wheat and other products that could be sold in broader regional markets. As ‘[c]ertain forms of production which had occurred within the household were gradually replaced by goods produced in artisan shops or factories’,⁶⁷⁰ the traditional labour of women, for instance, ‘switched from a concentration on production for family use to production more oriented to the market, such as dairying, poultry raising, fruit growing, and market gardening’.⁶⁷¹

By the middle of the century, ‘self-sufficiency was rapidly declining, creating demand for clothing, carpets, pianos, stoves, coal oil lamps, sewing machines and, of course, the ubiquitous tavern and general store’.⁶⁷² ‘Commodity frontiers’, to use Eric

⁶⁶⁹ Russell, *How Agriculture Made Canada*, 17.

⁶⁷⁰ Cohen, *Women’s Work, Markets, and Economic Development in Nineteenth-Century Ontario*, 89.

⁶⁷¹ Russell, *How Agriculture Made Canada*, 136.

⁶⁷² Paul Phillips, “Land Tenure and Economic Development: Comparison of Upper and Lower Canada,” *Journal of Canadian Studies* 9, no. 2 (1974): 41.

Wolf's expression, were created, where goods from the industrial centres were carried and sold or exchanged for local products.⁶⁷³ As the population of these commodity frontiers 'grew more dependent on the merchant for instruments of production such as guns, ammunition, steel traps, and metal tools, as well as for items of consumption such as manufactured goods and even food, they came to depend increasingly on the wider capitalist market'.⁶⁷⁴ Upper Canadian farmers were no exception to this logic, as they 'realized they could reduce the most onerous part of their workload by buying what was most difficult to make'.⁶⁷⁵ The problem was, of course, that this depended 'on being able to sell enough to buy what was needed on an ongoing basis. [...] Thus, many households faced the issue of borrowing money to purchase desired consumer goods in the hopes of paying off the debt at the next bumper crop. In this way an increasing dependence on the market could lead a family to a further dependence on credit'.⁶⁷⁶

Accepting this argument is not to give reason to neoclassical economists and their conception of human being as *homo economicus*, endowed with a universal rationality geared toward the maximization of utility as a consumer and of economic profit as a producer. It is, rather, to recognize that the development of industrial capitalism did radically transform the subjectivities of even those Canadian farmers far from industrial and commercial centres, who 'were thus gradually drawn into the capitalist market and connected indirectly with the industrial bases of the capitalist mode

⁶⁷³ Wolf, *Europe and the People Without History*, 306.

⁶⁷⁴ *Ibid.*, 306–307.

⁶⁷⁵ Russell, *How Agriculture Made Canada*, 19.

⁶⁷⁶ *Ibid.*

of production'.⁶⁷⁷ Upper Canada's geographical location, close to the northern United States, and its commercial connection with Boston, New York, and Philadelphia, made the province an early recipient of American industrial production.

As Béatrice Craig has pointed out in her study of consumption patterns in a farming frontier of New Brunswick, '[c]onsumption was a companion of the Industrial Revolution but it also entailed an attitudinal shift. Objects were now acquired for non-utilitarian reasons even by non-elite individuals without much money to spare, and could be discarded before being worn out simply because they had ceased to please [...]: consumption was a meaningful activity'.⁶⁷⁸ In other words, to engage in subsistence production at this point meant to forgo all sorts of goods and services that industrial capitalism made available. The gap between what one could acquire and what one could produce through subsistence production gave independent household-producers good reason to participate in the market.⁶⁷⁹

Market-exchanges were becoming increasingly attractive—as never before—because so many purchasable instruments and goods could then tangibly improve the quality life. Prior to the advent of industrial capitalism, it would have been unthinkable for a peasant or an independent household producer to seek to adapt production according to a cost/price optimum in the absence of an obligation to do so. The radically new reality of American industrialism, along with its agricultural implements and techniques, made the improvement of the means of production accessible, and the means

⁶⁷⁷ Wolf, *Europe and the People Without History*, 307.

⁶⁷⁸ Beatrice Craig, *Backwoods Consumers and Homespun Capitalists: The Rise of a Market Culture in Eastern Canada* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2009), 201.

⁶⁷⁹ I owe this point to Hannes Lacher.

of consumption sold on markets attainable. Exposed to the fruits of two hundred years of improved agriculture, rural producers were inclined to seek the financial means required to procure the goods of industrial capitalism. As subsistence agriculture became less and less attractive, Upper Canadian farm families were willing to allocate their labour-time to the production of commodities in order to access the means of consumption. Subsistence was no longer enough for independent household-producers, who saw with their own eyes the goods available and means to work toward them: 'living' was no longer merely about 'surviving', but increasingly a matter of 'consuming'.

Specialization was one of the principal ways of generating marketable surpluses that could bring greater returns to the farm. If, early in the century, specialization in wheat had been a way to take advantage of market opportunities, the growth of the US home market opened up possibilities for specializing in other crops and rural economic activities other than crop farming. By the middle of the century, tobacco was important to the extreme southwest of the province, wool to the communities west of Lake Ontario, flax to the Niagara region, and oats and livestock to the area east of Kingston, and timber to the Ottawa Valley.⁶⁸⁰ Progress was also considerable in animal husbandry practiced 'for the purpose of reaching foreign markets. The meat and the dairy industries [...] formed the main specialization of this agriculture, which did not owe its achievements solely to the richness of the soil but to the gradual improvement of techniques'.⁶⁸¹

⁶⁸⁰ Wood, *Making Ontario Agricultural Colonization and Landscape Re-Creation Before the Railway*, 102.

⁶⁸¹ Ouellet, *Economic and Social History of Quebec, 1760-1850*, 517; Jones, *History of Agriculture in*

Diversification, however, did not slow down the increase in wheat production, ‘which quadrupled from 1842 to 1851’.⁶⁸² At a time when French Canadians in Lower Canada had largely given up on wheat production and reverted to self-sufficient agriculture, the census of 1851 confirms the continuing importance of wheat to Upper Canada’s agricultural economy:

twenty-four of the twenty-six well-settled counties west of the Bay of Quinte, starting with Northumberland, had over half of the acreage devoted to grain sown to wheat. [...] It was with justification that an investigator [...] remarked, ‘there is probably no country where there is so much wheat grown, in proportion to the population and the area under cultivation, as in that part of Canada west of Kingston.’⁶⁸³

By that time, the driving force behind increases in wheat yields was no longer solely the geographical expansion of areas ‘under culture’. This expansion was still important, indeed, central, to Upper Canada’s agriculture; however, it was combined with the adoption of new machinery and farm implements originating from the United States that improved production. Much like in the American mid-west, the size of Upper Canadian farms, the associated scale of production, and the scarcity of rural wage labourers made machinery the perfect companion to agriculture. Machinery, in turn, added costs to

Ontario, 1613-1880, 84–196; McCallum, *Unequal Beginnings*, 20.

⁶⁸² Ouellet, *Economic and Social History of Quebec, 1760-1850*, 517; See also Jones, *History of Agriculture in Ontario, 1613-1880*, 84–196.

⁶⁸³ Jones, *History of Agriculture in Ontario, 1613-1880*, 89, 137.

production, and these costs had to be spread over ever larger units of production. As farmers sought higher returns to scale, they ‘had to go into substantial debt in order to practise a more extensive capital-intensive farming. [...] The price of such debt, however, was a wholehearted commitment to production of a major cash crop whose revenue could service that debt’.⁶⁸⁴ The result, as I.D. Andrews, the compiler of the most comprehensive statistics on the trade of the province, has argued in 1851, was that ‘the export of produce, and the import and consumption of all the substantial and necessary products of civilization, [we]re as high, per head, as in the best agricultural districts of the United States’.⁶⁸⁵

Conclusion

Geographically situated in close proximity to the northern United States, and commercially connected by the Erie Canal and the St. Lawrence/Great Lakes system, Upper Canada’s agricultural economy was impacted by America’s spectacular industrialization. Attracted by the radical transformations in material culture which promised an improved quality of life, Upper Canadian farmers did not idly watch the American drama unfold, but actively sought a part in the revolution. The threat of dispossession, so active in the transformation of north-eastern American independent-household producers into petty-commodity producers was, thus, not a necessary condition for a comparable transformation in Upper Canada. In the absence of an event

⁶⁸⁴ Russell, *How Agriculture Made Canada*, 32.

⁶⁸⁵ Quoted in McCallum, *Unequal Beginnings*, 69.

similar to the American Revolution in its economic and political consequences, Upper Canadian farmers, nevertheless, eventually succumbed to capitalist imperatives of production. Breakthroughs toward industrial capitalism in the United States decisively transformed the international context and the conditions in which subsequent economic development would occur elsewhere in the North American context by creating a new set of pressures and enticements.

For those communities directly and indirectly brought into the widening orbit of American industrial capitalism, social reproduction and the socially- and historically-determined standard of living came to mean much more than 'survival'. Subsistence production no longer sufficed, as households longed to purchase goods and foodstuffs that were not, properly speaking, necessary to the economic endurance of the family, but were nevertheless deemed essential to the improvement of everyday life. To purchase such goods and foodstuffs in local markets, Upper Canadian households needed to engage much more systematically in market relations, selling an ever larger marketable and specialized 'surplus' whose production required machinery and farm implements. Purchasing machinery required capital, and capital required competitive production. For Upper Canadians, market dependence was, in this sense, the price to pay for sharing in the fruits of British and American industrial capitalism.

6.

The Development of Capital-Intensive Agriculture in Quebec

In a period when industrial transformation tended to forcefully intersect with agriculture in various regions of North America, improving and intensifying production methods, the agriculture of Lower Canada was in a state of crisis. Generally speaking, the economy and society of Lower Canada were certainly not stagnant; the peasant society not only had its own distinctive social dynamic, but was evolving in connection with the geopolitically uneven and socially combined development of other regional economies in North America. Indeed, while Montreal, at the beginning of the century, was still a preindustrial city, its role as an import hub within the St. Lawrence/Great Lakes commercial system firmly anchored its development within the set of conditions brought about by the emergence of industrial capitalism in the north-eastern United States. By the end of the century, artisanal labour in Montreal was largely replaced by industrial production, '[i]ts metropolitan dominance was enhanced by developing waterpower, canal and rail facilities',⁶⁸⁶ and 'capital', in the words of two historians, was 'increasingly important in determining social relations'.⁶⁸⁷

In sharp contrast to the prosperity of industrializing Montreal, the French Canadian peasant economy was characterized by technical stagnation and low labour-

⁶⁸⁶ Young and Dickinson, *A Short History of Quebec*, 114.

⁶⁸⁷ *Ibid.*, 105.

productivity. The production of wheat, in serious decline, lagged far behind that of Upper Canada, as agricultural difficulties had led French Canadian peasants to substitute the cultivation of this lucrative crop with that of peas, potatoes, and oats for subsistence purposes. Moreover, peasants had begun to feel cramped on long settled seigneuries, where over-population and patterns of inheritance had led them to subdivide farmlands with every new generation. Between 1840 and 1880, the number of landless labourers and out-migrants attained new heights, with no less than 325,000 French Canadians leaving the province for the United States.⁶⁸⁸ In this context, to understand the late development of capitalist agriculture in Lower Canada, it is necessary to explain the constellation and transformation of the province's class relations. The manner and degree to which demographic factors and commercial activities affected the response of the rural population to the new realities of industrial capitalism in North America were decisively shaped by various social forces, including the petty bourgeoisie and the Church.

