

# FRENCH PRISONERS OF WAR, CONFLICTS OF HONOUR, AND SOCIAL INVERSIONS IN ENGLAND, 1744–1783\*

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**ABSTRACT.** *During the wars of the eighteenth century, French prisoners on parole in Britain were placed in a paradoxical situation of captives with privileges. Instead of studying these men as if they dwelt in a world apart, this article focuses on captivity zones as a social laboratory, where people of different status would socialize. These spaces accordingly provide a lens through which to glimpse the repercussions of international conflicts at the level of local communities. The disputes which opposed these captives to the English population, which were the object of letters of complaints sent by the French prisoners to the authorities, shed light on the normative and moral resources which were used by eighteenth-century Englishmen and Frenchmen to legitimize themselves in situations of social conflict. As a configuration characterized by shifting social relations, the parole zone brought together local, national, and international issues, intertwined primarily in the rhetoric of honour. In these incidents, there was no systematic alignment of class and national discourses and actions, while the precise standing of these Frenchmen on the social ladder was constantly challenged and debated. The resulting quarrels therefore reveal a series of social inversions: dominant groups in France were in many respects dominated in England. Rather than being a mere reflection of pre-existing social hierarchies, such micro-incidents reinvented them.*

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\* Earlier versions of this article have been given at universities of Lille, Oxford, Liverpool, Paris I Sorbonne, Cambridge, and Columbia in Paris. I wish to thank the various participants and organizers of these events for their comments. This research was funded by a Caird Fellowship from the National Maritime Museum (Greenwich) and by the IRHiS CNRS of the University of Lille. Michael Braddick, Stephen Conway, Quentin Deluermoz, Joanna Innes, Sam James, Tim Jenkins, Larry Klein, Michael Ledger-Lomas, Antoine Lilti, Simon Macdonald, and Piers Martin kindly commented on drafts. I would also like to thank the editor of the *Historical Journal*, Julian Hoppit, for his suggestions. I began work on this project in 2006, and unknown to me Mark Williams subsequently used some of the same materials to similar ends for chapter 3 of his Ph.D., 'Encountering the French: a new approach to national identity in England in the eighteenth century', defended in September 2010 at University of Sussex.

Near the end of the War of the Austrian Succession, two justices of the peace in Cumberland, in the north of England, issued the following warrant to the constables of the Leeth Ward:

Whereas Complaint & Information upon Oath hath this Day been made before us . . . that Samuel Spyby of Penrith in ye s<sup>d</sup>. County together with a great Number of other Persons unknown on Tuesday Night last at Penrith afores<sup>d</sup>. assembled themselves together in a very riotous & tumultuous Maner and assaulted Joseph Prerard a French Officer & Prisoner in the Streets there as he was peaceably returning to his Lodgings by throwing sev<sup>ll</sup>. Stones at Him & calling him French Dog & giving him other very opprobrious Language. These are therefore in his Majesty's Name to Require & Command You & every of You imediately upon Rect. hereof to attach the Body of ye sd. Samull Spyby & bring him before us to ans<sup>f</sup>. the previous and all other Matters of Misdemeanour as may then be objected ag<sup>t</sup>. him . . . Given under our Hands & Seals ye 23d. Day of May 1747.<sup>1</sup>

Similar incidents also happened regularly in Penrith and Carlisle, where French prisoners of war were stationed.<sup>2</sup> A focus on the assailants' words, as they were reproduced in the warrant, would appear to fit within the established paradigm of English francophobia in the eighteenth century. Such a narrative had become quasi-proverbial by the time Voltaire referred to it in 1770: 'The English populace . . . when they see a man who, by his manner, dress or wig, has the appearance of having been born on the banks of the Seine or of the Loire, commonly call him a French dog.'<sup>3</sup> Voltaire's testimony chimes with the assumption, shared by many historians, of the deep-seated popular Francophobia in eighteenth-century England. This hostility to all things French has been interpreted as a social solvent, revealing a sort of class conflict between Frenchified aristocrats and the 'cretinous prejudice of the rabble'.<sup>4</sup> Alternatively, it has been seen as social and national cement, unifying the different classes of British men and women in front of a common and foreign enemy.<sup>5</sup>

<sup>1</sup> 'To Robert Montgomery High Constable of Leeth Ward in the ye County of Cumberland & to all & every the Petty Constables in ye sd. County', 23 May 1747, Carlisle Record Office (CRO), D Hud 18/9/1.

