

no less baneful than those of doctrinaire *laissez-faire*. The mentality of urban revolutionaries has sometimes been profoundly hostile to the peasantry, and in the twentieth century collectivist states have precipitated famines as appalling as those presided over by complacent political economy. Some theorists today are interested in remembering the first, and in forgetting the second, which are tidied away as unmentionable in little exercises of political thought. For that reason I have redressed the account, to show that rioters had their reasons.

And (in conclusion) more caution might be proper in the use of the term, "market". I return to my earlier question: is market an actual market or is it a metaphor? One hears on every side these days talk of "a market economy". When this is contrasted with the centralised direction of old-style collectivist states one understands what is being described. And, very certainly, the "market" here is beneficial and can also be democratic, in stimulating variety and in expressing consumer choice. But I cannot clearly say what was "a market economy" in eighteenth-century England; or, rather, I cannot find a non-market-economy to contrast it with. One cannot think of an economy without a market; and even the most zealous food rioters, such as Cornish tinnners or Kingswood miners or West of England clothing workers,¹ were inextricably committed to the market, both as producers and as consumers. How could they have existed for a month or a week without it? What we can find are different ways of regulating the market or of manipulating exchanges between producers and consumers, to the advantage of one party or the other. It is with the special case of the marketing of "necessities" in time of dearth that we have been concerned,

¹We are fortunate in having excellent studies of these groups of workers, both in their capacities as (hard-bargaining) producers and (riotous) consumers. Even "custom" was not pre-market or non-market but a particular community consensus as to the regulation of wages and prices. See J. G. Rule, "The Labouring Miner in Cornwall, c. 1740-1820", (Univ. of Warwick Ph.D. thesis, 1971), esp. pp. 116-80; R. W. Malcolmson, "A Set of Ungovernable People", in J. Brewer and J. Styles (eds.), *An Ungovernable People* (1980) (the mining population of Kingswood); A. J. Randall, "Labour and the Industrial Revolution in the West of England Woollen Industry" (Univ. of Birmingham Ph.D. thesis, 1979).

and the crowd's preferred model was precisely the "open market" in which the petty producers freely competed, rather than the closed market when large dealers conducted private bargains over samples in the back parlours of inns.¹

The "market economy", I suspect, is often a metaphor (or mask) for capitalist process. It may even be employed as myth. The most ideologically-compelling form of the myth lies in the notion of the market as some supposedly-neutral but (by accident) beneficent entity; or, if not an entity (since it can be found in no space but the head) then an energising spirit — of differentiation, social mobility, individualisation, innovation, growth, freedom — like a kind of postal sorting-station with magical magnifying powers, which transforms each letter into a package and each package into a parcel. This "market" may be projected as a benign consensual force, which involuntarily maximises the best interests of the nation. It may even seem that it is the "market system" which has "produced" the nation's wealth — perhaps "the market" grew all that grain?

Market is indeed a superb and mystifying metaphor for the energies released and the new needs (and choices) opened up by capitalist forms of exchange, with all conflicts and contradictions withdrawn from view. Market is (when viewed from this aspect) a mask worn by particular interests, which are not coincident with those of "the nation" or "the community", but which are interested, above all, in being mistaken to be so. Historians who suppose that such a market really could be found must show it to us in the records. A metaphor, no matter how grand its intellectual pedigree, is not enough.

III

Let us next take the question of the role of women in food riots. In 1982 Jennifer Grimmett and M. I. Thomis published a helpful chapter on the theme,² in which they raised but left

¹*Mist's Weekly Journal*, 12 March 1726 reported that the mob rose on market days in Northampton, Kettering, Oundle, Wellingborough, Stony Stratford, because farmers would not bring corn to the market-place "but kept it in the Inns". At Towcester a riot was prevented by the Cryer giving notice that corn must be brought "into open market".

²Malcolm I. Thomis and Jennifer Grimmett, *Women in Protest, 1800-1850* (1982), ch. 2. This is based on a survey of published sources and some use of newspapers in 1800 and 1812.

unanswered the question as to which sex was the more prominent. Kenneth Logue, in a study of "meal mobs" in Scotland found that women were very active, although they comprised only 28 per cent of those charged before the courts. But this was possibly because "they were less likely to be prosecuted than their male colleagues", so that, again, the question is left open.¹ In 1988 John Bohstedt sought to bring a conclusive answer in a substantial article which purports to demolish "the myth of the feminine food riot".²

Bohstedt's conclusions are as follows:

Women did not dominate food riots; food riots were not a distinctly feminine province. . . Women typically joined men in food riots. . . Women's co-operation with men is much more significant than the monopoly suggested by the older view. Women were significant partners to men as bread rioters partly because they were essential partners as bread-winners in the household economies of pre-industrial society and partly because bread riots were still effective politics in stable small-to-medium-sized traditional towns.

These conclusions are sustained in two ways. First, John Bohstedt presents what purport to be refined statistics of all riots in England and Wales between 1790 and 1810. Second, he introduces some pages of speculation as to gender roles in the proto-industrial household economy.

I have already expressed my admiration for Bohstedt's major study of riot. And there is interesting material in this new article. But the piece obscures as much as it reveals. The first difficulty is that there is no "myth of the feminine food riot" to demolish. No-one, no historian, has ever suggested that food riots were a "monopoly" of women or were predominantly feminine, and Bohstedt can show none. The best that he can do is hold up to censure Barbara and J. L. Hammond for writing (in 1911) of the crisis year of 1795 as the year of "the revolt of the housewives", because of "the conspicuous part taken by women" in the food riots.³ That

¹Kenneth J. Logue, *Popular Disturbances in Scotland, 1780-1815* (Edinburgh, 1979), pp. 199, 202-3.

²John Bohstedt, "Gender, Household and Community Politics: Women in English Riots, 1790-1810", *Past and Present*, no. 120 (August 1988), pp. 88-122. The claim to have demolished "the myth of the feminine food riot" is at pp. 90, 93.

³*Ibid.*, p. 88. J. L. and B. Hammond, *The Village Labourer* (1911; reprint 1966), pp. 116-8.

does not constitute a "myth", so that we are being led into a spurious polemic. Previous historians have, perhaps, not always given enough attention to women's part in riots, but most have agreed that women were highly visible rioters and were frequently involved. Since all historians show riots in which men also were highly visible, or in which men and women acted together, no-one has suggested that food riots were "a distinctly feminine province".

In his eagerness to drive this mythical opponent from the field, Bohstedt introduces his tables. He has with great industry assembled a "sample" of 617 riots between 1790 and 1810 and he drills this sample through various statistical manoeuvres. Now I don't know what to say to this. There are times when his figures are helpful — for example, in showing a rough division between different occasions for riot. And Bohstedt is a careful scholar who sometimes remembers the limitations of his evidence. But in general his history becomes less credible the more he surrenders to his own figures and the further he gets away from "literary" and contextual sources. This is because much of the evidence is too "soft" to be introduced to the hard definitions of a table. And when one looks at some of John Bohstedt's counting, the points at issue may seem absurd. Of his 617 riots he is able to identify 240 as food riots. These are further refined as:

A. Women dominant	B. Women and men	C. Men only	D. Gender unknown
35	42	81	82

If one deducts D, and puts A and B together, then 77 out of 158, or 49 per cent of these food riots had female participation and 51 per cent did not. So that if one wished to claim that women took part in "most" food riots, one would be at fault by 2 per cent. But, putting B and C together, one would discover that 123 out of 158, or 78 per cent had male participation — which could be a step on the way to a myth of a male food riot, to be demolished by a subsequent generation of computers.

When Bohstedt offers to drill these figures through more refined manoeuvres (such as violence and disorder quotients), he must make anyone laugh who is familiar with the source material which he is using. Let me explain some of the difficulties. There are, first of all, the difficulties in gathering

any reliable count. These are familiar, and have often been discussed.¹ Bohstedt's sample is drawn from the *Annual Register*, two London newspapers, and the in-letters to the Home Office concerning disorders (HO 42). This is a wide survey, but the provincial coverage of the London press was patchy, JPs might not always wish to report their local affairs to the central authorities, the sample tends to over-report dramatic or violent affrays and under-report quieter episodes (hence possibly under-reporting women's participation), and so on. When compared to regional studies which draw upon local sources, Bohstedt's sample shows a serious under-count. A most thorough study, by Alan Booth, of food riots in the north-west of England in the same years, lists forty-six disturbances of which only twelve are in Bohstedt's sample. Booth adds that "in most riots where sexual composition was recorded women appear to have been both more numerous and particularly active", and he goes on to cite thirteen examples. Hence Booth's examples (which he does not suggest are exhaustive) exceed the total of Bohstedt's count of food riots in all categories, which *must* undercount the feminine presence.²

Next, we must consider the nature of the evidence which is being used. How does it come about that in eighty-two cases (or more than one third of the sample) the sex of the rioters is unknown, and how hard or soft is the evidence in the eighty-one cases of men only? The evidence often comes in a sexually-indeterminate vocabulary: "rioters", "the mob", "the poor", "the inhabitants", "the populace". Let us take a letter of 12 July 1740 from Norwich, published in the *Ipswich Journal*, which describes a riot by "the common People", "the meanest of the People", "the Multitude,":

About Eight in the Evening the Mayor committed three of four disorderly Fellows to Prison; which Act so incens'd the Mob, that they broke open the Prison, releas'd their Companions, and have scarce left

¹The best comment is Roger Wells, "Counting riots in eighteenth-century England", *Bulletin of Lab. Hist. Soc.*, 37 (1978), pp. 68-72. Alan Booth discusses successive errors in estimates in his excellent and dense study, "Food Riots in the North-West of England, 1790-1801", *Past and Present*, 77 (1977), esp. pp. 89-90.

²Bohstedt, *Riots and Community Politics*, pp. 11-14, 230-1; Booth, *op. cit.*, pp. 98-9.

a Pane of Glass in the whole Prison. . . Upon this Outrage of the Mob, an unthinking Gentleman is said to have taken a Musket out of the Hands of a Dragoon, and shot a Man thro' the Head. You will imagine how this enrag'd the Populace; and the Consequence of that Evening's Work was, three Men, a Boy, and two Women, were shot. . .¹

This report commences as indeterminate (D), becomes male (C) at "disorderly Fellows", and moves sharply across to (B) — women and men — only when the dragoons, by firing point-blank into the crowd, take a random sample. Amongst all the indeterminate ("mob", "populace") and male vocabulary, the first mention of women, in a long report, is when two of them are shot. A similar sexually-indeterminate crowd, in 1757, descended on a Hereford miller, and insisted on searching his house and mill for grain. The miller refused:

Yet they persisted in having another search, saying that if he had no grain he had some money, upon which declaration there was necessity for firing on them in which four women and two men were wounded, which occasioned the rest to disperse.²

Again and again reports of "mobs" leave them sexually indeterminate until the moment of some action or arrests make individuals visible. Nor is this any indication of sexist bias in the reporter. The bias (if there is one) is more likely to be in the mind of the twentieth-century historian or reader whose expectations, when he reads of "mobs", are of crowds composed of men, and who reads the accounts accordingly. Perhaps, in the later nineteenth century, "the mob" became a male noun? But the image called to the eighteenth-century mind by these collective nouns was very different — for them a "mob" suggested women, men and (often) older children, especially boys. I think it probable that Bohstedt's table is misleading, and that many riots in column (D) (gender unknown) and some in (C) (men only) were mixed affairs.

Moreover, these figures which enter the tables, whether derived from the press or from a letter to the Home Office, normally report a particular moment of riot — perhaps its

¹*Ipswich Journal*, 26 July 1740. I am indebted to Robert Malcolmson for this.

²*Bristol Journal*, 11 June 1757, cited in Jeremy N. Caple, "Popular Protest and Public Order in 18th-century England: the Food Riots of 1756-7" (Queens Univ. Ontario, M.A. thesis, 1978), p. 102.

crisis — and they rarely describe its evolution. Yet a riot may pass through phases, for example it might commence with actions by women, be joined by men, and end with men alone. In my view there are two situations in which we may expect to find a predominantly male crowd. First, when disciplined male working groups, accustomed to acting together, spearhead the riot: such may be the case with coal miners, keelmen, Cornish tanners, and seamen. In the second case, when heavy conflict is expected with the authorities, the women sometimes seem to fall back — or perhaps are asked by the men to do so.

