

Introduction

On 15 Messidor year V of the Revolutionary Calendar (3 July 1797), Citizen Talleyrand, known in his pre-revolutionary days as Charles Maurice de Talleyrand-Perigord, addressed the Institut National des Sciences et Arts in Paris on the ‘advantages to be gained from new colonies in the current circumstances’.¹ To his listeners in the Institute, the intellectual powerhouse of the French Republic, ‘current circumstances’ was a recognisable shorthand for the cascade of events that had brought the Ancien Régime colonial empire to its knees. Metropolitan merchants’ protected trade with the colonies had eroded as soon as authority collapsed and a chain of slave rebellions in Martinique, Guadeloupe, Guiana, and Saint-Domingue had jeopardised France’s lucrative sugar and coffee industries. Then, in 1794, the combined forces of rebellion, warfare, and terror expedited the decree to abolish slavery throughout the French colonial empire, ushering in versions of republican rule in Saint-Domingue, Guiana, and Guadeloupe while pro-slavery planters on Martinique capitulated to British forces. By the time Talleyrand took to the podium, these cataclysmic events had nonetheless started to subside. Skilled at reading the winds, he therefore seized this opportune moment to advocate a new colonial doctrine for the French Republic.

Addressing the Institute as a member of its section on political economy, and as a recent returnee from the United States, Talleyrand opened with the claim that men endowed with political foresight had long warned that the colonies in America would inevitably seek independence from their mother countries. Yet, he continued, European vice and mercantilist policies – ‘[t]hese pusillanimous doctrines that see a *loss* wherever a *gain* is made’ – had accelerated the process and devastated

¹ Unless otherwise stated, all translations are my own. Charles Maurice de Talleyrand-Perigord, *Essai sur les avantages à retirer de colonies nouvelles dans les circonstances présents* (Paris: Baudouin, Imprimeur de l’Institut National, 1797).

and estranged the colonies. The Republic should therefore reject the old colonial strategies and embrace a just and kind approach that guaranteed free exchange and ‘mutual enrichment’. He further promoted setting up new colonies with ‘more natural, useful, and durable’ ties to France, specifying that Egypt or ‘a few settlements along the coast of Africa or on adjacent islands would be easy and fitting’. Africa, he contended, had a similar climate to that of the Americas and would allow for the production of American commodities on its soil. Since the decreed abolition of slavery had raised the need for a new system of cultivation, why not ‘try such cultivation in the very region where the cultivators are born’? Regenerating the colonial system in such a manner, he emphasised, would beautifully complement the political achievements of revolutionary France.² All would be new. Or would it?

Some thirty years earlier, on a plot of land near the village of Rufisque in Senegal, a ship captain named Le Large was running his fingers through the topsoil to determine its fertility. Was this the right place for the colony and the cotton, indigo, sugar, and coffee plantations that the governor of Gorée, Jean-Georges, chevalier de Mesnager, was hoping to found? Le Large looked up. Cotton and indigo already grew around the village, cattle grazed and chickens and ducks waddled around. The air was fresh, the local fishing industry thrived, the dried fish was tasty, and the palm wine delicious, particularly when enjoyed cool. His sight fell on the local population. They looked healthy, large, and robust. Many were skilled farmers and fishermen and they seemed warmly disposed towards the French. He decided to report back that the plot was ideal for the founding of a new French colony.³

The terrain that Le Large reconnoitred belonged to the local ruler of Kayoor. The latter had offered it in tribute to de Mesnager after the governor had saved members of Kayoor’s royal family from British slave traders. De Mesnager was now hoping to bring European settlers to Africa to found a colony that would compensate for the recent territorial losses France had incurred in the Americas in the Seven Years War. The moment was favourable, de Mesnager thought. The government had just abrogated the trade monopoly of the Compagnie des Indes in Africa and opened trade to all French traders – a policy in line with the latest fashion in

² *Ibid.*, 3, 4, and 13.