<sup>2</sup> For similar examples, see CRO, D Hud 18/9/2 and 3. The wording of the warrant referred to the Riot Act, which had been passed against the Jacobite insurrection of 1715, and provided the legal basis for the repression of the second rebellion of 1745; see Rupert C. Jarvis, *The Jacobite risings of 1715 and 1745* (Carlisle, 1954).

<sup>3</sup> 'Chien', in Nicholas Cronk and Christiane Mervaud, eds., *Œuvres complètes de Voltaire*, iv: *Questions sur l'Encyclopédie. César-Egalité* (Oxford, 2009), p. 56. Unless otherwise stated, all translations from the French are mine. A similar discourse existed about popular Anglophobia in France: see for example Louis-Sébastien Mercier, *Tableau de Paris* (6 vols., Amsterdam, 1782–3), 1, pp. 46–7.

<sup>4</sup> Gerald Newman, *The rise of English nationalism: a cultural history, 1740–1830* (New York, NY, 1987), pp. 37, 75; Kathleen Wilson, *The sense of the people: politics, culture and imperialism in England, 1715–1785* (Cambridge, 1995), pp. 186–91. For a study which supports Newman's stance, see Robin Eagles, *Francophilia in English society, 1748–1815* (New York, NY, 2000).

<sup>5</sup> Linda Colley, *Britons: forging the nation, 1707–1837* (New Haven, CT, and London, 1992), p. 337.

None of these studies, however, is centred on actual situations of contact between English and French people.<sup>6</sup> To understand what happened in Carlisle, it is preferable to avoid assuming that either class or national belonging are the only possible ways to make sense of disputes involving Frenchmen and Englishmen in the eighteenth century. Indeed, the same type of explanation cannot apply to every such incident, whatever the moment and the local situation. As the work of sociologists and anthropologists have shown, disputes are forms of social interaction, involving much more than a simple social or political confrontation between two well-defined groups.<sup>7</sup> As Cyril Lemieux puts it, a dispute is a process ‘in which individuals displace and rework the social order which connects them’.<sup>8</sup> Rather than starting with pre-established definitions of the groups which were involved in these interactions, it is the activity of ‘group delineation’ by the actors themselves which becomes the focus of our enquiry.<sup>9</sup> In this sense, disputes constitute groups which are always in the making. If the emphasis is placed on ‘groupness as event’, new questions need to be addressed.<sup>10</sup> How many people were involved on each side, and who were they? Is it possible to know more about the reaction of the ‘victim’? Why would the magistrates choose the side of the official enemy and arrest an Englishman? And what was a French prisoner doing, apparently freely walking down the street of an English town in wartime?

During the wars of the eighteenth century, tens of thousands of Frenchmen were imprisoned in Britain, usually in England.<sup>11</sup> Their numbers fluctuated considerably both from one war to another and during each war. Although the greater part had been captured on board ships, most came from privateers or merchant ships.<sup>12</sup> Moreover, the majority of these prisoners were not seamen

<sup>6</sup> Moreover, in order to gauge popular attitudes, they rely on sources which can provide, at best, a very indirect answer, such as pamphlets or the press, as Jeremy Black points out in *Natural and necessary enemies: Anglo-French relations in the eighteenth century* (London, 1986), pp. 181, 183.

<sup>7</sup> P. H. Gulliver, *Disputes and negotiations: a cross-cultural perspective* (New York, NY, 1979).

<sup>8</sup> Cyril Lemieux, ‘A quoi sert l’analyse des controverses?’, *Mil neuf cent*, 25 (2007), p. 193.

<sup>9</sup> Bruno Latour, *Reassembling the social: an introduction to actor-network theory* (Oxford, 2005), p. 32. On this approach, see *ibid.*, pp. 28–42.

<sup>10</sup> Rogers Brubaker, ‘Ethnicity without groups’, *European Journal of Sociology*, 43 (2002), pp. 163–89, at p. 168.

<sup>11</sup> The concentration upon England and not Britain reflects the fact that the vast majority of the archival material uncovered for this article deals with the former. Further research on Scotland and also Ireland, where prisoners were also held, albeit in much fewer numbers, may give a different picture.