To map these social forces, the first section of this chapter provides an historical comparison of the French Canadian peasantry with its feudal European counterpart, highlighting how the absence of a collective system of regulation in the former case created a very different set of conditions of production than the open-field systems of feudal Europe, despite the existence of the seigneurial relation of exploitation. The second section highlights the links between the Lower Canada Rebellion and the strategy of reproduction of the French Canadian professional petty bourgeoisie. The

⁶⁸⁸ Yolande Lavoie, *L'émigration des Québécois aux États-Unis de 1840 à 1930* (Québec: Conseil de la langue française, Éditeur officiel du Québec, 1981), 53.

third section explores how the failure of the Rebellion brought about a period of profound change in the balance of class forces in the province, providing the state with an opportunity to introduce incremental socio-legal reforms leading to the abolition of the seigneurial regime. Section four discusses how, even after censives had been commuted into freeholds, the continuation of some aspects of the seigneurial relation of exploitation, together with patterns of demographic growth, inheritance, and mobility associated with the peasantry's logic of social reproduction, contributed to agricultural backwardness in the long-run. In the fifth section, I examine a further distinguishing feature of the French Canadian peasant society that set it apart from rural communities of petty-commodity producers elsewhere in North America: the growing authority of the Catholic Church over rural direct producers. Finally, section six analyses the social conditions under which the shift to capital-intensive agriculture was initiated in the last quarter of the nineteenth century.

Some Distinctive Traits of Quebec's Peasantry

Relations of domination between peasants and landowners have characterized many societies throughout history, but these relations were not necessarily 'feudal' or 'semi-feudal'. Feudalism, as George Comninel has pointed out, is best used in a restricted sense to designate the form of social relations that came into existence in some parts of Europe around the year 1000, following the disintegration of sovereign royal

power and its appropriation by regional magnates and individual *seigneurs*.⁶⁸⁹ The appropriation of the royal power of the *ban*—‘taxation, command and the provision of “justice” in courts’⁶⁹⁰—endowed seigneurs with a specific form of authority taking ‘the form of territorial jurisdiction’.⁶⁹¹ These powers enabled them to subject ‘villages of free peasants, previously independent of lords and manors’ to their personal authority.⁶⁹²

Herein lies, perhaps, the specificity of feudalism: ‘Pre-capitalist agrarian production has in most times and places depended on self-reproducing peasant households [...]. The feudal mode of production, however, was dramatically different, its open-field systems of collective crop and livestock management directly dependent upon the court of the lord’.⁶⁹³ The reorganization of production along open-field systems entirely revolutionized production in peasant communities, allowing for greater output per unit of land under culture, and an improvement in living conditions. The outcome was an unprecedented demographic growth that is often wrongly attributed to pre-capitalist societies in general, but was, in fact, very particular to the dynamics associated with the ‘the transformation of early medieval manors and independent villages into feudal *seigneuries*, ruled through parcellized sovereignty in wholly novel ways’.⁶⁹⁴

While the social relations of exploitation of the seigneurie were reproduced in New France, open-field systems were not. Characteristically, in open-field systems,

⁶⁸⁹ Jean-Pierre Poly, Eric Bournazel, and Caroline Higgitt, *The Feudal Transformation: 900-1200* (New York: Holmes & Meier, 1991); Comninel, “English Feudalism and the Origins of Capitalism.”

⁶⁹⁰ Comninel, “Feudalism,” 134.

⁶⁹¹ *Ibid.*

⁶⁹² *Ibid.*

⁶⁹³ *Ibid.*, 134–135.

⁶⁹⁴ *Ibid.*, 135.

the arable land was divided into two or three open fields and these were cultivated according to a rotation system, where each of the fields lay fallow in turn in order to avoid the exhaustion of the soil. Each field was divided into a large number of plots, each of which was divided in turn into several strips, so each peasant had to till a great number of strips scattered around in different plots.⁶⁹⁵

Where open-field systems existed in Europe, ‘the peasants had to take collective decisions about the use of the land’, leading them to live close together in villages, which the fields surrounded.⁶⁹⁶ Nothing of the kind existed in New France, where patterns of landscape transformation and spatial occupation followed other principles. The censives granted to individuals were rectangles of different sizes, large enough to meet the needs of an individual family.⁶⁹⁷ Rather than being further divided into strips to be tilled in rotation by different farmers, as in open-field systems, each censive was tilled by a single household, with occasional help from neighbours. Without the need to make collective decisions or establish a system of collective rotation, as in the open-field systems, no communal regulation or peasant political organization of the kind found in France developed in New France. The existence of a few ‘commons’ (36 in the whole

⁶⁹⁵ Søren Kjeldsen-Kragh, *The Role of Agriculture in Economic Development: The Lessons of History* (Copenhagen: Copenhagen Business School Press, 2007), 102; Adriaan Verhulst, *The Carolingian Economy* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002), 102.

⁶⁹⁶ Kjeldsen-Kragh, *The Role of Agriculture in Economic Development*, 102.

⁶⁹⁷ Laberge, *Portraits de campagnes*, 51, 54.

colony in 1725, of which 15 were located in Montreal)⁶⁹⁸ does not modify this claim. Few in number, commons tended to be located in spaces unsuitable for crop cultivation: shingle beaches (*'grèves'*), shoals (*'battures'*), coarse hay pastures (*'gros foins'*), islands and islets.⁶⁹⁹

The general features of the seigneurial system, including the private possession and tillage of the land, the rectangular integrity of the censives, and the lack of importance of the commons, testify to the distinctiveness and the non-feudal character of the peasant economy in the St. Lawrence Valley. Since legal and customary regulations determined 'virtually every aspect of production' in feudal Europe,⁷⁰⁰ it is certain that their absence in New France constituted a major departure that was to have implications for the economic evolution of the peasant economy. *Ex hypothesis*, the absence of collectively-established production in the St. Lawrence Valley may even help explain the poor farming practices that led to severe soil exhaustion in the nineteenth century. It may also help to explain peasants' difficulty in resisting seigneurial attempts to 'squeeze' more surplus out of them in the aftermath of the British Conquest, since the departure of French officials and colonial administrators left peasants with only weak village institutions to organize themselves politically.

While the open-field systems associated with feudalism were not emulated by French Canadian peasant communities, the seigneurial relation of exploitation based on the territorial authority of the seigneur, nevertheless, existed in the colony. As the

⁶⁹⁸ Ibid., 59.

⁶⁹⁹ Ibid., 61.

⁷⁰⁰ Comminel, "Feudalism," 135.

historical details of the seigneurial system were discussed in Chapter 2, it suffices here to recall that the seigneurial relationship was imposed on the colony in the broader context of absolutist social-property relations that had transformed ‘specifically feudal forms of politically constituted property [...] into state offices’.⁷⁰¹ In New France, like in France, social relations of appropriation were ‘no longer truly feudal, but still entirely pre-capitalist’.⁷⁰²

Given the non-feudal character of the peasant mode of production and the seigneurial relations of appropriation, the peasant society in the St. Lawrence Valley clearly emerges as a society that needs to be theorized as a *sui generis* type of peasant society. But what made French Canadian rural settlers ‘peasants’ in the first place? For one thing, they produced to meet immediate household needs. However, in contrast to independent household-producers elsewhere in North America, their ‘independence’ was limited by a political subjection to landlords who directly exploited their surplus-labour through non-economic means of appropriation. The limits imposed by this relationship of exploitation on economic development⁷⁰³ radically differ from independent household-producers’ freedom with regard to the control and distribution of income and agricultural ‘surpluses’. Independent household-producers who held and cultivated small landed estates elsewhere in North America did not have to deal with a landlord class that appropriated their surpluses.

An examination of the long-term patterns of development in France and Quebec

⁷⁰¹ Ibid., 137.

⁷⁰² Ibid.; Comminel, *Rethinking the French Revolution*; Beik, *Absolutism and Society in Seventeenth-Century France*; Teschke, *The Myth of 1648*.

⁷⁰³ See Chapter 2.

reveals further divergences in their social relations of appropriation. In France, the abolition of the seigneurial regime during the French Revolution put an end to the exploitation of the peasants by the seigneurs. However, it left intact open-field systems, which long remained an obstacle to the development of capitalist agriculture by maintaining French rural smallholders' production embedded in communal systems of regulation. In Quebec, the abolition of the seigneurial regime was a much more protracted process, which started, but did not finish,⁷⁰⁴ with the *Act for the abolition of feudal rights and duties in Lower Canada*. This Act did not truly put an end to the social relations of exploitation between seigneurs and peasants, but it did significantly impact long-term patterns of production by commutating censives, whose management had, hitherto, been subjected to the constraints of the seigneurial regime, into freeholds. The terms of the 'peasant question' were, therefore, about to be significantly transformed during the second half of the nineteenth century. But before examining this transformation, I turn to the series of events that marked the few decades preceding the adoption of the Act in order to map out the constellation of class forces that characterized the province in these times of change.

The Lower Canadian Rebellion

The French Canadian peasant economy was considerably affected by the British Conquest of New France, not least because the integration of the colony into the British

⁷⁰⁴ Benoît Grenier, "« Le dernier endroit dans l'univers »: À propos de l'extinction des rentes seigneuriales au Québec, 1854-1974," *Revue d'histoire de l'Amérique française* 64, no. 2 (2010): 75–98.

Empire radically transformed patterns of immigration, resulting in a modification of the balance of class forces in the province. Between 1815 and 1851, for instance, some 50,000 of the 800,000 immigrants who came to Lower Canada from the British Isles settled in the province. The Irish majority among them ‘became the rough labour of industrial society [...], an important source of wage labour. A significant factor in Lower Canadian ethnic politics was the fact that by 1831 over 40 percent of the day labourers in Montreal were anglophones’.⁷⁰⁵ The British Conquest also paved the way for the arrival of several hundred British and American merchants in Montreal.

As political subjects, these merchants sought to establish in Quebec many of the institutions that they deemed essential for transforming the province into a modern colony. For instance, they petitioned the British authorities for the granting of a representative assembly. In England, the consecration of parliamentary sovereignty during the Glorious Revolution of 1688 had, as Ellen Wood has pointed out, little to do with democracy; rather, it affirmed the rights of feudal barons and capitalist/entrepreneurial aristocrats over the arbitrary power of the monarchy.⁷⁰⁶ Montreal merchants wanted to introduce similar constitutional principles of parliamentary rule in the colony to limit the arbitrary power of the British government. Of greater concern than the ‘King in Parliament’, however, was the numerical preponderance of the French Canadian population and the influence it would have on the affairs of the province if a truly representative assembly was granted. The assembly

⁷⁰⁵ Young and Dickinson, *A Short History of Quebec*, 110–111; Donald Akenson, *The Irish in Ontario: A Study in Rural History* (Montreal; Kingston: McGill-Queen’s Press, 1999).

⁷⁰⁶ Ellen Meiksins Wood, *Democracy against Capitalism: Renewing Historical Materialism* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995), 205.

desired by the merchants, therefore, had to be limited to an exclusive political oligarchy of propertied Protestants who would rule over the destiny of the province. To this end, they ‘made a noise [...] out of all proportion to their numbers’.⁷⁰⁷ The British government, however, was in no hurry to respond to the demand; during the three decades following the Conquest, it refused to call an assembly.

After much hesitation, the elected Assembly was finally granted by the imperial authorities with the Quebec Act of 1791. For a time, the Assembly functioned in favour of the English bourgeoisie. Satisfied with its new political power and its consolidated economic domination, the bourgeoisie closed itself to further ideas of reform. The French and American revolutions still fresh in memory, the Catholic clergy similarly adopted a conservative stance. Both the English bourgeoisie and the Catholic clergy thus coalesced with the declining French Canadian aristocracy into a coherent elite opposed to change. In these circumstances, the aspirations of the French Canadian professional petty bourgeoisie (notaries, advocates, doctors, innkeepers, small merchants, and the like) to social mobility were blocked. Put in a position of political and economic inferiority, this professional petty bourgeoisie began to voice its discontent and exert its political leadership over the rural population.⁷⁰⁸ Its rhetoric targeted English merchants and bureaucrats; it also targeted the population of Irish immigrants who competed with French Canadian landless workers for jobs in towns and for land in rural regions.

Most of the French Canadian professional petty bourgeoisie had been trained in

⁷⁰⁷ Burt, *The Old Province of Quebec*, 92.