Yet the evidence is not as tidy as that. Miners and tanners were archetypal male rioters, yet also it is notorious that the whole communities shared in their movements. The Kingswood "mob" is usually thought of as masculine, for example in its destruction of turnpikes and toll-gates. But on occasion its resistance to authority was more like a rising of the whole district. During riots against the cider tax of 1738 the excise officers were "resisted by that savage Crew by Fire Armes": "there are now in the Forest not less than 1000 Men, Women and Boys in Armes, destroying all before them. . .".¹ In 1740 the Kingswood colliers marched into Bristol and demonstrated against the price of corn at the Council House, leaving behind "their usual Armour of Clubs and Staffs", but accompanied by "some weavers, colliers' wives and abundance of other women".² Both the absence of "armour" and the presence of women suggests (on that occasion) a commitment to peaceable courses.

In 1740 the north-east was swept with food riots, which culminated in the sacking of the Newcastle Guildhall. (See above p. 70 & p. 231.) Pitmen and keelmen were prominent in this, and at a superficial view this might appear as a male riot. But a longer and closer view will show an alternation of male and female presence. The regional actions against export were first raised in Stockton by "a Lady with a Stick and a horn". (See above p. 233.) Women as well as men took part in boarding vessels loaded with corn, and forcing them

¹G. Blenkinsop, 14 Oct. 1738 in PRO, T 1/299(15).

²*Northampton Mercury*, 6 Oct. 1740; R. Malcolmson in Brewer and Styles, *op. cit.*, p. 117.

to off-load to the crowd on shore.¹ When — after three weeks of popular export embargo — the Sheriff raised the *posse comitatus* against them, the people of Stockton, to the number of three thousand, "sent for the Colliers of Ederly and Caterhorn".² Meanwhile there had been small disturbances in Newcastle-on-Tyne, involving a group of women "incited by a leader calling herself 'General' or Jane Bogey, ringing bells and impeding the passage of horses carrying grain through the town".³ After five women had been committed,⁴ the troubles in Newcastle died down, only to resume on a much greater scale in mid-June, with the involvement of keelmen and pitmen (who struck their pits). In the first phase, "a body of 3 or 4 hundred men women and children" came into the city and demanded corn at a low rate; granaries were broken into, and the crowd marched about the streets in triumph, huzzaing and blowing horns. The magistrates then summoned and armed the Watch and Ward and seized some prisoners; the crowd then appears in accounts as increasingly male, with "Colliers, Wagoners, Smiths and other common workmen", well armed with cudgels, breaking open the keep and releasing the prisoners, and marching in great discipline through the town with drum, bagpipes and mock colours.⁵

Other episodes were to follow, including the firing on the crowd and the attack on the Guildhall. My point is to illustrate the evolution of a food rioting crowd, which may now be incited by women, may then become of assorted sexes and ages, and may then (when rescue and confrontation are the object) become predominantly male. But none of this should be stereotyped. The most careful historian of the affair observes that the role of women and children was under-

¹Edward Goddard, 24 May 1740 in PRO, SP 36/50/431 and miscellaneous depositions in SP 36/51.

²J. J. Williamson, Sheriff of Durham, 10 June 1740 in PRO, SP 36/51.

³Joyce Ellis, "Urban Conflict and Popular Violence: the Guildhall Riots of 1740 in Newcastle-upon-Tyne", *Int. Rev. Social Hist.*, xxv, 3 (1980).

⁴They were discharged at the Sessions a few days later.

⁵"Account of the Riots" by Alderman Ridley in Northumberland CRO, 2R1 27/8.

stated in subsequent investigations, and that of pitmen overstated. Women contributed to both physical and verbal episodes of violence, breaking into granaries and one woman going down on her knees in front of the magistrates and crying out "Blood for blood!".¹ The authorities came down most heavily upon the women who had unloaded wheat from a boat at Stockton,² whereas in Newcastle they selected the pitmen for indictment and passed over the women.

This shows whole communities in action, with one sex or the other coming into prominence as each assumes a different part. The episode might fall into any one of John Bohstedt's categories according to the moment at which it was reported. It also shows that the crowd might be made up of different elements, consciously playing different parts in co-operation with each other. There are other occasions when it is reported that the "people" sent for the miners to help them. In anti-export riots in St Asaph (Flint) in 1740 it was said that "men, women and boys" were joined by "Severall Colliers and Miners"; not only so, but it was alleged that the colliers "belonging" to Sir Thomas Mostyn were deliberately laid off, given cudgels, and encouraged to take part. In the event they completely dominated the affair, marching together under Mostyn colours and crying out "a Mostyn!".³ In Coventry (1756) the poor — presumably of both sexes — "patted the colliers on the back and urged them to go thro with what they had begun".⁴ And at Nottingham in the same year, the colliers negotiated an agreement with the mayor, and then, as they were leaving the town "a number of women. . . gave them money to come back, and showed them to a Windmill. . . having French stones". The colliers obligingly destroyed several mills in the vicinity.⁵ In the anti-export

¹Ellis, *op. cit.*, pp. 341-6.

²At Durham Assizes Anne Withy, Hannah Crone and William Young were transported for seven years for taking a large quantity of wheat out of a ship at Stockton. Three more women and one man were tried and acquitted: *Newcastle Journal*, 9 Aug. 1740. My thanks to Robert Malcolmson again.

³William Price, 13 June 1740 in PRO, SP 36/51, and various depositions in SP 36/50 and 36/51.

⁴PRO, SP 36/135.

⁵Caple, *op. cit.*, p. 82.

riots in Poole (Dorset) in 1737 (by contrast) the women took action, with the men supporting them and swearing that "if any one offers to molest any of the Women in their Proceedings" they would raise a great number of men and destroy both ships and cargoes" (above p. 233).¹

Two unusual examples of supportive gender actions come from Scotland. In January 1813 in Montrose the magistrates tried to bully the town carters into loading grain onto ships, and the carters reluctantly promised to do so; but (surprise!) on their return to their homes they found that they could not, because their wives had locked the stables or sent the horses away. In 1801 in Errol the Volunteers were called out for possible action against a "meal mob". "As they were going to parade, some of the women, mainly the wives and mothers of the Volunteers, took their guns from them, but immediately gave them back." The crowd then stoned an inn with impunity, and, Kenneth Logue suggests, "It may be that women simply removed part of the firing mechanisms, rendering the weapons useless and relieving the Volunteers of the unhappy task of shooting at their own townspeople".²

A more elaborate series of actions was described in Exeter in 1757:

Last Market-Day some Farmers demanded 11s. per Bushel for Wheat, and were agreeing among themselves to bring it to 15s. and then make a stand. But the Graecians (as the Inhabitants of St. Sidwell's are called) hearing of this Complot, sent their wives in great Numbers to Market, resolving to give no more than 6s. per Bushel, and, if they would not sell it at that Price, to take it by Force; and such wives, as did not stand by this Agreement, were to be well flogg'd by their Comrades. Having thus determined, they marched to the Corn-Market, and harangued the Farmers in such a Manner, that they lowered their price to 8s. 6d. The Bakers came, and would have carried off all at that Price, but the Amazonians swore, that they would carry the first man who attempted it before the Mayor, upon which the Farmers swore they would bring no more to Market; and the sanguine Females threatened the Farmers, that, if they did not, they would come and take it by Force out of their

¹Holles Newcastle to Secretary at War, 26 May 1737, PRO, SP 41/10.

²Logue, *op. cit.*, pp. 21. 44.

Ricks. The Farmers submitted and sold it for 6s. on which the poor weavers and woolcombers were content.¹

One doubts whether the male "Graecians" could have "sent their wives" on such a skilfully exercised sequence of actions, unless they had mutually agreed upon their gender roles: which (in this case) left the action and the thinking to the women, and only the eating to the men.

A further (and insurmountable) difficulty is that evidence taken from the years 1790-1810, however skilfully it is counted, cannot support generalisations as to the feminine presence in food riots which extended over a period of well over two hundred years. After 1812 food riots in most parts of the country gave way to other kinds of (political, trade union) protest. So that John Bohstedt's quantities are taken from the last stages of the traditional riot, in which — as he himself argues — the role of women may have been changing. At the least, generalisations would have to be supported by a review of the evidence across the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries.²

Instead of attempting this, John Bohstedt leaps across to another line of argument altogether. He raises doubts as to whether women had a significant place in the market at all. Indeed, pursuing the rather fashionable ploy in the Western academy of offering oneself as more-feminist-than-thou, he suggests that those who offer women as marketers are pedlars of sexist stereotypes. I am one target of his scorn, since in my essay I had, while drawing particular attention to the very active part played by women, suggested that one reason for this might be that they were "those most involved in face-to-face marketing, most sensitive to price significancies, most experienced in detecting short-weight or inferior quality" (p. 234). Bohstedt challenges this: "It is an anachronistic mistake to assume that women's role in food riots grew out of some special female role as the shopper of the family. Nowhere is there evidence for the frequent assumption that in

¹R. W. Malcolmson, *Life and Labour in England, 1700-1780* (1981), p. 118.

²Wendy Thwaites has found women present in Oxfordshire food riots in 1693, 1713, 1757, 1766 and 1795: Thwaites, thesis, table p. 472 (for 1795), pp. 485-6.

this period women were the primary shoppers. . .". "Plebeian women were income producers and earners, not unwaged housewives and shoppers confined by gender to the more modern role of 'home-making'."¹ Indeed, he waxes indignant at the stereotype of his own invention: "Women were not simply housewife furies, drying their hands and heading off to the market or igniting there as a crowd of shoppers". He does not attempt to show who did the purchasing of provisions, or how,² but he develops instead hypotheses as to the "nearly coequal" relations between women and men in the proto-industrial household economy.

I agree that "housewives" and "shopping" are (in their current usage) anachronistic terms, although I used neither of them. I have a little difficulty, in that I don't regard skills in marketing or home-making as unimportant and inferior, although it is true that male-dominated cultures may make them seem so, and may then try to confine women to "inferior" roles. But there are really two questions here: an empirical question — who did the marketing and how? — and a theoretical question about the proto-industrial household economy, and we will take them in that order.

There is no single source to which one can go to establish gender roles in the market-place. Women were certainly present as sellers of food, although few were licensed dealers.³ One might expect to find, in a market-town, a large throng of sellers of poultry, eggs, butter, vegetables, fruit and other locally-grown produce, and most of these were women: the wives, daughters and servants of local farmers,

¹Thomas and Grimmett, *op. cit.*, p. 10, also accuse me, on the same grounds, of placing women "firmly in the market-place, if not exactly beside the kitchen sink"; and they also throw no light on how marketing was done.

²Bohstedt is strangely inconsistent. He suggests that men did the marketing (p. 116). But women (who did not normally do so and hence were confined to the household?) were nevertheless somehow knitting the networks of neighbourhood, and he commends a French study for noting that housework "overflowed into communal co-operation" in "fetching water and provisions, for example" (p. 98, my italics).