<sup>12</sup> Timothy Le Goff gives the following numbers of Frenchmen (which I rounded off) who had been imprisoned at least one time in Britain over the course of each war: War of the Austrian Succession: 31,000; Seven Years War: 61,000; War of the American Independence: 31,000. The last figure is surprisingly low because many prisoners were kept in colonial prisons. See T. J. A. Le Goff, ‘L’impact des prises effectuées par les Anglais sur la capacité en hommes de la marine française au XVIII<sup>e</sup> siècle’, in M. Acerra et al., eds., *Les marines de guerre européennes XVII<sup>e</sup>–XVIII<sup>e</sup> siècles* (Paris, 1985), pp. 103–22. Prisoners taken on board privateers consistently accounted for more than half of the total during these wars, while prisoners coming from

but landsmen.<sup>13</sup> Unlike rank and file captives, officers like Joseph Prerard, the Frenchman detained in Cumberland, were paroled, living under fairly minimal restrictions. Overall and consistent figures for prisoners on parole are generally lacking. According to a list from May 1758, at that date there were 16,329 prisoners in England, of whom 2,261 (14 per cent) were on parole.<sup>14</sup> Such a hierarchy among combatants had developed from the medieval hostage system, which was redefined in the context of the *jus in bello* from the late seventeenth century.<sup>15</sup> Instead of studying these men as if they dwelt in a world apart, this article will focus on paroled prisoners of war as social and cultural intermediaries between French and English societies. Captivity zones were places of intermingling, a social laboratory, where people of different status would socialize. These spaces accordingly provide a lens through which to glimpse the repercussions of international conflicts at the level of local communities, small towns, and villages. As numerous works on prisoners of war captivity in the twentieth century have shown, this phenomenon had profound consequences for families, the workforce, gender relations, and the writing of international law.<sup>16</sup> For the early modern period, specialists of the

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merchant ships varied between 30.7 per cent and 33.6 per cent. Finally, the officers and crews from the Royale accounted for only 15 per cent of the prisoners in 1744–8 and 1756–63, and 9.2 per cent in 1778–83; Le Goff, *ibid.*, p. 115. During the Seven Years War, 66 per cent of the prisoners coming from ships-of-war were mariners (officers and common sailors), while the proportion was only of 46 per cent for merchant ships and 41 per cent for privateers: T. J. A. Le Goff, 'Problèmes de recrutement de la marine française pendant la Guerre de Sept Ans', *Revue Historique*, 283 (1990), pp. 205–32, at p. 232. On board French ships-of-war, the marine infantry was about 20 per cent of the crews: Martine Acerra and André Zysberg, *L'essor des marines de guerres européennes (vers 1680 – vers 1790)* (Paris, 1997), p. 183.

<sup>13</sup> Seamen tended to remain in captivity for longer periods. In the Seven Years War, the British government resorted to war captivity as a strategic weapon against the French *Marine Royale*, which was suffering from an endemic shortage of seamen. The repatriation of French prisoners was selective, and privileged landsmen, soldiers, and passengers, while seafaring men and particularly common sailors were not exchanged for years: Olive Anderson, 'The establishment of British supremacy at sea and the exchange of naval prisoners of war, 1689–1783', *English Historical Review*, 75 (1960), pp. 77–89; Le Goff, 'Problèmes', pp. 219–22; Alain Cabantous, *Dix-mille marins face à l'Océan* (Paris, 1991), pp. 196–7.

<sup>14</sup> 'A list shewing the several places in England whereat prisoners of war are confined, as also where such people are permitted to reside on parole', 1 May 1758, National Maritime Museum (NMM), ADM F17. As war against Spain was only declared in January 1762, this list is really only about French prisoners.

<sup>15</sup> Originally, the prisoner gave his word of honour that he would pay his ransom if released: on this medieval system, see Rémy Ambühl, 'Prisoners of war in the Hundred Years' War: the golden age of private ransoms' (Ph.D., St Andrews, 2009); Maurice H. Keen, *The laws of war in the late middle ages* (London, 1965), pp. 156–85. See also Michael Howard, George J. Andreopoulos, and Mark R. Shulman, eds., *The laws of war: constraints on warfare in the Western world* (New Haven, CT, and London, 1994).

<sup>16</sup> See for example Annette Becker, *Oubliés de la Grande Guerre: humanitaire et culture de guerre* (Paris, 1998); Jean-Claude Catherine, dir., *La captivité des prisonniers de guerre, 1939–1945* (Rennes, 2008); François Cochet, *Soldats sans armes: la captivité de guerre: une approche culturelle* (Brussels and Paris, 1998); Allan Rosas, *The legal status of prisoners of war: a study in international humanitarian law applicable in armed conflicts* (Helsinki, 1976).