⁷⁰⁸ Ouellet, “French-Canadian Nationalism: From Its Origins to the Insurrection of 1837”; Fernand Ouellet, *Lower Canada 1791-1840* (Toronto: McClelland & Stewart, 1980).

seminaries and classical colleges managed by the Catholic clergy. Their professions often rested entirely on an intimate knowledge of traditions, especially of French civil law, Catholic religious customs, and the seigneurial regime. Their reproduction as a class was, therefore, tied to the preservation of these institutions. This petty bourgeoisie sought access to the government structure and its networks of patronage, but had no problem with the seigneurial regime, French civil law, or the tithes of the clergy. In fact, it saw these as a bulwark against cultural assimilation and a protection of the rights of the French Canadian 'nation' which it claimed to represent.⁷⁰⁹ The petty bourgeoisie, which had strong support among the peasantry, organized itself in the *parti Canadien*, which eventually became the *parti patriotes*, the spearhead of the reform movement.

For the fifteen years leading up to 1837, the French Canadian professional petty bourgeoisie maintained control of the Assembly.⁷¹⁰ It was clear, however, that despite ever growing electoral successes, political power would be limited as long as the structure of the colonial state, within which the nominated Legislative and Executive councils held the most important powers, remained unchanged. Constitutional reforms, including the supremacy of the elected assembly over non-elected bodies, the control of public funds by the assembly, and the principle of ministerial responsibility, thus became the primary demand. Beyond these reforms, the professional petty bourgeoisie had renounced, in all but a minority faction influenced by English and American radicals, any social reforms that could threaten the seigneurie or the parish.

The peasantry, which constituted the backbone of the *patriotes* movement, was

⁷⁰⁹ Dumont, *Genèse de la société québécoise*, 183.

⁷¹⁰ Gerald Craig, "Introduction," in *Lord Durham's Report* (Toronto: Carleton Library, 1968), ii.

much less inclined to spare the clergy and the seigneurial regime in its criticism. In various regions surrounding Montreal, where the burden of dues and tithes was particularly heavy, peasants did not hesitate to openly demonstrate their anti-seigneurialism.⁷¹¹ However, the minority of petty bourgeois who, within the leadership of the *parti patriotes*, professed more radical ideas never came close to gathering sufficient momentum to impart upon the whole movement a program of radical reform. The conservative influence of the Church over the rural population, combined with the conservative nationalism of most local and national leaders, including the charismatic leader of the *patriotes*, Louis-Joseph Papineau, prevented more radical ideas from gaining a strong foothold among the majority of the population.⁷¹²

The English bourgeoisie, after initially welcoming the Quebec Act of 1791, increasingly resented the growing power of French Canadians within the Assembly. Their control of the institution blocked any hope for the legal and socioeconomic reforms sought by the merchant class, especially the abolition of the seigneurial regime. Merchants also looked upon the territorial and political division of Upper Canada and Lower Canada as an inappropriate arrangement, for the economic space which they dominated encompassed the whole St. Lawrence commercial empire. Without a union of the two Canadas, the United States seemed destined to gain the upper hand in the economic contest.⁷¹³ Merchants also saw in the union a means to achieve a new balance of political representation in their favour, given the rapidly growing English-speaking

⁷¹¹ Allan Greer, *The Patriots and the People: The Rebellion of 1837 in Rural Lower Canada* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1993).

⁷¹² Ouellet, *Economic and Social History of Quebec, 1760-1850*, 420-443.

⁷¹³ Creighton, *The Empire of the St. Lawrence*.

population of Upper Canada.

In March 1837, the British minister of the interior, John Russell, rejected altogether the demands of the *patriotes* with the presentation of its ten resolutions to the Parliament in London. The *patriotes* received this as an insolence and decided to take up arms. In a series of confrontation occurring in 1837 and 1838, peasants, labourers, and artisans, organized under the leadership of the professional petty bourgeoisie, were defeated by British troops in regions south and north of Montreal, where the agricultural crisis had been the most severe. ‘The decisive defeat of republican opposition’, as Allan Greer has explained,

paved the way for a major transformation of imperial rule. No matter how paltry the military contests of the Rebellion may seem, this had been a political turning-point of the first magnitude. From the summer of 1837 until the end of 1838, the central part of British North America underwent a thoroughgoing crisis of sovereignty, one in which the very framework of state power was in danger of collapse.⁷¹⁴

For the military crushed and heavily repressed *patriotes*, it was time to retreat. Maintained in their position of economic inferiority, and disappointed by the refusal of the government to approve reforms aligned with their political agenda, the French Canadian population fell back on the only social sphere over which it still seemed to

⁷¹⁴ Allan Greer, *Habitants et Patriotes : La Rébellions de 1837 dans les campagnes du Bas-Canada* (Cap-Saint-Ignace: Éditions du Boréal, 1997), 16–17. (my translation)

have some control: culture. In cultural affairs, as I discuss below, the Catholic Church did not take long to fill the leadership vacuum left empty by the petty bourgeoisie. Meanwhile, the weakness of the opposition gave the colonial establishment the opportunity to proceed with a series of reforms that would reshape and strengthen the state, forever changing the face of Lower Canada.

Socio-Legal Reforms of the State and Property

Until the 1840s, the power of the state was limited ‘by the absence of regular connections between centre and locality’.⁷¹⁵ The defeat of the *patriotes*, however, opened the door for the state to ‘grow enormously in size, scope, and power. In the short run, soldiers and police proliferated, but, before long, more peaceful agencies of regulation came to predominate: schools, prisons, asylums, and above all, bureaucracies’.⁷¹⁶ By then a consensus had grown about the need for representative rule among colonial administrators: ‘Men of property were to govern propertyless men through public institutions, and men generally would govern women and children through their dominance in the household’.⁷¹⁷ The authorities also undertook to reform the mode of tenure which culminated, in 1854, with the *Act for the abolition of feudal*

⁷¹⁵ Curtis, “Representation and State Formation in the Canadas, 1790-1850,” 65.

⁷¹⁶ Greer, *Habitants et Patriotes : La Rébellions de 1837 dans les campagnes du Bas-Canada*, 16–17. (my translation) Donald Fyson and Yvan Rousseau, *L’État au Québec. Perspectives d’analyse et expériences historiques* (Québec: Centre interuniversitaire d’études québécoises, 2008); Bruce Curtis, *The Politics of Population: State Formation, Statistics, and the Census of Canada, 1840-1875* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2002); Jean-Marie Fecteau, *La liberté du pauvre: crime et pauvreté au XIXe siècle québécois* (Montréal: VLB Éditeur, 2004).

⁷¹⁷ Curtis, “Representation and State Formation in the Canadas, 1790-1850,” 62.

rights and duties in Lower Canada. The ideological climate of the new reform era has been described by sociologist Fernand Dumont, in his examination of the report written in 1839 by Lord Durham, the commissioner sent from Britain to study the causes of discontent in the colony. As he explains, Durham

is primarily concerned by the economic development of the Canadas and the function of the British colonies within the Empire. Durham notes the delay of these colonies compared to the vitality of the United States: the weakness of settlement and leakage of immigration to the southern neighbors; the lack of communication; the absence of a consistent policy. It was imperative therefore to create the conditions necessary for a start-up and, for this, to structure a space of growth that goes beyond artificial political boundaries. The duality of ‘races’ is a subordinate question. It is important to remember this when one reads the pages where Durham carries on a merciless critique of the attitudes and culture of French Canadians which, according to him, are contrary to the needs of the economy.⁷¹⁸

The core of the reforms introduced to remedy to the problems identified by Durham was the Ordinance of 1840, promulgated under the military dictatorship of the Special Council, to allow the voluntary commutation of feudal property into freeholdings on the island of Montreal. The Ordinance made of Montreal ‘the testbed for the modification of

⁷¹⁸ Dumont, *Genèse de la société québécoise*, 192. (my translation)

the social and legal framework' as 'part of a series of measures taken [...] in order to facilitate the emergence of a capitalist property market'.⁷¹⁹ Other reform measures also paved the way for the emergence of a capitalist property market. They included:

the repeal of the control system of exchange and use of urban space by the justice of peace and its replacement by a council; a fundamental change in the custom of Paris by the restriction of *hypothèques* to introduce 'mortgages', an instrument of English credit that involves the transfer of title to the creditor; state regulation of bankruptcy, eliminating the Scottish feudal practice of settlement agreements; the creation of a property registration office for the first time in the seigneurial territory; the restriction of the social rights of wives and servants affecting the property of their husband or master.⁷²⁰

These socio-legal reforms were decisive steps toward the implementation of an institutional framework able to secure the right of private property. The ultimate obstacle to this institutional framework was, of course, the seigneurial tenure itself. While *censitaires* had frequently denounced seigneurial abuse, few of them sought its complete abolition. More radical in their criticism of the seigneurial regime were 'businessmen,

⁷¹⁹ Robert Sweeny, "Paysan et ouvrier: du féodalisme laurentien au capitalisme québécois," *Sociologie et sociétés* 22, no. 1 (1990): 156. (my translation)

⁷²⁰ Ibid. (my translation) The distinction between the common-law mortgage and the civil-law hypothèque is subtle, but has legal implications. The common-law mortgagee, for instance, "becomes a conditional owner of the property mortgaged to him, but not its possessor (unless he forecloses, in which case he becomes both absolute owner and possessor), whereas the hypothécaire gains neither ownership nor possession of the mortgaged property unless he enforces the mortgage". Gemma Capellas-Espuny, "The Problem of Terminological Equivalence in International Maritime Law," *Translation Journal* 3, no. 3 (1999).

especially of British origins, frustrated by the weight of seigneurial rights that limit[ed] their possibilities of enrichment'.⁷²¹ To them, the seigneurial regime was an anachronism when compared with the capitalist logic of production entrenched in the north-eastern United States and beginning to develop in the American mid-west and neighbouring province of Upper Canada. By the mid-century, the marked decline in agricultural productivity of the previous decades provided the economic context of the general crisis of the seigneurial regime.

Benoît Grenier has identified the two main obstacles 'to entrepreneurship, free property, and freedom of contract' that aroused the discontent of British businessmen: seigneurial monopolies and *lods et ventes*.⁷²² Seigneurial monopolies prevented free competition in the construction of fulling, carding, and sawing mills, for instance, and in the control of water streams, which were one of the prime movers of early industrialization; *lods et ventes* constituted a heavy levy on any purchase of property within the seigneurial territory, including Montreal, where transactions were frequent and often expensive.⁷²³

The question of the abolition of the seigneurial regime in Quebec had not ceased to occupy the minds of British rulers since the Conquest of New France. As early as 1801, a commission of inquiry had recommended its replacement by the free and common socage. One has to wait until the 1820s, however, to see significant actions being undertaken in this direction, at which time two laws passed in London, one in

⁷²¹ Grenier, *Brève histoire du régime seigneurial*, 193. (my translation)

⁷²² *Ibid.*, 192. (my translation)

⁷²³ *Ibid.*, 193–194.

1822, the other in 1825, partially reformed the regime. As Grenier has explained, the first, the *Canada Trade Acts*, allowed the purchase of the *lods et ventes* in the censives of the king. The second, an *Act to provide for the extinction of feudal and seigniorial rights and burthens on lands*, authorized the voluntary commutation of censives and seigneuries. Between 1825 and 1846, nine seigneurs seized the opportunity offered by this law to commute their seigneuries, in whole or part.⁷²⁴ During the second quarter of the century, other inquiries were led (1828, 1831, and 1842) and the Ordinance of 1840 concerning Montreal was adopted. More tergiversations had to be carried out before a decision concerning the entire province was taken in 1854.