³ Report by Le Large, 14 September 1765, enclosed with a letter from de Mesnager to Choiseul, Gorée. Archives nationales d’outre-mer, Aix-en-Provence, France (hereafter ANOM), Sénégal et Côtes d’Afrique, Sous-série C⁶ (hereafter C⁶) 15, memo 56.

political economy. It was also in the throes of forming a new colony in Guiana and modifying trade policies with the Caribbean sugar islands as part of broad imperial reform. Le Large's expert knowledge of Senegambia, the governor hoped, would help whet the crown's interest in West African colonial expansion and inspire incoming settlers 'arriving with dreams of great fortunes'.⁴

Thirty-two years later, Talleyrand's proposal before the Institute came at a crucial moment in the Revolution. After the first calamitous years of rebellion and warfare, success on the battlefield had boosted French nationalist pride and transformed defensive warfare into a self-proclaimed mission to liberate Europe from the shackles of despotism. In addition to the abolition of slavery, the revolutionary government of the Convention had integrated the French colonies into the Republic as overseas departments in the Constitution of the year III (22 August 1795) and France was one year from sanctioning the invasion and colonisation of Egypt. Talleyrand's speech, therefore, seems to lend itself to a history in which French imperial innovation and resurrection took off during the later stages of the French Revolution. Yet his proposal, like so many others of the time, built on Ancien Régime experimentation, innovation, and reform.

Economistes and the Reinvention of Empire brings these connections between the First Republic's imperial agenda and Ancien Régime colonial innovation and reform into view. Tracing change in French colonial ideas, policy and practice, it explores multiple and often interlinked efforts to regenerate French imperial interests in the Americas and in Africa in the second half of the eighteenth century. As imperial warfare imperilled the crown's grip on colonial possessions in the Caribbean and on the North American continent, political economists, policy makers, stakeholders of colonial commerce, administrators, and local entrepreneurs on the ground participated in a wider struggle to reorganise and enhance French colonial commerce. Attention to their myriad efforts to shape the recalibration of empire during the last decades of the Ancien Régime allows us to contextualise the articulation of a republican imperial policy during the French Revolution in ways that get beyond the stale generalizations integral to the division between pre- and post-revolutionary France. It also allows us to broaden our understanding of the dynamics that drove colonial reform.

At the radical end of the Ancien Régime reformist spectrum were a group of political economists, known as the *Economistes* or the *Physiocrates*. From

⁴ De Mesnager to Choiseul, undated, Gorée. ANOM C⁶ 15, memo 24.

the 1750s, this group elaborated a theoretical framework for a new mode of colonial empire in opposition to the body of commercial laws and attitudes that structured much of the existing French colonial system. Celebrating agriculture as the sole source of riches, they championed economic development over colonial exploitation, free international trade over monopoly trade, and free labour over slave labour. Later appropriated by revolutionaries during the Directory, their ideas were shaped not only by European intellectual circuits but also by policy makers and officials enmeshed in fractious and diverse colonial settings: an empire that was continually responding to, and occasionally even driving, efforts at top-down reform.

A core ambition of this book is to study how these attempts to reconstitute French empire in the Americas and in Africa developed in tandem with the better-studied push to strengthen the plantation complex in the Caribbean between the Seven Years War and the French Revolution. Within this story, the ambitions and perceptions of colonial entrepreneurs like Le Large and de Mesnager – as they sought to turn local land and labour into commodities and profit – proved decisive in shaping the colonial visions of political economists and metropolitan policy makers. In part for this reason, there is no single narrative arc of French imperial design, but rather multiple strands following distinct rhythms of change. With this polyphony in view, another core goal of this book is to examine how and why Talleyrand and his peers later adopted these elements of Ancien Régime colonial innovation for themselves as they set about fashioning a supposedly new imperial agenda for the First Republic.

Imperial Trajectories in the Second Half of the Eighteenth Century

The second half of the eighteenth century was an age of mammoth upheaval not only within the French imperial domains but across Europe's major colonial empires. In these decades, Britain rose as the prominent global power, yet warfare and competition crippled victor and losers alike. France lost its holdings up the Senegal River as well as its claims to colonial empire in India and on the North American mainland in the Seven Years War (1756–63) and was only able to secure the restoration of its sugar colonies in the Caribbean, a few trade stations in West Africa and India, and preservation of its Newfoundland fishery. Spain fared little better. Having joined the war on the side of the French in 1762, it was forced to cede Florida to Britain with the arrival of peace, prompting France to offer Louisiana to its ally in compensation. Britain could pride itself of territorial gains, yet the

