

SELLING AMERICAN EMPIRE ON THE EVE OF THE SEVEN YEARS WAR: THE FRENCH PROPAGANDA CAMPAIGN OF 1755–1756*

By the summer of 1755 France and Britain were locked in an undeclared naval and colonial conflict precipitated by clashes over the boundaries of their possessions in North America. As the two powers moved towards a formal declaration of war, the French foreign ministry orchestrated a propaganda campaign designed to present France as the victim of British aggression. The ministry published collections of diplomatic documents, commissioned pamphlets and placed news items in the French and European press. The centrepiece of this public relations initiative was the *Observateur hollandois*, a series of forty-six pamphlets published between September 1755 and February 1759, taking the form of a periodical ostensibly published in the Low Countries. French propaganda sought to influence European diplomatic opinion — to win the sympathy, or at least the neutrality, of other powers in the unfolding conflict. A major initial goal was to keep the Dutch out of the anti-French camp, an imperative that shaped the format of the *Observateur* (the conceit being that the journal constituted letters written by a Dutchman in Paris to a friend in the Netherlands).¹

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¹*L'Observateur hollandois: ou, Lettres de M. Van ** à M. H** de la Haye, sur l'état présent des affaires de l'Europe* (1755–9). Supplementing the edition produced in Paris, which bore an imprint of The Hague, other editions were published in Liège and Vienna. (References below are to the letter number and page of the Liège edition.) Aspects of the propaganda campaign are analysed in David A. Bell, *The Cult of the Nation in France: Inventing Nationalism, 1680–1800* (Cambridge, Mass., 2001), 78–98; David A. Bell, 'Jumonville's Death: War Propaganda and National Identity in Eighteenth-Century France', in Colin Jones and Dror Wahrman (eds.), *The Age of Cultural Revolutions: Britain and France, 1750–1820* (Berkeley, 2002); Edmond Dziembowski, *Un nouveau patriotisme français, 1750–1770: la France face à la puissance anglaise à l'époque de la guerre de Sept Ans* (Oxford, 1998), 62–7; William James Newbigging, 'Propaganda, Political Discourse, and the Battle over French Public Opinion in the Seven Years' War', in James Pritchard (ed.), *Proceedings of the Nineteenth Meeting of the French Colonial Historical Society* (Lanham, 1994). Other
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The propagandists also sought to shape opinion in France. As Section I of this essay will show, in the 1750s a courtly and administrative faction aimed to reorient French geostrategy towards the Atlantic. The propaganda campaign served to marshal the various groups embraced by this faction behind a military stand in America, while seeking to neutralize opponents who wished to keep the monarchy's strategic focus on continental Europe. Publicists tried to engage the interest of politically influential readers with the fate of France's colonies in North America, and in so doing offered a rich strategic and legal rationale for empire. This imperial outlook is examined in Section II. North America's role in shaping the balance of power in Europe was emphasized. New France had to be defended to prevent Britain from acquiring 'universal empire' in America, and monopolizing the trade of the New World, a position that would herald British preponderance in Europe. In contrast to the French diplomats at the Treaty of Utrecht who downplayed the importance of controlling extensive territories in North America, propagandists in the 1750s insisted that the security of France's commercial empire hinged on the ability to hold Canada — a territory they acknowledged had little commercial value. They underlined the territorial dimension of empire by a minute attention to the nature of the boundary disputes dividing France and Britain, using maps to put flesh and blood on the abstractions of American geography. They drew on the law of nations to bolster French claims to territories whose sovereignty was contested by the British, and, in so doing, offered a moral conception of empire that drew neither on religious precept nor on the idea of a civilizing mission.

Directed principally at foreign and courtly opinion, the propaganda also appealed to a wider French readership. Tales of British perfidy, and the strategic grandeur of the vision retailed by the foreign ministry's publicists, resonated with ordinary readers. The campaign marked a milestone in the monarchy's relationship with domestic public opinion, demonstrating the potential of the

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dimensions of French Seven Years War propaganda are explored in Nicholas Rowe, 'Romans and Carthaginians in the Eighteenth Century: Imperial Ideology and National Identity in Britain and France during the Seven Years' War' (Boston College Ph.D. thesis, 1997); Charles Gevaert Salas, 'Punic Wars in France and Britain' (Claremont Graduate School Ph.D. thesis, 1996).

press to mobilize the political nation in wartime. Section III of the essay considers the reception of imperial propaganda within France, and offers some reflections on the receptivity of readers to the conception of empire elaborated in the 1750s. There is a long-standing perception that the French public was apathetic, or even antagonistic, to colonial empire, especially the territorial colonies of North America. This view is based on rather limited evidence, much of it mined from the statements of men of letters, such as Voltaire's famously derisive characterization of Canada as 'a few acres of snow'. The propaganda campaign and the evidence of its reception offers a broader gauge of shared attitudes, but also suggests the difficulty of grasping public sentiment towards empire in a political culture structured in the fashion of absolutist France. Through a brief comparison with Britain, I shall suggest that, while a stable reservoir of support for empire may have been lacking in France, an imperial public could be mobilized given the right context — as it was on the eve of the Seven Years War.

I

Seventeenth- and eighteenth-century states routinely produced printed propaganda to justify their foreign policies. Following established precedents, the French and British governments published pamphlets in the mid 1750s presenting their territorial claims in America, and characterizing the opposing party in a negative light. Both sides also published collections of diplomatic documents, including correspondence, and memoranda of the commissioners established under the Treaty of Aix-la-Chapelle to regulate boundary disputes in America. Such material was intended to persuade a wider European public. As the French *Mémoire concernant le précis des faits* observed: 'Such are the facts. England can deny none of them. It is for Europe to decide'.²

² *Mémoire concernant le précis des faits, avec leurs pièces justificatives, pour servir de réponse aux Observations envoyées par les ministres d'Angleterre, dans les cours de l'Europe* (Paris, 1756), 48. The materials of the boundary commissioners were published under the title *Mémoires des commissaires du roi et de ceux de Sa Majesté Britannique sur les possessions et les droits respectifs des deux couronnes en Amérique*, 4 vols. (Paris, 1755–7). On foreign policy propaganda generally, see Joël Cornette, *Le Roi de guerre: essai sur la souveraineté dans la France du Grand Siècle* (Paris, 1993), 134–5; Joseph Klaitz, *Printed Propaganda under Louis XIV: Absolute Monarchy and Public Opinion* (Princeton, 1976).

One especially important European constituency was Dutch opinion. The United Provinces and Britain were linked by a defensive alliance. By representing Britain as the aggressor, Versailles hoped to undermine the position of the Orangist faction in the Netherlands, and to bolster the forces that supported neutrality in the impending war. A neutral stance was favoured by the States party, and especially the regents of Holland, who 'gave priority to the interests of commerce, shipping, and colonies', and whose thinking was 'pervaded, like the merchants and shipping interests, by widespread anti-British sentiment'.³ It is no coincidence that the first issue of the *Observateur hollandois* appeared in September 1755, the month the comte d'Affry arrived as special ambassador to the States General charged with preserving Dutch neutrality. On 19 February 1756, Louis XV sent a strongly worded letter to the States of Holland warning the Dutch to stay out of the Franco-British quarrel, and arguing that, as Britain was the aggressor, no *causis foederis* existed.⁴ The issue of the *Observateur* which appeared a week later made the same case.

But if Dutch and European diplomatic opinion was a key constituency for French propaganda, it was not the only audience publicists sought to reach. Of the several thousand copies of each issue of the *Observateur* that came off the presses, the foreign ministry took only two hundred.⁵ The rest were distributed, or sold, in France. The propaganda countered the influence of those who championed a Continental strategic orientation. There were divisions at the centre of power about whether an Atlantic or a Continental course was more appropriate for the kingdom. Many continued to see Habsburg Austria, France's traditional rival in Europe, as the chief threat to French security, influence and prestige. There was sharp disagreement as to whether Canada was worth fighting for. The marquis d'Argenson, a former foreign minister, confided to his diary that 'at least if we knew how to lose Canada with good grace, the kingdom would be saved'.

³ Jonathan Israel, *The Dutch Republic: Its Rise, Greatness, and Fall, 1477–1806* (Oxford, 1995), 1081.

⁴ P. Coquelle, *L'Alliance franco-hollandaise contre l'Angleterre, 1735–1788, d'après les documents inédits des archives du Ministère des Affaires étrangères* (Paris, 1902), 64.

⁵ Jacob-Nicolas Moreau, *Mes souvenirs*, ed. Camille Hermelin, 2 vols. (Paris, 1898–1901), i, 60.