Among the many issues at stake, was the question of the tenure to adopt as a replacement. Would it be, as many French Canadians preferred, the *franc-aleu roturier*, a form of freehold consistent with French civil law? Or would it be the free and common socage, with which settlers of British and American origins were familiar? The *franc-aleu* was finally retained in 1854, when the law for the abolition of the seigniorial regime was passed.⁷²⁵ More hotly contested, however, was the nature of the compensation, if any, to be given to seigneurs for the loss of their seigniorial rights. As Grenier has explained, the legislators

chose to end seigniorial ‘rights and duties’, but not without acknowledging the losses incurred by the seigneurs. The process therefore included a compensation [...]. [B]y this act the seigneurs became landowners like any others and could

⁷²⁴ Ibid., 198–199.

⁷²⁵ Dumont, *Genèse de la société québécoise*, 194.

freely dispose of their ‘domains’. [...] Specifically the law first enacted the abolition of feudal rights and duties, starting with the disappearance of honorific rights without compensation. Besides, all other rights, whether the *banalité*, casual rights (such as *lods et ventes*) and even chores, were recognized as financial losses [...] to be compensated.⁷²⁶

Detailed rules for calculating the financial compensation were enacted and ten officers were made responsible for surveying the seigneuries. In 1859, a register was created, identifying 330 seigneuries, and detailing the reimbursement to be received by the seigneurs. The state paid a part of the compensation, but the censitaires were left with the obligation to pay the compensation for the *cens* and *rentes*. While the Act provided for the mandatory commutation of censives into freeholds, it did not oblige censitaires to pay the compensation in full: censitaires could pay the whole compensation all at once, or opt for an annuity equalling 6% of the capital. The payment of the annuity gave the censitaire the right to postpone the payment of the capital, but it did not reduce its amount.⁷²⁷

Given the imposition of this annuity on former censitaires, Grenier concluded that the act of 1854 was more the beginning of the end than the end itself. Around 1930, some 60,000 ex-censitaires were still paying the annuity on more than 200 seigneuries: ‘[t]hey still have not redeemed the capital eighty years after the Act of 1854. These amounts represent a total capital of \$3,577,573.38 and annual instalment of \$212,486.53.

⁷²⁶ Grenier, *Brève histoire du régime seigneurial*, 203–205. (my translation)

⁷²⁷ *Ibid.*, 205–206.

The remains of the seigneurial age persist and make of Quebec, according to the deputy and mayor of Saint-Hyacinthe, [...] the “last place in the universe” to suffer from them’.⁷²⁸ In Grenier’s view, the real date marking the abolition of the tie binding the censitaires to the seigneurs was November 11, 1940, when censitaires went in person to seigneurial manors to pay their annuity for the last time. The *Syndicat national du rachat des rentes seigneuriales*, created by the legislative Assembly of the province, was given the task of reimbursing the outstanding amount, a task that it took thirty years to complete.⁷²⁹

That such a compensation was awarded to the seigneurs without successful resistance on the part of the peasantry, testifies to just how powerfully the legal claims of seigneurs to a share of the peasantry’s production were entrenched. Indeed, in her *History of Agriculture in Quebec*, Colette Chatillon has reiterated that the Act of 1854 did not represent a radical break with the past because of the persistence of annuities linking former censitaires to seigneurs:

the abolition was not really an abolition [...] The censitaire can choose between either paying an annuity of 6% on capital, that is to say, becoming debtor forever, or purchasing the land to the seigneur. As very few settlers have the capital necessary to purchase the land, the great majority continues to pay the rent. [...]

In reality the situation of the inhabitants remains substantially the same.⁷³⁰

⁷²⁸ Ibid., 207. (my translation)

⁷²⁹ Ibid., 208.

⁷³⁰ Chatillon, *L’histoire de l’agriculture au Québec*, 37. (my translation)

The persistence of this directly exploitative aspect of the seigneur-censitaire relationship well after the abolition of the seigneurial regime offers a sharp contrast with the abolition of the seigneurial regime in France during the Revolution. Achieved in times of crisis and violence, the abolition of the seigneurial relation of exploitation in France was, after some initial hesitations,⁷³¹ complete and definitive. No ‘compensation’ was given to seigneurs; the peasantry was freed from payments of annuities. In Lower Canada, by contrast, the abolition of the seigneurial regime was a protracted process extending over several decades of piecemeal reforms that extended well into the twentieth century.

Peasant Resistance to Market Imperatives

What effect had the abolition of seigneurial regime on the class structure of French Canadian peasant society and who benefited the most from it? The question should be understood broadly enough to encompass the role of the state and other classes beyond seigneurs and censitaires, as well as the nature of the changes it effected on agricultural productivity. The first observation, however, concerns seigneurs themselves. Many of the rights that had benefited the seigneurs in the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries lost their relevance in the changing context of the middle of

⁷³¹ The Assembly had first established a complicated scheme of buyouts and compensation in 1790, but before the peasant resistance, the Montagnard Convention in 1793 abolished the scheme outright together with all remaining seigneurial dues. D. M. G. Sutherland, “Peasants, Lords, and Leviathan: Winners and Losers from the Abolition of French Feudalism, 1780-1820,” *The Journal of Economic History* 62, no. 1 (2002): 1.

the nineteenth century; while, for the most entrepreneurial, those, for instance, involved in trade or industries, the set of obligations associated with the seigneurial regime came to be seen as an impediment upon the free management of their affairs. In these circumstances, the compensation received for the abolition of privileges was not a bad deal; for many seigneurs, it was even quite profitable.⁷³²

On the other side, the abolition freed the censitaires from an array of dues and obligations that had constituted real burdens. The commutation of the censives into freeholds was expected to affect great changes in the lives of the peasantry: as Abraham Robert, accomplished writer and owner of the *Montreal Gazette*, noted in the introduction to *Some remarks upon the French tenure of 'franc aleu roturier'*, '[i]n all ages, the mode in which a people has held its lands has been the most powerful agent in determining its character and fortunes'.⁷³³ The seigneurial tenure, he nevertheless concluded, was not the primary cause of 'the backward agriculture of Lower Canada and the poverty of its inhabitants'.⁷³⁴ According to him, the real causes were to be found in patterns of inheritance that shaped the aspirations of the peasantry; writing at the time,

[t]hough commutation is in some respects desirable, no material improvement can be effected while the present law of inheritance prevails, or rather while the custom of the country tends to indefinite division, and the accumulation and skilful application of capital are considered of secondary importance by a

⁷³² Grenier, *Brève histoire du régime seigneurial*, 207.

⁷³³ Robert Abraham, *Some Remarks upon the French Tenure of "Franc Aleu Roturier", and on Its Relation to the Feudal and Other Tenures* (Montréal: Armour and Ramsay, 1849), 3.

⁷³⁴ *Ibid.*, 39.

population whose aspirations [...] are limited to deriving a mere existence from the soil.⁷³⁵

Not everybody was of the same opinion. Writing in the same year, 1849, Clément Dumesnil led a frontal attack on the seigneurial tenure on behalf of the peasantry. In his *De l'abolition des droits féodaux et seigneuriaux au Canada*, he provided a long list of the obligations burdening the peasantry, before concluding that the abolition would bring prosperity to the common men and energy to agriculture of the peasants. Free 'to not be troubled, upset, harassed, bullied, in the occupation of their land, they [the peasants] will finally be able to engage freely in all agricultural improvements and all industrial enterprises'.⁷³⁶

Against expectations of this kind, the authorities decided to perpetuate the old social relation of exploitation through the imposition of a compensation; a perpetual annuity, in fact, for those unwilling or unable to defray the lump-sum payment. For many peasants, therefore, the abolition of the seigneurial regime resulted in 'very subtle changes' as they 'continue[d] to pay a rent equivalent to the old, to the same person, and the same date'.⁷³⁷ In other words, the remnants of seigneurial relations of exploitation durably added fixed costs to agriculture, putting a strain on the capital available for the improvement of farms, even if the abolition of seigneurial obligations had formally

⁷³⁵ Ibid.

⁷³⁶ Clément Dumesnil, *De l'abolition des droits féodaux et seigneuriaux au Canada et sur le meilleur mode à employer pour accorder une juste indemnité aux seigneurs* (Montréal: Réédition-Québec, 1969), vii–viii. (my translation)

⁷³⁷ Grenier, *Brève histoire du régime seigneurial*, 206. (my translation)

given peasants the full control of their estates.

In principle, the peasant was now free ‘to manage, develop, and dispose of his land as he saw fit’.⁷³⁸ Traditional inheritance practices and marital rights associated with French civil law, however, continued to influence the French Canadian peasantry’s dynamic of social reproduction and set strict limits upon the course of its economic development. As Gérard Bouchard has explained, this dynamic endowed the parents, in every generation, ‘with the obligation to provide for the establishment of many households out of only one’.⁷³⁹ This led to ‘an important movement of landholdings expansion and the reproduction, with each generation, of peasant household from simple to multiple’.⁷⁴⁰ As historians Serge Courville and Normand Séguin have explained,

the more the household ages, the more its labour force increases, as well as its movable and immovable assets, until one day, the need to establish children on land results in a significant drop in assets. Once this is done, the household reaches new levels until the final abandonment of farm work, which often results in a donation of the residential plot to the elder son who, in return for the assets received, takes care of his parents and remaining children, who he will ensure the establishment later.⁷⁴¹

⁷³⁸ *The Shaping of Québec Politics and Society*, 41.

⁷³⁹ Bouchard, *Quelques arpents d’Amérique*, 144. (my translation)

⁷⁴⁰ *Ibid.* (my translation)

⁷⁴¹ Serge Courville and Normand Séguin, *Le monde rural québécois au XIXe siècle*, Brochure historique 47 (Ottawa: Société historique du Canada, 1989), 9. (my translation)

This logic of social reproduction thus imposed rather strict limits and possibilities on the consolidation of farm units and the accumulation of capital by peasants, with important consequences for long-term patterns of economic development. Given these limits, Robert Abraham could declare, in 1849, that ‘one may travel twenty miles, in any direction, among the Canadian concessions, without seeing what in England would be called a “gentleman’s house”, that is, a house in which a person could live comfortably who was spending five hundred pounds a year’.⁷⁴²

The familial dynamic of reproduction of the French Canadian peasantry was ‘tying down’, in Abraham’s vivid depiction, ‘all the associations and hopes of families to a particular spot of earth’, converting ‘what ought to be thriving farms into petty hovels and gardens’, and inducing ‘the younger sons, instead of starting out energetically to new soils, with some assistance from the patrimonial estate, to become mere labourers on insufficient patches of land, or the unskilled servants of others’.⁷⁴³ The rationality behind this dynamic, as Bouchard has argued, prioritized reproduction over production, favouring ‘territorial expansion rather than the consolidation of resources and productivity’.⁷⁴⁴ The peasant was an ‘enemy of the large specialized farm which was too dependent upon the whims of extra-regional market’.⁷⁴⁵ By ‘trying to produce clones of itself’, the peasant family was ‘following the model of a society [...] that sought an anchor in physical expansion and achieved a form of autonomy in the

⁷⁴² Abraham, *Some Remarks upon the French Tenure of “Franc Aleu Roturier”, and on Its Relation to the Feudal and Other Tenures*, 39.

⁷⁴³ *Ibid.*, 20.