³See Wendy Thwaites' excellent study, "Women in the Market Place: Oxfordshire c. 1690-1800", *Midland History*, ix (1984), pp. 23-42, and, for the earlier tradition, Rodney Hilton, "Women Traders in Medieval England", in *Class Conflict and the Crisis of Feudalism* (1985), p. 213.

while others would be petty dealers from the labouring class. In a strictly governed market some of these might pay toll for stands — for example, at the Butter Cross (see Plate XVIIa) — but more commonly they would set out their wares on the periphery.¹ In 1816 a local historian described Bicester market —

I have heard many of the aged inhabitants say that they have formerly seen the whole market-hill covered with sacks of corn etc; the avenues leading to it crowded by the farmers' wives with their baskets of butter, eggs and poultry. . . .²

In fact the poultry, fruit and vegetable market was sometimes known as "the women's market". An experienced dealer, looking back to the 1760s, described the prosperous tourist market of Bath, where "the farmer, his wife, daughter, or servant", trudged there with "the best milk butter, whey butter, cheeses. . . roasting pigs. . . fattened bacon. . . black and white pudding, abundance of lard, chitterlings nicely cleaned, and made up by the hand of a neat dairy maid; variety of poultry. . . fresh eggs. . . fruits, flowers, herbs, honey, and the honey combs, &c, &c, &c."³ By the 1790s this trade was being taken over by "jobbers, higlers, &c."⁴ and as farmers became more prosperous it was the common complaint that farmers were "purchasing piano fortes for their daughters, instead of bringing their butter and eggs to market".⁵

It is less easy to identify the purchasers, although they were certainly of both sexes. Oxford, a well-regulated corn market

¹In the early eighteenth century Lord of the Market of Woodbridge (Suffolk) was threatening to prosecute "persons who come to this town with fish, fowl, fruits, butter, cheese, eggs" on market days, and who carry these things from house to house, instead of taking a stand or stall in the market: Ipswich and East Suffolk CRO, V 5/9/6 - 3 (3). Perhaps similar attempts at control were behind a rash of prosecutions of petty dealers (garden stuff, fruit, fish) for regrating in Oxford in 1712: of 24 persons prosecuted, 21 were women: Thwaites, p. 30.

²J. Dunkin cited in *ibid.*, p. 29.

³J. Mathews, *Remarks on the Cause and Progress of the Scarcity and Dearthness of Cattle*. . . (1797), pp. 9-10.

⁴*Ibid.*, pp. 70-71.

⁵J. Malham (Vicar of Helton, Dorset, and Ordinary of the Wiltshire County Gaol), *The Scarcity of Grain Considered* (Salisbury,

in the eighteenth century, has very little record of petty purchases, and the records show the main buyers to be bakers, millers and dealers. But petty purchases may have gone unrecorded. Or perhaps working people did not often buy a sack of wheat or a bushel of flour.¹ An inquest on Ruth Pierce, who died in bizarre circumstances in Devizes market in 1753, shows that she had clubbed together with three other women to buy one sack of wheat from a farmer.² Regions had differing practices, but by the mid-century in many parts of the South and Midlands working people were buying flour or bread, not wheat.³ Five cases involving Assize of Bread offences (short-weight, etc.) came up at Oxfordshire Quarter Sessions, Epiphany 1758, from Ploughley Hundred, and four of the purchasers whose oaths were taken were women.⁴ The Crown brief in 1766 against Hester Pitt and Jane Pitt shows that they stopped Mary Cooke in Ruscombe, near Stroud, as she was on horseback loaded with sixteen dozen of bread, pushed her off the horse and took the bread.⁵ This reminds us that in the second half of the century, bakers' and hucksters' shops were increasingly common, that bread might be brought around by horse, or horse-and-cart, and that riot could be by women against women.

The evidence suggests to me that working people were not, by the 1790s, buying wheat, flour or bread in the market on market day, but getting it elsewhere, at inns, shops, or bakeries. Catherine Phillips tells us in 1792 that "it was formerly the custom of the wives of labourers and artificers to purchase, on market days, two or three gallons of malt, which would perhaps brew tolerable good table beer for the week", but they were now ceasing to do so since the malt tax

¹Thwaites, thesis, i, pp. 208-21, discusses the question with care.

²"Inquisition on Ruth Pierce", *Wiltshire Archaeological and Natural History Magazine*, xii (1870), pp. 256-7. My thanks to Mary Prior.

³"A Person in Business", *Two Letters on the Flour Trade* (London, 1757, 1766), pp. 7-8; the author is writing from Hampshire. See also Wendy Thwaites, "Dearth and the Marketing of Agricultural Produce: Oxfordshire", *Agric. Hist. Rev.*, xxxiii (1985), p. 121.

⁴Thwaites, "Women in the Market Place", p. 37.

⁵PRO, TS 11/1138/5956: Special Commission, Gloucester, 14 Nov.

had raised the price too high.¹ Where people came in to the urban market from a little distance, they perhaps got hold of some transport, and women, men and older children piled on together; no doubt husband and wife often went round the market together. An observer in 1800 noted a man and wife coming to an inn to buy a peck of wheat, and "after the wheat was measured, the woman says to her husband, 'John I want some money to go to the grocer's for some tea, sugar, butter' ".² In this division of gender roles, hers was to finish off the shopping and his (no doubt) was to stay at the inn and drink.

All ages, shapes, sizes and sexes would throng together in a busy market. The genteel were falling away as the century wore on; they did not like to be squashed in the plebeian press and they sent their servants instead. (They are more likely to have sent the cook or kitchen maid to buy provisions than the footman.) The wives and daughters of cottagers might stay on to spend their small takings from selling eggs or cherries on cloth or ribbons or houseware. (Money earned from such produce belonged to "the distaff side" of the family budget.) Some farmers would stay on, get drunk, and have to be collected by their wives.³ There would be carters and ostlers, ballad-mongers, perhaps a fiddler or two, and a card-sharper. There would be wide-eyed children, hoping to scrump an apple. There would be courting couples, on the only day out when they saw each other. Bakers and millers, higglers and jobbers, market officials. And a throng of purchasers, very many of whom were women. As a rule it was the woman's role to bake, brew and cook — Mary Collier, the washer-woman, eloquently disclosed woman's dual roles as wage-earner and house-worker, in 1739⁴ — and it has long been assumed that women had the major role in purchasing provisions. The point has not been fully proven,

¹Catherine Phillips, *Considerations on the Causes of the High Price of Grain*. . . (1792), p. 7.

²William Brooks, *The True Causes of our present Distress for Provisions* (1800), pp. 29-30. My thanks to Dr Thwaites.

³F. W. Steer (ed.), "The Memoirs of James Spershott", *The Chichester Papers*, 30 (Chichester, 1962).

⁴See Mary Collier, *The Woman's Labour*, ed. Marian Sugden and E. P. Thompson (1989).

but if research is directed at it then I have little doubt as to its results.

The market was, in any case, a great occasion of sociability. Dare one suggest that market day could actually be fun? If women played so important a part in networking households into a community how could it happen that they should not take part in so important an occasion for community socialising (and gossip) as the market? Bohstedt offers us no evidence, but suggests that both the family income and necessary purchases were "probably collected by the man on the weekly trip to the warehouse and the market". He is thinking of a "proto-industrial" clothing worker or nail-maker, who works in his own household economy, but must collect raw materials and deliver the finished product to the putter-out. But the day for delivering his "piece" was not often the same as market day. And in a majority of households spinning was the mainstay of women's work until the 1790s or later, and the women (wives or spinsters) would have to visit their own putter-out, or the shopkeeper who acted as agent, as frequently. A 1741 pamphlet shows women in Hampshire and Dorset coming in to market on farmers' wagons, taking their spun yarn to the clothiers: "then they get the few things they want, and return to the Inn to be carried home again". (There might be as many as three or four hundred poor people, chiefly women, in the market doing this.¹) A well-informed observer, in 1794, wrote of the dismay of a labourer, "whose wife and children return home from the next market town with the sad tidings that the Wool-man puts out no more handwork. . .".²

If women usually did the cooking in the household economy and if some (but not all) women's food riots had targets in the market-place, common-sense suggests that women knew a lot about food marketing. It often seems so from the reports. In 1740 in Newport Pagnell (at a time when the crowd was blocking exports) farmers sold two wagons of wheat to factors. The wheat was disguised by being packed

¹Alice Clark, *Working Life of Women in the Seventeenth Century* (1919; reprint 1982), pp. 108-9.

²"A.B.", *Observations on the detriment that is supposed must arise to the family of every cottager. . . from the loss of woollen spinning*. . . (1794).

like cheese, but "some cunning old women" suspected the deception, stopped the wagons, and (joined by three hundred more women) entered into a long and successful engagement with the farmers.¹ John Bohstedt wishes to play down this female role in the market because he wants to emphasise the productive role of women in the proto-industrial household, which made them "virtually equal to men in the communal economy and polity". Women took part in riots, "not as housewives but as full-fledged contributors to the family income". "They should be seen as proto-citizens and constituents of the local polity and economy, nearly coequal to men in claiming their rights to affordable bread."

I don't wish to dispute the importance of the women's labour in the clothing or metal-working household. But there is no reason why they should not also have been the main food marketers just as the men may have dealt most often with the tools and materials of the trade. What may be misleading are the notions of "equality" and status brought to bear upon them from our own status-conscious and contractual society. These women (and these men) were for themselves and not for us: they were proto-nothing. They were not bugged by notions of equality, in a competitive sense, since they were deeply habituated to the acceptance that men's and women's roles were different, and that neither was the more nor the less for that. There were certainly places of overlap, and also occasions when each sex (the women more often than the men) would take part in the other's work. But Bohstedt goes too far, in his commendable attempt to emphasise the women's independent position, in suggesting that the roles of men and women in the household or cottage economy were almost indistinguishable.²

On the contrary, different gender roles were firmly demarked, perhaps the more firmly in that each sex's sphere of responsibility held the other's respect. One emphatically

¹*Ipswich Journal*, 7 June 1740.

²Bohstedt may be drawing too far upon the suggestions of Hans Medick on "The proto-industrial family economy", in Peter Kriedte, H. Medick and Schlumbohm, *Industrialization before Industrialization* (Cambridge, 1987), pp. 60-3.

literary source is the poem "descriptive of the manners of the clothiers" in the West Riding of Yorkshire, *circa* 1730. It is, exactly, a comedy of manners about gender roles in a "proto-industrial" household, although one of small master rather than journeyman status. In this the food is certainly cooked by the Mistress, with the help of "prentice Bess": it includes broth, "oaten cakes, mutton, bread (home baked)", "dumplings", and home-brewed ale. The "Maister" oversees the needs of the weaving trade; he or his sons (or apprentices) will get wool from the Wolds, take it out to the spinners, get size, dye, and so on. The Mistress must oversee getting yeast (perhaps from a neighbour), malt and hops for brewing, soap and "blue". She and Bess must also "sit at t'bobbin wheel", dye, do the washing (and washing-up), get the children to and from school, and oversee the work folk when the master is away. And a dozen other things.¹

It was exactly the extent and manifest importance of the woman's role, and her manifold responsibilities, each calling for specialised skills, which gave to her authority in the household and respect in the community. Her work was indispensable and she well knew it. It is pointless to try to grade the feminine and masculine spheres of work in terms of degrees of "near equality". Certainly in the public sphere of law and religion and property the woman was in a subject position. But in the household economy the terms which we need are "authority", "worth" and "respect": perhaps the parity and mutual interdependence of unlikes.²

If women were especially prominent in food riots in regions where the manufacturing household economy was strong, such as clothing districts, this was in part because their role in this economy gave them authority and self-confidence. But this was not because gender roles were almost indistinguishable. The female sphere of authority probably took in most marketing for provisions, and within

¹The full text is in *Publications of the Thoresby Society*, xli, pt. 3, p. 95 (1947). Extracts are in H. Heaton, *Yorkshire Woollen and Worsted Industries* (1920), pp. 344-7; Thompson, *The Making of the English Working Class*, pp. 300-1.

²See Dorothy Thompson, "Women, Work and Politics in Nineteenth-Century England: the Problem of Authority", in Jane Randall (ed.), *Equal or Different* (Oxford, 1987), pp. 61-3.

the household the women had responsibility for baking, brewing, and seeing that the household was fed. They were therefore especially sensitive to price and quality, and were the first to have to work out economies and strategies of survival when dearth threatened. This role made them as much guardians of the household's survival as were the men, who might earn the greater part of the family income. They would discuss their problems, anger or anxieties with other women, not only on market day but daily on their neighbourhood occasions. This favoured — Alice Clarke wrote long ago — “the formation of a feminine public opinion on current events”. Thus households would be bonded and the nucleus for direct actions prepared.¹

By downplaying this role and by fastening his analysis upon women's role as income-earners in the manufacturing household, Bohstedt — quite against his own intentions — gives an almost patronising account of women as rioters: “Women typically *joined* men in food riots” (above p. 306, my italics). The suggestion is conveyed that women expressed their solidarity *with* men, as their “near coequals”. But the evidence does not feel like that. On these matters the women were often the leaders of community opinion, and the initiators of actions; sometimes they were the sole executors of actions, and the men joined in in solidarity with them as often as they joined the men.