Mediterranean have studied the phenomenon of ransoming from an economic point of view, while the history of intercultural contact, based on captivity narratives, has fed a rich and ever-increasing literature especially on the Spanish and British empires.<sup>17</sup> By contrast, historians of eighteenth-century Britain and France have focused on the exchange of prisoners or on the effect of captures on military or naval strategy, with an emphasis upon the end of the period.<sup>18</sup>

In time of peace as in time of war, Anglo-French international exchanges took place below or beyond official diplomacy, and often transcended states' agendas and policies.<sup>19</sup> While I have previously studied peaceful exchanges between merchants, fishermen, or smugglers, the same conceptual framework could be applied to those who were directly involved in the conduct of war.<sup>20</sup> The interactions of these official enemies and the host society, as they happened in an English setting, will be the focus of this article. The parole zone can be described as what Norbert Elias calls a social configuration (or a figuration process): 'a fluctuating, tensile equilibrium, a balance of power moving to and fro'.<sup>21</sup> Indeed, the legal rules of the parole of honour brought together the French and the English, combatants and civilians, aristocrats and plebeians, urban people and country people. In this constrained framework, new forms of social relations were invented, which had not been anticipated by

<sup>17</sup> See for example Linda Colley, *Captives: Britain, empire and the world, 1600–1850* (London, 2003); Wolfgang Kaiser, dir., *Le commerce des captifs: les intermédiaires dans l'échange et le rachat des captifs en Méditerranée, XV<sup>e</sup>–XVIII<sup>e</sup> siècles* (Rome, 2008); Lisa Voigt, *Writing captivity in the early modern Atlantic: circulations of knowledge and authority in the Iberian and English imperial worlds* (Chapel Hill, NC, 2009); Gillian Weiss, *Captives and corsairs: France and slavery in the early modern Mediterranean* (Stanford, CA, 2011).

<sup>18</sup> See Anderson, 'Establishment'. Besides the works cited in n. 12 above, most studies on this subject focus on the time of the French Revolution and empire. See for example Gavin Daly, 'Napoleon's lost legions: French prisoners of war in Britain, 1803–1814', *History*, 89 (2004), pp. 361–80. The oft-quoted book by Francis Abell covers a longer period, but is of limited use, since it does not indicate its sources: *Prisoners of War in Britain 1756 to 1815: a record of their lives, their romance and their sufferings* (London, 1914). On prisoners on parole, see Roy Bennett, 'French prisoners of war on parole in Britain, 1803–1814' (Ph.D., London, 1964); Patricia K. Crimmin, 'French prisoners of war on parole, 1793–1815: the Welsh border towns', in *Guerres et paix, 1660–1815* (Vincennes, 1987), pp. 61–72; Mark Towsey, 'Imprisoned reading: French prisoners of war at the Selkirk subscription library, 1811–1814', in Erica Charters et al., eds., *Civilians and wars in Europe, 1618–1815* (Liverpool, 2012), pp. 241–61. See however Erica Charters, 'The administration of war and French prisoners of war in Britain, 1756–1763', in *ibid.*, pp. 87–99.

<sup>19</sup> Stephen Conway, *Britain, Ireland, and continental Europe in the eighteenth century: similarities, connections, identities* (Oxford, 2011); Jean-Philippe Genet and François-Joseph Ruggiu, eds., *Les idées passent-elles la Manche? Savoirs, représentations, pratiques (France-Angleterre, X<sup>e</sup>–XX<sup>e</sup> siècles)* (Paris, 2007).

<sup>20</sup> Renaud Morieux, *Une mer pour deux royaumes: la Manche, frontière franco-anglaise XVII<sup>e</sup>–XVIII<sup>e</sup> siècles* (Rennes, 2008) (English trans. *The Channel: a border between England and France, 1650–1800* (Cambridge, forthcoming); *idem*, 'Diplomacy from below and belonging: fishermen and cross-Channel relations in the eighteenth century', *Past and Present*, 202 (2009), pp. 83–125.

<sup>21</sup> Norbert Elias, *What is sociology?*, trans. Stephen Mennel and Grace Morrissey (New York, NY, 1978), p. 131.

the legislation. A dispute can be defined as a negotiation about accepted norms of behaviour in a given situation.<sup>22</sup> These incidents will shed light on the normative and moral resources which were used by eighteenth-century Englishmen and Frenchmen to legitimize themselves in situations of conflict.<sup>23</sup>