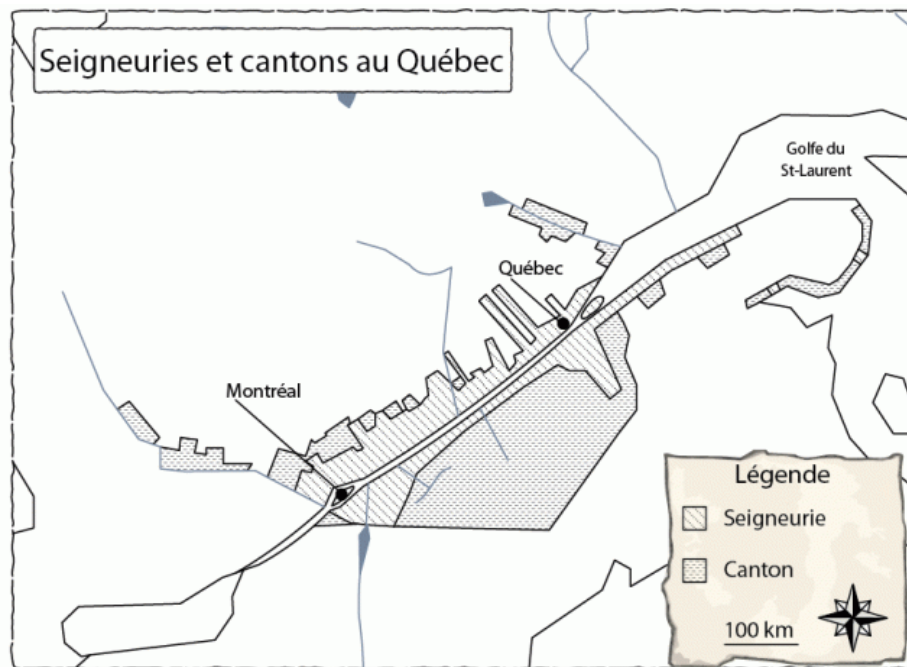
⁷⁴⁴ Bouchard, *Quelques arpents d’Amérique*, 235. (my translation)

⁷⁴⁵ *Ibid.* (my translation)

diversification of its dependencies'.⁷⁴⁶

While this familial dynamic of social reproduction had characterized the French Canadian peasant society since the early days of New France, during the third quarter of the nineteenth century political limits were progressively imposed on the seigneurial territory by the British authorities with the provisions of the Constitutional Act of 1791, the Acts of 1822 and 1825, the ordinance of 1840, and the Act of 1854.

1.2. Maps of the territorial division between seigneuries and townships (*cantons*) in Quebec, circa 1791-1854



⁷⁴⁶ Ibid. (my translation)

Source: Service national du RÉCIT de l'univers social. License: Creative Commons (by-nc-sa)

The Act of 1791 put a limit on the reproduction of both the seigneurial and peasant classes by circumscribing the boundaries of the seigneurial tenure to the territory already existing under this tenure at the time. In other words, from then on, no new seigneurie would be granted by the British authorities, which meant that the areas of land that could henceforth be granted as censives to the peasantry now had definite physical limits. As a result of massive waves of immigration from the British Isles, 'the Port of Quebec becoming the front door of tens of thousands of men and women fleeing poverty', already in 1815, 'access to land was beginning to pose serious problems for French Canadians'.⁷⁴⁷ These problems were intensified by the abolition of the seigneurial tenure in 1854, by which the peasantry completely lost its traditional non-market access to land through free grants of censives on seigneuries. Moreover, the abolition happened at a time of rapid population growth, creating a veritable demographic crisis: 'from some 70,000 in 1760', the population of Lower Canada 'reached 511,000 in 1831 and 890,000 in the census of 1851, at the end of the seigneurial period itself. This growth, in the absence of new concessions of fiefs, has the effect of leading to the saturation of agricultural land in the seigneurial world'.⁷⁴⁸

From then on, families could establish the new generation on a parcel of land only by subdividing the 'vieux-bien' (the parents' farm) or acquiring land by purchase

⁷⁴⁷ Grenier, *Brève histoire du régime seigneurial*, 154–155. (my translation)

⁷⁴⁸ *Ibid.* (my translation)

on the market. For a population used to a life of subsistence without much interaction with the market, the consequences were catastrophic. With the exception of land sold at a fixed low price by the state in remote areas recently opened to colonization, land was too expensive to be bought by the French Canadian peasantry. Crucially, even as their long-established manner of social reproduction was under severe strain, peasant households that retained possession of their farms tenaciously resisted integration into competitive markets. Families often preferred to move to urban centres in Quebec and New England, rather than modify farm production to obey emerging market imperatives.

During the second half of the nineteenth century, some 580,000 French Canadians made their way to the United States, with Fall River, in southern Massachusetts, and Rhode Island attracting particularly large numbers.⁷⁴⁹ Many of those who left the countryside, however, stayed in the province, seeking skilled and unskilled jobs in urban centres, especially in Montreal, where the landless children of the French Canadian peasantry joined the ranks of wage workers and, together with Irish immigrants, fuelled the demographic growth of the city (from 10,000 in 1816, to 57,515 in 1851, and 140,747 in 1881).⁷⁵⁰ At the same time as long-term economic development in the countryside was thwarted by the logic of reproduction of the peasant society, the same logic, under the historically specific conditions of the middle of the century, generated a considerable influx of wage labourers to urban centres, vitally contributing to the industrialization of the province. In this sense, the transformation of peasant agriculture into capitalist agriculture was not a necessary precondition for the

⁷⁴⁹ Young and Dickinson, *A Short History of Quebec*, 112.

⁷⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, 114.

development of industrial capitalism. As a matter of fact, industrialization benefited from the persistence of a large peasant population.

Another option left to those who sought out new horizons beyond the confines of their local parish, but did not want to abandon agriculture, was to search for affordable land in peripheral regions of Quebec recently opened to agricultural colonization, such as the Saguenay-Lac-Saint-Jean, the Outaouais, and the Mauricie. There, public lands were granted to settlers at a price fixed by the government under similar conditions to those that characterized the period of Upper Canada's formation, including the need to obtain a 'concession ticket' and the obligation to clear a certain surface of the land within a given lapse of time.⁷⁵¹ In some regions, this 'colonization' movement, as it usually referred to, received the help of organized colonization societies associated with the Catholic Church. The importance of the clergy to the colonization movement was not so much the result of direct action on the ground, but, as Bouchard has noted, of its ideological influence on the movement and agriculture more generally, which I will turn to in the next section.

The Structural Position of the Church in Peasant Society

Our inquiry into the effects that the abolition of seigneurial regime had on the class structure of the province would be incomplete without examining the place of the Catholic Church in French Canadian peasant society. It is first necessary to note that the

⁷⁵¹ Bouchard, *Quelques arpents d'Amérique*, 23.

failure of the rebellion of 1837-1838 considerably strengthened the power of the Church. The British authorities, continuing their long-term strategy of co-optation of the French Canadian elite, sought the support of the Church as a means to rule the population in the new 'Province of Canada', created in 1840 by the union of Lower Canada and Upper Canada.

English was adopted as the sole official language of parliamentary documents and the new government was endowed with an Assembly consisting of 84 members, drawn equally from each of the two provinces, now renamed Canada West and Canada East.⁷⁵² Canada East, nevertheless, kept its civil law and its educational institutions, which were then tightly woven with the Catholic Church. The liberal elements of the professional petty bourgeoisie and peasantry being in a state of disarray, the Church now naturally appeared as the main representative of the French Canadian nation and was well-placed to govern the countryside. The Church's indefectible loyalty since the British Conquest finally paid off: as republican secularism was dealt its fatal blow, the Church was able to revive its power.⁷⁵³ The petty bourgeoisie easily fell in line:

[T]he men of the professional bourgeoisie who formed the parliamentary leadership of the *patriote* movement quickly abandoned their democratic populism. Tempered by the defeat and imprisonment, those who had not been permanently exiled or otherwise marginalized tended to make peace with the existing order. Many of them, like Louis Hippolyte Lafontaine and Georges

⁷⁵² Francis, Jones, and Smith, *Origins*, 331.

⁷⁵³ Greer, *Habitants et Patriotes : La Rébellions de 1837 dans les campagnes du Bas-Canada*, 315–316.

Étienne Cartier, resumed their political career and fell on the conservative side of city merchants and the Catholic hierarchy.⁷⁵⁴

The Catholic hierarchy was itself radically reorganized with the aim of catholicizing the whole French Canadian population. The thoughts of bishop Ignace *Bourget*, here reported by Dumont, sketch out the direction of this reorganization: ‘There will be unity of action among all the bishops of the province, [...] more majesty and pomp in worship, which can help to tie people to their religion and inspire a deep respect, more union among the bishops in their dealings with the Government, forcing the Government to think twice before antagonizing the episcopal body’.⁷⁵⁵

The discipline imposed on clergy members was consequently strengthened and a new division of labour within the ecclesiastic body was operated. Priests were actively recruited across the province, their number more than doubling in twenty years. Gone were the days when politicians could turn a deaf ear to the priests.⁷⁵⁶ The clerical Establishment spared no effort to extend its influence well beyond the walls of its churches: it set up colleges, convents, temperance societies, missionaries, and other organizations, all carved out to work for ‘the spiritual and moral rebirth of the peasantry’.⁷⁵⁷ It also doubled efforts to provide essential services, including hospitals and educational institutions, as well as charitable associations.⁷⁵⁸ The liberal state, in

⁷⁵⁴ Ibid., 317. (my translation)

⁷⁵⁵ Dumont, *Genèse de la société québécoise*, 222. (my translation)

⁷⁵⁶ Ibid., 222–223.

⁷⁵⁷ Greer, *The Patriots and the People*, 358.

⁷⁵⁸ Ibid.

other words, was not the only institution which experienced a dramatic growth. The Church was becoming, according to Greer's expression, 'almost a quasi-state, and at the same time an influential partner of the state, the French Canadian Church of the mid-nineteenth century did its part in subjecting rural society to outside supervision'.⁷⁵⁹

The Church's ascendancy in a period of identity redefinition on the part of French Canadians. It was a time in which, as Dumont notes, 'from the economy to the forms taken by power, the whole social structure was redesigned; ideologies reshaped the direction of the community; the reconstruction of the past became a new urgency; literature became a national institution'.⁷⁶⁰ The Church was perfectly positioned to assume the leading role in a French Canadian society that had withdrawn into itself, 'excluded from the large-scale exploitation of natural resources, from the local use of foreign sources of capital, and from management positions in large-scale industry and the North American commercial space'.⁷⁶¹

The Church was worried that its French Canadian constituency would lose its numerical preponderance if the mass exodus toward the United States was not stopped. The clergy, therefore, became actively involved in the promotion of an ascetic life of traditional family values, religious observance, and tilling of the land. In the aftermath of the rebellion, this ideology of survival ('la survivance') took shape as a cultural movement of resistance in social conditions of politically- and economically-imposed inferiority. The ground for this ideological offensive had been prepared long before

⁷⁵⁹ Ibid.

⁷⁶⁰ Dumont, *Genèse de la société québécoise*, 191. (my translation)

⁷⁶¹ David Dupont, *Une brève histoire de l'agriculture au Québec* (Montréal: Fides, 2009), 36. (my translation)

1837, as the Church gained a degree of clerical control over education, ecclesiastical nominations, parish appointments, and the establishment of the diocese of Montreal. The continuous loyalty it had shown the British Empire through pastoral letters and sermons during the French Revolution and the War of 1812 proved that it could be a powerful ally in managing the domestic affairs of the colony.

In 1854, the structural position of the Church in the peasant society was reinforced as one of the two pillars of the old French Canadian ruling coalition—the seigneurial class—was abolished. The influence of the seigneurs, undoubtedly, did not disappear overnight, as they left their mark on the landscape of the province, its architecture, and the toponymy of places.⁷⁶² As mentioned before, a large portion of the peasantry also continued to pay an annuity to seigneurs. Moreover, many of the social, economic, and symbolic dimensions of seigneurial authority persisted in an informal status, with former seigneurs often ending up in important positions within municipal governments and in provincial politics, for instance as mayor, deputies, or ministers.⁷⁶³ And yet, the unity of interests that the seigneurs as a class had had in the past, if there was any such unity, was lost forever.

With the British government holding the door open, the Church was now free to fill the power vacuum left by the professional petty bourgeoisie and the formal disappearance of the seigneurial class. Its social conservative agenda encompassed all aspects of the peasant society, from the development of its productive forces to its patterns of consumption. At the top of this agenda, figured prominently the promotion of

⁷⁶² Grenier, *Brève histoire du régime seigneurial*, 212–213.

