

Agrarian Capitalism: England *versus* France

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ÖZET Makale sosyal bilimlerde sıklıkla yapıldığı üzere, İngiltere ve Fransa'nın kapitalist ekonomiye geçişlerindeki farklı performanslarının karşılaştırılması konusu üzerinde yoğunlaşmaktadır. Makalenin ilk bölümünde İngiltere'nin sanayi devrimini gerçekleştiren ilk ülke olmasının nedeni olarak öne sürülen tarım kapitalizmi tezini ortaya atan Brenner, Wood ve Comminel tezi, aynı materyalden farklı sonuçlar ortaya çıkan Nairn-Anderson tezi ve Alchian ve Demsetz'in mülkiyet ilişkileri yazını ile karşılaştırmalı olarak incelenecektir. Makalenin ikinci bölümünde ise her iki ülkedeki tarımsal yapılar ve kurumlar yazını ele alındıktan sonra, Fransız yazınının görece savunmacı yaklaşımları incelenecektir. Bu bölümde ayrıca Bush gibi İngiliz revizyonistleri ve Albritton ve Clark gibi yazarların görüşleri de ele alınacaktır.

ANAHTAR KELİMELELER Tarımsal kapitalizm, çitleme, mülkiyet hakları okulu

ABSTRACT The article will compare the differing performances of England and France in the development of capitalism. In the first part of this paper, the works of Brenner, Wood and Comminel will be discussed within the context of agrarian capitalism and the supremacy of England. Their arguments will be compared and contrasted with Nairn and Anderson's work, which derive opposite conclusions from the material, and with the so-called 'property rights school' of Alchian and Demsetz. In the second half of the paper, the agrarian structures and institutions of both countries will be further examined. In doing so, not only the differing economic performances of both countries will be examined, but also the differences between the scholarship about them, which is characterized with an approach that might be called a defensive one on behalf of the French writers. In this section, the works of English revisionists like Bush, and others such as Albritton and Clark will also be examined.

KEYWORDS Agrarian capitalism, enclosure, property rights school

“Sheepe have eate up our medows and our downes,
Our come, our wood, whole villages and townes;
Yea, they have eate up many wealthy men,
Besides widowes and orphan children;
Besides our statutes and our Iron Lawes,
Which they have swallowed down into their maws:
Till now I thought the proverbe did but jest,
Which said a blacke sheepe was a biting beast.”

Bastard's *Chrestoleros*, Act. iv. Sc. 1.¹

INTRODUCTION

Comparison of England and France, a staple job of the social scientists for a long period of time, continues to be an important problem in our day. Although opposing

1. Lord Ernle, *English Farming Past and Present* (Chicago: Quadrangle Books, 1961), p.63.

interpretations abound, as I will try to discuss in what follows, there seems to be a consensus that starting from the Seventeenth and Eighteenth centuries England's lapping in the race in terms of economic and social development became visible. As examples of recent scholarship, the works of Brenner, Wood and Comninel not only reiterate this English supremacy thesis, but also put this supremacy in the perspective of unfolding of the institution of property. In order to back their thesis, they increasingly took recourse to agrarian capitalism, which laid the basis of the forthcoming capitalism.

In the first part of this paper, I will discuss the works of Brenner, Wood and Comninel in the context of agrarian capitalism and the supremacy of England. I will do this with references to Nairn and Anderson's work, which derive opposite conclusions from the material, and to the so-called property rights school of Alchian and Demsetz, which was backed by Douglas North. The property rights school developed a liberal thesis for the evolution of the institution of property rights taken as the necessary infrastructure for development. As a result, a word on the differences between Brenner, Wood and Comninel's approach and the property rights school will be necessary.

In the second half of the paper, I will look at the agrarian structures and institutions of both countries. In doing so, I will try to show not only the differing economic performances of both countries, but also the differences between the scholarship about them, which is characterized with an approach which might be called a defensive one on behalf of the French writers. In this section, I will also briefly discuss the theses of English revisionists like Bush. Lastly, this section will include the critiques of Albritton and Clark to the agrarian capitalism and English supremacy theses respectively.

PART I—BRENNER, WOOD AND COMNINEL

There are two targets of Wood in her book entitled *The Pristine Culture of Capitalism*. The first and the major one is the so-called Nairn-Anderson theses as a developed form of what she calls the 'bourgeois paradigm' of progress and historical change. The second and the minor one is the thesis of revisionist writers, Clark and Macfarlane, which emphasize continuity in the British history rather than transformation.

Nairn-Anderson theses revolve around the argument that England fails to conform to the dominant image of capitalism, which is said to depend on the latter element of the following dualities, agricultural *versus* commercial and industrial, communal *versus* individual, unreason *versus* reason, status *versus* contract, coercion *versus* freedom and, most

importantly, aristocracy *versus* bourgeoisie.² Wood argues that though the bourgeois paradigm contains some elements of truth, the bourgeois model does not correspond to an actually existing pattern of historical development. For example, there was capitalism in England but the bourgeoisie did not bear it, or there was a triumphant bourgeoisie in France but its revolutionary project had not much to do with capitalism. In France, although there was not an agrarian capitalism, we can observe an antagonistic relation between the bourgeoisie and aristocracy. For her, the ‘bourgeois model’ is an historical *post-festum* construct, which confers the bourgeoisie a significant role as the agent of progress, and it was not felt by the contemporaries like Locke. The other criticisms directed by Wood against the bourgeois model are: it conceals the particularity of capitalism, takes the process linearly, takes the market as opportunity instead of imperative, depends on the ‘bourgeois revolution’ concept, which is problematic, and emphasizes the classes as rising and falling entities.³

Wood delineates two distinct theses of Nairn and Anderson. The first thesis depicts a precocious capitalism and a mediated bourgeois revolution; capitalism stunted by its aristocratic and agrarian origins in England, and complete bourgeois revolutions which achieved complete ruptures with their agrarian and aristocratic pasts in the Continent. The second thesis also starts from the precocious development of capitalism in England, but emphasizes the obstacles caused by this early development instead of the *ancien régime*. It is interesting that, for Anderson not only Italian city-states but also the English development is characterized by its precocity. Wood rejects this view, arguing that although the organic development of England may leave “archaic forms instead of sweeping them away in a series of revolutionary onslaughts,”⁴ capitalism in England was more firmly established than anywhere else.⁵

2. Ellen Meiksins Wood, *The Pristine Culture of Capitalism: A Historical Essay on Old Regimes and Modern States* (London and New York: Verso, 1991), pp.1-3.