The duc de Croÿ opposed fighting a war over America on the grounds that 'to show one's teeth it was necessary to have some'.⁶ Strategic divisions between Atlanticists and Continentalists were overlaid in 1755 by tactical disagreements between those who thought British aggression could best be parried by launching a land war in Europe and those who endorsed a naval and colonial approach. If France seized Hanover or the Austrian Low Countries, some argued, no matter how badly matters went in the colonies, Versailles would have bargaining leverage at the peace. Others argued for a purely naval war, and called for France to avoid entanglements on the Continent.⁷

The propaganda offensive would also serve to rally the various supporters of an Atlantic geostrategy behind a policy of military confrontation with Britain in North America. Those elements at court, and in the ministries of the navy and foreign affairs, who saw France's chief strategic interests residing in the Atlantic encompassed a range of not always harmonious positions. The Atlanticists agreed that Britain represented the principal menace to French interests, that colonies and the navy were the keys to British power, and that France must compete with her rival in these domains. But there were tensions between the supporters of military and commercial visions of colonial empire, between those who saw the continental American colonies as key imperial assets and those who did not. Even among policy makers who championed a territorial North American empire, there were disagreements between those committed to preserving Canada and those who saw France's colonial future primarily in the Mississippi valley.

⁶ René-Louis de Voyer de Paulmy, marquis d'Argenson, *Journal et mémoires du marquis d'Argenson*, ed. E. J. B. Rathery, 9 vols. (Paris, 1859–67), viii, 476; 'Mémoires du duc de Croÿ', Bibliothèque de l'Institut, quoted in Albert Babeau, 'L'Appel à l'opinion publique de l'Europe au milieu du XVIII^e siècle', *Séances et travaux de l'Académie des sciences morales et politiques*, new ser., clxii (1904), 174. On the persistent strength of the Continental strategic orientation, see James Pritchard, *In Search of Empire: The French in the Americas, 1670–1730* (Cambridge, 2004), 234, 403, 420–1.

⁷ 'Projet de conduite dans la situation présente des affaires relativement a l'Angleterre', Mar. 1755: Archives du Ministère des Affaires étrangères, La Courneuve (hereafter AAE), Mémoires et documents (hereafter MD), Angleterre, 41, fos. 4–12; Jean-Louis Favier, 'Doutes et questions sur le traité de Versailles entre le Roi de France et l'Impératrice Reine de Hongrie': AAE, MD, Autriche, 38, fos. 36–71. See also Jonathan R. Dull, *The French Navy and the Seven Years' War* (Lincoln, Nebr., 2005), 36–9.

Chief among the champions of an Atlantic orientation was the maréchal de Noailles, formerly a key foreign policy adviser to Louis XV, and still a member of the Council of State. Since the 1740s, Noailles had been warning about the British threat. In 1755 he described Britain as a nation with pretensions 'to dispute the first rank in Europe'. The British were engaged in a bid for 'universal monarchy' through the domination of Atlantic commerce. 'However chimerical the project of universal monarchy might be', he warned, 'that of a universal influence by means of wealth would cease to be a chimera if a nation succeeded in making itself sole mistress of the trade of America'. According to the maréchal, it was the immense weight of its public debt that drove Britain to seize the wealth of American trade: 'The more England is exhausted by its debts, the more it pursues with ardour and steadfastness the execution of a plan which would place immense wealth at its disposal'. In Noailles's vision, the attempted destruction of the French colonies in North America was only the most recent step in a long history of British efforts to engross the commerce of its neighbours. Britain had already demolished the navy and trade of the Dutch, and had pried open markets in Spanish America; the invasion of the French colonies was a logical next step.⁸

Some of Noailles's claims were echoed by writers linked to the royal Intendant of Commerce, Jacques-Claude Vincent de Gournay. In the mid 1750s Gournay encouraged a group of young authors to translate works of political economy from other languages, and to produce political-economic works of their own. Though I have found no evidence of direct co-ordination, there are striking convergences between some of the writings produced by the Gournay circle and Noailles's message. Pierre-André O'Héguerty suggested that trade was now the main field of strategic struggle. Britain would bully France over the extent of its possessions in America until the French had a navy capable of defending their interests. For this reason it was imperative for the king 'to turn his principal forces towards the sea'.

⁸ On Noailles's views in the 1740s, see *Correspondance de Louis XV et du maréchal de Noailles*, ed. Camille Rousset, 2 vols. (Paris, 1865), ii, 290. For his intervention in 1755, see Adrien-Maurice, duc de Noailles, 'Mémoire sur la conjoncture présente', Feb. 1755: AAE, MD, Angleterre, 52, fos. 103–12. A similar position is taken in Anon., 'Réflexions sur les démêlés survenus entre les cours de France et d'Angleterre': AAE, MD, Angleterre, 41, fos. 44–53.

O'Héguerty called for the development of all the French colonies, especially those in the Caribbean and Louisiana. Georges-Marie Butel-Dumont argued that 'the colonies that the English possess on the continent of North America are the principal source of their strength and of their wealth'. How else could one understand how a kingdom as small as England had acquired so much power? In a statement that resonates with Noailles's language, Butel-Dumont noted that 'it is no less essential for statesmen to occupy themselves with the balance of America, than with that of Europe'. He emphasized the 'jealousy' with which the English viewed the French, 'and the measures by which they tend to make themselves sole masters of these immense countries'.⁹

Neither Butel-Dumont nor O'Héguerty ascribed any special strategic value to Canada. In the vision of some other Atlanticists, however, Canada played a vital military role in the preservation of France's colonial empire. This perspective was argued most trenchantly by Roland-Michel Barrin, marquis de La Galissonnière, who had served as interim governor of New France at the end of the War of Austrian Succession, and was appointed, along with Étienne de Silhouette, as a commissioner to regulate Franco-British boundary disputes in America. For La Galissonnière, colonies were sources of wealth for the state; they caused 'the balance of riches to tilt in favour of France'. Unlike Saint-Domingue or Martinique, however, New France generated little revenue, and

⁹ [Pierre-André O'Héguerty], *Essai sur les intérêts du commerce maritime* (The Hague, 1754), 16–23, 63–4, 135–9, 157–8; [Georges-Marie Butel-Dumont], *Histoire et commerce des colonies angloises, dans l'Amérique septentrionale* (London, 1755), pp. ix–xi, 1–2. Many of the other works published by members of the Gournay circle also touched on the value of colonies. See, for example, Gabriel François Coyer, *La Noblesse commerçante*, revised edn (London, 1756), 98, 107, 142; [Louis-Joseph Plumard de Dangeul], *Remarques sur les avantages et les désavantages de la France et de la Grande Bretagne, par rapport au commerce, & aux autres sources de la puissance des États*, 3rd edn (Leiden, 1754), 5–8; [François Véron Duverger de Forbonnais], *Éléments du commerce*, 2 vols. (Leiden, 1754), ii, 351–99. On the politics of the Gournay circle generally, see Loïc Charles, 'French Cultural Politics and the Dissemination of Hume's *Political Discourses* on the Continent (1750–1770)', in Carl Wennerlind and Margaret Schabas (eds.), *David Hume's Political Economy* (London, 2007); Robin J. Ives, 'Political Publicity and Political Economy in Eighteenth-Century France', *French Hist.*, xvii (2003); Simone Meyssonnier, 'Aux origines de la science économique française: le libéralisme égalitaire', in Gérard Gayot and Jean-Pierre Hirsch (eds.), *La Révolution française et le développement du capitalisme* (Lille, 1989); Antoin E. Murphy, 'Le Développement des idées économiques en France (1750–1756)', *Revue d'histoire moderne et contemporaine*, xxxiii (1986).

nothing like enough to cover its costs. Canada's value was strategic, La Galissonnière argued, not economic. As an ever present threat to the security of British North America, Canada prevented forces in the American colonies from invading the French Caribbean, or from launching a strike into Spanish America. Though Canada would always remain a charge on France, it was 'the strongest dyke that one might oppose to the ambition of the English'. If France were to lose its colonies in America, La Galissonnière warned, it would lose its pre-eminence in Europe. For the English, on the other hand, 'superiority in America and the wealth they would draw from it . . . would very certainly entail superiority in Europe'.¹⁰

Similar claims for the value of the continental American colonies had been a staple of French foreign policy discussions since the beginning of the century, when Louis XIV redefined the mission of Canada and the new colony of Louisiana as one of blocking the spread of British power to the interior of North America, and preventing a British incursion into Mexico. But the French monarchy had never unambiguously embraced such a vision of empire. As Dale Miquelon has shown, it played almost no role in the thinking of the French diplomats who negotiated the Treaty of Utrecht. They concentrated their attention on preserving economic assets, especially access to the North Atlantic cod fisheries, systematically slighting the interior of the continent. Indeed, concessions to Britain on access to the fur trade weakened France's position in the Great Lakes region, and Versailles showed a willingness to give up Louisiana altogether in exchange for the cession of Spanish Santo Domingo. The crown long remained unwilling to apportion the resources necessary to create a strong strategic buffer in North America; the fact that these territories cost more than they returned was regularly adduced as reason to expend no more resources there.¹¹

¹⁰ 'Mémoire sur les colonies de la France dans l'Amérique septentrionale. Par M. le marquis de La Galissonnière', 1751: AAE, MD, Amérique, 24, fos. 110–38. On La Galissonnière, see Roland Lamontagne, 'La Galissonnière et ses conceptions coloniales d'après le "Mémoire sur les colonies de la France dans l'Amérique septentrionale" (décembre 1750)', *Revue d'histoire de l'Amérique française*, xv (1961–2).