In 1766 and afterwards there were fewer spontaneous crowd actions in the market-place because less grain was being sold there. Sales were removing to inns, and the open market was in some places coming to an end. Working people in the south and midlands were increasingly buying bread. This might fluctuate in price, or (if the priced loaf remained steady) in weight, which was more difficult to judge. In the high-price years of the 1790s, the huge quartern or half-quartern loaves normally baked in many towns went out of reach of “the poor”, who “were obliged to buy fragments of bread, with several surfaces exposed to the sun, air, flies,

¹ Clark, *op. cit.*, p. 51. See also Maxine Berg's suggestion as to networks in *The Age of Manufactures* (1985), pp. 164-7, and the excellent survey of women's work in the family economy in Bridget Hill, *Women, Work, and Sexual Politics in Eighteenth-Century England* (Oxford, 1989), chapters 3 and 4.

dust, and all the contingencies of a huckster's shop”.¹ But the end product in a huckster's shop was a futile target for those who wished to bring down the price of grain. Hence the crowd had to plan more carefully, and to select targets, often outside the market-place, such as inns, canals, wharfs, granaries, farms, mills, wagons on the road. These actions around wheat or flour must have followed upon discussions (and rumours of hoarding or speculation) within the working community.

Spontaneous actions by women in the market-place were more frequent in the first half of the century, because wheat and flour were still in the open market. Thus in Oxford in 1693 we find women in the market “pelting millers, mealmen, bakers etc with stones”;² in 1740 most of the riots were against export, but market-place riots are also reported, such as that at Peterborough where “a number of women rose in a tumultuous manner on the market day, rioted the farmers out of their sacks & strow'd their corn in the street”.³ Similar market-place actions by women are reported in 1757 in Bewdley, Worcester, Taunton, Newcastle-under-Lyme, and Salisbury, while in 1766 in Kidderminster, when some poor women were bidding in the corn market for a bag of wheat, and a baker offered more, “the people immediately became riotous”.⁴ If that sort of affair then fell away, women might (and did) still initiate spontaneous actions in the market-place about other foodstuffs, such as potatoes or meat. In Ashby-de-la-Zouche in 1766, when a farmer put up his butter by 2d. a pound, “an old woman clapped one hand around the nape of his neck and with the other smeared his face with butter”.⁵

It is not a significant matter whether women took part in

¹ Thomas Parsons, *Letters to an M.P. on the absurdity of popular prejudices*. . . (Bath, 1800).

² Thwaites, thesis, ii, pp. 468-9.

³ *Gloucester Journal*, 24 June 1740.

⁴ Bewdley — *Northampton Mercury*, 6 June 1757; Worcester — *Worcester Journal*, 19 May 1757; Taunton, Newcastle-under-Lyme, Salisbury, Kidderminster — all in R. W. Malcolmson, *Life and Labour in England, 1700-1780* (1981), pp. 117-8.

⁵ Dale E. Williams, “Midland Hunger Riots in 1766”, *Midland History*, iii, 4 (1976).

more or less than 50 per cent of the recorded riots. What remains significant — and indeed remarkable — is the extensive evidence of women's active part in food riots over a period of more than two hundred years, and in many parts of Great Britain.¹ No other issue commanded women's support so wholeheartedly and consistently, at least in England.² On a review of indictments in the Western and Oxford Assize circuits in the second half of the eighteenth century, there are a few cases of what appear to be the community's defence of trade practices (but not of formal trade unionism), of resistance to enclosures, of rough music, and of civic politics in old clothing towns, all of which appear to have significant female involvement. But food riots are the indictments where the women are most often to be found. There are some all-male indictments,³ just as there are some all-female ones.⁴ There are indictments where there seems to be the selection of a token woman,⁵ just as there seem to be token men.⁶ There are other cases where the prosecution

¹ John Walter in Charlesworth (ed.), *An Atlas of Rural Protest* (1983), shows women present in riots in Kent (1595), Essex (1596), and unloading a ship at Southampton (1608).

² In Scotland at the end of the eighteenth century, the issue which occasioned the highest participation of women in direct action "was opposition to the exercise of church patronage by lay patrons against the popular wishes of the congregation". Food riots came second. Logue, *op. cit.*, pp. 199-204.

³ PRO, Assi 24/42, Devon, Winter 1767: 21 men (17 weavers, 2 woolcombers, 2 labourers, 1 cordwainer) for attacking a boulding mill; *ibid.*, 9 men of Ottery St Mary for pulling down a water mill (and the two following cases); *ibid.*, Somerset 1766, cheese riot, Wellington (13 woolcombers, weavers, etc. indicted); *ibid.*, Somerset, Summer 1767, cheese riot, 7 labourers of Trowbridge indicted (but no true bill found); *ibid.*, Wiltshire, Winter 1767, 8 men indicted (5 broadweavers, 2 scribblers, 1 labourer).

⁴ PRO, Assi 4/22, Shropshire, Summer 1767, 5 women of Culmington, for cutting sacks and throwing grain on the floor. Assi 4/20, Worcestershire, Summer 1768, 7 women for carrying away 60 bushels of wheat. Assi 4/21, Worcestershire, Lent 1775, 7 women from Old Swinford (1 widow, 2 spinsters, 2 colliers' wives and 2 labourers' wives) for a flour riot in which 200 took part. Assi 24/43, Somerset, Lent 1801, 4 women for compelling the sale of bread under market price.

⁵ PRO, Assi 24/43, Devon, Summer 1801, 5 labourers and 1 single-woman, for compelling the sale of barley under the market price.

⁶ PRO, Assi 24/42, Somerset, Summer 1767, butter riot, 5 women and 1 labourer indicted.

appears to be even-handed in serving out indictments.¹ But the indictments testify to the vigorous presence of women.

There is room for further research into this, for as yet no one appears to have interrogated the legal records systematically over a long period of time. Nor should we expect that uniform answers will be forthcoming. John Bohstedt notes that of fifty-four rioters committed for trial in Devon in 1795 and 1801, only seven were women; but that at Manchester in 1795, of twelve persons charged for food rioting, nine were women.² My own searches into Assize records show a similar discrepancy between the Western circuit (taking in Devon, Wiltshire, Dorset and Somerset riots in 1765-72) with 114 men and only fourteen women indicted; and the Oxford circuit (taking in food rioters indicted in Herefordshire, Worcestershire and Shropshire in 1767 to 1774), where there are twenty women and only five men.³ Do these figures indicate differential gender behaviour or differential practices in policing and prosecution?⁴

We do not know how far the authorities were as willing to prosecute women as men, or whether women must have committed particular "outrages" before they were indicted. There is a little evidence to suggest that in the deeply traditional West of England, where food rioting was almost a tolerated mode of "negotiation", the authorities found the indictment of female rioters to be distasteful. In 1764

¹ For a Bicester (Oxfordshire) wheat riot in 1757, 4 men and 4 women were tried, of whom 1 man and 1 woman were sentenced to 7 years transportation; for a riot involving beans, 2 men were transported, and 1 woman was branded: Thwaites, thesis, pp. 471, 473.

² Bohstedt, "Gender, Household and Community Politics", p. 120, note 116.

³ PRO, Assi 24/42, 24/43, 4/20, 4/21, 4/22. I have only counted cases of riot related explicitly to food.

⁴ Douglas Hay has found women leading food riots in Staffordshire in 1740, 1757, 1783 and 1800: "Crime, Authority and the Criminal Laws in Staffordshire 1750-1800" (Univ. of Warwick Ph.D. thesis, 1975), p. 265 and private communication.

⁵ In 1795 miners from the Forest of Dean searched a trow at Awre on the Severn. Finding wheat and flour, 100 men, women and children came down from the Forest with horses and asses and carried off 500 bushels. According to a witness "the women were more riotous than the men". But 5 miners were arrested, of whom 2 were hanged for stealing flour; PRO Assi 5/116; *London Chronicle*, 17-19 Nov. 1795.

Tiverton was convulsed by community-and-trade riots against the Mayor and Corporation, in which (according to literary evidence) the women were most prominent, dashing in upon the Mayor through the windows of an inn, pulling off his wig and threatening to kill him if he did not sign a paper. But of twenty-six indicted for these riots, only six were women.¹ But, then, what was the function of prosecution? In the Western circuit the prosecution of food rioters seems to have been a haphazard and often a lenient process. It was often difficult to persuade the grand jury to find a true bill against food rioters, and (once found) the petty jury might not convict. For a Devon attack on a bolting-mill in 1767, twenty-one were discharged and in two cases a bill could "not be found" by the grand jury, and for another attack on a mill *all* of eighteen indicted in Ottery St Mary were "not to be found".² And so on. A little more zeal was shown in 1795 and 1800-1, but a Devon forced sale in 1801 resulted in the acquittal of five men charged and no process against the only woman, while the prosecution was abandoned of two men indicted for terrorising a farmer (with a rope about his neck) to sign a paper. On the other hand four women from Montacute (Somerset) were indicted for grand larceny for compelling Elizabeth Hopkins to sell seventy-two loaves at a lower rate than she was willing, and Mary Gard and Sarah Baker were convicted.³

In several other cases in both Western and Oxford circuits the offenders were bound over with one shilling fine, or were discharged as "paupers".⁴ This suggests that the function of prosecution was to inspire momentary terror until order could be restored, and that the accused would be brought to a due state of contrition by the anxiety and nuisance of the trial

¹PRO, Assi 24/42, Devon, Summer 1765; F. J. Snell, *The Chronicles of Twyford* (Tiverton, 1893), pp. 192-201.

²PRO, Assi 24/42. Those whose indictments were "not to be found" by the grand jury in Ottery St Mary included 4 carpenters, 4 woolcombers, 3 husbandmen, 2 tailors, 2 labourers, 2 cordwainers, 1 thatcher.

³PRO, Assi 24/43.

⁴In a Taunton cheese riot, 11 men and 6 women were indicted. All were found "paupers" and discharged. The "paupers" included 3 woolcombers, 2 serge weavers, 2 cordwainers, 2 labourers, 1 whitesmith, 1 fuller; and 3 spinsters, the wives of a cordwainer, a labourer and a serge weaver; PRO, Assi 24/42, Somerset, Winter 1767.

itself. Prosecution was attended with difficulties — the selection of offenders, the drilling of reluctant witnesses, the odium attaching to the prosecutor — and local magistrates (notoriously in the West) were reluctant to set the process in motion.¹ Since prosecution was both selective and uncertain — that is, it was undertaken to provide an "example" but had no necessary direct relation to the incidence of riot — it cannot be assumed that it was gender-blind. Except in cases where women were manifestly predominant in riots, the authorities might have found it to be more convenient to make an example of men.

There might even have been a hierarchy of levels of prosecution, with differing gender ratios at each level. At the top of the hierarchy would be the Special Commissions of Oyer and Terminer which government instituted in late 1766 with the aim of making "examples" in the disturbed districts. Those brought to trial here were predominantly male: thirteen men in Berkshire, and no women; fifteen men in Wiltshire, and four women; and in Gloucestershire fifty-four men and twelve women.² There may have been some reluctance to launch women into a process which might end in their execution,³ but once so launched it is difficult to say whether they received any preferential treatment from the courts.⁴ Of the Wiltshire women, Priscilla Jenkins was sentenced to death for stealing in a dwelling-house (commuted to life transportation), Elizabeth Moody and Mary

¹See Wells, *Wretched Faces*, ch. 16, "The Role of the Courts".