3. Ellen Meiksins Wood, *The Pristine Culture of Capitalism*, pp.6-7.

4. Ellen Meiksins Wood, *The Pristine Culture of Capitalism*, p.17.

5. Perry Anderson’s comparison of the France and England skews to the side of France as a more developed form of Absolutism. The following lines are illuminating to show the lacks in the British history, in Anderson’s mind: “The idiosyncracies of the English landowning class in the epoch of Absolutism were thus to be historically interlocked: it was unusually civilian in background, commercial in occupation and commoner in rank. The correlate of this class was a State that had a small bureaucracy, a limited fiscality, and no permanent army. The inherent tendency of the Tudor monarchy was ... strikingly homologous to that of its continental opposites (down to the personality parallels, often noted between Henry VII-Louis XI-Ferdinand II and Henry VIII-Francis I-Maximilian I): but the limits of its development were set by the character of the nobility that surrounded it.” However, it is impossible to find an analysis about the class relations or the property settlements in his comparison,

Against these theses, Wood criticizes Anderson's emphasis on the absolutist state and his consequent thesis that there was no modernization in England. Likewise, she criticizes his parcellization of sovereignty thesis. She argues that "continuing tension between monarchical centralization and feudal parcellization" in France was based on a division between competing forms of politically constituted property and the latter cannot be claimed to be more developed than England's property system.⁶ England never had a feudal parcellization but an early emergence of a unitary national Parliament and the traditional formula of Crown in parliament testify to the centralization of the state as a project of the united propertied class. Hence, this demilitarized class did not need a politically constituted form of property, and having a large proportion of landed property, they relied on purely economic modes of appropriation, the productive and competitive utilization of land.⁷ As for the modernization of France, Wood brings many arguments ranging from France's bureaucratism, mandarinism and elite academies for office holders, a culture that regards the civil service as the highest career, a career dominated by a hereditary elite, continuing influence of the peasant and localism.⁸

The rest of the book is devoted to the criticism of the specific arguments of Nairn and Anderson and turning them into as evidences of the backwardness of France. For example, Anderson argues that the Roman law was significant for the development of bourgeoisie. Wood argues instead that it only served to regulate age-old practices of commerce, without necessarily giving a capitalist character to them. Moreover, land-based common law was more attuned to capitalist property than the commerce-centered Roman law.⁹ As for the republicanism, Wood argues that the lateness of French republicanism seems to back the Nairn and Anderson theses about "the transformative force of a deferred and correspondingly violent confrontation with the *ancien régime*, under the auspices of a 'mature' bourgeoisie," but indeed this only attests to the latter's firm implantation in the *ancien régime*.¹⁰ Likewise, the contrast between the ideology of

as we can in the analyses of Brenner, Wood and Comninel. Instead of these, Anderson seems to stress factors like the demographic size (Perry Anderson, *Lineages of the Absolutist State* (London and New York: Verso, 1974) p.86, and p.122), administrative efficiency and techniques (Perry Anderson, *Lineages of the Absolutist State*, pp.87-102), geography (Perry Anderson, *Lineages of the Absolutist State*, p.115), and existence or lack of a foreign threat (Perry Anderson, *Lineages of the Absolutist State*, p.125).

6. Ellen Meiksins Wood, *The Pristine Culture of Capitalism*, p.25.

7. Ellen Meiksins Wood, *The Pristine Culture of Capitalism*, p.27.

8. Ellen Meiksins Wood, *The Pristine Culture of Capitalism*, pp.39-40.

9. Ellen Meiksins Wood, *The Pristine Culture of Capitalism*, pp.53-54.

10. Ellen Meiksins Wood, *The Pristine Culture of Capitalism*, p.72.

tradition in England and ideology of revolution in France stemmed from the fact that the monarchy was far from forming a structural threat in England—and thus could be endowed with great ideological value. At the same time, in France, the revolutionary ideology masked deep structural continuities between absolutism and post-revolutionary state.¹¹ I think, what Wood points continues to be valid also in our day. To give an example from the local government structure of France, it can be said that the communes continue to be praised as descendants from the French revolution, but instead they are nothing but organizational devices to increase the weight of the peasantry instead of the working classes in the cities.¹²

As elements of the culture, Wood argues in the same vein. Against Nairn who emphasizes the crucial role of speech-accent in England, rendering the humblest social cell captive to the Royal, she puts forward the stylized formality of French classicism in contradistinction to literally economic attitude of England.¹³ Against Nairn and Anderson's thesis that Britain suffers from the lack of classical sociology, she states that this was the reflection of the separation of political theory, economics and history in England, contrary to the continuities in the continental social thought. It is also possible to find similar arguments in Wood's book about British ruralism and French urbanism.¹⁴ Hence, she clearly supports the English supremacy thesis.

I think Wood's criticisms against Nairn and Anderson are important, since they problematically equate the success of the capitalist economy and maturity of the bourgeois democracy and emphasize the British distaste for the more democratic bourgeois ideas "the rational and permanent bourgeois concepts of citizenship, equality, and statutory right" which was turned into "subjecthood, loyalty and class" in the British context.¹⁵ Wood argues that these lines carry the risk of equating democracy and capitalism bowing to the ideological weight of the collapse of Communism. According to her, what is necessary is democratic self-determination against concentration of power in the capitalist property and market imperatives sealed off from any kind of democratic accountability.

11. Ellen Meiksins Wood, *The Pristine Culture of Capitalism*, p.76.

12. See for example, Yves Mény, "France," in Edward C. Page and Michael J. Goldsmith (eds.), *Central and Local Government Relations: A Comparative Analysis of West European Unitary States* (London: Sage, 1987).

13. Ellen Meiksins Wood, *The Pristine Culture of Capitalism*, p.82.

14. Ellen Meiksins Wood, *The Pristine Culture of Capitalism*, p.109.

15. Ellen Meiksins Wood, *The Pristine Culture of Capitalism*, p.173.

In Brenner's work one can find similar arguments about English supremacy in terms of the development of the property structures.¹⁶ His initial aim was to criticize the theories of long-term economic change in late mediaeval and early modern Europe, which prioritize 'objective' economic forces like demographic fluctuations and the growth of trade and markets.¹⁷ In his own words, Brenner's methodology in showing the inadequacy of these demographic and commercialization models is 'simple.' He observes main demographic trends in Europe for a six- or seven-hundred years period and shows that similar influences brought dramatically different outcomes for England, France and Eastern Europe, namely agrarian capitalism, absolutism and rise of the second serfdom respectively. His thesis is that these different outcomes are the result of "different structure of the class relations, of class power, which will determine the manner and degree to which particular demographic and commercial changes will affect long-term trends in the distribution of income and economic growth—and not vice versa."¹⁸

For Brenner, the deviation between England and France, which was a process started in the Eleventh and Twelfth centuries, became visible in the mid-Fourteenth Century. While in England, Black Death gave way to a seigneurial reaction including moves to control peasant mobility through the introduction of high fees for permission to move, legislation to control wages and actual increase in the rents, peasant solidarity and strength in Western Europe prevented such an outcome.¹⁹ Brenner's explanation for the relative strength of the French peasantry is "its close interconnection with the particular *form* of evolution of the French monarchical state."²⁰

16. Robert Brenner, "Agrarian Class Structure and Economic Development in Pre-Industrial Europe," in T. H. Aston and C. H. E. Philpin (eds.), *The Brenner Debate: Agrarian Class Structure and Economic Development in Pre-Industrial Europe* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1985).

