

James Livesey, *Provincializing Global History: Money, Ideas, and Things in the Languedoc, 1680-1830*. New Haven: Yale University Press, 2020. ix + 214 pp. Figures, notes, and index. \$45.00 (hb). ISBN: 978-0-3002-3716-0.

Response by James Livesey, National University of Ireland Galway

It is a genuine pleasure to write in response to such generous reviews of my work. I am so pleased that the reviews acknowledge the scope of the argument as well as the archival base on which that argument turns. In some cases colleagues have expressed my view on particular points more succinctly and directly than I have myself, even sometimes when disagreeing with that view. My thanks to them for their collegiality and critical fellowship.

I would like to take this opportunity to pick up issues of general concern that are reflected across the reviews, and I hope colleagues will forgive me if I do not respond to every point of detail that they have. That would be a burden on readers and a book has to stand on its own two feet without needing to be propped up by the author. There are four themes that I would like to say something about in this forum: social categories, methodological issues in economic history and the social sciences generally, capitalism, and finally debates in French economic history.

Erika Vause has noticed that I use the term “subaltern” twenty-five times and remarks that such a load-bearing concept deserves definition, which is entirely fair. A little intellectual autobiography may help here. When I started this project, I thought it was about peasants and technological capacity and was very taken with the work on households that had been done in the *Journal of Peasant Studies* in the seventies.[1] What I was trying to do was establish the adaptive capacity of peasants and small farmers. That framing collapsed on contact with the archive, mirroring what has happened to peasant studies. I suspect any essentialist social category would suffer the same fate once one tried to use it as an explanatory element as opposed to an interpretative device.

As is obvious from the title of the book, I found the route out of my problem through the scholarship on agrarian India and by Indian scholars on social and intellectual history.[2] In fact, the book is in debt to those wonderful bodies of scholarship in another way as well. The tension in Indian historiography between the archivally-inspired social history work, and the more theoretically inflected diasporic literature, often played out around the meaning of the subaltern and its cultural content, dramatized for me the challenge I was facing of genuinely capturing what was going on while being able to articulate the implicit normative dynamics created by innovation. Behaviour can have normative and philosophical consequence without being articulated in those registers. Subalterneity is a relationship of bounded agency, not an identity. Many elements of a social assemblage can become subalterns. Conceptualising a dynamic relationship between elites and subalterns is easy, illuminating actual relationships of subalternity with any degree of credibility is hard. So one cannot define the subaltern, because

it isn't any thing, it posits a relationship for which I hope I have offered some grounds to take seriously in the context of the Languedoc in the eighteenth century. The core of the book explores the specific spaces of agency for subalterns, and the argument is about the consequence of that exploration. The province is a great frame because it stages the interaction between elites and subalterns. It would of course be hopelessly naïve to ignore the difference between subalternity and domination; my argument is that the relationship in my case study became communicatively ordered and normatively regulated. It is a matter of judgement, but I respectfully disagree with colleagues who see more evidence for domination and resource extraction in this area. I see some, though not as much, of the same adventure and dynamism in these rural lives as Peter Linebaugh, Julius Scott, Niklas Frykman and Nathan Perl-Rosenthal see among sailors.[3] My challenge to those who see nothing but domination and resource extraction in this world would be to account for the features of growth and democratisation.

Gender was always at the forefront of my concerns in the research for this book and in conceptualising the non-elite actors whose behaviour I was most concerned with. When I look at the work of colleagues such as Clare Crowston and Sheilagh Ogilvie I recognise that my archival strategy did not serve my ends well in this regard, something Rebecca Spang pointed out to me some time ago.[4] If I were doing this again, I would at least try to work with the notarial archives and do a deeper dive into one or two towns in the Aude or the Hérault. Those sources would be more likely to reveal traces of female agency than the official and semi-official records that I rely on. I can only plead that the kilometres of unexplored archival material for the Estates particularly are very hard to turn away from. I should also note here that I think I have overdrawn the contrast between the local and the universal and Emma Rothschild's comments point to a Mediterranean mediating zone that needs to be taken seriously.

This is a very interdisciplinary book, highly engaged with work in the social sciences contiguous to history, as well as work in the history and philosophy of science, and I find it a little sad that should be in any way remarkable. The language of risk, and rent seeking, and the work on innovation and value that is cited in the book, are very mainstream features of fields like economic history, and were recently part of the professional concern of all working historians. Another element in the background of the intellectual machinery of this book is a concern with the issues around democratic transition articulated by Barrington Moore and then further conceptualised by Theda Skocpol.[5] Again, this is mainstream Weberian social science. If we are to engage with the larger questions of change through time, I feel we need to be able to use these concepts and work in those borderlands. It is worth noting that the equilibrium models and rationality assumptions that made some work, in economics especially, so frustrating to engage have become less hegemonic than they may have been some years ago, and the engagement with economics and political science is much more of an exchange than it may have once been. The work by Mariana Mazzucato on public goods, and Kate Raworth on dynamic economic models I find particularly useful, and closer to home the California School of institutional and cultural economics, and the associated analytic narrative strategy, have been around for a long time.[6]