¹¹ On Louisiana, see John C. Rule, 'Jérôme Phélypeaux, comte de Pontchartrain, and the Establishment of Louisiana, 1696–1715', in Glenn R. Conrad (ed.), *The French Experience in Louisiana* (Lafayette, 1995). On the French approach at Utrecht, see Dale Miquelon, 'Envisioning the French Empire: Utrecht, 1711–1713', *French Hist. Studies*, xxiv (2001). For the decades following Utrecht, see

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The argument about the importance of Canada made by La Galissonnière was the view of one group rather than the consensus position of all who saw France's strategic future in the Atlantic. The mercantile vision of colonial empire, which tended to devalue uneconomic territorial colonies like Canada, stood as a constant challenge to this perspective. Even among convinced partisans of territorial empire in North America there was disagreement over the viability of Canada. One anonymous foreign ministry memorandum, responding directly to La Galissonnière, argued that while the Louisiana territory and the Ohio offered significant potential as colonies, their fate ought to be separated from that of the St Lawrence valley, which, because of its vulnerability to attack from New England, had no long-term strategic future.¹²

Notwithstanding such disagreements, the partisans of a military-territorial empire centred on Canada seemed well placed to achieve their objectives in the early 1750s. The governor of New France, Michel-Ange Duquesne de Menneville — appointed at the behest of La Galissonnière in 1752 — was committed to establishing a strong French presence in the Ohio territory. He launched a military incursion into the area in 1753. Louis-Antoine Rouillé, the minister of the navy and colonies, backed the move into the Ohio. A new map of North America, which would serve to underwrite French territorial claims in Acadia, was commissioned from royal geographer Jacques-Nicolas Bellin.¹³ Inside the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, the American faction had a supporter in the abbé Jean-Ignace de

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Dale Miquelon, *New France, 1701–1744: A Supplement to Europe* (Toronto, 1987), 10, 53–4.

¹² 'Réflexions sur le mémoire de M. de La Galissonnière': AAE, MD, Amérique, 24, fos. 139–44.

¹³ On Duquesne, see Guy Frégault, *François Bigot, administrateur français*, 2 vols. (Ottawa, 1948), ii, 58, 74. However, Rouillé balked when he saw the cost of the operation, telling Duquesne and intendant François Bigot that the crown might abandon Canada if it could not pay its way. On Bellin's cartographic activities, see Jacques-Nicolas Bellin, *Carte de l'Amérique septentrionale depuis le 28 degré de latitude jusqu'au 72* (n.p., 1755); Jean-Marc Garant, 'Jacques-Nicolas Bellin et son œuvre en Amérique', in Philip P. Boucher (ed.), *Proceedings of the Eleventh Meeting of the French Colonial Historical Society* (Lanham, 1987); Christine Marie Petto, *When France Was King of Cartography: The Patronage and Production of Maps in Early Modern France* (Lanham, 2007), esp. 108.

La Ville, the most influential permanent official in the ministry. Crucially, a policy of military confrontation in America found a supporter (though only temporarily, as it turned out) in Louis XV's mistress, the marquise de Pompadour. Pompadour's influence at court was enormous, and since 1751 she had interested herself increasingly in foreign policy. In 1755 she was at the head of a faction that temporarily threw its weight behind a naval and colonial orientation in French strategy. (Her protégé Jean-Baptiste Machault d'Arnouville replaced Rouillé as minister of the navy and colonies in July 1754; an American strategy would have increased his credit, while diverting resources and power from Pompadour's arch enemy, the comte d'Argenson, who had responsibility for French forces in Europe.) In August 1755, the Council of State resolved, at least provisionally, on an Atlantic strategy in the unfolding war with Britain; it was agreed that France would avoid entanglements on the Continent. While willing to make limited concessions to the British over Acadia, Versailles would insist on French sovereignty in the Ohio. Such resolutions were to be undone by the diplomatic revolution of 1756, and by the outbreak of war in Europe. But these developments still lay in the future when the propaganda campaign was initiated, at Noailles's suggestion, to sell the French position on America. The *Observateur hollandais* was, at least in part, his brainchild; it was written by one of his protégés, Jacob-Nicolas Moreau, and the abbé de La Ville supervised its production. While promoting an Atlantic strategic orientation at home, and concurrently seeking to conciliate Dutch opinion, the *Observateur* elaborated a remarkable vindication of the French imperial presence in North America.¹⁴

¹⁴ On Pompadour, see *Les Correspondances des agents diplomatiques étrangers en France avant la Révolution*, ed. Jules Flammarion (Paris, 1896), 20–2; d'Argenson, *Journal et mémoires*, ed. Rathery, ix, 186. On the resolution to pursue a naval war, see Moreau, *Mes souvenirs*, ed. Hermelin, i, 55. On concessions in Acadia, see memorandum dated 9 May 1755, sent to the duc de Mirepoix, French ambassador in London: AAE, MD, Amérique, 24, fos. 223–4. On de La Ville's influence, see d'Argenson, *Journal et mémoires*, ed. Rathery, ix, 29, 77, 94. On his support for the colonial project in America, see Patrice Louis-René Higonet, 'The Origins of the Seven Years' War', *Jl Mod. Hist.*, xl (1968), 75. On his career and position within the ministry, see Camille Piccioni, *Les Premiers Commis des affaires étrangères au XVII^e et au XVIII^e siècles* (Paris, 1928), 220–7.

II

The *Observateur hollandois* drew on a range of Atlanticist positions, but generally underlined the value of territorial empire in America, and the strategic importance of Canada. Moreau repeated Noailles's argument that the British sought universal empire by monopolizing the commerce of North America and driving out their European competitors. British success in such a design must have stark consequences for the 'balance of commerce of America' and beyond that for the balance of power in Europe. Moreau did not use the term 'balance of commerce' in the ordinary eighteenth-century sense, which referred to the ratio between a nation's imports and its exports. Rather, in a metaphorical extension of the term 'balance of power', he used the expression to suggest the underlying relationship between trade and national might: 'The balance of commerce of nations in America is like the balance of power in Europe', he argues. 'One could even add that those two balances are one and the same. Trade is the strength of states, and a people that practises it exclusively is always sure to tilt the balance of power in its favour'. Moreau also echoed La Galissonnière's line that Canada's value was strategic rather than commercial. 'Canada, that sterile portion of the New World, and which, costing its possessors enormous expenses, gives them back only furs that they purchase far too dearly, is not an object capable of piquing the ambition of this people [the British], or of attracting its interest'. The reason the British wanted Canada was because it stood between them and the French Caribbean colonies: 'That unfruitful country is, as it were, the rampart of the islands from which France draws the riches of its trade. There is the great object of the cupidity of its neighbours'.¹⁵

Such charges were repeated by other propagandists. The goal of the English is unmistakable, wrote Jean-Bernard Le Blanc: 'they wish absolutely to ruin our colonies' and 'to render themselves masters of North America'. 'The balance of power follows that of commerce', he insisted, and if the English could incline it any further in their favour they would become masters of Europe. According to Mathieu-François Pidansat de Mairobert, the object of the English was not just the lands they claimed in

¹⁵ *Observateur hollandois*, iv, 4–5, 17–18, 21; i, 9–10.

Acadia, most of which were ‘unfruitful, sterile and without commerce’. Their goal, rather, was ‘to invade all of Canada, and to prepare thereby the path to the universal empire of America’. Pidansat’s contentions were echoed in the *Mercure de France*. One had only to read the account of Admiral George Anson’s voyage around the world in the early 1740s, the *Mercure* noted, to understand that the ‘vast projects’ of the British ‘embrace all of Spanish America’.¹⁶ The propagandists’ conception of empire remained mercantile to the extent that protecting the commercially important Caribbean colonies was adduced as a key goal. But by contrast with the narrowly economic vision of French negotiators a generation earlier at Utrecht, control over huge swathes of territory was represented as the necessary condition for preserving commercial empire.