17. Robert Brenner, "Agrarian Class Structure and Economic Development in Pre-Industrial Europe," p.10.

18. Robert Brenner, "Agrarian Class Structure and Economic Development in Pre-Industrial Europe," p.11. In a later article ("The Rises and Declines of Serfdom in Mediaeval and Early Modern Europe," in M. L. Bush (ed.), *Serfdom and Slavery: Studies in Legal Bondage* (London and New York: Longman, 1996), p.276), Brenner starts to emphasize intra-lordly conflict as prime determinants of this evolution. However, this is not say that this is a complete novelty in his work, since his earlier work ("The Agrarian Roots of European Capitalism," in T. H. Aston and C. H. E. Philpin (eds.), *The Brenner Debate: Agrarian Class Structure and Economic Development in Pre-Industrial Europe* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1985), p.258) also depends on "competing feudal lords" to explain the diverging paths of England and France starting from the eleventh century. The only change might be the addition of this term into the prime determinants.

19. Robert Brenner, "Agrarian Class Structure and Economic Development in Pre-Industrial Europe," p.35, and p.40.

20. Robert Brenner, "Agrarian Class Structure and Economic Development in Pre-Industrial Europe," p.55.

This in turn, is the result of different development paths of both countries in terms of the ruling classes and the state structures.

“The foregoing development in England is in marked contrast to that in France during the same period, which was characterized by a multitude of complete jurisdictions, dominated by *competing* feudal lords. Whereas late eleventh- and twelfth-century England witnessed the growth of monarchical centralization, most of France in these years was characterized by the extreme fragmentation of authority, expressed in the lack of effective political organization at the level of the monarchy or even the principality. Through much of France in this era, power was effectively in the hands of the so-called ‘banal lords’ or ‘castellans.’”²¹

Different from England, the French ruling class lacked a political unity which would enable them to behave in unison against the peasantry. As a result, starting from the Thirteenth Century, they were unable to prevent the decay of feudalism and the decline in their incomes under conditions of rising inflation.²² By contrast, in the same period, English ruling class centralized around the monarchy and reintensified seigneurial powers over the peasantry. Hence, they did not live the crisis of declining revenues as French ruling class witnessed in this period.²³

For Brenner, agrarian property settlements determined the subsequent period of economic expansion in both countries. In France, the monarchy was in competition with the lords’ jurisdiction and power, and the rising Absolutism relegated them into its functionaries and tax collectors. In doing so, the central state consolidated the hereditary *cens* tenure of the peasantry, abolished the remnants of serfdom and seigneurial *taille*, and supported local customs and placed the full responsibility for the collection of the royal *taille* in the hands of the peasant villages.²⁴ These moves proved to be disastrous for the subsequent economic development of France, as consolidation of peasant ownership discarded any moves towards an efficient agrarian production.

On the other hand, in England the development was not towards enserfment as in Eastern Europe or the rise of absolutism as in France. For Brenner, this caused them to seek novel ways out of the revenue crisis.²⁵ Affirmation of their absolute private property against peasant possession, together with the gradual rise of a different sort of the state, the landlords were able to profit from rising land rents, through “presiding over a newly

21. Robert Brenner, “The Agrarian Roots of European Capitalism,” p.258.

22. Robert Brenner, “The Agrarian Roots of European Capitalism,” p.261.

23. Robert Brenner, “The Agrarian Roots of European Capitalism,” p.264.

24. Robert Brenner, “The Agrarian Roots of European Capitalism,” pp.286-288.

25. Robert Brenner, “The Agrarian Roots of European Capitalism,” p.293.

emerging tripartite capitalist hierarchy of commercial landlord, capitalist tenant and hired wage laborer.” Hence, for the first time in England, the English landed classes no longer needed extra-economic coercion to extract surplus from the peasantry. Likewise, they did not need the state to serve them directly for surplus expropriation.²⁶ Therefore, the fusion between the economic and the political was separated for the first time in England.

Thus, agrarian capitalism is the key term in Brenner’s account to explain the differences between England and France. He avers that even similar phenomena of development in these countries are not of the same sort, if we look through the lenses of the development of the property settlements. For example, while it is true that some French peasants were forced to sell their lands, this has nothing to do with the concentration of lands under the landlord ownership as seen in England. In France the already fragmented land ownership (88% of the properties were under 6.2 acres) of the peasants linked with the heavy taxation of the state caused many peasants to sell their lands, but the process did not amount to accumulation of land ownership. More importantly, even where accumulation took place, it did not lead to a better organization than the peasant ownership in France, as the direction was not towards production for the market but continuation of the smaller units of cultivation in large demesnes.²⁷ Hence, the landlords did not seek increasing the productivity of agriculture but continued squeezing their peasants, curbing any motive towards peasant initiative.²⁸

Therefore, in Brenner’s account the diverging patterns of England and France is attributed to agrarian capitalism. However, he also explains this divergence as a historical process which has its roots from much earlier times. Before the accumulation of lands in the Sixteenth Century, English landlords had already a greater percentage of the cultivated land than their French counterparts did. Moreover, another one third of the land was in villein tenure, which was deemed as lord’s land in the eyes of the king’s court, whatever the varying realities of local custom and the local balance of power, laying the basis of the enclosure movement which was explanatory for the English uniqueness.²⁹ While serfdom was dissolving in France, English reintroduction of serfdom, entailed a differentiation of the peasants into a free peasantry, which would have access to the king’s court, and an unfree peasantry which was explicitly consigned to lord’s jurisdiction.³⁰

26. Robert Brenner, “The Agrarian Roots of European Capitalism,” p.298.

27. Robert Brenner, “The Agrarian Roots of European Capitalism,” pp.304-305.

28. Robert Brenner, “Agrarian Class Structure and Economic Development in Pre-Industrial Europe,” p.51.

29. Robert Brenner, “The Agrarian Roots of European Capitalism,” p.294.

30. Robert Brenner, “The Rises and Declines of Serfdom in Mediaeval and Early Modern Europe,” p.259,

This process is more explicitly explained in Comninel's article. For him,

"... the specific historical basis for the development of capitalism in England—and not in France—is ultimately to be traced to the unique structure of English manorial lordship. It is the absence from English lordship of the *seigneurie banale*—the political form of parcellized sovereignty which was central to the development of Continental feudalism—that can be seen to account for the peculiarly 'economic' turn taken in the development of English class relations of surplus extraction."³¹