Gail Bossenga, in her useful framing of the book in debates on the Great Divergence, comments that it helps to explain "self-sustaining growth made possible by industrial capitalism". When I began this project that is exactly what I thought it would do, but on the evidence of social

innovation in eighteenth-century Europe, which long precedes the Industrial Revolution, I am now of the view that capitalism is a highly contingent outcome of the revolutionary era (I have started to explore this further in a recent article in *Critical Historical Studies*).^[7] The topic is too big to address fully in a forum like this, but I'd like to throw out some ideas to the research community, all of which need more work of course. I think a lot of people are aware that we use the term capitalism in ways that are in tension with one another; as a specific and historically contingent form of economic life and as a portmanteau term to mean the modern economy (and in some forms of economics that economy has laws akin to those of physics). As Jürgen Kocka has pointed out the concept of capitalism emerges only in the 1850s, and it is a real historical problem to explain why capital became the regulative principle that determined value and meaning in a complex communicative order.^[8] From the standpoint of the intellectual historian, there were competing articulations of utility, and even alternatives to utility, as the evaluative horizon for collective action. How money, capital, and utility maximisation became the intellectual foundations for capitalist realism is not entirely clear (and this is an important research agenda). The problem is radicalised by the obviously racialised elements of capitalism. Hank Gonzalez's *Maroon Nation*, to take one example, speaks to the agrarian focus of my own, but the possibilities for agency that he explores are radically different to those of the eighteenth-century Languedoc.^[9] Bronwen Everill's recent *Not Made by Slaves: Ethical Absolutism in the Age of Abolition* is a good example of the kind of nuanced and specific explorations of the construction of capitalism, and the normative orders around it, that we need to make progress in this domain.^[10]

As will probably be obvious, the project I am working on now is precisely to explore this terrain and to try to understand capitalism in this historically specific way. The contributors to the recent special issue on the history of capitalism and the French Revolution in *French History*, as well as colleagues such as Hannah Callaway and Rafe Blaufarb have advanced this field enormously.^[11] Clearly this is not a comprehensive list and my apologies to anyone working in this area to whom I have not referred.

Which brings me to the last point and the one I will say the least about, which is placing the Languedoc in the long-running debate on French economic performance. There are optimistic and pessimistic schools of thought on this (Peter Jones and Gail Bossenga note many of the contributors) but there is no conclusion as they really don't speak to the same problems. If raising GDP, wages, or mechanisation is your benchmark, then the comparison with the UK is not a happy one for France. If on the other hand the provision of public goods, welfare, or creating high-value industries is your concern France does better. I hope that as we get a more historically specific understanding of the institutions of economic life, we will have more consensus on what are the important categories of judgment.

I want to repeat my thanks to my colleagues for careful attention they have brought to my book. It does marry a lot of explanatory ambition to a diverse archival base and frames it all in a very particular understanding of the agenda of global history, so I am aware it is not an easy read, but I hope it was an interesting one.

NOTES

[1] See for example Mark Harrison, "The peasant mode of production in the work of A.V. Chayanov," *Journal of Peasant Studies* 4 (1977): 323-336; Diana Hunt, "Chayanov's model of peasant household resource allocation," *Journal of Peasant Studies*, 6 (1979): 247-285.

[2] For an illuminating, and concise, account of this work see Vinay Lal, "Review: Subaltern Studies and Its Critics: Debates over Indian History," *History and Theory* 40 (2001): 135-148. I should also thank Nandini Bhattacharaya for her sustained critical engagement with me on these topics.

[3] Peter Linebaugh and Marcus Rediker, *The Many-Headed Hydra: Sailors, Slaves, Commoners, and the Hidden History of the Revolutionary Atlantic* (London: Verso, 2000); Julius S. Scott, *The Common Wind: Afro-American Currents in the Age of the Haitian Revolution* (London: Verso, 2018); Niklas Frykman, *The Bloody Flag: Mutiny in the Age of the Atlantic Revolution* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 2020); Nathan Perl-Rosenthal, *Citizen Sailors: Becoming American in the Age of Revolution* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 2015).

[4] Clare Haru Crowston, *Fabricating Women: The Seamstresses of Old Regime France, 1675-1791* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2001); Sheilagh Ogilvie, *A Bitter Living: Women, Markets, and Social Capital in Early Modern Europe* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003).

[5] Barrington Moore, *Social Origins of Dictatorship and Democracy: Lord and Peasant in the Making of the Modern World* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1967); Theda Skocpol, *States and Social Revolutions: A Comparative Analysis of France, Russia and China* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1979).

[6] Mariana Mazzucato, *The Value of Everything: Making and Taking in the Global Economy* (London: Allen Lane, 2016); Kate Raworth, *Doughnut Economics: Seven Ways to think like a 21st-Century Economist* (London: Random House, 2017).

[7] James Livesey, "An Alternative Genealogy for Global Capitalism: The Rhine Becomes an Inland Sea, 1792-1815," *Critical Historical Studies* 6 (2019): 223-245.

[8] Jürgen Kocka, *Capitalism: A Short History*; trans. Jeremiah Riemer (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2016), 3.

[9] Johnhenry Gonzalez, *Maroon Nation: A History of Revolutionary Haiti* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2019).

[10] Bronwen Everill, *Not Made by Slaves: Ethical Capitalism in the Age of Abolition* (Cambridge Mass.: Harvard University Press, 2020).

[11] Alexia Yates and Erika Vause eds., Special Issue: Beyond the Dual Revolution: Revisiting Capitalism in Modern France, *French History* 34 (September 2020); Rafe Blaufarb, *The Great Demarcation: The French Revolution and the Invention of Modern Property* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2016); Hannah Callaway, "A Contested Inheritance: The Family and Law from the Enlightenment to the French Revolution," *Law and History Review* 37 (2019): 61-87.

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