French publicists underlined the importance of territorial empire through a close attention to maps. Maps had been sources of contention between European powers in North America for over a century, encoding claims to sovereignty over territories contested by rival powers. The *Extrait des mémoires concernant les limites de l’Acadie*, a commentary on the memoranda of the commissioners appointed to discuss French and British boundary claims, complained about the English commissioners’ assertion that five maps — four of them French — supported British claims in Acadia. It went on to show that this was not the case, and cited English maps that sustained French pretensions. Moreau complained bitterly about a map disseminated in London by one Pallairet, an agent of the Dutch States, which exaggerated the extent of British territories in America. He protested that the map was being displayed at the Stock Exchange and in the coffee houses of the city.¹⁷ Asking readers to ‘be so good as to

¹⁶ [Jean-Bernard Le Blanc], *Le Patriote anglois: ou, Réflexions sur les hostilités que la France reproche à l’Angleterre, et sur la réponse de nos ministres au dernier mémoire de Sa M. T. C., ouvrage traduit de l’anglais de John Tell Truth, par un avocat au Parlement de Paris* (Geneva, 1756), pp. viii–x; [Mathieu-François Pidansat de Mairobert], *Discussion sommaire sur les anciennes limites de l’Acadie et sur les stipulations du Traité d’Utrecht, qui y sont relatives* (Basle, 1755); *Mercure de France* (Oct. 1755), 229–32. The editors of the *Mercure* and Pidansat de Mairobert appear to have cribbed from the same foreign ministry document, a memorandum titled ‘Sur la politique des Anglois pour détruire l’équilibre des puissances en Amérique’, 1755: AAE, MD, Angleterre, 41, fos. 24–7.

¹⁷ *Extrait des mémoires concernant les limites de l’Acadie, et des pièces justificatives sur lesquelles ils sont appuyés* (n.p., [1755]), 11–12; *Observateur hollandois*, iv, 7–9. On maps as vehicles for imperial rivalry, see John Brian Harley, ‘Power and Legitimation in the

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follow me' on a map of North America, he traced an imaginary journey that underlined the unprecedented claims the British were making to territories long considered French:

Place yourself, Sir, at Cape Rosiers at the extremity of the Gaspé, and follow from east to west the southern banks of the St Lawrence river. Are you as far as Quebec? It's not enough; go as far as Montreal; now cross the river and go up the Ottawa river, much beyond Lake Nipissing; now move along the edge of the province of Mississauga from east to west where the English have never traded. There you are arrived at the shores of Lake Huron; cross the strait at Michilimackinac and go as far as the small Fort St Ignace, built by the French. Up to this point you have encountered only the establishments of that nation [the British, according to their recent pretensions].¹⁸

Moreau's description embodies a way of thinking about imperial space that Lauren Benton has described as 'unfolding along routes and corridors that in turn partially followed rivers, coastal passages, sea lanes, and overland paths'. An imaginative form that drew on voyage chronicles or itineraries rather than maps and charts, such a mode of configuring space, Benton suggests, was typical of early modern European empires.¹⁹ What is unusual is Moreau's insistence that the reader locate and trace this itinerary on a map, in essence hybridizing two distinct spatial imaginaries. Techniques such as this may have been intended to make the sources of dispute in America less abstract to an ordinary reader. But Moreau also seems to have wanted French readers to form a connection with the territories themselves. The propagandist's injunction to trace the outlines of putatively French territory — to run one's fingers physically over the map — along with the careful, detailed cataloguing of the names of settlements, rivers, islands, lakes and headlands, is an invitation to identification.

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English Geographical Atlases of the Eighteenth Century', in John A. Wolter and Ronald E. Grim (eds.), *Images of the World: The Atlas through History* (Washington, DC, 1997); Sara Stidstone Gronim, 'Geography and Persuasion: Maps in British Colonial New York', *William and Mary Quart.*, 3rd ser., xlviii (2001); Mary Pedley, 'Map Wars: The Role of Maps in the Nova Scotia/Acadia Boundary Disputes of 1750', *Imago Mundi*, 1 (1998); Petto, *When France Was King of Cartography*, 106–13; Benjamin Schmidt, 'Mapping an Empire: Cartographic and Colonial Rivalry in Seventeenth-Century Dutch and English North America', *William and Mary Quart.*, 3rd ser., xlv (1997).

¹⁸ *Observateur hollandois*, iv, 10–11.

¹⁹ Lauren Benton, 'Spatial Histories of Empire', *Itinerario*, xxx (2006), 22.

A more straightforwardly cartographic representation of imperial space — but one with similar objectives to those of the *Observateur* — featured in a pamphlet published three months earlier. The author, Pidansat de Mairobert, counselled readers that to acquire a just idea of British pretensions in America, they must refer to the map of North America prepared by Jacques-Nicolas Bellin in 1755:

Follow me, I pray you, Sir, on the map. They [the British] establish their limits at 308 degrees of longitude and at 41 degrees 45 minutes of latitude, above the southern point of the Banks of Saint George and of Cape Cod, from which they draw a line which goes to the north-west to cut above Sable Island, from which, continuing to the north, it passes by the tip of Île Royale's Cape North and all of Cape Breton, which it incorporates, from which it would result that Cape Breton would belong to them.²⁰

The *Extrait des mémoires* also recommended that 'it would be a good idea to have at hand a map of Acadia, or even of a large part of North America', when examining the competing British and French claims. For those who did not own such a map, the *Extrait* noted, an excellent one might be found appended to the memorandum published by the king's commissioners for the regulation of borders in Acadia.²¹

The way propagandists used maps suggests, on the one hand, a confidence that readers would be familiar with this mode of representing territory. On the other hand, it was probably intended to address the rather shaky grasp that even many well-informed individuals had on the particulars of American geography. When he noted the capture of Fort Oswego in his diary, the duc de Luynes correctly placed the outpost on Lake Ontario but went on to note that 'this action opens to us a part of Virginia'. Men educated in the *collèges* of the old regime were usually taught geography as an adjunct to history, which meant that they might know the geography of the ancient world better than that of France's American empire. As late as the 1730s there were few maps of the Americas available for sale in France. When Jean Mariette, one of the largest map publishers in France, sold his entire collection of map plates to Gilles Robert de Vaugondy in 1733 the sale included just five American plates. Jacques-Nicolas Bellin produced new maps of

²⁰ [Mathieu-François Pidansat de Mairobert], *Lettre de M. de M... à M. de ... sur les véritables limites des possessions angloises et françoises en Amérique* (n.p., 1755), 4–5.

²¹ *Extrait des mémoires concernant les limites de l'Acadie*, 2.

North America for F.-X. Charlevoix's *Histoire et description générale de la Nouvelle France*, published in 1744. But it was not until the 1750s that inexpensive maps of North America became widely available.²²

In addition to making creative use of maps, propagandists drew on the law of nations, and the modern natural law tradition on which it was based, to ground French claims to empire in America. This represented a departure from the standard language of the Atlanticists, but made sense given the objectives of the propaganda campaign. The law of nations was a logical choice to communicate with European diplomatic opinion, as it was one of the common idioms of European diplomatic culture. The classics of the modern natural law tradition were widely accessible. Jean Barbeyrac's translations of Samuel von Pufendorf's *De iure naturali* and Hugo Grotius' *De iure belli ac pacis*, dating from 1706 and 1724 respectively, established what Richard Tuck has called 'a two-volume encyclopaedia of contemporary political thought available in virtually every private or public library from the Urals to the Mississippi'. According to Tuck, the modern natural law tradition offered two distinctive visions of international order. One, drawing on neo-Roman writings on war, justified aggression in the service of empire, and served as the 'ideology of the commercial powers', the Dutch and the British. The second, associated most closely with the writings of Pufendorf, articulated the perspective of smaller states in central and northern Europe which sought to construct a more peaceable international environment and were critical of the aggressive, expansionary orientation of the commercial powers. (The Dutch might be viewed as having passed from the former camp into the latter by the middle of the eighteenth century.) Theoretically, the principal difference between the two schools was that Pufendorf's approach posited

²² Charles-Philippe d'Albert, duc de Luynes, *Mémoires du duc de Luynes sur la cour de Louis XV (1735–1758)*, ed. L. Dussieux and E. Soulié, 17 vols. (Paris, 1860–5), xv, 248. On geography education, see L. W. B. Brockliss, *French Higher Education in the Seventeenth and Eighteenth Centuries: A Cultural History* (Oxford, 1987), 154–60; François de Dainville, *La Géographie des humanistes* (Paris, 1940). On the Mariette sale, see Vente et constitution (Jean Mariette to Gilles Robert de Vaugondy), 19 Dec. 1733: Archives nationales, Paris, Minutier central, lxxvi, 259. On Bellin's 1744 commission, see Petto, *When France Was King of Cartography*, 106; F.-X. Charlevoix, *Histoire et description générale de la Nouvelle France avec le Journal historique d'un voyage fait par ordre du roi dans l'Amérique septentrionale*, 3 vols. (Paris, 1744).

a more robust notion of natural sociability and, consequently, a richer conception of the obligations states owed one another.²³