This initial basic difference brings different consequences for these countries: while in England there was a unique differentiation of freehold and customary tenures, allodial land along *censive* tenures survived in France, together with important differences like common law *versus* Roman law, commoner status of the English manorial lords, and the unique enclosure movement of England.³²

For Comninel, the rise of feudalism in France was characterized with the *castellan's* appropriation of the power of "adjudication, punishment and taxation" over *all* peasants. This dramatically transformed the class relations of France, rendering the sovereign powers of the landlords the source of the "single most lucrative aspect of lordship" together with its *taille*, *corvée* labor, jurisdiction fines, etc. There is also another process of excessive fragmentation of these *seigneuries*, as "every knight who held a village as his fief could claim *seigneurie* over it."³³

On the other hand, England feudalism was fundamentally different from the French one. Following the Norman Conquest in 1066, the Norman nobility replaced the Anglo-Saxon nobility without any collapse of central authority in-between. "As a consequence of this integral conquest, and the effective organization of the Norman lords under their king, England *never* experienced the appropriation of the powers of the ban by manorial lords, nor underwent any of the parcellization of sovereign public power that was characteristic of French feudalism."³⁴ While in France the networks of fealty of the lords provided the basis of the constitution of monarchy, rendering the king a lord among others, in England lords owed their lands and positions to the relations of fealty right from the conquest.

For Comninel, at the heart of this divergence lie the manorial relations of English feudalism. As the king continued to have full and effective jurisdiction over all free men, *seigneurie* never developed in England, "but instead combined proprietary lordship—

31. George C. Comninel, "English Feudalism and the Origins of Capitalism," p.3.

32. George C. Comninel, "English Feudalism and the Origins of Capitalism," p.4.

33. George C. Comninel, "English Feudalism and the Origins of Capitalism," p.19.

34. George C. Comninel, "English Feudalism and the Origins of Capitalism," p.22.

subject to lord's obligations to the king—with a domestic lordship much magnified by the Conquest.”³⁵ In this process, the issue of ‘freedom’ gained significance in England and the lords were able to subject only their *dependent* tenants to their jurisdictions. Hence, although they also took recourse to extra-economic coercion, the landlords in England “remained essentially private and domestic,” laying the basis of the subsequent developments towards agrarian capitalism.³⁶

In England differentiation of freehold from villein tenure, starting from the mid-Twelfth Century rendered the former category on an equal footing with the landlords—in terms of legal formal equality—in front of king's jurisdiction. Therefore, where in France all peasants were under the jurisdiction of their lords, English freeholders were exempt from it and only holders of the villein tenures were in this situation.³⁷ The fact that the latter were only protected by the custom of the manor, provided the basis of the subsequent English history of enclosures, curtailment of the customary law, engrossment, adoption of more efficient methods of farming, thus in one word, the agrarian capitalism, which was very far from the French developments.

Hence, in the works of Brenner, Wood, and Comninel the divergence of the English path from that of France was attributed to the different property right patterns of these countries. Besides being a very convincing theory compared to others, I think these studies have another merit. As Wood repeats in almost every work, the specificity of capitalism should be stressed. The development of capitalism can be understood with a perspective of the development of the imperatives, not only of the opportunities, as it is generally done. This characteristic is the difference of this trio, compared to other property rights schools. I will finish this section with a parenthesis on such a school provided by Alchian and Demsetz, depending on the work of Coase.

Property rights writers favor empirical studies to elucidate the development of private property. Hence, they refer to cases such as Indians of the Labrador Peninsula where the development of the fur trade ignited private property at the beginning of the Eighteenth Century,³⁸ or relative rise in the value of land in England during the Thirteenth Century which initiated enclosures and an extensive body of land law.³⁹

35. George C. Comninel, “English Feudalism and the Origins of Capitalism,” p.23.

36. George C. Comninel, “English Feudalism and the Origins of Capitalism,” p.26.

37. George C. Comninel, “English Feudalism and the Origins of Capitalism,” p.31.

38. Harold Demsetz, “Toward a Theory of Property Rights,” *The American Economic Review*, 57/2 (May 1967), p.351.

39. Armen A. Alchian and Harold Demsetz, “The Property Rights Paradigm,” *The Journal of Economic History*, 33/1 (March 1973), pp.16-27; and Douglas C. North and Robert Paul Thomas, “An Economic Theory of the Growth of the Western World,” *The Economic History Review*, 23/1 (April 1970), pp.11-13.

Although the property rights theorists emphasize the need for empirical work for specific situations, they have a general model in mind. Changes in technology or rising demand, which changes relative prices, will initiate changes in the structure of property rights. They argue that “the communal rights system raises transaction costs by creating a free rider problem.” Thus, for example, enclosures proved to be a cure for high transaction costs and they “have eased the task of putting resources to their most productive uses.”⁴⁰ For them,

“Under a communal right system each person has the private right to the use of a resource once it is captured or taken, but only a communal right to the same resource before it is taken. This incongruity between ownership opportunities prompts men to convert their rights into the most valuable form; they will convert the resources owned under communal arrangements into resources owned privately, that is, they will hunt in order to establish private rights over the animals. The problem can be resolved either by converting the communal right to a private right, in which case, there will be no overriding need to hunt the animals in order to establish a private claim, or the incentive to convert communal rights to private rights can be restrained through regulation.”⁴¹

If private rights can be easily policed, the transformation of communal rights into private rights will be socially useful, as private rights encourage persons to take account of social costs. If communal rights get the upper hand,⁴² that is, if the whole produce will be shared among the community, the problem will be replaced by another, *i.e.* “the problem of providing incentives to work.” In this case, the state has to regulate directly or an indirect cultural indoctrination would be necessary.”⁴³

Hence, the property rights school of Alchian and Demsetz is nothing but a liberal reading of legitimizing the institution of private property, and does not read the events as the development of both opportunity and imperative, but the one-sided development of the former. Hence, Wood’s caveat about this is of prime importance.

In the following, I will try to compare agrarian development of England and France using other resources, in an attempt to make a small literature survey.

40. Armen A. Alchian and Harold Demsetz, “The Property Rights Paradigm,” pp.21-22.

41. Armen A. Alchian and Harold Demsetz, “The Property Rights Paradigm,” pp.22-23.

42. Le Roy Ladurie’s views on the development of private and common-property in England are different from both the theory of Alchian and Demsetz and the studies of Brenner, Wood and Comninel. Le Roy Ladurie argues, with reference to razing practices in the Pyrenees that “the communal spirit, far from being a survival from pre-history, must have developed in upper Ariege between the fourteenth and eighteenth centuries ...” Therefore, he thinks that the diverging performances of France and England in this period is not the result of French backwardness (Barry C. Field, “The Evolution of Property Rights,” *Kyklos*, 42 (1989), pp.319-320). I am not able to answer the question whether his arguments stem from the ‘defensive’ approach, which has been not so rare among French historians, at this stage.