²These are the formal returns in Baga de Secretis, G.B. *Deputy Keeper of Public Records, 5th Report* (1844), Appendix II, pp. 198-204. But some prisoners were held over for subsequent trial or their cases were dismissed. The *Gloucester Journal*, 15 Dec. 1766, reported that 96 rioters were then in prison, of whom 16 were women; see also Williams, thesis, pp. 162-3. But other records suggest that as many as 22 women were committed: cases against one or two were dropped, and another turned evidence against her fellows; crown brief, PRO, TS 11/1188/5956, and "A Calendar of the Criminal Prisoners in the Castle Gaol of Gloucester", 13 Dec. 1766 (annotated) in TS 11/995/3707.

³This is suggested by John Beattie in his authoritative article, "The Criminality of Women in Eighteenth-Century England", *Journal of Soc. Hist.*, viii, (1975), p. 113, note 57. Also Beattie, *Crime and the Courts in England, 1660-1800* (Oxford, 1986), pp. 436-9.

⁴Booth, *op. cit.*, p. 106 finds that in the courts in Lancashire 1790-1801 "no differentiation seems to have been made between the sexes".

Nash were transported for seven years for stealing to the value of 1s. 7d. in a dwelling-house, and Sarah Pane, a widow, found guilty of stealing flour to the value of 6d., was privately whipped and discharged. This seems severe enough. But these were the counts upon which juries had been willing to convict. On a closer view it seems that they had been selected for trial because all except Sarah Pane, went beyond "food riot" to theft from the homes of farmers or traders. Priscilla Jenkins was supposed to have taken off a gammon of bacon, a pair of boots, a bundle of things on her head tied up in a handkerchief. . . and a gun. Elizabeth Moody and Mary Nash were not such desperate felons, but they were accused of breaking into a house, smashing the windows and some of the furniture, and carrying off the family's clothes.¹

A little more can be worked out about the Gloucestershire accused.² The Special Commission at Gloucester was restrained by a grand jury which refused to act as a rubber-stamp and perhaps by a reluctant petty jury. Of twenty-one women who were being prepared for trial, one was not indicted, presumably as *feme covert*. More than one-half of the remainder were either acquitted (eight) or the grand jury found "ignoramus" (three). Of seventy-five male prisoners, about the same proportion got off, with eighteen acquittals and twenty "no true bills". And there is no great difference in the conviction rate: seven out of twenty-one women as against thirty-five out of seventy-five men. The marked difference is in the severity of the convictions and sentencing. Sixteen of the men were convicted of felonies, nineteen of misdemeanours, whereas only two of the women were found felons and five were found guilty of misdemeanours. Nine rioters were sentenced to death — all men, although in six cases the condemned were reprieved — and nine were

¹Crown briefs in PRO, TS 11/1116/5728. Elizabeth Moody and Mary Nash were both pregnant, giving birth immediately after their trials, Mary Nash with twins: it is not clear whether their sentences were enforced. See Williams, *op. cit.*, pp. 167, 170.

²Some of the following deductions depend upon rough annotations to the Gaol Calendar in PRO, TS 11/995/3707, but these are difficult to decipher and not always accurate. Also TS 11/1188/5956; Williams, *op. cit.*; *Gloucester Journal*, 22 Dec. 1766; Gloucester CRO, Q/SG 1767-70, Gloucester Gaol Calendar, 13 Jan. 1767.

sentenced to seven years' transportation, of whom two were women.

A closer view of the cases does not tell us much. Six of the female acquittals were for a cheese riot at Farmer Collett's, for which one man was also acquitted and one other man convicted. Mary Hillier ran after the mob in Minchinhampton and "told them Mr Butt was come home & had fired a gun and killed 2 children and desired them to come back and pull down the House". The grand jury found no true bill. Elizabeth Rackley and Elizabeth Witts, both sentenced to transportation, were convicted of stealing 10d. worth of flour, but as part of several night-time break-ins of the mill of Richard Norris. It was the night-time breaking and entering which made the offence felony.¹ The clearest case of gender discrimination concerned John Franklyn and Sarah Franklyn, his wife, jointly committed for entering a shop in Stroud and carrying off in their laps soap, glue and other things. But Sarah was not indicted, presumably because while acting with her husband she was, according to the legal doctrine of *feme covert*, not responsible for her actions. That was fortunate for her, since John Franklyn was found guilty of grand larceny and was transported for seven years.²

This suggests that the heavier exercises of the courts might fall a little less heavily on women. But the lighter exercises need not show the same gender-inflection. Summary committals to Bridewells or convictions for minor public order offences were used by magistrates to cool off a crowd, without respect for differences of sex. For example, a letter from Lincolnshire in 1740 notes that "we have had a Disturbance by the Mobb at Bourn they Cutt Some Sacks of Wheat in the Boat & Obstructed its passage to Spalding for a time, but was Quel'd seasonably by the Officers of the Town & 5 Women Committed to the House of Correction".³ Such episodes are unlikely to have left traces in national records,

¹Elizabeth Rackley was later pardoned.

²Gaol Calendar in PRO, TS 11/995/3707. On *feme covert*, see Blackstone, *op. cit.*, iv, pp. 26-7 and John Beattie, *op. cit.*, p. 238, note 71.

³Letter of John Halford, 1 July 1740, in Lincs., Archives Office, 3 Anc. 7/4/14.

although after the 1760s they were more likely to be brought to Quarter Sessions.¹

John Bohstedt tells us that "repression did not know gender", and he is right that troops were frequently ordered to fire into mixed crowds. From Anne Carter of Maldon, Essex, in 1629 to Hannah Smith of Manchester in 1812, a trickle of victims or heroines were sent to the gallows, while others were sentenced to transportation.² Yet I am undecided; it remains possible that, while "examples" were made from time to time, the examples made of women were fewer, that they sometimes enjoyed the "privilege of their sex", and that much depended upon place, time and the temper of the authorities.

If the central authorities insisted that examples had to be made, then gender did not matter. In 1766 government and law officers were pressing hard for capital offenders to be selected, and the Treasury Solicitor regretted that "at Leicester, the Evidence is very slight, against a Woman for throwing Cheese out of a Waggon to the Mob, which if not a Highway Robbery, is not Capital".³ (Hannah Smith was convicted of highway robbery nearly fifty years later, for selling off butter cheaply to the crowd.) In the end, no women were hanged for the riots of 1766, although Sarah Hemmings was capitally convicted for her part in a riot in Wolverhampton: the town petitioned for her life, and the sentence was commuted to life transportation.⁴ In 1800 *The Times* correspondent lamented from Nottingham and its environs that "there is not even a prospect of the riot

¹ Ann Welford and Barbara Mason were sentenced to six months hard labour at Northampton Quarter Sessions in 1796 for trying, with a great number of persons, "principally women", to stop a market wagon: *Northampton Mercury*, 9 Apr. 1796. My thanks to Jeanette Neeson.

² For Anne Carter, see John Walter, "Grain Riots and Popular Attitudes to the Law: Maldon and the Crisis of 1629", in Brewer and Styles (eds.), *An Ungovernable People*, pp. 47-84, an excellent study which follows the rioters back into the local records. For Hannah Smith, see Thomis and Grimmett, *op. cit.*, pp. 43-44.

³ Memorandum as to the state of evidence against food rioters (1766) from Treasury Solicitor in Shelburne Papers, Vol. 132, William L. Clements Library, University of Michigan, Ann Arbor; see also PRO, SP Dom 44/141.

⁴ Williams, "Midland Hunger Riots in 1766", p. 277.

subsiding", owing to the non-arrest of the women, who were "the principal aggressors".¹ In the sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries, women rioters had been liminal people with an "ambivalent legal status at the margins of the law's competence". They claimed, in enclosure riots, "that women were lawlesse, and not subject to the lawes of the realme as men are but might. . . offend without drede or punishment of law".² If the sex had been disabused of that illusion in the eighteenth century, yet perhaps some notion of "privilege", both among offenders and prosecutors, lingered on in such regions as the West.

Were there other peculiarities of the feminine input into food riots? I doubt the value of tabulating disorder and violence according to gender, partly because of the imperfect nature of the evidence, partly because all riot must involve disorder and violence of some kind. When an affair involved outright confrontation, with cudgels against fire-arms — the attack on a mill, the break-in to a keep to rescue prisoners — the predominant sex would be male. The women are more commonly reported as throwing missiles — stones or potatoes — and on one occasion, in the Midlands in 1766 "planted in rows five or six deep", defending a bridge with stones and brickbats against horsemen.³ Whatever conclusions we reach as to the gender reciprocities and respect between women and men in these communities, it would be foolish to suppose that these dissolved sexual differences. Without doubt the physical confrontation of men and women, of soldiers and crowd, aroused sexual tensions, perhaps expressed by the women in robust ribaldry, by the male forces of "order" in a contest between the inhibition of violence and sexually-excited aggression.⁴ On occasion the military affected contempt for the women. The commander of troops sent to deal with a riot in Bromsgrove in 1795

¹ Wells, *op. cit.*, p. 121.

² John Walter in *An Ungovernable People*, p. 63; see also Roger B. Manning, *Village Revolts* (Oxford, 1988), pp. 96, 116.

³ Williams, *op. cit.*, pp. 273-4.

⁴ After "repeated solicitations" from a Captain of marines, the constable of Brentwood reluctantly arrested two women, in "The Ship" alehouse, who had been "singing a song in Brentwood Street reflecting on the military": Essex CRO, Q/SBb 352/55 (Aug. 1793).

complained loftily that they found the cause was "a parcel of old women. . . as in all pretended riots in this part of the country". But this parcel of women (not all of whom were old) had given a good account of themselves, some seventy of them stopping a wagon and six horses, and carrying off twenty-nine sacks of wheaten flour.¹

When women rioted they made no attempt to disguise their sex or to apologise for it. In my view there was very little cross-dressing in food riots, although once or twice there are unconfirmed reports of men in women's clothes.² These "rites of inversion" or, maybe, simple exercises in the most available disguise, were more commonly encountered in turnpike riots, in "carnival" protests, and, later, in Luddism.³ But inversion, whether intentional or not, was exactly what the women did *not* wish to achieve. So far from wishing to present an ominous androgynous image, they sought to present their particular right, according to tradition and gender role, as guardians of the children, of the household, of the livelihood of the community. That symbolism — the blood-stained loaves on poles, the banging of kitchen ware — belonged especially to the women's protests. They evinced what Temma Kaplan has called "female consciousness" rather than feminist, which rested upon "their acceptance of the sexual division of labor" which is one which "assigns women the responsibility of preserving life". "Experiencing reciprocity among themselves and competence in preserving

¹PRO, WO 1/1091, 5 and 8 Aug. 1795; Assi 2/26 and 5/116.

²*Jackson's Oxford Journal*, 28 May 1757 reports a wagon of wheat taken away in Bath by a mob in women's clothes. I have not found any eighteenth-century indictment for such an offence in a food riot.

³See Natalie Davis, "Women on Top", in *Society and Culture in Early Modern France* (Stanford, 1975). I think Professor Davis overlooks the fact that a woman's gown was the most readily-available garment to disguise a collier or a cottager. Some of the upside-down symbolic effects (which she describes so well) were consequence rather than intention. Attacks on turnpikes had more military symbolism: "Deponent saith. . . they heard the Noise of Horns blowing. . . and soon after a great Number of Persons armed with Guns & Axes, some of them disguised with black'd faces and Womens Cloathes. . .". This was an attack on a turnpike gate in Ledbury, Herefordshire. James Baylis, labourer, who was apprehended said that he had blacked his face with a burnt cork, and that the gown, apron and straw hat which he wore were his wife's: informations in PRO, TS 11/1122/5824, 4 Nov. 1735.

life instills women with a sense of their collective right to administer daily life, even if they must confront authority to do so.¹

Nothing pleased female rioters more than the humiliation of pompous male "aggro". In a Tiverton riot in 1754 a certain Lieutenant Suttie attracted the crowd's notice by his zeal; he was heard to say to a JP, "Give me leave sir, to order the men to fire, and you shall see the fellows hop like peas". The troopers were unleashed upon the crowd and they "rode through the streets hacking with their broad-swords and stabbing with their bayonets":

While the troopers were dashing about in the execution of their orders, some women seized Lieutenant Suttie by the collar and took away his sword, which he never recovered. This was a sore blow to his pride, and a favourite subject of banter on the part of his friends, who, very cruelly, would not allow him to forget his skirmish with the women and the inglorious loss of his weapon.²

Not for the first or last time, disarming symbolised emasculation.