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costs of war quickened its looming conflict with its thirteen colonies in North America and, once war broke out, saw it lose some of its earlier conquests. Over the years, the strains of rivalry and warfare among Europe's colonial empires generated a 'crisis of the anciens régimes' and a series of revolutions and independence movements in the Atlantic World, but also pan-European imperial reform as implicated powers strove to preserve their claims to colonies and markets.⁵

A key intellectual driver of reform was the growing attention paid to political economy. Whether one looks at Britain, France, Portugal, or Spain, this budding field 'galvanised a generation of reformers' looking to overhaul imperial relations and boost domestic prosperity. Proponents of often competing strands of political economy participated in attempts to recalibrate the characteristic features of what most scholars still refer to as Europe's mercantilist colonial systems.⁶ Government officials with connections to the sprawling networks of merchants, traders, and economists readjusted tariff barriers and monopoly trade and scrutinised the obsession with a balance of commerce. During the 1760s, 1770s, and 1780s, first the Iberian and French colonial empires, and soon also the British, reorganised or abrogated the trade monopolies of chartered colonial companies and opened up sectors of colonial commerce to their merchants, while still looking to circumscribe colonies' access to international markets. In turn, the smaller maritime powers of the Dutch, Danes, and Swedes set out to enhance or develop their Caribbean free port systems in conjunction with a policy of neutrality to survive and profit from great power rivalry.⁷

⁵ Jeremy Adelman, *Sovereignty and Revolution in the Iberian Atlantic* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2006), 5. On the Age of Revolution as an agent of imperial regeneration, see also his 'An Age of Imperial Revolutions', *The American Historical Review*, 113, 2 (2008), 319–40. On the global context of revolutions, see David Armitage and Sanjay Subrahmanyam (eds.), *The Age of Revolutions in Global Context, c. 1760–1840* (Basingstoke, UK: Palgrave Macmillan, 2010); on the French global context, see Suzanne Desan, Lynn Hunt, and William Max Nelson (eds.), *The French Revolution in Global Perspective* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2013).

⁶ On political economy galvanising reform, see Gabriel Paquette, *Enlightenment, Governance, and Reform in Spain and its Empire, 1759–1808* (Basingstoke, UK: Palgrave Macmillan, 2008), 2. On political economic theory and colonial empire more broadly, see Sophus Reinert and Pernille Røge (eds.), *The Political Economy of Empire in the Early Modern World* (London: Palgrave, 2013). For a critique of 'mercantilism', see Steven Pincus, 'Rethinking Mercantilism: Political Economy, the British Empire, and the Atlantic World in the Seventeenth and Eighteenth Centuries', *The William and Mary Quarterly*, 69, 1 (2012), 3–34, and Philip J. Stern and Carl Wennerlind (eds.), *Mercantilism Reimagined: Political Economy in Early Modern Britain and Its Empire* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014).

⁷ On Iberian imperial reform, see Adelman, *Sovereignty and Revolution*; Paquette, *Enlightenment, Governance, and Reform*. On French reform, see Jean Tarrade, *Le commerce colonial de la France à la fin de l'Ancien Régime. L'évolution du régime de 'l'Exclusif' de 1763 à 1789*, 2 vols. (Paris: Presses universitaires de France, 1972). On Britain and its emulation of Bourbon reforms, see

For France, this broader moment of European imperial crisis and reform, pushed it to intensify its production of sugar and coffee for foreign markets. Boosting the French sugar and coffee business catered to French economic needs, but perpetuated endogenous problems particular to France and its colonies. In the eighteenth century, French colonial interests converged on the Caribbean plantation complex whose capital-intensive cash crop cultivation and forced labour system generated high profits for the metropole. Trailing British sugar production in the early 1700s, France became the world's greatest sugar producer in 1740 due to the rise of Saint-Domingue and soon also the biggest producer of coffee.⁸ Yet the preservation of colonies in the Americas was inherently challenging in a region haunted by intermittent warfare, environmental disasters, epidemics, fraudulent colonial administrators, and often-distraught colonial populations. The quest to satisfy European consumers' appetites for sugar and coffee and French metropolitan merchants' ambitions to remain competitive on the world market further aggravated inherent instabilities. Seeking to drive up production, planters invested in technology, land, and ever-larger numbers of bonded labourers from Africa but fell into debt to colonial and metropolitan merchants along the way. Moreover, Saint-Domingue's privileged position within the French colonial system engendered intra-imperial frustrations because metropolitan merchants with an exclusive privilege to colonial markets – a system known as the *Exclusif* – preferred taking their manufactured goods, agricultural foodstuff, and African slaves to Saint-Domingue at the expense of other colonies.⁹