43. Armen A. Alchian and Harold Demsetz, “The Property Rights Paradigm,” pp.23-24.

PART II—AGRARIAN CAPITALISM AND ENGLISH SUPREMACY: OTHER THESES

The divergence between the agricultural performances of England and France became visible after the Seventeenth Century. Interestingly, the ‘consciousness’ of French backwardness was realized at the same time of the divergence, especially thanks to writers like Arthur Young who became the Secretary of the Board of Agriculture in 1793. Although there was not enough data, and Young may be biased⁴⁴ and presumptuous in his figures, it is generally accepted that towards the end of the Eighteenth Century English agriculture could produce roughly the same amount of agricultural produce on a land which was almost equal to one third of that of France.⁴⁵ Similarly, Le Roy Ladurie provides us similar data depending on the tithe levels.⁴⁶ Although his interpretations can be generally taken as a defensive approach towards French backwardness, his studies not only provide data on French backwardness, but also pull the start of divergence back to the Sixteenth Century.⁴⁷ According to him, wheat yields in England had increased by 30% between 1450 and 1650, while France was virtually stagnant in this period. Likewise, wheat production in England increased by 34.5% in England in the Eighteenth Century (between 1700 and 1790). Le Roy Ladurie argues that in the same period this increase could be around 20% in France.⁴⁸ Over the Nineteenth Century, the divergence continued as productivity per worker grew at a rate of 0.25% per annum in France, but around 1% in England.⁴⁹

44. Young’s studies were full of sentences like the following about France: “Heaven grant me patience while I see a country thus neglected” (Benjamin Sexauer, “English and French Agriculture in the Late Eighteenth Century,” *Agricultural History*, 50/3 (July 1976), p.494).

45. Benjamin Sexauer, “English and French Agriculture in the Late Eighteenth Century,” pp.492-493.

46. Emmanuel Le Roy Ladurie and Joseph Goy, *Tithe and Agrarian History from the Fourteenth to the Nineteenth Centuries: An Essay in Comparative History* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1982), p.100.

47. Le Roy Ladurie’s (*Tithe and Agrarian History*, pp.124-132) approach can be taken as a defensive one, since one can amply find excuses for French figures. For example, according to him, the reason that the 1560’s were not bright was the wars of religion, the 1630’s, 1640’s and early 1650’s were lost because of the Thirty Years’ War and Fronde, and the period between 1690 and 1713 suffered from the reign of the Louis XIV (Emmanuel Le Roy Ladurie and Joseph Goy, *Tithe and Agrarian History*, pp.124-132). Although these arguments could be reasonable, this does not mean that England was free from ‘problems’ like the seventeenth century revolutions, rendering Le Roy Ladurie’s neglect of other types of variables like the property settlements problematic.

48. Emmanuel Le Roy Ladurie and Joseph Goy, *Tithe and Agrarian History*, p.156, and p.175. However, it is necessary to state that, French increase in this period is the only argument of the book which is not backed by statistical data. Here, he uses a logical method, which reaches this 20% with assumptions about French and English population rates and relative prices. As a result, this is not a very reliable figure, since it depends on an assumption about the parallel developments of both countries, which was not the case.

49. Patrick O’Brien and Çağlar Keyder, *Economic Growth in Britain and France, 1780-1914: Two Paths to the Twentieth Century* (London: George Allen and Unwin, 1978), p.102.

As a result, it can be maintained that there is a consensus about the divergence between the agricultural performances of these countries and about the higher productivity of the English agriculture. For example, according to Sexauer, the problem of the French agriculture was its institutional specificities which prevented the necessary investments. In England higher capital/land and capital/labor ratios, which in turn were the result of the large farms in England, were the reasons of English superiority. He cites calculations of Young, who gave 2 pounds of average capital stock per acre in France and 4 pounds for England. Three fourths of this difference was in buildings, drainage systems and fencing, and the biggest item in the rest was the French deficit in livestock. For Young, “the quantity of sheep and cattle is everywhere trifling in comparison to what it ought to be.”⁵⁰ Hence, French agriculture was backwards in terms of fertilizers, lowering the quality of its soil and therefore its productivity.

For Sexauer, although the two countries were roughly similar in terms of agricultural organization until the enclosure movement, they drastically differed thereafter.⁵¹ As a result, while large farms dominated in England, French agriculture was characterized with *métayers* in the South and the *fermiers* in the North. For Young, the *métayage* system was “the most miserable of all modes of letting land; in many instances, the defrauded landlord receives a contemptible rent; the farmer is in the lowest state of poverty; the land is miserably cultivated.” Likewise, the other system of France was not better, since it did not enable a productive organization because of the farm sizes being under the necessary threshold. As a result, France did not fare better than a subsistence economy, while England could apply developed techniques such as ‘new husbandry’ by the late Eighteenth Century. The basis of new husbandry was the integration of livestock and arable farming, enabling the dung to be used extensively. The most important difference was the multiple crop rotation in England, which eliminated the fallow, while according to Young, two-thirds of the French arable land was under a rotation of three years, and the rest was under an even backward system of two-course rotation.⁵²

O’Brien and Keyder, in their detailed study, provide us more data on the French backwardness. Also for them, the greater yields of English agriculture depended on the application of organic fertilizer, which in turn was the result of a more favorable land endowment and higher investment levels. In their explanations of French backwardness,

50. Benjamin Sexauer, “English and French Agriculture in the Late Eighteenth Century,” p.497.

51. Benjamin Sexauer, “English and French Agriculture in the Late Eighteenth Century,” p.500.

52. Benjamin Sexauer, “English and French Agriculture in the Late Eighteenth Century,” p.499.

however, they emphasize contrasts in the systems of property rights, though they also take differences in geography into consideration. For example, they argue that excessive rains in England caused the soil to become acid, and as a result, large parts of British Isles were naturally suited to pasture, while those of France were not.⁵³ However, they also argue that geography does not explain enough. Citing Young, they emphasize the small scales of French agriculture, and held prevailing “peasant proprietorship, partible inheritance, the wider diffusion of land ownership and above all smaller-scale farm units” as aspects of the property rights settlements of France, which were the reasons of its backwardness.⁵⁴

Following Bloch, O’Brien and Keyder locate the origins of these differences in the “weaker juridical and political control over tenure exercised by the seigneurs, compared to the lords of English manors.”⁵⁵ For them, the absolutist state protected the peasants and communal lords in France, since its tax base depended on the peasantry, while the British government did not need to tax land, since they found other and more lucrative sources of revenue in trade and industry. The other explanation of them for the French difference was the tenacity and violence of the French peasants to maintain their “rights of access and control over land.”⁵⁶ As a result, French peasants could prevent the encroachment of the seigneurs, making the equation of ownership and control less secure in France. Thus in France, the seigneurs were in trouble if they refused to renew a lease and worse trouble was waiting for a possible new tenant who might dare to lease the land.⁵⁷ All these are the reasons of the continuity of France with old ways and caused the backwardness of the French agriculture.