⁷⁶³ *Ibid.*

agriculturalism. The ultramontane clerical elite ‘wanted to see the people maintaining its presence on the North American territory by land cultivation’.⁷⁶⁴ Its agenda also included a critique of the state, in competition with the Church for influence, and a rejection of liberal principles and capitalism.⁷⁶⁵ The parish was the Church’s ‘territorial stronghold’, from which it ‘presided over the organization of the spiritual life, certainly, but also of the political and economic life [...]’. In farm families communities, the Church became, to borrow a phrase from Guy Laforest (1986), a kind of “collective sculptor” who shaped the souls and organized community, and in particular the public space’.⁷⁶⁶

Where the clergy exerted its influence over the peasantry, the development of industry and commerce so eagerly desired by politicians and urban leaders was checked by a conservative ideology which extended beyond social mores to include agrarian questions. The Church’s agrarianism was a direct response to the development of industrial capitalism in the cities, which threatened the basis of its symbolic authority and the traditional way of life that it sought to preserve. As a result, its agrarianism ‘meant to denounce unemployment, poverty, and the harsh conditions of the urban proletariat [...], the immorality of cities and to exalt, in turn, the grandeur of agriculture and rural values. [...] From this superiority of country life, it was concluded that the French people had an agricultural vocation. Industry and commerce diverted it away from this vocation’.⁷⁶⁷ This so-called agricultural vocation may very well have ‘served as an alibi for the Francophone community which faced an economic development that

⁷⁶⁴ Dupont, *Une brève histoire de l’agriculture au Québec*, 28–30. (my translation)

⁷⁶⁵ Ibid. (my translation)

⁷⁶⁶ Ibid., 30–35. (my translation)

⁷⁶⁷ Dumont, *Genèse de la société québécoise*, 268–270. (my translation)

eluded it'.⁷⁶⁸

A Creative Process of Change in Production

That economic development eluded the peasant society is a fact testified to by the absence of significant innovation or advancement in the farming techniques of French Canadian agriculture before the last quarter of the nineteenth century. Until that time, with the exception of a few regions settled by English-speaking communities, labour-productivity was stagnant throughout Quebec. Farm animals were undernourished; columnists repeatedly complained of poor yields. In 1851, a report of the agricultural society of Beauharnois concluded that 'there exists in Quebec two systems, the English system and the French system. The fundamental principle of English agriculture is the improvement of the soil, according to the most approved systems [...]. The French Canadian system, on the contrary, implies the principle (if it is possible to speak so) of soil deterioration'.⁷⁶⁹ In 1879, the naturalist Provancher could still depict French Canadian agriculture as characterized by 'the absence of fertilizer, imperfect drainage, defective ploughing, too few animals, and rarely the practice of accounting'.⁷⁷⁰

G rard Bouchard observed the technical stagnation and low-labour productivity of French Canadian agriculture in a regional study of agriculture in the Saguenay-Lac-Saint-Jean. This region was opened to colonization in 1838, and constituted one of the

⁷⁶⁸ Ibid. (my translation)

⁷⁶⁹ Jean Hamelin and Yves Roby, *Histoire  conomique du Qu bec, 1851-1896* (Montr al: Fides, 1971), 7. (my translation)

⁷⁷⁰ Dumont, *Gen se de la soci t  qu b coise*, 199. (my translation)

main destinations of those who sought to escape rural poverty without leaving the province or becoming wage labourers in urban centres. As Bouchard noted, during the last quarter of the nineteenth century, Saguenay's agricultural techniques and farm implements were almost identical to those of the first quarter of the century. The number of acres that could be cleared in a year had not changed significantly. Selective breeding in animal husbandry was ignored, and the feeding of cows during winter was deficient: at springtime they had to be 'drawn by the tail' out of barns. Pigs and hens were poorly fed too.⁷⁷¹ Crop rotation was basic, with little crop diversity and little care in preparing the soil. Furthermore, Saguenay's farmers 'proved long reluctant to adequately prepare the land by rigorous dripping works, harrowing and levelling'.⁷⁷² In sum, agriculture remained a traditional practice geared toward self-sufficiency, and in which 'changes,' when they did occur 'were very localized and followed highly uneven rhythms'.⁷⁷³

Jean-Pierre Wampach's statistical analysis of agricultural labour productivity in the province as a whole demonstrates that the technical stagnation observed by Bouchard in the Saguenay was not limited to the region. Wampach's statistics show that, up until the 1890s, throughout the whole province, 'agricultural production increased less rapidly than the number of farms, and just as much as subsistence consumption on farms, so that agriculture was unable to generate an agricultural surplus nor, a fortiori, a provincial surplus: the degree of caloric sufficiency remained around 70%. Areas of

⁷⁷¹ Bouchard, *Quelques arpents d'Amérique*, 66–67.

⁷⁷² *Ibid.*, 68. (my translation)

⁷⁷³ *Ibid.*, 59. (my translation)

cultivation grew faster than production, while yield per hectare decreased'.⁷⁷⁴ Most of the nineteenth century, in other words, was characterized by the extension of traditional agricultural practices without a corresponding increase in productivity, 'whether in labour or soil. [...] Agriculture had not fundamentally changed and it just managed to give rural people the nutritional balance that today we would deem of poor quality'.⁷⁷⁵

During the last quarter of the century, this situation, nevertheless, began to change. Indeed, by the 1890s, considerable technical development and an increase in labour-productivity had become apparent. According to Bouchard, what occurred in Saguenauy during this period 'should truly be called a reform of agricultural technology'.⁷⁷⁶ Production shifted from wheat to the dairy industry, there was a diversification crops, and new technologies were introduced, such as the drill, the mower, and the reaper.⁷⁷⁷ With statistics for the province as a whole, Wampach identified a similar take-off in the late nineteenth century: '[a]gricultural production surges forward at the same time as agricultural labour forces decrease. Areas of cultivations shrink too. These movements express a better performance of the agricultural activity: both labour productivity and soil productivity increase'.⁷⁷⁸ Capital invested per worker and per hectare also increased: '[f]armers organize themselves differently, they change their methods, as well as their equipment. Increasingly aimed at commercial markets, production specializes: milk, for example, whose production

⁷⁷⁴ Jean-Pierre Wampach, *Agriculture et développement économique au Québec* (Sainte-Foy: Presses de l'Université Laval, 1992), 13.

⁷⁷⁵ Ibid.

⁷⁷⁶ Bouchard, *Quelques arpents d'Amérique*, 72. (my translation)

⁷⁷⁷ Ibid., 73–74. (my translation)

⁷⁷⁸ Wampach, *Agriculture et développement économique au Québec*, 14.

suddenly doubles between 1880 and 1910 farm'.⁷⁷⁹ As Régis Thibeault explains,

[t]he rise of industrial milk processing occurs between 1870 and 1880. During this period, the number of counted factories increased from 27 to 159. This marks a start in the process of manufacturing butter and cheese in Quebec, which was hitherto based on domestic transformation processes and crafts. [...] During the decade from 1881 to 1891, the growth in the number of factories is also spectacular. In 1891, Quebec has 726 factories composed of nearly 85% of cheese factories [...]. This increase is even more pronounced from 1891 when the total number of butter and cheese factories increased by more than 220%. In Quebec during a single decade, 1,597 new factories were identified, which represents an average of three new factories per week for ten years.⁷⁸⁰

The birth of the dairy industry marks the switch away from extensive agriculture toward capital-intensive and specialized agricultural production.⁷⁸¹ From then on, there was 'a series of transformations that many contemporaries identified as a true revolution in the peasant economy. Very quickly farmers concentrated their efforts on livestock and dairy

⁷⁷⁹ Ibid.

⁷⁸⁰ Thibeault, "Périodisation et spatialisation des débuts de l'industrie laitière au Québec, 1871-1911," 138–139.

⁷⁸¹ Dumont, *Genèse de la société québécoise*, 199; Perron, "Genèse des activités laitières, 1850-1960"; Thibeault, "Périodisation et spatialisation des débuts de l'industrie laitière au Québec, 1871-1911"; Dupont, *Une brève histoire de l'agriculture au Québec*, 37–78; Chatillon, *L'histoire de l'agriculture au Québec*, 40; Jack Little, "Agricultural Progress in Canada East/Quebec: Problems in Measuring Relative Productivity During the Grain-Dairy Transition Period," *Histoire sociale/Social History* 18, no. 36 (1985): 425–31.

production and, soon enough, each parish had a cheese factory'.⁷⁸² The dairy industry had a ripple effect on other crops: as an example, the demand for oats, clover, and hay, the basis of the feed given to dairy cows, rose sharply.⁷⁸³

In the 1860s, the American Civil War increased the demand for French Canadian products: not only oats and barley, but also hay, eggs, butter, poultry, and horses became the object of significant trade. The grain trade was short-lived, however, since the frontier was closed to Canadian agricultural products before the end of the War. Furthermore, the Reciprocity Treaty signed in 1854 expired in 1866. The closing of the border severely hit grain crops, but it shielded other industries from American competition.⁷⁸⁴ In these circumstances, it seemed to contemporary economic actors that milk could replace wheat for good: '[a]fter 1873 and the outbreak of the biggest financial crisis of the century, dairy products are among the few agricultural commodities to difficultly stay the course and be sold abroad. In Quebec parishes, butter factories are built and benefit from the expertise of agronomists out of new agricultural schools'.⁷⁸⁵

There was, in these years, a growing enthusiasm for the prospects of dairy production. While governmental publications encouraged Quebec's farmers to make the transition,⁷⁸⁶ the secretary of the *Montreal Board of Trade* of the day observed that American protectionism was playing against American dairies, offering a chance for

⁷⁸² Bouchard, *Quelques arpents d'Amérique*, 84; 61–62. (my translation)

⁷⁸³ Dupont, *Une brève histoire de l'agriculture au Québec*, 43.

⁷⁸⁴ *Ibid.*, 41.

⁷⁸⁵ *Ibid.*, 41–42.

⁷⁸⁶ Hamelin and Roby, *Histoire économique du Québec, 1851-1896* (Montreal, 196).

cheese manufacturing to develop in Quebec.⁷⁸⁷ As another historian has insisted, there is ‘an almost perfect coincidence between the start of trade protectionism and the creation of the first Quebec mills. The growing demand for cheese on the international market, and especially in the British market, coupled with the growth in demand for dairy products in local urban markets (from 1870) are also important causes of the development of the Quebec dairy industry’.⁷⁸⁸

One cannot understand the development of the dairy industry in Quebec without examining the market conditions that encouraged its emergence. In themselves, however, market conditions fail to explain, in the first place, why peasants abandoned their subsistence agriculture to engage in market-exchanges after having resisted them for so long. Economic actors do not passively respond or adapt to market structures that are imposed from outside;⁷⁸⁹ as agents embedded in social relations and class conflict, they are ‘the ultimate arbiters over the form and direction of social change’.⁷⁹⁰ If French Canadian peasants were not willing to relinquish their traditional methods of agriculture, they did not, however, meekly follow the Church's exhortations to remain on the land, for this inevitably meant a life of impoverishment in over-crowded parishes. The colonization of remote areas of the province did not necessarily provide a more attractive option, for it meant a lifetime of hard work away from the comforts of

⁷⁸⁷ Thibeault, “Périodisation et spatialisation des débuts de l’industrie laitière au Québec, 1871-1911,” 137.

⁷⁸⁸ Ibid.; On these issues see Perron, “Genèse des activités laitières, 1850-1960,” 115; Raymond Duhaime, “Les exportations canadiennes de produits laitiers, 1867 à 1955,” *L’Actualité économique* 23, no. 2 (1957): 242–270; Hamelin and Roby, *Histoire économique du Québec, 1851-1896* (Montreal, 37.

⁷⁸⁹ Mario Handfield, “Review of David Dupont, Une brève histoire de l’agriculture au Québec,” *Recherches sociographiques* 52, no. 3 (2011): 91.