Men in authority still feared the violence and the incitement of the female tongue (see below pp. 501-2), and women could sometimes attain their ends by mockery, insult, or by shaming farmers or dealers by their expostulations. Susannah Soons was convicted in Norwich in 1767 for "uttering several scandalous and inflammatory speeches", and Mary Watts in Leicester for "assaulting" the magistrates "with indecent and opprobrious Language and Gestures".³ In Montrose in 1812, when the Riot Act was being read and the military were deployed to disperse the crowd, Elizabeth Beattie called out, "Will no person take that paper out of his hand?" and tried to snatch the Act from the magistrate.⁴

Elizabeth Beattie knew what she was doing. But so did Anne Carter, in 1629. She clearly despised the pomp of the local authorities, calling one of Maldon's chief magistrates in 1622 "bloud sucker and. . . many other unseemely tearmes".

¹Temma Kaplan, "Female Consciousness and Collective Action: The Case of Barcelona, 1910-1918", *Signs*, vii, 3 (1982), pp. 545, 560, 565.

²Snell, *The Chronicles of Twyford*, pp. 194-5. This was an election riot.

³Williams, thesis, pp. 203, note 2, and p. 279.

⁴Logue, *op. cit.*, p. 22.

When the bailiff had questioned her about her absence from church, she had answered back: "that yf he woold prouid [provide] wone to doe hir worke shee would goe". In the riots she described herself as "Captain", calling out: "Come, my brave lads of Maldon, I will be your leader for we will not starve."¹ "General Jane Bogey" in Newcastle in 1740 knew what she was doing, and so did "Lady Ludd", the title claimed by leaders of riots in 1812 in both Nottingham and Leeds.² So too did fifty-four-year-old Hannah Smith who "headed up the mob" for some days in Manchester in the same year, bringing down the prices of potatoes, butter and milk, and boasting that she could raise a crowd in a minute.³ It was lack of deference as much as rioting which got Anne Carter and Hannah Smith hanged. What clergyman was likely to give a character reference, what nobleman to intercede, on behalf of such viragos?

The women's riots may not have been precisely of the same violence quotient as the men's, but they were not shrinking, demure affairs. Frequently they came to a climax when women led off the fore-horses, climbed aboard the wagons and threw down the sacks to their fellows, sometimes took the horses out of the shafts and pulled the wagon back themselves to a place for convenient distribution of its load.⁴ In the engagement at Newport Pagnell in 1740 (above pp. 319-20), the women fought with the farmers for a considerable time, declaring that they were "unwilling that so much Wheat should go out of the Kingdom, while they wanted bread, [and] swore they would lose their lives before they would part with it". At length "with great acclamations of joy the waggons were unloaded". The reporter of the *Northampton Mercury* found that the affair merited a little comment:

¹Walter, *op. cit.*, pp. 58, 72.

²Ellis, *op. cit.*, p. 340; Thomis and Grimmett, *op. cit.*, p. 31.

³*Ibid.*, pp. 43-5.

⁴For examples, see *Derby Mercury*, 10 July 1740 (Derby 1740). Elizabeth Beer and Elizabeth Bell were each sentenced to 7 years transportation for their part in this riot. Information of Thos. Higgins against Ann Burdon, who stopped his wagon in Long Handborough in August 1795, took the horse out of the shafts, and got into the shafts to prevent the horses being put back in: PRO, Assi 5/116.

The Conquerors are now holding a Grand Council to consider what to do with it among themselves. Such uncommon Bravery and Resolution appearing in the soft & tender Sex is a Matter of Surprise to those who stile themselves their despotick Sovereigns, & the Lords of Creation.¹

Such bravery was not uncommon. Repeatedly women faced troops and were fired upon. In one of the only letters that survives from a food rioter, he wrote of a great riot in Nottingham (1800): "your hearts would have ached to have seen the women Calling for Bread and Declaring they would fight till they died Before they would be used so any longer. . . the conduct of the people. . . who stood the fire from the yeomanry with such undaunted courage that astonished the gentlemen for they poured such showers of stones on them in all directions that they could load their pieces no more after they had fired them. . .".²

Perhaps the poor of both sexes partnered each other better in bad times than we suppose. Maybe men were more prominent in food riots than women, and maybe not.³ But if one adds up all that is already known (and there is much still to find out) there were an awful lot of women involved in food riots, sometimes on their own, more often in mixed affairs in which there was a loyal gender partnership.

For two hundred and more years these food riots were the most-visible-and-public-expressions-of-working-women's-lack of deference and their contestation with authority. As such these evidences contest, in their turn, the stereotypes of feminine submission, timidity, or confinement to the private world of the household. Robert Southey (p. 234) may not have been so silly after all. Indeed, when once aroused the women may have been more passionate than men in their eloquence, less heedful of the consequences, and, in their role

¹*Northampton Mercury*, 2 June 1740; *Ipswich Journal*, 7 June 1740.

²Intercepted letter of J. and L. Golby to "Dear Brother and Sister", dated Nottingham 7 Sept: 1800, in PRO, HO 42/51. Extracts of the letter are in Quinault and Stevenson (eds.), *op. cit.*, pp. 58-9 and in Wells, *Wretched Faces*, pp. 120-2.

³Or maybe the answer differed according to place and time. Walter, *op. cit.*, p. 62 writes that "women were present in almost every food riot in the period [i.e. early seventeenth century] and some riots were exclusively feminine affairs".

as guardians of the family, more determined to get quick results.¹ Perhaps — as John Bohstedt suggests — many women were more immersed than were men “in the moral, less in the market, economy”, and they were among the last to give the practices of the moral economy up.²

That is not the whole truth about women and authority, but food riots provide an important and weighty chunk of evidence, which must not be tidied away. It may enlarge our sense of the possibilities of feminine “nature”. The more difficult question may be, not why women sometimes rioted, but why, in the mid nineteenth century, the tradition of public protest became so much weaker and women’s presence retreated into a serial world of private households.³ Perhaps (in contrast to what came after) a “myth of the feminine food riot” should be rehabilitated after all?

IV

I do not know how far back one must go to find the origin of the term, “moral economy”. I think that it comes from the late eighteenth century, but I cannot now find references. It

¹ Tom Wedgwood wrote to his father, Josiah, describing “the mob” in the Potteries in March 1783: “The women were much worse than the men, as for example, Parson Sneyd got about 30 men to follow him. . . but a woman cried: ‘Nay, nay, that wunna do, that wunna do’, and so they turned back again, and it was agreed that the corn taken [in] the boat should be sold at a fair price”: *The Wedgwood Letters*, ed. Ann Finer and G. Savage (1965), p. 268. My thanks to Douglas Hay.

² Women and miners were prominent in traditional price-setting in south-west England in 1847, and women and fishermen in north-east Scotland: A. Rowe, “Food Riots of the Forties in Cornwall”, *Royal Cornwall Polytechnic Society* (1942); E. Richards, *The Last Scottish Food Riots, Past and Present Supplement* (1981). See also Roger E. Swift, “Food Riots in Mid-Victorian Exeter, 1847-67”, *Southern History*, 2 (1980). Robert Storch, in a most interesting study, shows how in 1867 in Devon and Oxfordshire, traditions of food riot, of rough music, and of “Guy Fawkes” carnival came together, with the women and the disguised “bonfire boys” playing the leading roles: “Popular Festivity and Consumer Protest: Food Price Disturbances in the Southwest and Oxfordshire in 1867”, *Albion*, 14, 3-4 (1982). Although women were often the most active in these events, few of the women were arrested or brought to trial. See Storch, p. 233, note 41.

³ Dorothy Thompson, “Women and Nineteenth-Century Radical Politics: a Lost Dimension”, in Juliet Mitchell and Ann Oakley (eds.), *The Rights and Wrongs of Women* (Harmondsworth, 1976), pp. 112-138.

was certainly around in the 1830s,¹ and it was used by Bronterre O’Brien, the Chartist, in 1837 in a polemic against political economists:

True political economy is like true domestic economy; it does not consist solely in slaving and saving; there is a moral economy as well as political. . . These quacks would make wreck of the affections, in exchange for incessant production and accumulation. . . It is, indeed, the MORAL ECONOMY that they always keep out of sight. When they talk about the tendency of large masses of capital, and the division of labour, to increase production and cheapen commodities, they do not tell us of the inferior human being which a single and fixed occupation must necessarily produce.²

This directly anti-capitalist usage is close to that which I introduce into *The Making of the English Working Class*, when I referred to food riots as being “legitimized by the assumptions of an older moral economy, which taught the immorality of. . . profiteering upon the necessities of the people”. And I went on to describe the food riots of 1795 as “a last desperate effort” to re-impose the “old paternalist moral economy” as against the economy of the free market.³

I subsequently defined more carefully the term, the practices associated with it, and the contradictory components of paternalist control and crowd rebellion. The reason for this retrospective enquiry is that the theory of a moral economy has now taken off in more than one direction and in several fields of specialist study, and my essay is sometimes cited as authority. But while the term is available for every development which can be justified, my own usage has in general been confined to confrontations in the marketplace over access (or entitlement) to “necessities” — essential food. It is not only that there is an identifiable

¹ Thus Robert Southey was claiming to espouse “MORAL versus political economy”, see David Eastwood, “Robert Southey and the Intellectual Origins of Romantic Conservatism”, *Eng. Hist. Rev.*, civ. (1989), p. 323. The “moral economy of the factory system” was employed in a very different sense by Dr Andrew Ure in *The Philosophy of Manufactures* (1835).

² Bronterre’s *National Reformer*, 21 Jan. 1837. I am indebted to Dorothy Thompson for this reference.

³ (Penguin, 1968), pp. 67-73.

bundle of beliefs, usages and forms associated with the marketing of food in time of dearth, which it is convenient to bind together in a common term, but the deep emotions stirred by dearth, the claims which the crowd made upon the authorities in such crises, and the outrage provoked by profiteering in life-threatening emergencies, imparted a particular "moral" charge to protest. All of this, taken together, is what I understand by moral economy.¹

If the term is to be extended to other contexts, then it must be redefined or there will be some loss of focus. Adrian Randall has so redefined it, in applying it to "The Industrial Moral Economy of the Gloucestershire Weavers" in the eighteenth century.² The same weaving communities that were involved in food riots (1766) were involved in industrial actions (1756); these were informed by the same values, showed the same community solidarities and sanctions (such as rough music against those who broke the norms of the trade), a similar appeal to custom and to Tudor and Stuart statute law (when this protected their own interests), and a similar insistence that, where the community's economic well-being was concerned, market forces and the profits of individuals should be subdued to custom. Moreover, Randall

¹Similar "moral economy" themes have been examined in different national histories — notably (France) Louise Tilly, "The Food Riot as a Form of Political Conflict in France", *Journal of Interdisciplinary History*, i (1971), pp. 23-57, and Cynthia A. Bouton, "L' 'économie morale' et la Guerre des farines de 1775", and also the editors' "Introduction" in Florence Gauthier and Guy-Robert Ikni (eds.), *La Guerre du Blé au XVIII^e Siècle* (Paris, 1988); Laura Rodriguez, "The Spanish Riots of 1766", *Past and Present*, 59 (1973); Barbara Clark Smith, "Food Rioters in the American Revolution", in Alfred F. Young, (ed.), *Beyond the American Revolution* (Urbana, forthcoming); John Rogers, "The 1866 Grain Riots in Sri Lanka", *Comparative Studies in Society and History*, xxix, 3 (1987).