Lastly, O’Brien and Keyder also point to the ‘rehabilitation of the large estate’ in France between 1480 and 1789. However, they accept that even this consolidation was not towards a capitalist agriculture. For this, they emphasize the lack of investment of the seigneurs in France and their sticking to rent collecting. Likewise, there was not any partnership between the landlords and the tenants, and “the land was but a means to be sucked fry to provide the cream of society the resources to consume, to buy, to pay dowries and to consume again.”⁵⁸ However, they argue, the movement towards large

53. Patrick O’Brien and Çağlar Keyder, *Economic Growth in Britain and France, 1780-1914*, p.130.

54. Patrick O’Brien and Çağlar Keyder, *Economic Growth in Britain and France, 1780-1914*, p.131.

55. Patrick O’Brien and Çağlar Keyder, *Economic Growth in Britain and France, 1780-1914*, p.132.

56. Patrick O’Brien and Çağlar Keyder, *Economic Growth in Britain and France, 1780-1914*, pp.132-133.

57. Patrick O’Brien and Çağlar Keyder, *Economic Growth in Britain and France, 1780-1914*, p.133.

58. Patrick O’Brien and Çağlar Keyder, *Economic Growth in Britain and France, 1780-1914*, p.136.

estates was checked in 1789, and the peasant proprietorship increased until the early Twentieth Century.⁵⁹

At this stage, it might be useful to look at the works of the French writers. As mentioned above, Le Roy Ladurie's work gives us some necessary data on the French backwardness, though the aim of this book was to find excuses for this. In terms of the lack of capitalist motives of the French seigneurs, Le Roy Ladurie brings another argument. He states that, being a country comprised of diverse regions, France had some regions which approximated English performances.⁶⁰ For him, the performance of Normandy—as opposed to Brittany, for example—indicates that there were real increases in the tithes and rents in the region in the Eighteenth Century. Hence, he criticizes the depictions of French seigneurs as 'turning the screw' on the peasantry, at least for all of the seigneurs. Nevertheless, in none of his arguments, Le Roy Ladurie could argue that there was a development towards capitalism even in successful regions such as Normandy, and his method does not fare well than breaking down the arguments about English supremacy, and criticizing these partial assumptions.

Likewise, Soboul's arguments about the French revolution, which was depicted as the midwife of capitalist agriculture, are also problematic. According to Soboul, the key to the history of French peasants is the rural community, and the French Revolution enabled the transition from 'natural' to 'capitalist' economy in the countryside.⁶¹ Like

59. Patrick O'Brien and Çağlar Keyder, *Economic Growth in Britain and France, 1780-1914*, p.137. According to Labrousse (Ernest Labrousse, "The Evolution of Peasant Society in France from the Eighteenth Century to the Present," in Evelyn M. Acomb and Marvin L. Brown, Jr. (eds.), *French Society and Culture since the Old Regime* (New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1966), p.44), the distribution of French lands on the eve of the Revolution were as follows: "clergy, less than ten percent; nobility, one-quarter; bourgeoisie, one quarter; peasant, undoubtedly a good third; the rest in the form of commons." More importantly, the share of the peasants after the Revolution increased, as they profited from the sale of national lands (*biens nationaux*), and peasant advances gradually continued until the 1880s, reaching 45% at the end of the Nineteenth Century (Labrousse "The Evolution of Peasant Society in France," p.45, and p.51). Thereafter, medium holdings, instead of the small ones started to increase, but the peasant proprietorship remained dominant until the 1930's (Labrousse, "The Evolution of Peasant Society in France," p.60).

60. Emmanuel Le Roy Ladurie and Joseph Goy, *Tithe and Agrarian History*, p.180.

61. Albert Soboul, "The French Rural Community in the Eighteenth and Nineteenth Centuries," *Past and Present*, No.10 (November 1956), p.83. Marc Bloch provides a definition of the rural community. "The foundations of the rural community were the collective ownership and use of the communal goods, the collective constraints upon private property for the benefit of the inhabitants as a group (prohibition of enclosure, compulsory rotation of crops), by the rights of usage over woods and fields (right to pasture on the fallow, of gleaning and stubble (*chaumage*), and lastly, by the rules of communal agriculture (the regulation of temporary cultivation, the fixing of the dates of harvest, the regulation of pasture on communal lands, etc.) (Bloch cited in, Albert Soboul, "The French Rural Community in the Eighteenth and Nineteenth Centuries," p.82).

other French writers, who count on French diversity, he argues that in some French regions such as Loire, custom permitted enclosures. But his main argument is that the French Revolution destroyed the feudal relationships and thus triggered the disintegration of the rural community.⁶² However, even his own arguments contradict this statement. For example, just a few pages later, he argues that the last peasant unrest of 1848-1851 was concentrated in the southeastern regions where rural communities continued to be strong.⁶³ He defends his position by arguing that these were nothing but ‘rearguard’ actions, but his arguments seem not convincing enough. Soboul argues that the French Revolution liberated “the productive forces from their feudal shackles” and the peasants benefited from the abolition of the feudal rights and tithes. The increase in the peasant proprietorship for him shows nothing but the “incompleteness of the bourgeois revolution.”⁶⁴ However, he does not explain how this necessitated more than a century to be completed.

Lastly about French writers, one should not ignore Bloch’s contributions to the debate. As mentioned above, most of the French writers use parts of Bloch’s arguments and there is much valuable which must be used in his studies. For example, Bloch traced back the differences between the French and English divergence to the Twelfth Century, and to the status differentials of the free peasant and villein in England and French seigneurs’ jurisdiction as an indivisible whole.⁶⁵ Likewise, he states that in the agrarian history of Europe, there is only one striking transformation—that is the enclosure movement of England which took part in the period between the Fifteenth and Nineteenth centuries, resulting in the “disappearance of communal obligations and the growth of individualism in agriculture.”⁶⁶ However, even he seems not to be devoid of a ‘defensive approach,’ since he criticizes the lack of any allusion to movements of this kind in France. For him, “yet there certainly have been such movements” in French history, especially in Provence in the Fifteenth, Sixteenth and Seventeenth centuries. However, these changes did not attract due attention, especially because of the fact that “the change did not bring about any visible modification of the countryside, since the disappearance of communal obligations did not entail the construction of hedges, and it was therefore