Given the position the 'Dutch observer' claimed to occupy as a principled critic of an aggressive and expansionary Britain, it made sense for Moreau to cast his arguments in the mould of Pufendorf, and he did so consistently. Affirming that society was the original and primitive state of mankind, and that men were linked by natural sociability, he argued that every nation remained in a state of natural society with other nations. Nations remained bound by the same obligations of reason and humanity that existed in nature. The adoption of this Pufendorfian attitude, however, placed Moreau in the odd position of having to define and justify French empire in America in terms of a discourse with a normatively anti-imperialist bent. The way the propagandist rose to the challenge constitutes the principal merit of the *Observateur* from the perspective of a history of political thought.²⁴

²³ Richard Tuck, *The Rights of War and Peace: Political Thought and the International Order from Grotius to Kant* (Oxford, 1999), 142, 151–2, 165, 187. On the law of nations in diplomatic culture, see Hamish Scott, 'Diplomatic Culture in Old Régime Europe', in Hamish Scott and Brendan Simms (eds.), *Cultures of Power in Europe during the Long Eighteenth Century* (Cambridge, 2007), 63; Marc Bélissa, *Fraternité universelle et intérêt national (1713–1795): les cosmopolitiques du droit des gens* (Paris, 1998), 120. The role of natural law in grounding European claims to empire in the New World is widely recognized. See L. C. Green and Olive P. Dickason, *The Law of Nations and the New World* (Edmonton, 1989); Edward Keene, *Beyond the Anarchical Society: Grotius, Colonialism and Order in World Politics* (Cambridge, 2002); Robert A. Williams Jr, *The American Indian in Western Legal Thought: The Discourses of Conquest* (New York, 1990).

²⁴ *Observateur hollandais*, iii, 17, 22. The foreign ministry almost certainly also sponsored the writings of the natural law scholar Martin Hübner of the University of Copenhagen. Hübner's *Le Politique danois: ou, L'Ambition des Anglais démasquée par leurs pirateries* (Copenhagen, 1756) condemned as piracy British naval actions against French shipping in the Atlantic. Hübner was a member of the French Académie des Inscriptions. He published a major work on natural law in an anti-Hobbesian vein, the *Essai sur l'histoire du droit naturel*, 2 vols. (London, 1757–8). There is also evidence that Emer de Vattel, who in 1758 would publish the celebrated *Le Droit des gens: ou, Principes de la loi naturelle*, was engaged in the late 1750s in the dissemination of French propaganda. Though Vattel's personal sympathies were with Britain, he was a diplomat in the service of the Saxon royal house, an ally of France in the war. On Vattel's career at this time, see André Bandelier, 'De Berlin à Neuchâtel: la genèse du *Droit des gens* d'Emer de Vattel', in Martin Fontius and Helmut Holzhey (eds.), *Schweizer im Berlin des 18. Jahrhunderts* (Berlin, 1996). Vattel is credited as the editor of several works published in Germany between 1757 and 1759 that excerpted and relayed the central messages of the *Observateur hollandais*. See *Mémoires pour servir à l'histoire de notre tems, par-rapport à la guerre anglo-gallicane*, 2 vols. (Frankfurt, 1757); *Mémoires pour servir à l'histoire de notre tems, par l'Observateur hollandais*, 5 vols.

(cont. on p. 137)

Moreau insisted that law, not force, was the foundation of whatever rights European states possessed in America. The claims of European empires vis-à-vis their rivals were founded, in the first instance, on treaty law. British pretensions in Acadia, he observed, were at odds with any reasonable interpretation of the treaties of Utrecht and Aix-la-Chapelle, treaties he quoted and parsed extensively. Most of the early propaganda pamphlets devoted a similar attention to the interpretation of treaties. The *Extrait des mémoires* quoted treaty articles and debated their legal significance. The same problems were explored by Pidansat de Mairobert.²⁵ If the differences separating France and England in Acadia were bound up in the interpretations of treaties, for the Ohio dispute there was no relevant agreement, Moreau argued, only the principles of natural law. The middle of the eighteenth century was a 'transitional and eclectic moment in the history of international law' when proponents of the law of nations could appeal both to treaties and to the natural law that was supposed to precede and underlie such voluntary compacts.²⁶ The Ohio territory was largely unoccupied by Europeans, but it played a strategically important role in French America as a bridge between established French enclaves in the Great Lakes and the Mississippi valley. To defend French rights to the Ohio, Moreau adapted an argument first made by Pufendorf, and restated by Barbeyrac, that questioned European claims to land on the grounds of its vacancy. In Barbeyrac's words, 'All the land within the Compass of each respective Country is really occupied; tho' every part of it is not cultivated, or assigned to any one in particular'. Moreau argued that 'intermediary lands' between actual establishments in a European colony, because they were necessary for communication and commerce, formed part of the possessions of that colony, even though those lands might be unoccupied. Drawing an analogy to European conditions, he argued that sovereigns were no less the rulers of waste territories

(n. 24 cont.)

(Frankfurt, 1757–9); *Mémoires pour servir à l'histoire de notre tems, où l'on déduit historiquement le droit & le fait de la guerre sanglante qui trouble actuellement toute l'Europe* (Frankfurt, 1758).

²⁵ *Observateur hollandais*, i, 12–17, 22–5; *Extrait des mémoires concernant les limites de l'Acadie*, 5–10; [Pidansat de Mairobert], *Discussion sommaire sur les anciennes limites de l'Acadie*, *passim*.

²⁶ David Armitage, 'The Declaration of Independence and International Law', *William and Mary Quart.*, 3rd ser., xlix (2002), 42.

within their boundaries than they were of cultivated lands. Should the Dutch or the Danes have a right to found a colony in some deserted part of the mountains of Scotland?²⁷

The *Observateur* laid out at some length the theoretical foundation in natural law for French claims to empire in America. Moreau distanced himself from the version of the law of nature that Tuck links to the ‘commercial powers’, a version which founded European claims to property (and ultimately sovereignty) over New World land on a supposed right to appropriate from the common stock of humanity that which was necessary for one’s own consumption. The *Observateur* echoed Pufendorf’s argument that property rights were founded on conventions or agreements, not on natural right. Everything belonged to human beings in common in the state of nature, Moreau conceded, and true property was no different from possession in this early state. But to create property in land one had to secure ‘an agreement among men’, a tacit or explicit division. Such an agreement, he implied, was the foundation of French claims to possession in America. Between the French and the indigenous nations the issue of ownership had been decided by consent; the Indians had favoured the establishments and commerce of the French.²⁸

According to the *Observateur*, French relations with indigenous peoples conformed to the model of ethical relations between nations called for in Pufendorf’s vision. The French enjoyed the closest and most equitable relations with these peoples — ‘the title of benefactors, and the obligations of gratitude’. English relations with the same peoples marked a striking contrast. Crafting his own Black Legend of British atrocity, Moreau represented the English as cruel in their treatment of the indigenous population. He drew attention to a bounty of £200 placed by Governor Shirley of Massachusetts on the heads of Indians captured or killed. The humane ‘Dutchman’ recoiled: ‘Is it a man who dictated this sanguinary order? And Mr Sirlhey [*sic*], does he then regard as flocks of wild beasts these peoples that it pleases him to proscribe?’ (Shirley was one of the two British commissioners appointed to regulate boundary disputes in America — all

²⁷ Barbeyrac’s comment appears in a note to Hugo Grotius, *The Rights of War and Peace in Three Books* (London, 1738), 156; *Observateur hollandois*, ix, 10–14.

²⁸ *Observateur hollandois*, viii, 13, 40–2.

the more reason to represent him as a type of English violence and aggression.) In reaction to such British attitudes, Moreau claimed, the Indian peoples of the Great Lakes had 'sworn a terrible hatred for the English'.²⁹

Moreau was anxious to refute British pretensions based on claims of first discovery. He rejected the notion that merely by seeing the coast of Labrador in 1497 John Cabot could have acquired all or any of the continent for the English crown. To undermine pretensions based on discovery alone, he asked his readers to imagine that some Algonquians or Iroquois had crossed the Atlantic in their canoes and reached the coasts of France or Ireland only to make war over which of the two peoples was the proprietor of Europe. If mere discovery were a title to ownership it would be limited to what the discoverer had actually seen; one could hardly lay claim to Poland or Germany in casting one's eyes on the coast of France. Nor were charters and commissions given to groups of settlers by European monarchs an adequate title to property; these signified an intention, a scheme for an establishment, but no more. It was not mere claiming that gave title to property in the New World, Moreau insisted, but actual possession and rule. Here Moreau deployed long-standing arguments drawing on Roman law precedents, which had been used since the seventeenth century by the agents of European empires to ground claims to sovereignty in the New World. In quarrels with Spain at the beginning of the century over who owned the Mississippi valley, for example, the French had insisted that abstract claims to territory were worthless without establishments.³⁰

²⁹ *Ibid.*, i, 30–1; vii, 35. Similar charges are made in Anon., *Petit catéchisme politique des Anglois, traduit de leur langue* (n.p., [1756]).