Consequently, this article is primarily based on the actors' own ways of interpreting these incidents. The main source is about a hundred letters of complaint sent by French prisoners of war, either as individuals or in the form of collective petitions, to the lords commissioners of the admiralty and to the commissioners for sick and wounded seamen and the exchange of prisoners of war, who topped the administrative pyramid which provided for the French prisoners' subsistence and lodging in Britain.<sup>24</sup> These complaints, written in French and dating from 1745 to 1779, detailed the incidents which opposed the Frenchmen to Englishmen and women in the localities. They are scattered in the admiralty archives at the National Archives (Kew) and the National Maritime Museum (Greenwich). Prisoners on parole were not all aristocrats: besides the superior officers of ships-of-war, the senior officers of privateers and merchant ships, passengers of rank, and the masters, chaplains, pursers (*écrivains*), of ships-of-war, among others, were also entitled to be paroled. However, most of these letters were written by sea-officers, who were particularly sensitive to matters of rank and status: this certainly influenced the way in which they reacted to insults – real or imaginary – offered by the host community.<sup>25</sup>

<sup>22</sup> Isabelle Thireau and Hansheng Wang, eds., 'Introduction', in *Disputes au village chinois: formes du juste et recompositions locales des espaces normatifs* (Paris, 2001), p. 18. Simon Roberts also notes that disputes can be defined as 'those confrontations which follow from an actor's perception that some harm he has suffered or anticipates flows from another's departure from accepted criteria of association': 'The study of dispute: anthropological perspectives', in John Bossy, ed., *Disputes and settlements: law and human relations in the West* (Cambridge, 1983), p. 7.

<sup>23</sup> This approach to disputes is influenced by the pragmatic sociology of Luc Boltanski: Luc Boltanski, *L'amour et la justice comme compétences: trois essais de sociologie de l'action* (Paris, 1990); idem and Laurent Thévenot, *On justification: the economies of worth* (Princeton, NJ, 2006).

<sup>24</sup> The prisoners' uncertainty about the exact status and responsibilities of their addressees is reflected in the fluctuating phrasing of their titles, varying from the 'commissioners of the admiralty' to the 'commissaries for the French prisoners'. The commissioners for the sick and wounded seamen (hereafter sick and wounded), whose number varied between two and five, were also in charge of the care and exchange of naval prisoners of war, under the direction of the lords of the admiralty: the system is explained in Olive Anderson, 'The treatment of prisoners of war in Britain during the American War of Independence', *Bulletin of the Institute of Historical Research*, 28 (1955), pp. 63–83, at pp. 64–6.

<sup>25</sup> The internal hierarchies between the different kinds of French naval officers have confused generations of historians. Officers of the 'Grand Corps' were all noblemen from 1683, and have been described as a naval caste, sharing a professional esprit de corps even more than aristocratic prejudices. Below them were the 'officiers bleus', the vast majority of common birth, who were volunteers and only served for the time of a campaign, such as merchant captains serving on board men-of-war and lower deck officers (Jacques Aman, *Les officiers bleus dans la marine française au XVIII<sup>e</sup> siècle* (Geneva, 1976), pp. 9, 21–5, 46). If sea officers were known for their 'general hostility towards all outsiders', officers of the 'Grand Corps' had the reputation of being insubordinate and 'imbued with a sense of social superiority', and would often quarrel with civilians or other officers, even when the latter were

There is an obvious methodological bias in studying social interactions primarily through complaints sent to the authorities. Although prisoners also wrote to the authorities to ask for favours (to be exchanged, to be allowed to have a servant, to teach French lessons, etc.), by definition peaceful contacts are not the main focus of these sources. Moreover, they tend to document only one side of the incident: attention thus needs to be paid to rhetorical strategies and posturing in these addresses to foreign authorities. It is also difficult to know the proportion of prisoners on parole who expressed grievances: some letters were signed by the whole cohort of prisoners in a given town, and others only by a couple of names, while some particularly compulsive writers could write several times in a few months.<sup>26</sup> But despite these limitations, these documents offer an original perspective on Anglo-French interactions, from the viewpoint of the actors themselves. In the lords of the admiralty's name, the secretary to the admiralty and the commissioners for the exchange of prisoners often wrote to local authorities to gather information about the truth of the grievance, evidence that will also be used to provide other perspectives on the same events.<sup>27</sup>

## I

The procedures of life for prisoners on parole evolved throughout the eighteenth century, but a basic structure persisted. Originally, the notion of 'freedom on parole' meant the authorization given to a prisoner of specified rank to return to his own country, provided he gave his word of honour not to fight against his captors until another officer of similar rank was exchanged for him. Those officers who were not sent back to their country were called 'prisoners on parole' and were given the freedom of a town or village. The rank and file, on the other hand, were crammed into prisons.<sup>28</sup> This system was part of a 'cosmopolitan customary law' which emerged in the eighteenth century,

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of noble extraction: William S. Cormack, *Revolution and political conflict in the French navy, 1789–1794* (Cambridge, 1995), pp. 36, 38. There were also internal 'jealousies and factionalism' within their ranks, due to the lax structure of authority in the French navy (*ibid.*, p. 40).