62. Albert Soboul, “The French Rural Community in the Eighteenth and Nineteenth Centuries,” p.85.

63. Albert Soboul, “The French Rural Community in the Eighteenth and Nineteenth Centuries,” p.93.

64. Albert Soboul, “The French Rural Community in the Eighteenth and Nineteenth Centuries,” p.89.

65. Marc Bloch, *Land and Work in Mediaeval Europe* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1967), pp.59-63.

66. Marc Bloch, *Land and Work in Mediaeval Europe*, p.49.

easy for it to pass unnoticed.”⁶⁷ Nonetheless, this does not mean that, Bloch argues that French history was similar to that of England, as he states that “I am very far from believing that all the characteristics of the English movement were reproduced on the shores of the Mediterranean.”⁶⁸

Therefore, it can be argued that although there are some counter arguments against the agrarian capitalism thesis and English supremacy, these are generally of defensive origin and do not deal with the spirit of the theses. In the following pages, I will discuss another literature, generally of English origin, which generally support these theses, though some of them—especially those of Bush and Mingay—suggest some modifications. It can be stated that Ernle’s book entitled *English Farming: Past and Present*, which was originally published in 1912, had laid the basis of the theses of English agricultural supremacy. For example, Ernle argues that English divergence started in the Twelfth Century, especially after 1236, when the rights of the landlords to enclose was recognized by the common law.⁶⁹ Although he does not emphasize class struggle, Ernle also discusses the role of the Black Death in the transfer of lands to the landlords and commutation of labor services into money rents.⁷⁰ Likewise, Ernle stresses the point that towards the end of the Fifteenth Century the modern trio of owners, occupiers and cultivators started to assume its modern aspect. However, he also accepts that the agricultural history of the Fifteenth Century is almost blank.⁷¹ This gap in theory is especially important, since without an explanation of the rise of this trio, it is impossible to completely explain English divergence.

Mingay brings other arguments about agrarian capitalism and the role of the landlords in it. He states that the arguments that ‘great proprietors’ had led the agricultural revolution are misleading. Although many examples in this line can be found, he argues that the ‘agrarian revolution’ was the result of owner-occupiers and tenant-farmers’ efforts. For Mingay, Arthur Young’s reports, though they were meticulous to show the activities of the landlords in the forefront, were full of experiments of the bigger tenant-farmers. Likewise, he cites A. Smith’s argument that it was not landlords *per se*, but “merchants who became country gentlemen” who led the process.⁷² More importantly,

67. Marc Bloch, *Land and Work in Mediaeval Europe*, p.50.

68. Marc Bloch, *Land and Work in Mediaeval Europe*, p.51.

69. Lord Ernle, *English Farming Past and Present*, pp.37-38.

70. Lord Ernle, *English Farming Past and Present*, pp.40-44.

71. Lord Ernle, *English Farming Past and Present*, pp.47-48.

72. Gordon E. Mingay, *English Landed Society in the Eighteenth Century* (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1963), pp.163-166.

Mingay states that in the late Seventeenth and early Eighteenth centuries, English landlords did not invest in the farm stocks, since they had other more lucrative areas to invest like mortgages, purchase of land or funds.⁷³ Likewise, he criticizes the political under-renting of the English landlords until the early Eighteenth Century. This is a process, as Young argues, which curbed the capitalist mentality, since high rents were vital for efficiency.⁷⁴

Mingay, therefore, criticizes the efficiency which is argued to come together with the bigger farms. Not only the ‘political mentality of the landlords’ but also the scattered nature of many of the large estates presented difficulties for administration and prevented an efficient production.⁷⁵ Likewise, he argues that the economic advantages and social effects of enclosures were exaggerated. For him, there was not any rapid revolution in agricultural techniques because of enclosures and open-field farming proved resilient against enclosures. Hence, enclosures did not amount to a destruction of the English peasantry.⁷⁶ Despite these arguments, he accepts that enclosures changed the institutional structure of English farming, and it was considered as an investment by the landlords.⁷⁷

Bush also supports some of the views of Mingay. For him, English nobles were but a variant of the continental nobility with all of their contempt for trade and commercialization.⁷⁸ As a result, commercial innovation had not been the work of the nobles but commoners. But, like Mingay his arguments were not against agrarian capitalism thesis, but discussions of some aspects of it. For him, the process was towards an economic rent in the Seventeenth and Eighteenth centuries different from the earlier periods.⁷⁹ Nevertheless, Bush thinks that this development was not only the result of the consolidation of the large farms. He states that,

“The engrossment of farms ... owed something to changes in the nature of tenancy. For these changes the lord and his agents were wholly responsible. Yet engrossment essentially occurred because the tenantry was capable of appreciating its advantages and possessed the resources to rent and operate land farms. Vital to the enlargement of farms was the willingness of the tenants

73. Gordon E. Mingay, *English Landed Society in the Eighteenth Century*, pp.168-169.

74. Gordon E. Mingay, *English Landed Society in the Eighteenth Century*, p.53.

75. Gordon E. Mingay, *English Landed Society in the Eighteenth Century*, p.60.

76. Gordon E. Mingay, *English Landed Society in the Eighteenth Century*, p.179.

77. Gordon E. Mingay, *English Landed Society in the Eighteenth Century*, s.182.

78. Michael L. Bush, *The English Aristocracy: A Comparative Synthesis* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1984), p.214; and Michael L. Bush, “An Anatomy of Nobility,” in Michael L. Bush (ed.), *Social Orders and Social Classes in Europe since 1500: Studies in Social Stratification* (London and New York: Longman, 1992), pp.26-46.

79. Michael L. Bush, *The English Aristocracy: A Comparative Synthesis*, p.181.

who had accumulated multiple tenancies to farm them directly rather than to adopt the stance of aristocrats and to sublet. Furthermore, engrossment was not an inevitable consequence of leasing. In parts of south-west France the tenures were incorporated in the demesne and the leasehold reigned supreme in the early modern period, but the conversion simply proliferated small holdings. Instead of producing the agrarian-capitalist sitting on his large farm, it produced the abject share-cropper subsisting on a minute holding. This suggests that the amalgamation of holdings and changes in the nature of tenure are only part of the explanation. An essential ingredient in the emergence of large-scale farming was the economic conditions favouring the rise of the agrarian capitalist.”⁸⁰

Therefore, Ernle, Mingay and Bush support the agrarian capitalism thesis, though especially the latter two raise questions about the role of the landlords in this process. In what follows, I will discuss the works of Clark and Albritton, who have more serious criticisms against these theses.