Tensions over provision, production, and debt in the French Caribbean colonies were compounded by anxieties produced by the use of African

Richard Drayton, *Nature's Government: Science, Imperial Britain, and the 'Improvement' of the World* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2000), 92. On the Dutch, Danes, and Swedes, see Han Jordaan and Victor Wilson, 'The Eighteenth-Century Danish, Dutch and Swedish Free Ports in the Northeastern Caribbean: Continuity and Change', in Gert Oostindie and Jessica V. Roitman, *Dutch Atlantic Connections, 1680–1800: Linking Empires, Bridging Borders* (Leiden: Brill, 2014), 275–308.

⁸ On the French sugar and coffee economy, see Paul Butel, *L'économie française au XVIII^e siècle* (Paris: Sedes, 1993), 114–15. On a definition of the plantation complex, see Philip D. Curtin, *The Rise and Fall of the Plantation Complex: Essays in Atlantic History*, 2nd edn. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998), 10–13.

⁹ On the ultimately ill-fated relationship between Ancien Régime France, its sugar economy, and nascent capitalism through the lens of a single plantation on Saint-Domingue, see Paul B. Cheney, *Cul de Sac: Patrimony, Capitalism, and Slavery in French Saint-Domingue* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2017). On the growing prominence of Saint-Domingue at the expense of Guadeloupe and Martinique, see Tarrade, *Le commerce colonial*, i, 23. For an overview of Martinique and Guadeloupe's economic development, see Alain-Philippe Blérald, *Histoire économique de la Guadeloupe et de la Martinique du XVII^e siècle à nos jours* (Paris: Karthala, 1986), Chapter 1.

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slave labour. Colonial slavery was a brutal form of human exploitation, in which plantation owners and slave traders categorised African men, women, and children as commodities or cattle whose sole value stemmed from the labour that could be extracted from them. The demands for ever-higher numbers of slaves to maximise production generated a demographic imbalance in the colonies in which the enslaved population vastly outnumbered free whites. The latter constantly feared a violent reaction from African slaves, whose strategies of resistance took expression in both passive and aggressive forms. They also worried in ever-more racist tones about the rising population of free people of colour whose economic aspirations they found threatening to the colonies' social and racial hierarchies. Adding to these demographic concerns, slave owners increasingly faced moral headwinds as 'enlightened' sectors across the Atlantic World started portraying plantation slavery as incompatible with the moral fibre of civilised society.¹⁰

The French government was well aware of these mounting problems, yet the fiscal and financial benefits that it stood to make from its sugar colonies determined its response to them. It was not only merchants in French port cities or artisans producing goods for the plantations who chased the economic opportunities that the plantation complex fostered. Direct and indirect duties on colonial imports and exports bolstered state revenues and lined the pockets of receivers general and tax farmers, while state financiers and ministers reaped the benefits of private investments in colonial companies, sugar plantations, and sugar refineries. The quest for profits that drove the intensification of the plantation complex, however, was not confined to France. Several European states were willing to go to war to secure the colonial economies on which their domestic prosperity and consumer culture had come to rely. Excepting the 1720s, France was at war in every decade of the eighteenth century – often on numerous

¹⁰ On the commodification of Africans during the transatlantic slave trade, see Marcus Rediker, *The Slave Ship: A Human History* (London: John Murray, 2007), and Stephanie E. Smallwood, *Saltwater Slavery: A Middle Passage from Africa to American Diaspora* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2008). On tensions between whites and free people of color, see Stewart R. King, *Blue Coat or Powdered Wig: Free People of Color in Pre-Revolutionary Saint Domingue* (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 2001). On the rise of anti-slavery in Atlantic and Global perspective, see David Brion Davis, *The Problem of Slavery in Western Culture* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1966), and Seymour Drescher, *Abolition: A History of Slavery and Antislavery* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2009). On French anti-slavery, see Edward Derbyshire Seiber, *Anti-Slavery Opinion in France during the Second Half of the Eighteenth Century* (London: Oxford University Press, 1937); Jean Ehrard, *Lumière et Esclavage: L'Esclavage colonial et l'opinion publique en France au XVIII^e siècle* (Bruxelle: André Versaille, 2008); and Madeleine Dobie, *Trading Places: Colonization and Slavery in Eighteenth-Century French Culture* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2010).