²A. J. Randall in John Rule (ed.), *British Trade Unionism, 1750-1850* (1988), pp. 29-51. See also Charlesworth and Randall, "Morals, Markets and the English Crowd", pp. 206-9. Professor Charles Tilly, in a private communication, has suggested a further definition: "The term 'moral economy' makes sense when claimants to a commodity can invoke non-monetary rights to that commodity, and third parties will act to support these claims — when, for example, community membership supersedes price as a basis of entitlement. To the extent that moral economy comes merely to mean tradition, custom, or exchange outside the established market, it loses its conceptual force."

shows that the industrial crowd also would seek to press the gentry into the role of conciliators and arbitrators, so that "the moral economy was the obverse of the paternalist model".

I am more than half persuaded by this argument. In those West of England clothing towns there was a dense texture of trade rituals and customary usages, endorsed by community sanctions, which may be seen as the stubborn plebeian underside to mercantilist industry. Of course these workers were habituated to an economy with markets, but markets conducted within customary norms; in times of conflict they affirmed the priorities of "the Trade", or they elevated the defence of the interests of the working community above those of the profits of the few, and if the term "moral economy" helps us to identify these norms and practices, then let it be used. It certainly helps us to see the strongly defensive, and, in that sense, conservative nature of this plebeian culture.

But where are we to draw the line? Pirates had strongly-transmitted usages and customs: did they have a moral economy.¹ Keith Snell suggests that the poor's right to a settlement "formed a consistent part of those 'moral economy' values" which I have analysed. And he extends the list of candidates for inclusion in this moral economy to the poor laws generally, to yearly hirings and "fair wages", and even to "popular consumption, fashion [and] leisure activities". Then he turns around and gives me a dressing-down for "the amorphous character" of my moral economy.²

I admire Dr Snell's work, but on this occasion I am perplexed, because I can see little evidence that he knows much about the tensions around the nexus of food in time of dearth. What is "amorphous" is his own extension of the term's use, and this stems from the error of supposing that what are at issue are "moral economy values". But if values, on their own, make a moral economy then we will be turning up moral economies everywhere. My own notion of the moral

¹Marcus Rediker, *Between the Devil and the Deep Blue Sea* (Cambridge, 1987), ch. 6.

²K. D. M. Snell, *Annals of the Labouring Poor* (Cambridge, 1985), pp. 99-199, 103.

economy of the crowd in the food market includes ideal models or ideology (just as political economy does), which assigns economic roles and which endorses customary practices (an alternative "economics"), in a particular balance of class or social forces. It is by taking "values" or "moral attitudes" out of the context of a particular historical formation that Snell gets his amorphous results.

However, I have no right to patent the term. Some historians prefer a more descriptive and looser use. No other term seems to offer itself to describe the way in which, in peasant and in early industrial communities, many "economic" relations are regulated according to non-monetary norms. These exist as a tissue of customs and usages until they are threatened by monetary rationalisations and are made self-conscious as a "moral economy". In this sense, the moral economy is summoned into being in resistance to the economy of the "free market".¹ As Charlesworth and Randall have argued, "The basis of the moral economy was that very sense of community which a common experience of capitalist industry generated".² The rationalisations or "modernisations" of the capitalist market offended against community norms and continually called into being a "moral" antagonist.

This is an extension which is further generalised by William Reddy in *The Rise of Market Culture*, for whom the moral economy is "a set of values and moral standards that were violated by technical and commercial change":

Defence of such moral standards need not have been motivated by memory of the past. The inadequacy of market language was constantly being brought to the laborer's attention by the very conditions of work.

And Reddy concludes that "something like a moral economy is bound to surface anywhere that industrial capitalism

¹The great British miners' strike of 1984 was a late example of such a confrontation, although "free market" forces appeared in the guise of every resource of the State.

²Charlesworth and Randall, "Morals, Markets and the English Crowd", p. 213.

spreads".¹ This has the advantage of discarding the notion that "moral economy" must always be traditional, "backward-looking", etc.; on the contrary, it is continuously regenerating itself as anti-capitalist critique, as a resistance movement.² We are close to the language of Bronterre O'Brien. But what this gains in breadth it loses in focus, and in inexperienced hands may bleed off the edge into uncontextual moralistic rhetoric.³

There is less danger of this in the alert theoretical discussions in the field of peasant studies, where a "moral economy theory" is now at the centre of controversy. This is thanks to James C. Scott whose *The Moral Economy of the Peasant* (1976) generalised an argument derived from studies in Lower Burma and Vietnam. The term is drawn from my own essay but it is now brought to bear upon "peasant conceptions of social justice, of rights and obligations, of reciprocity". But what distinguishes Scott's use is that it goes much further than descriptive accounts of "values" or "moral attitudes". Since for the peasantry, subsistence depends upon access to land, customs of land use and of entitlement to its produce are now at the centre of analysis rather than the marketing of food. And custom is seen (against a background of memories of famine) as perpetuating subsistence imperatives, and usages which insure the community against risk. These imperatives are also expressed in protective landlord-tenant (or patron-client) relations, and in resistances to technical innovations and to market rationalisations, where these might entail risks in the event of crisis. Scott analyses village redistributive institutions and religious charitable obligations, and shows that "there is good reason for viewing both the norm of reciprocity and the

¹William Reddy, *The Rise of Market Culture* (Cambridge, Mass., 1984), pp. 331-4.

²Carl Gersuny and Gladys Kaufman, "Seniority and the Moral Economy of U.S. Automobile Workers, 1934-46", *Journal of Social History*, xviii (1985), extend the notion into non-"economic" trade union defences.

³A danger which Reddy himself does not wholly avoid in his sequel, *Money and Liberty in Modern Europe* (Cambridge, 1987), in which "asymmetrical monetary exchange" is made the key to all modern history, wherein "honour" and "money" enact an unequal contest.

right to subsistence as genuine moral components of the 'little tradition' . . . — that is, in peasant culture universally. The threat to these institutions and norms associated with European expansion and with market rationalisations has often provoked the peasantry to participation in revolutionary movements.¹

There is some likeness here to the moral economy of the eighteenth-century English crowd, although Scott does not elaborate the comparison and he is in fact more interested in patron-client relations in the village rather than in those confrontations or negotiations which mark the European tradition of food riot.² Predictably his theories have been vigorously contested by protagonists of "market forces", and Samuel L. Popkin delivered a polemic against what were presented as "the moral economists" in *The Rational Peasant* (1979). This offered the characteristic peasant as a rational actor, shrewdly adjusting to the market economy in a satisfactorily self-interested and normless manner. So that the old debate between moral and political economists seemed likely to re-enact itself over the paddy fields of South-East Asia — a debate into which it would be foolish for me to enter, although my sympathies are certainly with James Scott.

However, Professor Scott has moved the debate forwards (and sideways) in his *Weapons of the Weak*, and onto territory where comparisons may be explored with advantage. This territory is not only that of the tenacious forms of resistance to power of the weak and of the poor: "in ridicule, in truculence, in irony, in petty acts of non-compliance, in dissimulation. . . in the disbelief in elite homilies, in the steady and grinding efforts to hold one's own

¹James C. Scott, *The Moral Economy of the Peasant: Rebellion and Subsistence in Southeast Asia* (New Haven, 1976). See also James M. Polachek, "The Moral Economy of the Kiangsi Soviet", *Journal of Asian Studies*, xlii, 4 (1983), p. 825.

²For constructive criticism, see David Hunt, "From the Millennium to the Everyday: James Scott's Search for the Essence of Peasant Politics", *Radical Hist. Rev.*, 42 (1988), pp. 155-72; Michael Adas, "Moral Economy" or 'Contest State'?", *Journal of Social History*, xiii, 4 (1980).

against overwhelming odds".¹ It is also, and at the same time, into the limits which the weak can impose upon power. As Barrington Moore has argued in *Injustice*:

In any stratified society. . . there is a set of limits on what both rulers and subjects, dominant and subordinate groups can do. There is also a set of mutual obligations that bind the two together. Such limits and obligations are not set down in formal written constitutions or contracts. . .

There is (rather) "an un verbalized set of mutual understandings", and "what takes place is a continual probing on the part of rulers and subjects to find out what they can get away with, to test and discover the limits of obedience and disobedience". This takes us, by way of the concept of social reciprocity, or, as Moore prefers, mutual obligation ("a term that does not imply equality of burdens or obligations"),² back to the "moral economy", in the sense of the equilibrium or "field of force" which I examined in Chapter I and in the bargaining between unequal social forces in which the weaker still has acknowledged claims upon the greater. Of those who have recently developed these ideas I find a particular sympathy with Michael Watts, whose *Silent Violence* examines food and famine among the Hausa in northern Nigeria. He sees the norms and practices of an imperative collective subsistence ethic as permeating the peasant universe, but he sees this without sentimentality:

The moral economy was not especially moral and the Caliphate was certainly no Rousseauian universe of peasant welfare and benevolent patrons. Rather, the moral economy was necessary to the survival of ruler and ruled, and the price was paid by prevailing power blocs for the maintenance and reproduction of the social relations of production replete with its exploitative relations and class struggles.

¹James C. Scott, *Weapons of the Weak: Everyday Forms of Peasant Resistance* (New Haven, 1985), p. 350. See also the editors' contributions in Andrew Turton and Shigeharu Tanabe (eds.), *History and Peasant Consciousness in South East Asia* (Osaka, 1984), and the special issue of the *Journals of Peasant Studies*, xiii, 2 (1986).

²Barrington Moore Jr, *Injustice: The Social Bases of Obedience and Revolt* (1978), pp. 18, 506.

"There is no need to saddle the moral economy with the legacy of Durkheim, Rousseau, and Ruskin."¹

Much of the very interesting discussion which is now extending under the rubric of "moral economy" from African and Asian to Latin American² or to Irish studies has little to do with my (1971) usage but is concerned with the social dialectic of unequal mutuality (need and obligation) which lies at the centre of most societies. The term "moral economy" has won acceptance because it is less cumbersome than other terms (such as "dialectical asymmetrical reciprocity") which we might otherwise be clobbered with. When an Irish historian writes of "moral economy", he is writing of eighteenth-century paternalism, deference, and non-economic (i.e. unprofitable) "easygoing farming practices" such as low rents and tolerance of arrears.³ A scholar (Paul Greenough) writing on the Bengal famine of 1943-44 has an even more extended definition:

By 'moral economy' I mean the cluster of relations of exchange between social groups, and between persons, in which the welfare and the merit of both parties to the exchange takes precedence over other considerations such as the profit of the one or the other.⁴

These capacious definitions will certainly allow in most things we might wish to introduce, and if the term will encourage historians to discover and write about all those areas of human exchange to which orthodox economics was once blind, then this is a gain.

If we employ the terminology of class, then "moral economy" in this definition may be concerned with the way in which class relations are negotiated. It shows how

¹Michael Watts, *Silent Violence: Food, Famine and Peasantry in Northern Nigeria* (Berkeley, 1983), pp. 106, 146.

²Leslie Anderson, "From Quiescence to Rebellion: Peasant Political Activity in Costa Rica and Pre-Revolutionary Nicaragua" (Univ. of Michigan Ph.D. thesis, 1987; Erick D. Langer, "Labor Strikes and Reciprocity on Chuquisaca Haciendas", *Hispanic American History Review*, lxx, 2, 1985.

³Thomas Bartlett, "An End to Moral Economy: The Irish Militia Disturbances of 1793", in C. H. E. Philpin (ed.), *Nationalism and Popular Protest in Ireland* (Cambridge, 1987).