⁷⁹⁰ Teschke, “IR Theory, Historical Materialism and the False Promise of International Historical Sociology,” 28fn.

civilization, on land whose agricultural quality was often dubious: '[d]espite strong support from family networks, Catholic clergy, government, and colonization societies, colonists faced serious difficulties. Arable parts of the Shield and the Appalachians were isolated, and colonization roads proceeded only slowly, making it difficult to obtain supplies and to market potash, pork, and butter'.⁷⁹¹

With every new decade, the number of French Canadian peasants quitting the province for the United States reached new heights: there were 70,000 out-migrants in the 1850s, 100,000 in the 1860s, 120,000 in the 1870s, and 150,000 in the 1880s, when emigration reached its peak.⁷⁹² Clearly, the Church's efforts to keep the peasantry in the countryside had limited effects. Confronted with the limitations of its strategy by this mass migration, and threatened by the growing power of the state and capital, the Church for forced to adopt a new strategy of economic development had to improve economic development in the countryside and thereby lessen the irresistible attraction exerted by industrial centres. The Church sought, indeed, to adapt to changing conditions by embracing the idea that agricultural production could be made profitable without the peasantry having to renounce its Christian values.⁷⁹³

To conciliate two worlds so strongly apart, the Church had no choice but to innovate, eventually shaping the transformation of the peasant society by promoting a particular organizational model for the rural economy: the cooperative model.⁷⁹⁴ The cooperative model offered the promise of an economic development that would respect

⁷⁹¹ Young and Dickinson, *A Short History of Quebec*, 133.

⁷⁹² Lavoie, *L'émigration des Québécois aux États-Unis de 1840 à 1930*, 53.

⁷⁹³ Dupont, *Une brève histoire de l'agriculture au Québec*, 38.

⁷⁹⁴ *Ibid.*, 18.

kinship solidarity and religious customs. The Church then sought to put in place institutions aimed at coordinating the sale and transformation of farms' surpluses through cooperative associations that it helped to diffuse in agricultural parishes,⁷⁹⁵ offering a counterweight to the deprivation that was awaiting wage labourers in the urban centres of Montreal and New England. By providing organizational resources and forms of credit for investments, the cooperative movement came to play a role analogous to the one played elsewhere by the state or banks in contexts of backwardness.⁷⁹⁶

The cooperative movement thus renewed the ability of the Church to exert some influence on the direction taken by the economic development of Quebec's peasant society as it entered the twentieth century.⁷⁹⁷ But the Church was not alone, of course, in seeking to shape the economic development of the province's agriculture. The state, which had developed considerably in the decades following the rebellion, also intervened. It was influenced by 'a more discrete and diffuse current of modernist ideas generated by the movement of economic transformation [...]. This current was represented by representatives of various communities (agronomists, journalists, politicians, civil servants, members of the clergy involved in teaching) eager to see the Quebec countryside opening faster to agricultural progress'.⁷⁹⁸ State interventions contributed to the dissemination of knowledge and provided support for agricultural

⁷⁹⁵ Ibid., 38.

⁷⁹⁶ Alexander Gerschenkron, *Economic Backwardness in Historical Perspective* (Cambridge: Belknap Press, 1962); Selwyn, "Trotsky, Gerschenkron and the Political Economy of Late Capitalist Development."

⁷⁹⁷ For a discussion of the complex relationship between the Church, liberalism and the regulation of poverty, see Fecteau, *La liberté du pauvre*, Chapter 7.

⁷⁹⁸ Courville and Séguin, *Le monde rural québécois au XIXe siècle*, 25.

exhibitions, societies, and journals. The state also undertook ‘further action with the adoption of laws favoring the creation of agricultural unions and cooperatives. It then wanted to give farmers the tools to better face the market economy’.⁷⁹⁹

The importance of cooperatives within Quebec’s economy long remained one of its most distinctive features. Of course, as a form of association and social philosophy, the cooperative was also an important element of European history during the second half of the nineteenth century, as workers and peasants tried to cope with the ‘multiple seizures experienced by civil society in the transition to the industrial world’.⁸⁰⁰ The crucial role that cooperatives played in the ‘late development’ of the province has, however, no parallel. In Quebec, it shaped the process by which the peasant economy switched from subsistence toward capital-intensive agriculture, and constituted ‘the foundation for a Quebec agri-food industry that still bears the imprint of its past’.⁸⁰¹ Far from a ‘natural’ response to market conditions, the cooperative movement that presided over the emergence of the dairy industry testifies to the creative process by which economic agents—the peasantry, church organizations, and the state—decided to engage in ‘modernization’ at a time when industrial capitalism was already well-developed in

⁷⁹⁹ Normand Perron, *L’État et le changement agricole dans Charlevoix, 1850-1950* (Sainte-Foy: Presses de l’Université Laval, 2003), 2.

⁸⁰⁰ Jean-Marie Fecteau, *L’émergence de l’idéal coopératif et l’État au Québec 1850-1914*, Cahier no. 3 (Montréal: Chaire de coopération de l’UQAM, 1989), 11. Another form of popular resistance to market pressures taking roots in Quebec at the same epoch are mutual aid societies, which closely linked ‘the economic protection of mutual aid to an associative culture of solidarity’. See Martin Petitclerc, *Nous protégeons l’infortune: Les origines populaires de l’économie sociale au Québec* (Montréal: VLB Éditeur, 2007), 17. (my translation)

⁸⁰¹ Dupont, *Une brève histoire de l’agriculture au Québec*, 18; See also Benoît Lévesque, *Un siècle et demi d’économie sociale au Québec: plusieurs configurations en présence (1850-2007)*, Collection Études théoriques – no ET0703, Cahiers du Centre de recherche sur les innovations sociales (CRISES/ÉNAP/ARUC, 2007).

various regions of North America.

Conclusion

The underdeveloped state of French Canadian agriculture in the second half of the nineteenth century is striking. As I have suggested in this chapter, key among the many constraints that impeded the long-term economic development of Quebec's agriculture is the payment of annuities by ex-censitaires which put a strain on peasants' agricultural capital. As late as 1930, 60,000 of them had not yet reimbursed the capital and were still paying the annuity. Another impediment was the specific patterns of inheritance and long-term demographic growth associated with the French Canadian peasant household's dynamic of social reproduction. Given the limited supply of land, the priority given to familial reproduction by peasant households put limits on the consolidation of landholdings and impeded capital-intensive progress, for instance, by working against the ability of enterprising farmers to maintain herds of stock, vary crop-rotation methods, or accumulate capital to provide a source of investment.

The third reason evoked to explain the long term 'backwardness' of Quebec's peasant economy is the structural position held by the Catholic Church. The Church emerged from decades of class struggle with the professional petty bourgeoisie, the seigneurial class, the English merchants, and the British authorities as a powerful social agent. Here, my emphasis was on the agrarian ideology of survival promoted by the clergy as a form of cultural resistance. This ideology was largely crafted as a response to

the transformation of the province's urban areas into industrial centres and the attraction exerted by New England's industrial capitalism over French Canadian peasants which threatened the Church's traditional place within society. The strategy of *survivance* called for self-sufficiency; it demanded the practice of self-discipline and abstention from indulgence, and promoted the value of tradition, ultimately acting as a bulwark against capitalist imperatives. The peasantry, however, did not passively embrace this conservative ideology, but exited the province on mass or sought out new frontiers of colonization. The Church was soon forced to adapt to the new realities of late development, which it did through the promotion of the cooperative movement. Through this analysis, many aspects of the creative process by which social agents confronted the challenges that emerged from the encounter between Quebec's pre-capitalist peasant economy and the developing world of industrial capitalism have been identified.

Conclusion

This thesis has offered a comparative account of the historical processes and social agents that determined the socio-economic transformations of agricultural production in Upper and Lower Canada in the early modern period. More generally, it endeavoured to reconstitute the social reproduction strategies of French Canadian peasants and their Upper Canadian counterparts and situate them within a constellation of international, intersocietal, and imperial social forces. In seeking to theorize the shift from extensive- to capital-intensive farming practices in these two different contexts, I found that, from the early nineteenth century onwards, the breakthrough to industrial capitalism in the northeast United States created a new international reality, irrevocably transforming the system-wide conditions in which subsequent agricultural evolution was to take place in neighbouring regions. While Upper Canadian rural households took advantage of these new structural opportunities by increasing the portion of their agriculture dedicated to the market, giving up subsistence production for the production of cash crops, particularly wheat, and readily adopting the new technologies made available to them, Lower Canadian peasants systematically avoided market imperatives by holding to their former subsistence farming practices, emigrating to the United States, or seeking out new plots of land on the frontiers of colonization. These findings point to the radically diverging outcomes of the resolution of the problem of late development.

Historians have sometimes been tempted to explain this differential resolution of

the problem of late development within similar structural pre-conditions by emphasizing differences in cultural *mentalités*. English Canadians are described as being particularly dynamic and entrepreneurial, while French Canadians are criticized for having an inherently conservative outlook opposed to change and progress. My thesis, however, has challenged these deep-rooted assumptions about cultural *mentalités*, as well as the allegedly static nature of peasant communities and their inherent inability to transform. It has done so through a radical historicization of social-property relations and class struggles premised on a comparative perspective that examined the international dimension of social change in Quebec and Ontario, by considering the set of pressures and possibilities generated by the northeastern United States, the American mid-west, England, and France. Crucially, this analysis has highlighted the game-changing importance of the development of industrial capitalism in New England on the conditions of social reproduction for ‘late developers’ like Upper Canada and Lower Canada. Efforts on the part of the social classes and political actors of these two provinces to adapt to the new international reality gave rise to creative processes of resistance and innovation, with different outcomes in each province.

The first settlements of British Loyalists in Upper Canada were a direct offspring of the American Revolution. From the time of its formation, the province’s destiny was intimately linked with that of its southern neighbour, who provided it not only with settlers, but eventually—following the development of industrial capitalism in the northeastern United State—with manufactured goods and farm implements. Upper Canada was also closely connected to the economic evolution of its eastern neighbour,

Lower Canada, where an agricultural crisis struck the countryside as the poor methods of cultivation associated with extensive types of farming had, by the early nineteenth century, exhausted the soil. The misfortune of Lower Canada contributed to the prosperity of Upper Canada, as rural household producers in the latter province were quick to seize upon market opportunities and dedicate ever larger areas of their farms to the commercial production of wheat destined for export to Lower Canada.

This was made possible by the ‘independent’ character of these household-producers in the absence of formal state obligations and political subordination. Since their production was not customary or communally regulated, they could readily adopt new technologies when they were presented with the opportunity to do so. As such, no strict limits imposed by social-property relations on long-term patterns of economic development prevented them from jumping on the capitalist bandwagon when a new material culture and productive possibilities were spawned by the development of industrial capitalism in the northeastern United States. In this sense, Upper Canadian independent household-producers benefited from the ‘advantage of backwardness’, that is, the possibility for late developers to skip developmental ‘stages’ and achieve sustained capitalist growth without having to go through the same processes as early developers.⁸⁰² For Upper Canadian household-producers to become petty-commodity producers dependent on the law of value for their reproduction, the threat of dispossession from the means of subsistence through extra-economic processes had not

⁸⁰² For discussions of this issue, see, inter alia, Gerschenkron, *Economic Backwardness in Historical Perspective*; Knei-Paz, *The Social and Political Thought of Leon Trotsky*; Justin Rosenberg, “Isaac Deutscher and the Lost History of International Relations,” *New Left Review*, 1996, 3–15; Selwyn, “Trotsky, Gerschenkron and the Political Economy of Late Capitalist Development.”

been necessary; the attractions of material culture and the improved quality of living it promised were enough.