³⁰ *Observateur hollandais*, viii, 47–8, 53–5; ix, 25–6, 3–5. According to David Armitage, British commentators had attempted to 'colonize the very idea of America for England' on the basis of the Cabots' discovery of North America, and the subsequent history of English navigation. David Armitage, 'The New World and British Historical Thought: From Richard Hakluyt to William Robertson', in Karen Ordahl Kupperman (ed.), *America in European Consciousness, 1493–1750* (Chapel Hill, 1995), 54. On the invocation of Roman law ideas in struggles among European empires over sovereignty in America, see Ken MacMillan, *Sovereignty and Possession in the English New World: The Legal Foundations of Empire, 1576–1640* (Cambridge, 2006), *passim*; Lauren Benton and Benjamin Straumann, 'Acquiring Empire by Law: From Roman Doctrine to Early Modern European Practice', forthcoming in *Law and History Rev.*

However, if French propagandists insisted that the question of who arrived first in America was not decisive legally, they implicitly recognized that it carried at least some weight in anchoring valid claims to sovereignty. They were careful to chronicle the exploits of early French navigators in the Americas. There were traditions in French mercantile circles of claiming first discovery of America; in his popular handbook for merchants, Jacques Savary detailed such arguments. The propagandists made use of similar claims. If the principle of first discovery had any merit, insisted the *Extrait des mémoires*, the French would have taken possession of America long before the Cabots, from the time French fishermen voyaged to the Grand Banks and the coasts of Newfoundland. The *Extrait* went on to point out that the first establishments in North America were French — those of the barons de Léry and de Saint-Just — and that the foundation of Quebec preceded that of Boston.³¹ Sustained occupation, combined with acquiescence to French sovereignty by indigenous peoples, and the rights conferred on the French monarchy by past treaties, vindicated the French imperial presence in America in legal and moral terms. Such normative arguments, fused with the strategic claims of the Atlanticists, made for a complex rhetorical alloy calculated to sell the French stance in America to a variety of publics.

III

‘There are wars in which the nation only takes an interest because of its submission to its prince’, a correspondent of the *Année littéraire* noted in 1756, but ‘this one is of another nature; it is the English nation which, by unanimous accord, attacks our nation to take from it a good that belongs to each of us’. The writer never identifies this ‘good’, but surely it was French North America that was in question. It is often claimed that the French public, and those who helped form their opinions, were indifferent, or even hostile, to colonial empire, and especially to the colony of New France. The reception of the *Observateur hollandois* and other imperial propaganda hardly bears out this

³¹ Jacques Savary, *Le Parfait Négociant: ou, Instruction générale pour ce qui regarde le commerce des marchandises de France, & des pays étrangers* (Geneva, 1750), 283–4; *Extrait des mémoires concernant les limites de l’Acadie*, 3–4.

thesis. The very existence of the propaganda campaign suggests that influential political actors believed American territorial empire was worth fighting for. That lay elites were not indifferent to calls for a military stand in America is indicated by the striking popularity of the initial issues of the *Observateur*. According to Moreau, the first instalment caused a sensation, and the second sold over eight thousand copies (making it one of the best-selling works published that year in France). Moreau was surprised and delighted that the early issues enjoyed such a wide appeal. From the fifth instalment, published in November 1755, he began to translate the Latin quotations that peppered his prose — a gesture of inclusion towards a broader public.³²

The success of the *Observateur hollandois* helped demonstrate to the French monarchy the potential for mobilizing domestic opinion through printed media. The crown had always communicated with its subjects in wartime, seeking to mobilize their support and sustain their morale. But the published propaganda of previous wars appears to have been produced mainly for a diplomatic rather than a domestic audience. The model for the *Observateur hollandois*, Jean de La Chapelle's *Lettres d'un Suisse à un Français*, written during the War of Spanish Succession, was published in far smaller numbers than its successor, as evidenced by its rarity today. The wide appeal of the propaganda produced in the 1750s catalysed a shift away from an older model of communication, embodied in Te Deums and letters read from the pulpit, to take fuller advantage of the secular public sphere that was developing in France. Moreau would go on to play a critical role as a publicist for the crown in the following decades.³³

³² 'Projet patriotique', *Année littéraire*, viii (1756), 42–3. On French attitudes towards empire, see Glenn R. Conrad, 'Reluctant Imperialist: France in North America', in Patricia K. Galloway (ed.), *La Salle and his Legacy: Frenchmen and Indians in the Lower Mississippi Valley* (Jackson, 1982); David R. Farrell, 'Reluctant Imperialism: Pontchartrain, Vauban and the Expansion of New France, 1699–1702', in Philip P. Boucher (ed.), *Proceedings of the Twelfth Meeting of the French Colonial Historical Society* (Lanham, 1988); Guy Frégault, *La Guerre de la conquête* (Montreal, 1955), 318–19; Charles-André Julien, *Les Français en Amérique de 1713 à 1784* (Paris, 1977), 292; Jean Meyer et al., *Histoire de la France coloniale*, i, *Des origines à 1914* (Paris, 1991), 185–7. On sales figures for the *Observateur*, see Moreau, *Mes souvenirs*, ed. Hermelin, i, 60. For a comparison with the sales figures of other works, see David T. Pottinger, *The French Book Trade in the Ancien Régime, 1500–1791* (Cambridge, Mass., 1958), 204.

³³ Moreau was given copies of the *Lettres d'un Suisse* as a model to imitate. See Edmond Dziembowski, 'Les Débuts d'un publiciste au service de la monarchie: l'activité littéraire de Jacob-Nicolas Moreau pendant la guerre', *Revue d'histoire* (cont. on p. 142)

In some respects, the favourable public response to the *Observateur* is not surprising. The propaganda tapped into an avid public interest in diplomatic and military affairs (the peace of Aix-la-Chapelle in 1748, for example, had generated much public commentary in France). News on international affairs was conveyed to sophisticated French readers principally by French-language periodicals published in the Netherlands — the kind of publication the *Observateur hollandois* set out to imitate. The very title of Moreau's journal had been used by another periodical produced in the Low Countries in the 1740s. (Gazettes published in France were subject to censorship and were not permitted to comment on French politics. The monarchy tolerated the circulation of unregulated foreign journals because, given their dependence on the mails, and their susceptibility to bribery or diplomatic pressure, they could generally be counted on to exercise self-censorship.) Thus, if the format of the *Observateur* was calculated to speak to a Dutch audience, it also conformed to the structures of the French domestic news system.³⁴

A striking affirmation of how the principal strategic message of the propagandists could resonate with lay readers is recorded in the diary of the Parisian lawyer Edmond-Jean-François Barbier. 'There appear here papers with the title *Observateur hollandois*', Barbier wrote in January 1756. 'It is a Dutchman, removed to Paris, who writes to an old friend in Holland to give him an account of events happening in America since last August'.

(n. 33 cont.)

diplomatique, cix (1995), 308. On the propagandist's subsequent career, see Keith Michael Baker, *Inventing the French Revolution: Essays on French Political Culture in the Eighteenth Century* (Cambridge, 1990), 60–1. See also Dieter Gembicki, *Histoire et politique à la fin de l'Ancien Régime: Jacob-Nicolas Moreau (1717–1803)* (Paris, 1979).

³⁴ On reactions to the Treaty of Aix-la-Chapelle, see Tabetta L. Ewing, 'Rumor and Foreign Politics in Louis XV's Paris during the War of Austrian Succession' (Princeton Univ. Ph.D. thesis, 2005), 483; Arlette Farge, *Subversive Words: Public Opinion in Eighteenth-Century France*, trans. Rosemary Morris (University Park, 1995), 153–61; Thomas E. Kaiser, 'The Drama of Charles Edward Stuart, Jacobite Propaganda, and French Political Protest, 1745–1750', *Eighteenth-Century Studies*, xxx (1997); Catherine Larrère and Catherine Volpillac-Auger (eds.), *1748, l'année de l'Esprit des lois* (Paris, 1999), 27–8, 31–3. Moreau's periodical shared the same title as the *Observateur hollandois, où l'on traite de divers sujets qui ont rapport aux sciences, & particulièrement à la morale (1745?–1751)*. On the character of this publication, see Jean Sgard (ed.), *Dictionnaire des journaux, 1660–1789*, 2 vols. (Paris, 1991), ii, 989. On the circulation in France of foreign periodicals, see Jeremy D. Popkin, 'The *Gazette de Leyde* under Louis XVI', in Jack R. Censer and Jeremy D. Popkin (eds.), *Press and Politics in Pre-Revolutionary France* (Berkeley, 1987), 83–5.