continents at once. Because it never found a sustainable way to finance these wars, the crown's ambitions to remain a leading power pushed it to teeter on the edge of bankruptcy as the eighteenth century unfolded. The expanded scene of conflict in the Spanish and then the Austrian Wars of Succession depleted state coffers while the costs of the Seven Years War and the American Revolution pushed the crown towards deluge.¹¹ With these latter wars, domestic, colonial, and trans-imperial tensions began to reinforce each other with alarming speed, threatening to render France's colonial empire in the Americas untenable within the existing French political and economic structures.

Economistes and the Rethinking of Colonial Empire

In an age of expanding public debate, none of this tumult went unnoticed. Since the seventeenth century, commentators had warned that France's political and social structures failed to respond adequately to the economic opportunities colonial and global commerce offered but also required to flourish. In the following century, an array of political economists of lesser or greater theoretical persuasion had turned their attention to the puzzle of how best to equip France to reap the benefits of colonial and global commerce. Among these were also the group of political economists with whom this book engages, a group co-founded by Victor Riqueti, marquis de Mirabeau and Doctor François Quesnay in the late 1750s and who later became known as the Physiocrats.¹²

The Physiocrats' critique of prevailing French colonial policies and practices, I argue in this book, embodied a radical rethinking of the underpinnings of French relations with the Americas and Africa. Building on an

¹¹ On the financial burdens of warfare, see James C. Riley, *The Seven Years War and the Old Regime in France – The Economic and Financial Toll* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1986); on the fear of deluge, see Michael Sonenscher, *Before the Deluge – Public Debt, Inequality, and the Intellectual Origins of the French Revolution* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2007). The subject of the fiscal and financial problems leading to the French Revolution is discussed succinctly in Joël Félix, 'The Financial Origins of the French Revolution', in *The Origins of the French Revolution*, ed. Peter R. Campbell (Basingstoke, UK: Palgrave Macmillan, 2006), 35–62.

¹² On growing attention to commerce and agriculture, see Henry C. Clark, *Compass of Society: Commerce and Absolutism in Old-Regime France* (Lanham, MD: Lexington Books, 2007), and John Shovlin, *The Political Economy of Virtue: Luxury, Patriotism, and the Origins of the French Revolution* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2006). On the critique of Louis XIV's commercial policies, see Lionel Rothkrug, *Opposition to Louis XIV: The Political and Social Origins of the French Enlightenment* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1965). On the struggle to respond to expanding commercial opportunities and the rise of French economic thought, see Paul B. Cheney, *Revolutionary Commerce Globalization and the French Monarchy* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2010).

earlier generation of agrarian political economists, their economic doctrine rested on the notion that France was an agricultural monarchy whose failure to tend to the cultivation of land hindered its prosperity. In their view, agriculture was the sole source of riches. If allowed to thrive unfettered and in accordance with what they referred to as ‘the natural order’, a single land tax on the net product of agricultural production would be enough to alleviate the crown’s financial problems and place the monarchy on a path to success. To the Physiocrats, the problem was that France’s existing commercial laws impeded agricultural development. Labelling these laws the *système mercantile* years before Adam Smith baptised it the ‘mercantile system’, they castigated exclusive trade privileges, tariffs, and guilds as harmful to the general interests of the state.¹³

In the context of French colonial empire, the Physiocrats’ critique of the mercantile system translated into damning attacks on the *Exclusif* and chartered colonial companies such as the French *Compagnie des Indes*. It also led to critiques of the institution of slavery and a reconceptualisation of colonies as ‘overseas provinces’. Most in eighteenth-century France, including the Crown, viewed colonies as entities created to serve the economic development of the metropole. In contrast, the Physiocrats argued that the economic development of the metropole was best achieved if colonies enjoyed the same right to economic prosperity as French domestic provinces. According to Quesnay, colonies should be integrated into the metropole as overseas provinces and subjected to the same set of economic laws that he advocated for metropolitan France. This was a radical proposal at the time, not because colonies had never previously been depicted as provinces – Sicily, Sardinia, and Corsica were designated as *provinciae* of the Roman Empire – or because colonial integration was a new phenomenon.¹⁴ The novelty of his proposition hinged on its