In Upper Canada, like in the northeastern United States, essentially capitalist farming developed prior to the advent of industrial capitalism in urban areas. Upper Canadian households switched away from an extensive form of agriculture, exclusively premised on the geographical expansion of cleared land, to a hybrid agriculture combining both the extensive dimension of the former and the capital-intensive dimension of capitalist agriculture. At that time, extensive capital-intensive types of agriculture were unique to the North American context, where the almost unlimited land supply provided by westward colonization made it possible. This type of agriculture was ‘capitalist’ in the sense that it was subordinated to the law of value, but in a contradictory manner: farm producers owned the ‘means of production’, but they depended on family labour and machinery to increase labour-productivity, instead of on the control and exploitation of wage workers, as would be the case with more directly capitalist types of production. In this sense, they were ‘petty-commodity producers’ rather than capitalists of the agrarian sector. They were, in other words, market-dependent as producers, but not market-dependent with respect to their access to the means of production.

Lower Canada offered quite a contrast to Upper Canada. While industrial capitalism began to develop earlier in Montreal than in the urban centres of Upper Canada, ‘capitalist’ agriculture—read petty-commodity agriculture—developed much later in Lower Canada. These developmental differences are best accounted for by

examining the distinctive social-property relations and class struggles that characterized both provinces. In Upper Canada, the merchant class joined colonial administrators and military officers within the land/office state to preside over the distribution of land among the members of the ruling class. The *timing* of colonization was a decisive factor in enabling this specific strategy of accumulation and territorialisation: ruling over a pioneer frontier in a state of absolute backwardness at the time of Upper Canada's formation, merchants and officers fell back upon speculative practices rather than the productive use of the land as their main way to reproduce and enrich themselves, not least of all because the absence of a large pool of wage labourers precluded the development of exploitative capital/labour relationships.

Because the colonization of Lower Canada dated back to the bygone era of New France, the province was already well-populated at the time when Upper Canada was only beginning to be settled. Its soil was already exhausted. No land/office state developed there, but a set of colonial institutions that shared some, though not all, of the properties of the French absolutist state. As a result of the conquest of these institutions by the British Empire in 1763, the French Canadian ruling class was expelled from lucrative commercial connections and from positions of influence within the colony. The seigneurial class that had presided over the settlement of the colony since its origins was then left with little other choice than to rely upon their landed estates to ensure their reproduction by 'squeezing' more surpluses from the peasantry. The doors of the state were similarly closed to the French Canadian professional petty-bourgeoisie of notaries, advocates, doctors, innkeepers, and small merchants who had aspirations of social

mobility for themselves and their people.⁸⁰³ Excluded from economic networks, they nevertheless participated actively in the affairs of the state through the elected Assembly that was granted to the colony by the British authorities in 1791.

The impact of the introduction of the new legislature on the political development of the province can hardly be exaggerated. By this action, a first step toward the formation of what Robbie Shilliam calls the ‘impersonalized individual’ political subject of capitalism was realized,⁸⁰⁴ laying the groundwork for the gradual development of a capitalist state which, under the auspices of the British authorities, and in accordance with the desire of the English merchant class to see private property rights consolidated, pursued the reform of the provincial dual system of tenure that had been created with the Act of 1791. Meanwhile, the peasantry gave full support to the electoral struggle of the French Canadian professional petty bourgeoisie, who secured the control of the Assembly during the fifteen years preceding 1837. When it became clear, in 1837, that no further political progress could be made through electoral means, peasants and professionals joined together in an armed rebellion that was military crushed by British troops and Loyalist militias.

The aftermath of the Rebellion was a time of considerable transformation for the colonial state, which saw all branches of its power grow in size and scope. The Catholic

⁸⁰³ That said, French Canadians were not, of course, totally excluded from the ruling apparatus of the province, as the criminal justice system and local state agencies did offer them some opportunities of (limited) social advancement. Fyson, “The Conquered and the Conqueror: The Mutual Adaptation of the Canadiens and the British in Quebec, 1759-1775”; Donald Fyson, “Between the Ancien Régime and Liberal Modernity: Law, Justice and State Formation in Colonial Quebec, 1760–1867,” *History Compass* 12, no. 5 (2014): 412–32.

⁸⁰⁴ According to which ‘the right to own and dispose of private property’ was ‘unencumbered with wider social duties’, by opposition to ‘personalized, directly communal rights and duties over property’. Shilliam, *German Thought and International Relations*, 21.

Church too was able to re-organize its institutions and expand its activities considerably. To do so, it benefited from the weakening of its rivalries, which had occurred through the abolition of the seigneurial regime and the military defeat of the forces of republicanism that left their leaders imprisoned or in exile. Rewarded for the loyalty that it had shown to the British Empire since the Conquest, the Church was in a perfect position to fill the social power vacuum. Meanwhile, peasants and professionals found something to fight for in the cultural realm, where the Church exerted considerable intellectual and moral leadership in promoting the agrarian vocation of the French nation.

At that time, the face of town and country had changed considerably since the beginning of the century. Rural seigneuries were beginning to feel cramped as the peasant population had grown at a rapid pace. The land supply, however, was limited by the political decision of the British authorities to circumscribe the extent of the seigneurial territory to the area already under that mode of tenure in 1791. New concessions were made under the free and common socage tenure in townships, where land had to be bought from monopolistic land companies and was often sold at expensive prices. Too expensive, in any case, for peasants who were used to living from subsistence agriculture with only limited participation in markets. Where neoclassical economists would expect individual peasants to adopt a 'rational' behavior of utility and profit maximization by embracing market-exchanges in order to acquire the means to purchase land for themselves and their children, the peasantry, on the contrary, resisted market imperatives through a three-pronged strategy of territorialization (out-migration

to the United States, to the province's urban centres, and to pioneer frontiers).

The peasantry's refusal to subordinate itself to capitalist discipline despite the severe crisis of its traditional dynamic of social reproduction fits with one of the observations drawn by Robert Brenner from his study of European social history: once established, 'class structures tend to be highly resilient in relation to the impact of economic forces; as a rule, they are not shaped by, or alterable in terms of, changes in demographic or commercial trends'.⁸⁰⁵ In another form of resistance, part of the peasantry embraced the conservative agrarian ideology of the *survivance* proposed by the Catholic Church. Not all peasants, however, accepted the frugal and ascetic destiny awaiting them if they were to follow the Church's exhortation to till ever smaller plots of land in their over-crowded parishes, or to leave for marginal land with little potential for agriculture in remote areas recently opened to colonization.⁸⁰⁶

The sources of clerical organizations' social power in those days rested on the numerical superiority of the French Canadian rural population, who provided the Church with its wealth (tithes and voluntary labour), its influence with political parties and the government, and an army of loyal supporters. The Church thus had a strong interest in keeping the peasantry on the land. However, the industrialization of the province's urban areas, especially Montreal, together with the industrialization of New England, provided peasants with opportunities to escape rural poverty. It is not clear, however, whether the life that was awaiting landless peasants-cum-wage workers in the towns was a great deal

⁸⁰⁵ Brenner, "The Agrarian Roots of European Capitalism," 31.

⁸⁰⁶ The Saguenay-Lac-Saint-Jean, a fertile enclave bordered by forests and mountainous massifs in the Canadian Shield north of the St. Lawrence River, was the exception. The region was, however, quite far from any other settlement, and cut off from civilization.

better than that in the countryside, but it was, in any case, the option chosen by many: 440,000 inhabitants left the province between 1850 and 1880.⁸⁰⁷ Clearly, the forces of attraction of industrial capitalism were winning over the Church's efforts at retaining the peasantry on the land. For clerical organizations, there was, therefore, no 'advantage of backwardness' of which they could avail themselves, but only the disadvantage of facing a specific system of power relations—capitalism—constitutive of a distinctive social process that melted 'all that is solid into air'.

Nor did 'advantages of backwardness' await the peasantry. The position of political and economic inferiority in which peasants had been confined since the Conquest—formally subordinated, as a class, to seigneurs appropriating their surpluses and, as a 'nation', to the British authorities—imposed strict limits on the likelihood that they could share in the fruits of capitalism on an equal footing. It has been wrongly assumed by some historians that the conservative *mentalité* of the French Canadian peasantry was what maintained them in a state of backwardness. The inverse is, in fact, true, for it was the state of backwardness in which they were confined by their political and economic subordination that led them to grasp onto conservative forms of cultural resistance. Only by taking into account the specific social conditions under which peasants participated in class struggle can the attraction exerted by the Church's ideological offensive be explained adequately.

The Church itself had designed its program (family, religion, land, and labour) as a response to the development of industrial capitalism that threatened to dislocate

⁸⁰⁷ Lavoie, *L'émigration des Québécois aux États-Unis de 1840 à 1930*, 53.

traditions and dissolve the social fabric. In these times of hardship, the anti-capitalism of *la survivance* met with the peasantry's agreement. The logic of familial reproduction among the peasantry had prevented the consolidation of large holdings and the accumulation of capital, leaving peasants at a great disadvantage if they were to abandon their subsistence agriculture to enter commercial farming. But harsh exploitation was also awaiting them in industrial centres, where those who emigrated ended up filling the ranks of a burgeoning proletariat. In agriculture, as in commerce, industry, or finance, even if the most ambitious members of the peasantry had wanted to start-up capitalist ventures, they would not have been able to compete with English and American capital.

The geopolitically uneven and socially combined development of various regional realities—the French Canadian peasant society, urban centres such as Montreal, industrial capitalist New England, and pioneer Upper Canada—gave rise in Lower Canada to a complex set of social relations in which the Church emerged as a leading agent in shaping long-term patterns of economic evolution. Repelled by the deleterious effects of capitalism, the Church and the peasantry coalesced into a social force dedicated to defending traditions and old ways of living. Emigration and *survivance*, as strategies of reproduction and spatial occupation, were substituted for the modernizing drive found within the industrial centres of North America. The peasantry and the Church could, alas, hold onto these strategies only for a while, however, as they failed to provide a sustainable alternative to capitalist development under conditions of limited land supply and strong demographic growth.

As the pre-capitalist long-term pattern of economic development of French

Canadian agriculture was reaching its limits, clerical organizations opened up to the idea that changes in production were necessary. A compromise was found between the preservation of Christian values and the need for more ‘efficient’ production: the cooperative model. When put into practice, this model distinguished itself from capitalist farms in that it fostered links of solidarity among direct producers and enabled the creation of collective pools of resources—in terms of finance, technologies, labour, and knowledge—supported by external agencies (the Church and the state). The social welfare of the rural population could subsequently be served by more capital-intensive types of production (especially the dairy industry, which, still today constitutes the backbone of agriculture in Quebec) that did not threaten, in the short term, the social fabric of the French Canadian peasant economy, nor the traditional foundation of the Church’s power.

By looking at how Quebec’s peasants and Ontario’s farmers turned toward capital-intensive agriculture at different moments in the nineteenth century, I have sought to re-ascribe to economic actors their agency as they creatively put forward diverse strategies of social reproduction to cope with a variety of economic, political, cultural, and demographic challenges that are not reducible to the automatic operation of market forces, to fixed cultural *mentalités*, or to ‘natural’ movements of population. In speaking of the development of capital-intensive agriculture in the two provinces, I emphasized the unevenness of the timing, not least because settler-colonization in various parts of central Canada occurred at different moments, with different paces, and with different people. These people also brought with them distinctive cultural and

institutional baggage, among which were divergent conceptions about tenurial arrangements that contributed to shaping different agrarian property settlements in Ontario and Quebec. But these peoples did not act within the boundaries of clearly delimited states impervious to what was occurring elsewhere in the world. As such, the interplay of class conflicts within each society could only be understood within the broader geo-territorial configuration that constituted an inescapable dimension of social change in both provinces: it has been one of the main contentions of this dissertation that once capitalism had set off in Britain, the conditions of its development elsewhere in the world changed radically; the development of industrial capitalism in the north-eastern United States had no less epoch-making implications for the long-term economic evolution of various regions of North America and beyond.

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