⁴Paul R. Greenough, "Indian Famines and Peasant Victims: The Case of Bengal in 1943-44", *Modern Asian Studies*, xiv, 2 (1980), p. 207.

hegemony is not just imposed (or contested) but is articulated in the everyday intercourse of a community, and can be sustained only by concession and patronage (in good times), by at least the gestures of protection in bad.¹ Of the two parts of the term, the "economy" can probably now look after itself, since it will be defined in each scholar's practice. It is the "moral" part which may now require more attention. One benefit that has accrued from the term's transportation into peasant studies is that it can be viewed in operation within cultures whose moral premises are not identical with those of a Judeo-Christian inheritance.²

No-one has made this more explicit than has Professor Greenough in his study of Bengal famine, and he has done this on the directly comparative ground of the crisis of subsistence. Greenough presents a conspectus of the Bengali peasants' value-system,³ and he derives this, not (as does Scott) from remembered scarcity and from risk-avoiding strategies, but, on the contrary, from a Bengal tradition of abundance. At the centre of this value-system is *Laksmi*, both a conception of order and abundance and a benevolent goddess of prosperity. Prosperity flows down from above, from *Laksmi*, or from "kings", patrons or parents. In its simplest form there are two situations only: the givers and the receivers of rice, and in time of crisis the peasant's reflex is to seek refuge in the patron-client relationship, to search for new patrons, or to wait in patience for *Laksmi's* gifts to be restored. Greenough also finds "an unyielding Bengali antipathy to individual assertion":

Temple art, learned texts, and folk apothegms reiterate that whatever success one has comes only through a superior's benevolence. . . There is no widely accepted creed of commercial accumulation.⁴

¹See Scott, *Weapons of the Weak*, ch. 8 — an excellent discussion of "hegemony" in this everyday sense.

²See also Charles F. Keyes, "Economic Action and Buddhist Morality in a Thai Village", *Journal of Asian Studies*, xlii, 4 (1983).

³Paul R. Greenough, *Prosperity and Misery in Modern Bengal* (Oxford, 1982), esp. ch. 1. Greenough derives his account from Hindu cosmology and is silent as to any differences between Hindu and Moslem villagers.

⁴Paul R. Greenough, "Indulgence and Abundance as Asian Peasant Values: a Bengali Case in Point", *Journal of Asian Studies*, xlii, 4 (1983), p. 842.

This brief summary will serve if it leaves us with the expectation that "giving" and beseeching "protection" are critical to the peasantry's discourse of crisis, rather than "duties" or "rights". Greenough finds in this an explanation for the Bengali response to famine. In the appalling conditions of 1943-44 attacks on granaries or shops were rare. "Food of all sorts lay before their eyes", while people were starving on the streets of Calcutta, "but no one attempted to seize it by force". The attitude of the people was one of "complete resignation", and "they attribute their misery to fate or *karma* alone. . .". An English medical officer contrasted this with the Punjab or the United Provinces where "you would have had terrific riots", and:

The husbands and brothers would have had those food shops opened, but in Bengal they died in front of bulging food shops.

Q. Bulging with grain?

A. Yes, they died in the streets in front of shops bulging with grain.

Q. Because they could not buy?

A. Yes, and it was due to the passive, fatalistic attitude of those people that there were no riots. . .¹

A leading Bengali Communist wrote with admiration of these villagers, "saturated with the love of peace and honesty", turning away from the path of looting, and with "unbounded fortitude. . . standing in the queue of death".² And, regarding this evidence, Greenough concludes that this behaviour represented "the continued acceptance in a crisis of the very values which hitherto had sustained the victims":

Abandoned victims could do no more than to dramatize their helplessness in the hope of re-stimulating a flow of benevolence. Mendicancy, cries and wails, imploring gestures, the exhibition of dead or dying children — all were part of the destitutes' attempts to evoke charity and to transfer responsibility for their nurture to new 'destined providers'.³

Professor Greenough's intervention is most welcome. But it does present certain difficulties. One set of difficulties arises from his interpretation of complex evidence. His reconstruction of the value-system of Bengali peasants bears

¹ Greenough, *Prosperity and Misery*, pp. 266-7.

² *Ibid.*, p. 268.

³ *Ibid.*, p. 271.

the mark of a certain school of holistic anthropology and allows no space for variety and contradiction. This is most evident in his discussion of the demoralisation induced by prolonged dearth, the break-up of families, and the abandonment of wives and children by the father. Greenough concludes that "familial disintegration did not occur randomly but seems to have been a result of the intentional exclusion of less-valued family members from domestic subsistence". Such exclusion was "desperate but not reprehensible" and was "explicable in terms of Bengali moral conceptions". The most favoured member of the family (in this account) is the male family head, who might — even if he should be the only survivor — reconstitute the familial lineage. So deeply are these patriarchal values internalised that the abandoned passively assent to their own abandonment.¹

This may be true, or may be part of the truth.² But Greenough hangs his interpretive apparatus upon slender evidence — a few accounts of the "banishment" of wives or desertion of families — and alternative interpretations are not tested.³ And he affirms his conclusions in increasingly confident form, as if they were incontestable findings. What were "desperate" measures on one page becomes, fifty pages

¹ *Ibid.*, pp. 215-25 and "Indian Famines and Peasant Victims", pp. 225-33.

² Megan Vaughan in "Famine Analysis and Family Relations: 1949 in Nyasaland", *Past and Present*, 108 (1985), has similar disturbing evidence of the aged, the young and the disabled being abandoned, and of husbands abandoning their families: and M. Vaughan, *The Story of an African Famine. Gender and Famine in Twentieth-Century Malawi* (1987).

³ Some men may have left their families in the hope of finding work (and sending remittances) or in the expectation that in their absence the wife's kin or village charities would support the family. Wives might have been encouraged to go begging as the ultimate recourse against starvation. Similarly, the sale of children may have been an ultimate strategy to secure their survival. (Greenough assumes that "the dominant motive" for selling children was to secure cash for the parents' food, or else to "relieve themselves of the intolerable clamoring of their children for food"! *Prosperity and Misery*, p. 221.) Greenough's account of age-differential mortality during famine (*ibid.*, ch. 6) makes no attempt to relate this to the findings of historical demography as to trends commonly encountered during subsistence crisis. Indeed his treatment of historical and demographic studies is cavalier: see David Arnold, *Famine*, pp. 89-90.

later, the sweeping assertion that "authority figures in peasant households abandoned numerous dependents deemed inessential for the reconstitution of family and society in the post-crisis period".¹ What is found in extremity is now offered as if it were the norm: "husbands and heads of families appropriated domestic assets and abandoned their spouses, and parents sold children for cash".²

We must leave these questions to specialists in Bengali culture. But they strongly influence Greenough's comparative findings as to riot:

This pattern of victimization has nothing in common with European traditions of rage and revolt. In Europe famine violence was turned 'outward' and 'upward' against offending landlords, merchants, and officials; in Bengal the tradition was to turn violence 'inward' and 'downward' against clients and dependents. This was the cold violence of abandonment, of ceasing to nourish, rather than the hot violence of bloodshed and tumult.³

The comparison would be more convincing if Greenough had not misread the European evidence in such a way as to accentuate the violence of that tradition. He prefers an excitable letter from the Abbé Raynal, in which European food rioters in the 1780s are shown as pursuing each other with daggers in their hands, "massacring each other", "tearing and devouring their own limbs", etc., to the less sensational conclusions of historians of riot.⁴ This rigging of the evidence, in which submissive sufferers are contrasted with "enraged looters", devalues his comparative study.

There remains, however, the significant interrogation of "moral" premises, in relation to subsistence, in differing cultures. In criticising *The Moral Economy of the Peasant*, Greenough argues that:

Scott's model of the moral economy. . . is essentially legal in nature. Scott says that peasants everywhere assert a *right* to subsistence, that

¹*Prosperity and Misery*, pp. 215 and 264. Cf. Greenough, "Indulgence and Abundance", pp. 832-3: heads of households "coolly abandon" their dependents; in "an extreme realization of core patriarchal values. . . it becomes acceptable to channel threats of extinction toward less essential actors like clients, women and children".

²"Indulgence and Abundance", p. 847.

³*Ibid.*, p. 847; *Prosperity and Misery*, pp. 270-1.

⁴*Ibid.*, p. 268.

this assertion is felt to be *just*, and that it arises from a *norm* of reciprocity; further, it is the *duty* of elites to subsidize their peasants, and any failure to do so entails a loss of their *legitimacy*. This Latinate terminology is derived from study of the numerous food riots that erupted in Western Europe in the seventeenth through nineteenth centuries; its appropriateness in explaining Bengali conditions is doubtful. Bengalis in crisis have spoken of their needs for "boons" (*bar*), "help" (*sahajya*), and "gifts" (*dan*), but rarely of their "rights"; of "indulgence" rather than "reciprocity"; of kingly *dharma*. . . but rarely of an enforceable class "duty".

This is not just "a narrow matter of terminology, but of the cognitive structures and customary paths for action that are conjured by the use of such terms".¹

This is partly an academic language-game which, unfortunately, is rigged once more in order to score points off Scott. For Greenough has confused the language (and cognitive structures) of the historical subjects and of the academic interpreter. Neither English food rioters nor Burmese peasants acted with a vocabulary of "norms", "reciprocity" or "legitimacy" on their lips, and, equally, Professor Greenough's interpretive terminology ("cosmology", "hierarchical", "anthropomorphized") can be as Latinate (or Hellenic), as Scott's and, perhaps, even less likely to be found on the lips of a Bengal peasant.

But let us forgive him his polemical zeal. For he has reminded us of two important things. The first is that even extreme hunger, and even the simplest act of preparing food, may have differential cultural expression: "to cultivate, cook, share, and eat rice in Bengal is to perform a series of rituals. . . To dissect out an area of economic activity and label it 'subsistence' is to sever the social, sacral and even cosmic links" that food preparation and commensality may represent. For these reasons Greenough suspects that "the moral economy of rice in much of Asia is more truly moral, more pregnant with implication, than economic and political historians have been ready to admit".² But there is no reason to confine these thoughts to Asia or to rice. Bread, which is "the staff of life", features in the Lord's Prayer, bread and salt are the gifts with which European peasants

¹"Indulgence and Abundance", p. 846.

²*Ibid.*, p. 848.

once welcomed visitors, and the wafer of the sacrament of Eucharist was unleavened bread.

We are also reminded that we are always in danger of confusing the historical evidence with the terms of interpretation which we have ourselves introduced. Food rioters did sometimes appeal to justice (or "fair" prices) and they certainly protested against unfair practices; but the language of "duties", "obligations", "reciprocity" and even of "rights" is mostly our own. Rioters abused those accused of sharp practices in marketing as "rogues", and, in the theatre of confrontation, anonymous letter-writers elaborated a rhetoric of threat — murder, arson, even revolt.¹ Yet if we were to find ways of interrogating the cognitive structure of food rioters, we might find certain essential premises, whether expressed in the simplest biblical terms of "love" and "charity", or whether in terms of notions of what humans "owe" to each other in time of need, notions which may have little to do with any Christian instruction but which arise from the elementary exchanges of material life.

There was a plebeian "discourse" here, almost beneath the level of articulacy, appealing to solidarities so deeply assumed that they were almost nameless, and only occasionally finding expression in the (very imperfect) record which we have. Walter Stephens, indicted for riot before the Gloucestershire Special Commission in December 1766, was alleged to have declared that "what the Mob had done was right and justifiable, and that for all the Justices' acting they would have it all on a Level before it were long".² That certainly is not reputable political thought, and it will not be allowed to pass by King's College, Cambridge. But Walter Stephens said this at a time when he stood in danger of being tried for his life for these opinions (which, at the present moment, is not

¹ See my essay, "The Crime of Anonymity", in Hay, Linebaugh and Thompson, *Albion's Fatal Tree*, esp. the "Sampler of Letters", pp. 326-43. But even these letters are studied and "literary" productions.

² Crown brief in PRO, TS 11/1188/5956. I cannot find out what happened to Walter Stephens. His name does not appear on the Calendar of Prisoners in TS 11/995/3707. The case against him may have been dropped, or he might have been the Thomas Stephens committed for riot and diverse outrages and felonies, who appears in the Calendar with an annotation "acquitted".

— so far as I know — the case with any Fellow of King's) and his meanings deserve our respect.

Comparative enquiry into what is "the moral" (whether as norm or as cognitive structure) will help us to understand these meanings. It is an agenda for forward research. It would be a shame to leave future historians with nothing to do. In any case, if I did father the term "moral economy" upon current academic discourse, the term has long forgotten its paternity. I will not disown it, but it has come of age and I am no longer answerable for its actions. It will be interesting to see how it goes on.