But Barbier is not really fooled about the provenance of the periodical. 'It is said that M. l'abbé de La Ville, who had been in Holland and who is principal clerk [*premier commis*] of Foreign Affairs, is, at bottom, the author of the system', he notes, 'and that it is edited by M. de Gennes or M. Moreau, lawyers at the Parlement of Paris, who are indeed excellent writers'. The fact that the work issued from official channels did not dim Barbier's enthusiasm for it. He commented approvingly on the journal's explication of treaties and its references to maps. The diarist fully grasped the central strategic claim of the *Observateur*: it 'lays bare the plan of the English nation to seize the possessions of the French, and to cast their eyes then on the possessions of the Spanish and the Dutch to make themselves masters of the trade of all Europe. What a vast project!' Barbier reiterated the point three years later in comments on the fall of Quebec:

The English have besieged the town of Quebec and have finally made themselves masters of it. They are, by this means, in possession of all Canada, the loss of which is considerable for us; they will thereby, through their naval superiority, get a hold of all our possessions in America, one after another, and will in the end do all the trade.³⁵

Further evidence of public responsiveness to the claims of the propagandists lies in the expansion of the market for maps of the American theatre. The *Annonces, affiches, et avis divers*, a gazette that advertised everything from land and offices, to carriages, paintings and musical instruments, carried numerous advertisements for American maps in 1755 and 1756. These included maps of Virginia, the Ohio territory, the French and British colonies, Canada, Louisiana and the principal towns and fortresses of North America. The maps it contained of Canada, the British colonies and the course of the Ohio river were advertised as selling points of Robert de Vaugondy's *Atlas universel complet*. The clearest evidence that an extensive market for American maps had developed is the presence of advertisements for cheap maps. In November 1755, the map publisher Georges-Louis Le Rouge advertised a new map of eastern Canada indicating French and English land claims for 1 *livre* 4 *sols*. In the same issue, he advertised a translation and engraving of the 'famous map of North

³⁵ Edmond-Jean-François Barbier, *Journal historique et anecdotique du règne de Louis XV*, ed. A. de la Villegille, 4 vols. (Paris, 1847–56), iv, 110–11, 331. The M. de Gennes to whom Barbier refers was likely Edmé-Jacques Genet, who assisted Moreau by translating English documents into French.

America by Doctor Mitchel', published in London earlier that year, and hitherto selling for as much as 2 *louis* (48 *livres*). Le Rouge would offer his version for 12 *livres*, or 10 for those who subscribed in advance.³⁶

Commentary on the *Observateur* in the French press was widely favourable. The *Année littéraire* echoed and reiterated Moreau's central claims, emphasizing, in particular, the contrast between paternal French-Indian relations and the inhumanity of the British. The *Journal de Trévoux* made flattering references to the *Observateur*, and showed itself equally anxious to refute British claims to first discovery of North America. The Cabots were Venetians, the editors of the journal pointed out. These explorers had outfitted their voyage at their own expense and, in any case, founded no establishments in America. Besides, Basque and Breton fishermen had frequented Newfoundland a century before Columbus landed in America, and the first settlements in Canada were French.³⁷

Not every aspect of the propagandists' message enjoyed equal appeal. Moreau's excursus on the law of nations appears to have alienated some of his readers. 'All the frightened readers sounded the alarm', noted one sympathetic commentator, obliging Moreau, 'so to speak, to give his retraction in writing, to be reconciled with them'.³⁸ This 'retraction' took the form of a short commentary at the beginning of the tenth issue of the *Observateur* in which he acknowledged that his jurisprudential arguments had

³⁶ *Annonces, affiches, et avis divers*, xxxii (24 Apr. 1755), 254; xxxvii (12 May 1755), 294; xlvi (16 June 1755), 367; xlvi (23 June 1755), 382; lviii (28 July 1755), 462; lxxviii (6 Oct. 1755), 622; lxxxix (17 Nov. 1755), 709. The *Atlas universel* was advertised in the *Journal économique: ou, Mémoires, notes et avis sur les arts, l'agriculture, le commerce et tout ce qui peut y avoir rapport* (Oct. 1756), 2. Vaugondy sold 1,118 copies of the atlas. About half were bought for resale by booksellers and map dealers in Paris, the provinces and abroad. The rest were sold chiefly to members of the old-regime elite. The largest single category of buyers were robe nobles. See Mary Sponberg Pedley, 'The Subscription List of the 1757 Atlas Universel: A Study in Cartographic Dissemination', *Imago Mundi*, xxxi (1979). The Le Rouge advertisement appeared in *Annonces, affiches, et avis divers*, lxxxix (17 Nov. 1755), 709. On the commercial activities of Le Rouge, see Mary Sponberg Pedley, *The Commerce of Cartography: Making and Marketing Maps in Eighteenth-Century France and England* (Chicago, 2005), 76–7.

³⁷ *Année littéraire*, i (1756), 3–37; *Mémoires pour l'histoire des sciences et beaux-arts* [*Journal de Trévoux*] (Oct. 1756), 2440–52; (Aug. 1756), 1943–51.

³⁸ [P. Saintard], *Roman politique sur l'état présent des affaires d'Amérique: ou, Lettres de M*** à M*** sur les moyens d'établir une paix solide & durable dans les colonies, & la liberté générale du commerce extérieur* (Amsterdam, 1756), pp. xvii, x.

'made half my readers yawn'. The other half had accused him of 'engaging to prove truths that are all too clear'. The Dutch might be interested in such claims, he concluded, but they did not accord with French tastes: 'All agree, finally, that the *droit des gens* and the laws of nations [*loix des Nations*] might well interest a few Germans or Batavians, but would succeed with difficulty in stirring the imagination of the French'. An otherwise enthusiastic review in the *Année littéraire* confirms the negative reception given to Moreau's invocation of the law of nations. The reviewer criticized the eighth letter as containing 'only abstract principles on the law of nations, on the titles that found the property of countries, on the reciprocal obligations of nations and other similar subjects which are found in most works of politics'.³⁹ This may be an instance where Moreau's need to speak to Dutch opinion undercut the appeal of his message to French readers.

The capacity of the *Observateur* to stir French readers seems to indicate a latent public enthusiasm for empire. Here a comparison with Great Britain may be helpful. Across the English Channel sentiment in support of empire was probably deeper and more widespread than in France. Kathleen Wilson has discerned an enthusiastic popular imperialism in mid-century Britain, with the trading classes forming the core of an imperialist constituency. The British Empire, Wilson argues, 'was imagined to consist of flourishing and commercially viable colonies, populated with free British subjects, that served as bulwarks of trade, prosperity, naval strength and political virtue for the parent state'.⁴⁰ Such pro-colonial feeling manifested itself in popular celebrations of imperial triumphs such as Admiral Vernon's capture of Porto Bello in 1739, or the fall of Louisbourg in 1745. In comparing France with Britain, however, we should bear in mind that the evidence for imperial sentiment is profoundly shaped by differences in the way political space was structured in the two countries. The popular British imperialist attitudes adduced by Wilson were closely associated with a partisan political culture for which no equivalent existed in France. Celebrations of Vernon's

³⁹ *Observateur hollandais*, x, 3–4; 'L'Observateur hollandais', *Année littéraire*, i (1756), 37.

⁴⁰ Kathleen Wilson, "'An Empire of Virtue': The Imperial Project and Hanoverian Culture, c.1720–1785", in Lawrence Stone (ed.), *An Imperial State at War: Britain from 1689 to 1815* (London, 1994), 132.

victories, for example, functioned as party demonstrations against the policies of Walpole. Such views could be articulated in Britain through a relatively free press, while the French press was tightly controlled.⁴¹

It was more difficult for French merchants to marshal public support for an imperial policy because mercantile lobbying was organized differently in France than in Britain. While often cautious politically, British merchants could sit in Parliament, take part in political campaigns and participate in the public sphere. Merchants in France lobbied the government behind closed doors, primarily through the official chambers of commerce. Direct appeals to the public were unusual. The way that mercantile preferences could remain unvoiced in such a system is exemplified by the reaction of the chambers of commerce to the prospective loss of Canada. In 1761 the La Rochelle chamber resolved to try to push the administration to recover New France at the peace. Echoing the *Observateur hollandois*, the memorandum described Canada as ‘the safeguard of America’, arguing that if it were ceded to Britain ‘all of America will be its first conquest’. The Rochelais contacted other chambers to mobilize their support. While most of the other bodies conceded the commercial importance of New France — one describing it as a ‘precious colony’ — most were reluctant to make demands that might be viewed as infringing on the prerogatives of the administration. As the Lille chamber put it, to offer such advice ‘it would be necessary . . . to treat affairs of state, which chambers of commerce are never allowed to do’.⁴²

Bob Harris suggests that enthusiasm for imperial triumphs in Britain was less a function of attachment to colonies than of passionate popular engagement in the British struggle against

⁴¹ Kathleen Wilson, ‘Empire, Trade and Popular Politics in Mid-Hanoverian Britain: The Case of Admiral Vernon’, *Past and Present*, no. 121 (Nov. 1988). See also Kathleen Wilson, *The Sense of the People: Politics, Culture, and Imperialism in England, 1715–1785* (Cambridge, 1995), 137–205.