<sup>26</sup> For May 1758, we know exactly the numbers of prisoners in each parole town (see n. 14 above). Comparing this to the complaints written in that same month, it appears that in Goudhurst, a long collective memoir asking to punish the 'reckless population' was signed by seventy-two names, i.e. the total number of the prisoners on parole in that town: memoir to the lords of the admiralty, [9 May 1758], The National Archives (TNA), ADM 97/119. D'Helincourt, on parole in Tenterden, wrote at least five letters in 1757–8 (25 Aug. 1757, 4 Oct. 1757, 22, 30 Mar. 1758, TNA, ADM 97/121; 17 Nov. 1757, TNA, ADM 97/122).

<sup>27</sup> The secretary to the admiralty was in charge of reading all incoming letters, and answered them usually without referring it to the lords of the admiralty: N. A. M. Rodger, *The admiralty* (Lavenham, 1979), p. 64.

<sup>28</sup> Gary D. Brown, 'Prisoner of war parole: ancient concept, modern utility', *Military Law Review*, 156 (1998), pp. 200–23.

and derived from aristocratic codes of war.<sup>29</sup> Thus, the degree of spatial freedom reflected a social hierarchy which ultimately relied on the notion of honour.

To prove he was trustworthy, the prisoner signed a written oath, the form of which varied depending on the time and the captor.<sup>30</sup> A prisoner allowed to remain in Britain on his parole had to sign a certificate such as the following one from 1747:

Whereas, pursuant to directions from the Lords Commissioners of the Admiralty . . . , the Commissioners for taking care of Sick and Wounded seamen, and for exchanging Prisoners of War, have granted me leave to reside in . . . . . upon condition, that I give my parole of honour, neither to withdraw myself from the bounds prescribed me there, without leave for that purpose from the said Commissioners; that I will behave myself decently, and with due regard to the Laws of the Kingdom, and also that I will not either directly or indirectly hold any correspondence either with France or with Spain, during my continuing a prisoner of war; but by such letter or letters, as shall be shewn to the agent for such prisoners, under whose care I am, or may be, in order to their being read, and approved by his superiors. I do hereby declare, that I have given my parole of honour accordingly, and that I will keep it accordingly.<sup>31</sup>

This document was not merely a formality. The obligation not to serve against the enemy when on parole was regularly observed, as in the case of an English lieutenant whose command of a navy sloop was cancelled when the admiralty realized that he was a 'prisoner on his parole of honour'.<sup>32</sup> Perjury was taken very seriously by state administrations, not least because military men were expected to be less casual than civilians about making promises which involved the safety of their comrades-in-arms.<sup>33</sup> If apprehended on his return home, the prisoner was usually sent back to his captors:

The King disapproves much of the behaviour of those of his subjects who thus violate their promises. I have given orders following those of His Majesty to search for these

<sup>29</sup> Geoffrey Best, *Humanity in warfare: the modern history of the international law of armed conflicts* (New York, NY, 1980), p. 60.

<sup>30</sup> The system was not restricted to Europe nor to this period. See for example the case of French prisoners allowed to go to Mauritius on their parole: Lord Clive, governor at Fort St George, to the governor general in India, 6 Jan. 1801, British Library (BL), MS IOR/F/4/95/1921, fos. 235–8. The mechanics of oath-taking were not formalized at the beginning of the War of the Austrian Succession, and pragmatism remained the rule throughout the century: on 28 May 1744, the lords commissioners of the admiralty for instance asked to be informed 'when officers taken prisoners, and suffered to return home upon their parole of honour, to whom they gave that parole of honour?', NMM, ADM M387, item 52/1. Documents in this class are not folioed, but the first page of a letter is often numbered: whenever it is the case, I indicate this number.

<sup>31</sup> NMM, ADM M398, item 157/1.

<sup>32</sup> 17 July 1745, NMM, ADM M392, item 198.