Clark has some reservations against the English supremacy thesis and does not accept that English landlords fared better than the continental nobility.⁸¹ Depending on the revisionist works, such as that of Chaussinand-Nogaret⁸² and Bush,⁸³ he argues that the overwhelming dim interpretation of the French performance has to be reconstructed with systematical comparisons of both countries. For this, he suggests that the peripheries of both countries should be included in the studies.⁸⁴ Therefore, he thinks that inclusion of Wales, Ireland, and Scotland in the comparative studies will qualify the English supremacy thesis. Unfortunately, this approach plays too much into the hands of diversity, which the French writers not so seldom have taken recourse to. Hence, Clark excludes the necessary property settlements and class relations of both countries. I think, this stems from the fact that Clark defines the English supremacy in terms of a transition from a status society to a class society.⁸⁵ Likewise, he trusts too much on the differentiation arguments of the structural functionalist theories. Hence, for him, state power and economic power was less differentiated in England compared to France, reproducing Nairn-Anderson theses from very different premises.⁸⁶

80. Michael L. Bush, *The English Aristocracy: A Comparative Synthesis*, p.182.

81. Samuel Clark, *State and Status: The Rise of the State and Aristocratic Power in Western Europe* (Montreal and Buffalo: McGill-Queen's University Press, 1995), pp.18-20.

82. Guy Chaussinand-Nogaret, *The French Nobility in the Eighteenth Century: From Feudalism to Enlightenment* [translated by William Doyle] (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1985).

83. Michael L. Bush, *The English Aristocracy*; and Michael L. Bush, “An Anatomy of Nobility.”

84. Samuel Clark, *State and Status*, p.22.

85. Samuel Clark, *State and Status*, p.16.

86. Samuel Clark, *State and Status*, pp.363-366.

The former problem of whether it is class or status which is determining in the pre-capitalist history is discussed by many writers.⁸⁷ Here is not the place to discuss this very important problem, which is a key term for many discussions about the pre-capitalist societies of all kind. But it should be stated that, as Bloch argues against Fustel de Coulanges, social classes were superimposed on juridical status from the earlier dates, and counterpoising the two might be problematic.⁸⁸ The second problem in Clark's work is his arguments about differentiation in England and France. As he accepts, the differentiation is multi-dimensional, and without a theory to put this into perspective, every country can be taken as more differentiated according to a scale in mind. Unfortunately this will not help much.

Robert Albritton makes another argument and criticizes the notion of agrarian capitalism. He questions the capitalist character of agrarian capitalism, providing an analysis, which depends on the conception of pure capitalism.⁸⁹ For Albritton, the major determinant is the degree of commodification of the labour power. Having said this, he writes that at the beginning of the Eighteenth Century English agriculture cannot be taken as capitalist, since labour saving was minimal—the improvements had mainly to do with such things as new crops, crop rotation, and the use of animal fertilizers rather than the use of labour-saving tools—even in 1831 around 50% of the farmers employed no labour other than their own families, the labour was not mobile because of the Settlement acts which prevent the moving of poor families from one parish to another, etc.⁹⁰ Thus he argues that Brenner focuses on commercialization of farming instead of commodification of labour power.

Albritton also argues that English grain yields were comparable to other continental countries. Hence it was not superior in terms of output but only of labor productivity. More importantly, English labor productivity was lower than that of France until the 1700's and only thereafter it started to diverge. Hence Albritton argues that agrarian

87. See, for example, A. D. Lublinskaya, "The Contemporary Bourgeois Conception of Absolute Monarchy," *Economy and Society*, 1/1 (February 1972), pp.47-92; Peter Burke, "The Language of Orders in Early Modern Europe," in Michael L. Bush (ed.), *Social Orders and Social Classes in Europe since 1500: Studies in Social Stratification* (London and New York: Longman, 1992), pp.1-13; Michael L. Bush, "An Anatomy of Nobility"; and William Doyle, "Myths of Order and Ordering Myths," in Michael L. Bush (ed.), *Social Orders and Social Classes in Europe since 1500: Studies in Social Stratification* (London and New York: Longman, 1992), pp.218-229.

88 Albert Soboul, "The French Rural Community in the Eighteenth and Nineteenth Centuries," p.83.

89 Robert Albritton, "Did Agrarian Capitalism Exist?" *The Journal of Peasant Studies*. 20/3 (April 1993), p.420.

90 Robert Albritton, "Did Agrarian Capitalism Exist?" pp.425-431.

capitalism thesis in itself is problematic. Against these lines, Wood provides an answer. She agrees that proletarianization is central to the story of capitalism.⁹¹ However, the answer to that cannot come from assuming the division between rich and poor peasants, which can be found in many non-capitalist places. According to her, what is important is the particular system of class relations, within which the participants acted to reproduce themselves *as they were*, with the unintended consequence of setting off a process of development that gave rise to capitalism.”⁹² Hence, the logic of the market was imposed on English farmers whether or not they consistently employed wage labour.

CONCLUSION

Even a cursory reading of the history of agrarian relations of England and France shows that their performances started to diverge in the Seventeenth Century. As discussed above in this paper, there is a consensus about the more productive character of the English agriculture. Brenner, Wood and Comninel take this English supremacy thesis and put it into the perspective of agrarian capitalism thesis, emphasizing the property rights settlements and class relations.

Among the writers discussed in this paper, only Clark seems not to accept the English supremacy thesis in general, though even he maintains that agrarian relations in England were more ‘differentiated.’ On the other hand, only Albritton criticizes the notion of agrarian capitalism in an open manner. The rest of the writers seem to discuss the partial aspects of this thesis. For example, French writers seem to accept the basic arguments of the theses, but argue that these relations were not absent in some regions of France, hence they put forward the diversity thesis. Or they can find some excuses about the reasons of the ‘backwardness’ of France, as Le Roy Ladurie does, and thus divert the attention from the real causes like class relations and property settlements towards external ones like the wars or abject rules of the specific rulers.

The response of the British writers like Mingay and Bush is a reserved approval of the thesis. While on the one hand, they accept the British supremacy and agrarian capitalism, they reject arguments about the specificity of the English nobility. More

91 Ellen Meiksins Wood, *The Origin of Capitalism: A Longer View* (New York: Monthly Review Press, 1999).

92. Ellen Meiksins Wood, *The Origin of Capitalism*, p.52.

importantly, for Bush, the rise of the tenantry which was capable of investing, and the economic background of this is the most important determinant of the English uniqueness. I think, though this interpretation is not against the agrarian capitalism thesis, it is against the interpretation of Brenner, who asserts that “it was not ... the rise of the market in itself which made for the rapid differentiation of the peasantry in England and the rise of the yeoman (almost always larger commercial *tenants*), but rather the social-property relationships which made the English agricultural producers fully dependent upon competitive production.”⁹³ This question can be resolved by further studies on the period starting with the Fifteenth Century of England, which Ernle argues to be relatively neglected, and it seems that comparative method will pay off.

93. Robert Brenner, “*The Agrarian Roots of European Capitalism*,” p.301.