⁴² Émile Garnault (ed.), *Le Commerce rochelais au XVIII^e siècle d’après les documents composant les anciennes archives de la Chambre de commerce de La Rochelle*, 5 vols. (Paris, 1887–1900), iv, 309, 312–15, 321. See also ‘Les Chambres de commerce de France et la cession du Canada’, in *Rapport de l’archiviste de la Province de Québec pour 1924–25* (Québec, 1925). On merchant politics in Britain, see Perry Gauci, *Emporium of the World: The Merchants of London, 1660–1800* (London, 2007), 165–200. On the relationship between French chambers of commerce and the administration, see David Kammerling Smith, ‘Structuring Politics in Early Eighteenth-Century France: The Political Innovations of the French Council of Commerce’, *JlMod. Hist.*, lxxiv (2002).

France. From this perspective, pro-imperial sentiment should be seen as situational, rather than a permanent feature of the political landscape. Enthusiasm for empire in France might be viewed in similar terms. When American colonies were presented in 1755 and 1756 as the critical stakes of a struggle for preponderance against Britain, the French public responded eagerly. Displays of imperial sentiment in eighteenth-century Britain were closely linked to military victories, and would-be British imperialists had more to celebrate in this respect than their French counterparts. On the rare occasions when France had successful overseas adventures of which to boast, French authors were not slow to manifest their glee. A wave of joyful pamphlets and broadsides celebrated the taking of Minorca in the spring of 1756.⁴³ In short, support for empire was less visible in France than in Britain, but this inconspicuousness is not proof of its absence. The public reaction to the *Observateur hollandois* testifies to an identification with imperial projects, especially when these could be represented as critical to France's position in Europe.

IV

The colonial theme largely disappeared from the *Observateur hollandois* after the middle of 1756. Henceforth events in Europe would dominate discussion. After the war spread to Germany

⁴³ Bob Harris, '“American Idols”: Empire, War and the Middling Ranks in Mid-Eighteenth-Century Britain', *Past and Present*, no. 150 (Feb. 1996). On reactions to the fall of Minorca, see *Lettre d'un Mahonnais à un Anglais* (n.p., 1756); *Lettre d'un grenadier à sa maîtresse, sur la prise du fort S. Philippe* (n.p., n.d.); *Dialogues entre deux poissardes, sur la prise du fort Saint-Philippe* (n.p., n.d.); *Le Détail et le récit de la victoire remportée par les Français, avec la prise de la place du Port-Mahon* (n.p., n.d.); *Véritable relation historique de la conquête de l'île de Minorque* (n.p., n.d.); *Détail de ce qui s'est passé le 27 juin 1756, à l'attaque des ouvrages avancés du fort Saint Philippe* (n.p., n.d.); *Relation de la prise du fort Saint Philippe, faite le 29 juin 1756, par l'armée française, commandée par M. le maréchal de Richelieu, avec les articles de la capitulation* (n.p., n.d.); *Lettre d'un négociant de Mahon à son correspondant à Paris, contenant la description de l'Isle de Minorque, & des avantages que le commerce pourra tirer de la conquête du Port Mahon* (n.p., n.d.); *Lettre d'un négociant à un milord, dans laquelle on considère, sans partialité, l'importance de l'île Minorque et de Port-Mahon* (n.p., 1756); [Mathieu-François Pidansat de Mairobert], *Lettre à Mme de ***, sur les affaires du jour: ou, Réflexions politiques sur l'usage qu'on peut faire de la conquête de Minorque* (n.p., 1756); [Ignace Hugary de la Marche Courmont], *Essai politique sur les avantages que la France peut retirer de la conquête de l'île Minorque (Citadella, 1757)*. Some of the Minorca material is discussed in Rowe, 'Romans and Carthaginians in the Eighteenth Century'. Much of it is collected in *Recueil général des pièces, chansons et fêtes données à l'occasion de la prise du Port-Mahon, précédé du Journal historique de la conquête de Minorque* (n.d., 1757).

in the autumn of 1756, a consequence of the diplomatic revolution whereby Prussia threw in its lot with Britain, and France embraced an Austrian alliance, the monarchy turned back to Continental priorities. The Atlanticist position within the administration temporarily collapsed. Madame de Pompadour had played a central role in the forging of the Austrian alliance — an alliance intended to buttress an Atlantic strategy — but once it led to war in Europe, her factional interests shifted to the prosecution of the land war. It was August 1758 before the ‘Dutch observer’ returned to the struggle in America. With Louisbourg besieged (in fact, it had already fallen, but this was not yet known in France), Moreau reminded his readers of the stakes of the struggle in America. The second last issue of the *Observateur*, dated 1 January 1759, offered a final despairing plea that France recognize her true strategic situation and turn once again towards the Atlantic.⁴⁴

Nevertheless, the strategic and ideological moment represented by the propaganda for empire in 1755–6 did not prove ephemeral. If the closing years of the 1750s were difficult ones for those who saw France’s strategic future in the colonies, by the time the war ended they were in a stronger position. Étienne-François de Stainville, duc de Choiseul, a convinced partisan of an Atlantic geostrategy, had emerged as the dominant figure in the administration. The size of the navy increased sharply under Choiseul. The family compact with Spain, a keystone of his diplomatic system, was intended to serve French colonial and commercial interests. Though La Galissonnière was dead, something of the spirit of his scheme for a fortress Canada to defend the mercantile empire lived on. In 1763 Choiseul sponsored the largest French colonial expedition of the old regime, sending over ten thousand settlers to Guyana. His goal was to establish a territorial and military colony to protect Saint-Domingue and the other sugar islands from British attack. The venture failed, but it testifies to the continuing appeal of the military-territorial vision of empire. The Austrian alliance remained the centrepiece of the French diplomatic system, marking the monarchy’s commitment to preserve the peace with its Continental neighbours

⁴⁴ *Observateur hollandois*, xlii, 17–18; xlv, 6–38. In addition, several short brochures appeared in 1756 and 1757 describing the progress of French and Amerindian forces against the British in America. See Newbigging, ‘Propaganda, Political Discourse, and the Battle over French Public Opinion’.

and to face the British menace. In retrospect, the Seven Years War and its immediate aftermath can be seen as the moment when the strategic priorities of the French monarchy shifted from the Continent to the Atlantic.⁴⁵

Moreau's success with the *Observateur hollandois* won him a permanent position in the administration as a kind of consultant for the management of public opinion. In his new role, he pushed the monarchy to engage its critics, and mobilize its supporters, through the medium of the printed word. He contributed to public debates on taxation in the early 1760s, and he was asked to reprise his role as the editor of a propaganda journal during the American War, though this time he declined.⁴⁶ In his place, one of his former collaborators, Edmé-Jacques Genet, edited the *Affaires de l'Angleterre et de l'Amérique* for the foreign ministry. Like its precursor of the 1750s, this propaganda periodical was supposedly published in the Low Countries, but was in fact produced in Paris. It sought to rally court and elite opinion to a policy of military intervention in America, and it retailed news of the struggle across the Atlantic to an eager public. French enthusiasm for the American cause in the 1770s is often viewed as a harbinger of the liberal politics of 1789, and rightly so. But it can also be understood, to some degree, as a recrudescence of the energy stirred in defence of American territorial empire in the 1750s — an ideological aftershock of a remarkably successful propaganda campaign on the eve of the Seven Years War.

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⁴⁵ On the navy, see Philip P. Boucher, *Les Nouvelles Frances: France in America, 1500–1815. An Imperial Perspective* (Providence, 1989), 85. On the family compact, see John Fraser Ramsey, *Anglo-French Relations, 1763–1770: A Study of Choiseul's Foreign Policy* (Berkeley, 1939), 149–50. The so-called 'Kourou expedition' to Guyana was a fiasco. See Marion F. Godfroy-Tayart de Borms, 'La Guerre de Sept Ans et ses conséquences atlantiques: Kourou ou l'apparition d'un nouveau système colonial', *French Hist. Studies*, xxxii (2009); Emma Rothschild, 'A Horrible Tragedy in the French Atlantic', *Past and Present*, no. 192 (Aug. 2006). A memorandum written in February 1759, considering the question of Canada's abandonment, reiterated La Galissonnière's views in the strongest terms. See 'Premier mémoire où l'on traite la question, s'il convient ou non d'abandonner le Canada', 8 Feb. 1759: AAE, MD, Amérique, 24, fos. 259–72.

⁴⁶ Baker, *Inventing the French Revolution*, 60 ff.; John Shovlin, *The Political Economy of Virtue: Luxury, Patriotism, and the Origins of the French Revolution* (Ithaca, 2006), 98–100; Gembicki, *Histoire et politique à la fin de l'Ancien Régime*, 68.