<sup>33</sup> Paul Langford, *Public life and the propertied Englishman, 1689–1798* (Oxford, 1991), p. 105. The degree to which state oaths were to be taken seriously at all, and what were the spiritual and political consequences of false swearing, was debated in eighteenth-century England: *ibid.*, pp. 98–114.



escapees, so that if they arrive in any port of this kingdom, they will be arrested, and sent back to England.<sup>34</sup>

Despite such oaths, in the eighteenth century, prisoners' escapes were more common than is often asserted and were not an invention of the French revolutionary wars.<sup>35</sup> Understandably, this worried the English administration, who consequently asked some of these men to obtain 'good behaviour bonds' financially guaranteed by merchants.<sup>36</sup> Relying on commitment and trust, the logic of this measure fell within the moral economy of the parole system, but with a supplementary requirement, since a pecuniary as well as a moral contract was involved. The importance of status was reflected in the fact that commissioned officers were exempted from a measure which was akin to the ransom system, and only weighed on the masters of merchant ships and privateers.<sup>37</sup>

On signing their parole certificate, prisoners received a certificate of protection and travelled, on their own, to an allotted parole town. During their time in England they were given subsistence money proportional to their rank, which was distributed to them by parole agents.<sup>38</sup> On reaching their

<sup>34</sup> Copy of a letter from marquis de Massiac, secrétaire d'État à la Marine, to Paris de Montmartel, member of the council of state, 10 July 1758, NMM, ADM F18. During the War of the American Independence, it seems that the custom of simply crediting the escapees to the balance of exchanges was established: Anderson, 'The treatment', n. 2, p. 74.

<sup>35</sup> It is often considered that, with the emergence of new egalitarian values, and because of the conscription which massively opened the ranks of officers to non-nobles, the very notion of an oath of honour lost its meaning. This would explain why escapes multiplied during the 'French Wars', whereas they were an epiphenomenon before. Compare Chamberlain Paul, *Hell upon water: prisoners of war in Britain, 1793-1815* (Stroud, 2008), pp. 114-37; Lewis Michael, *Napoleon and his British captives* (London, 1962), pp. 44-5, 61-5. However, many escapes of paroled prisoners were reported during each war: in August 1748, thirty prisoners on parole escaped from Eltham (Kent) on board smuggling boats from Folkestone, four escaped on board a Lowestoft pilot boat, and nine from Helston (Cornwall), on board a fisherman's boat (lords of the admiralty to the sick and wounded, 6, 17, and 23 Aug. 1748, NMM, ADM M 403, items 217, 225, 229-30); in 1759, the commissioners for the sick and wounded remarked that 'desertions have lately been very frequent among the French prisoners of war, who are permitted to reside on parole in this Kingdom' (26 Feb. 1759, NMM, ADM F19).

<sup>36</sup> This system was in vigour during the first two wars, and we have not yet found evidence of its continuation during the War of the American Independence: see lords of the admiralty to the sick and wounded, 4 July 1744, NMM, ADM M 388, item 88; sick and wounded to lords of the admiralty, 26 Feb. 1759, NMM, ADM F19.

<sup>37</sup> At the very beginning of the war, 'even more inferior officers' obtained the same authorization: lords of the admiralty to the sick and wounded, 17 Jan. 1744, NMM, ADM M390, item 21.

<sup>38</sup> Anderson, 'The treatment', pp. 74-5. The financial workings of the system have not been studied, and would be worth investigating further. The source of this allowance seems to have been twofold: one stream of funds came from the admiralty, which was accounted and would be settled at the end of each war; there was another, more substantial remittance, which was granted by the French monarchy. Depending on the state of diplomatic relations and of French finances, the French government sometimes defaulted on its payments, as happened during the Seven Years War. Thanks to Erica Charters for the discussion about this.

destination, they were free to circulate within a variable perimeter, provided they gave their word not to abscond.

Between 1744 and 1780, forty-three English towns received prisoners on parole, while the same places were generally reused in successive wars (see map p. 73 below). Some twenty-seven (63 per cent) were south of a line from Bristol to London, mainly in Kent, Hampshire, and Devon, while Cornwall and the Bristol area were secondary. The proximity of the main Channel ports of Dover, Portsmouth, and Plymouth, where prisoners would be landed and exchanged, explains this choice: it was easier and less costly to accommodate them in the hinterland of these major seaports. For the same reasons, the secure prisons which were used for common men and for officers who had broken their parole were also located in the south: the main prison in Kent, during the Seven Years War, was at Sissinghurst, near the parole towns of Tenterden, Cranbrook, Goudhurst, and Tunbridge. Likewise, Winchester prison, the main depot in Hampshire, was conveniently situated in the middle of a constellation of parole towns, and the same was true of Plymouth prison. This geographical pattern, however, could raise security problems. It was thus recommended in 1744 that prisoners should be paroled 'at inland places, a convenient distance from any sea port of the kingdom, and particularly from those where His Majesty has dockyards', and should be prevented from sojourning in the vicinity of London. Similar precautions were taken in following wars.<sup>39</sup> When there was a fear of a French invasion, as in 1745, 1759, or 1779, prisoners on parole were put into closed confinement or marched northward.<sup>40</sup> This concern for security probably also explains why they were sent to small market towns and villages rather than spas and provincial towns. But the presence in large numbers of these foreign military men in small localities could in itself be the source of problems locally. A list sent to the lords of the admiralty in May 1758 gives a snapshot of the ratio between these prisoners and the English population in different towns. Prisoners on parole for instance accounted for about 13 per cent of the populations of Wye (Kent) and Callington (Cornwall), and 15 per cent of the population of Petersfield (Hampshire).<sup>41</sup> Accordingly,