¹³ On the Physiocrats’ and Adam Smith’s formulation and use of the concept of ‘mercantile system’, see Céline Spector, ‘Le concept de mercantilisme’, *Revue de métaphysique et de morale* 39, 3 (2003), 289–309. Works that have informed my understanding of Physiocracy include Georges Weulersse, *Le mouvement physiocratique en France (de 1756 à 1770)*, 2 vols. (Paris: F. Alcan, 1910); Jean-Claude Perrot, *Une Histoire Intellectuelle de l’Économie Politique (XVII^e–XVIII^e siècle)* (Paris: Éditions de l’École des Hautes études en sciences sociales, 1992); Philippe Steiner, *La ‘science nouvelle’ de l’économie politique* (Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 1998); Cathrine Larrère, *L’Invention de l’Économie au XVIII^e siècle* (Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 1992); Liana Vardi, *The Physiocrats and the World of the Enlightenment* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012).

¹⁴ On the Roman use and meanings of *provinciae*, see John Richardson, *The Language of Empire: Rome and the Idea of Empire from the Third Century B.C. to the Second Century A.D.* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008), 11. On ideas of integration and assimilation in the early modern French colonial empire, see Saliha Belmessous, *Assimilation and Empire: Uniformity in French and British Colonies, 1541–1954* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013), Part I.

assumption that the mutual prosperity of colonies and domestic provinces was best attained through the universal application of the same single and simple set of economic laws across the French colonial empire. This physiocratic reconceptualisation of colonies as overseas provinces, I argue in this book, served as an intellectual precursor to the recasting of colonies as ‘overseas departments’ in the Constitution of the year III.

Contemporaries of Quesnay usually depicted the doctor as the Physiocrats’ principal leader and genius. While this may have been the case in terms of Physiocracy’s domestic focus, the marquis de Mirabeau was the intellectual engine behind the doctrine’s colonial stance. Mirabeau had developed a clear argument against the *Exclusif* before he started collaborating with Quesnay and had articulated a poignant critique of the use of African slave labour in his European best-seller, *L’Ami des hommes* (1756). Mirabeau’s interest in colonies and slavery, as Michèle Duchet has noted, originated in the correspondence he maintained with his younger brother, Jean-Antoine Riqueti, chevalier de Mirabeau, during the latter’s governorship of Guadeloupe in the 1750s. In the book, I analyse the ways in which *L’Ami des hommes* was a response to the chevalier de Mirabeau’s abysmal portrayal of colonial life. I further consider how the marquis’ ideas would subsequently influence Quesnay and the principal recruits to the physiocratic doctrine.¹⁵ Although Mirabeau and Quesnay’s earliest collaborator, Pierre-Paul Le Mercier de la Rivière, refrained from publicly attacking colonial slavery during his years as intendant of Martinique, key recruits such as the journalists Pierre Samuel Du Pont de Nemours, Abbé Nicolas Baudeau, and Abbé Pierre-Joseph-André Roubaud used the marquis de Mirabeau’s initial critique to develop what they believed to be a more legitimate and rational form of colonial expansion. Mining a budding literature on the natural history of West Africa for commercial opportunities closer to home, they proposed relocating the production of sugar, coffee and other colonial cash crops to Africa where free local labourers could cultivate it with European encouragement. They coupled such suggestions with ideas of progress and ‘civilisation’, a concept coined by the marquis de Mirabeau and which would become integral to French imperialist discourse in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries.

Despite a recent increase in scholarly attention, the Physiocrats’ ideas on colonial empire are not well known.¹⁶ There is even a tendency to portray

¹⁵ Michèle Duchet, *Anthropologie et histoire au siècle des Lumières*, 2nd edn. (Paris: Albin Michel, 1995), 161.

¹⁶ There is still no single monograph on the colonial ideas of the Physiocrats except for André Labrousse’s dissertation, *Les idées coloniales des Physiocrates* (Paris: Presses Universitaires