<sup>39</sup> Sick and wounded to lords of the admiralty, 4 July 1744, NMM, ADM M388, item 98. From Aug. 1744 onwards, London was forbidden, owing to fear of espionage: lords of the admiralty to the sick and wounded, 10 Aug. 1744, NMM, ADM M388, item 153.

<sup>40</sup> As in Dec. 1745, when fear of a French invasion combined with the Jacobite rebellion: 6 Dec. 1745, NMM, ADM M393, item 342. The parole system was re-established a few weeks later: 28 Dec. 1745, NMM, ADM M393, item 369. The same cause produced the same effect during the following conflicts: see 'Report on removing to Carlisle and Berwick the prisoners on parole in Devonshire Cornwall Hampshire & Kent', 18 June 1759, NMM, ADM F19. On 15 Aug. 1779, prisoners on parole at Whitchurch (Shropshire) petitioned the sick and wounded to protest against the decision to transfer them to Pontefract (Yorkshire), TNA, ADM 97/124.

<sup>41</sup> 'A list shewing the several places in England', 1 May 1758, NMM, ADM F17. In order to do these calculations, Jack Langton kindly allowed me to use his town estimates for the late seventeenth century and the 1801 census. In some towns, the population was stable throughout

some town authorities were reluctant to welcome these prisoners: in 1759, the mayor of Appleby-in-Westmorland (with perhaps 400 inhabitants) refused the admiralty's selection of his town, insisting that the French officers should rather be sent back to their country.<sup>42</sup> The arrival of dozens of foreign prisoners would unsettle the demographic balance, and could be perceived as fuelling potential tensions.

Besides these administrative procedures, the very existence of the parole has to be understood in the context of an honour-based society. Once sworn, an oath modified the social relations between those involved and created both obligations and solidarities. The parole of honour belonged to the category of promissory oaths, 'committing the swearer to a future action'.<sup>43</sup> Giving a word of honour bound the swearer three times over: first, it was given at the risk of losing one's honour; secondly, it was a legal and moral engagement to the monarch, which risked discrediting him, while also putting at risk fellow prisoners, as potential victims of reprisals; finally, it was a bond of trust with the individual to whom the parole was sworn, sometimes against money.

But this commitment was balanced by a highly rated prize: the preservation of privileged status (as well as some freedom). Indeed, the oath recognized a social superiority, based on the claim to pride embodied in the parole of honour itself. The parole delineated social frontiers. While the rank and file were imprisoned, officers of a certain rank would be paroled, because they were gentlemen – often noblemen – and as such deemed to be worthy of this mark of trust. Here, as in the British navy, the links between personal esteem and military honour were intimate.<sup>44</sup> The requests by officers to get the status of prisoners on parole testified to this, and often emphasized their heroic and generous attitudes on the battlefield:

Messrs Louvel, Perrée, Mollier, & Bellaie have in their possession indubitable proofs that their honour is dear to them, and they dare to mention Mr Stevens . . . , who would vouch for them, and has been the witness of their care to preserve L'Auguste ship after its defeat, without which the said ship would have been flooded the night

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the period: it was the case of the Kentish towns of Wye (92 prisoners on parole for a population of about 690) and Sevenoaks (90/1,000, 9 per cent), of Petersfield (Hampshire, 156/1,049, 15 per cent), Crediton in Hampshire (57/2,250, 2 per cent), or the Cornwall towns of Callington (107/830, 13 per cent) and Launceston (103/1,503, 7 per cent). However, other towns, such as Alresford (Hampshire) (185/846, 22 per cent), Okehampton (112/867, 13 per cent), and Tavistock (Devonshire, 296/2,050, 14 per cent) doubled during this period: their population in 1758 is only an average, and the ratio a very rough estimate. Finally, towns such as Redruth (Cornwall) boomed so much between the late seventeenth century (480) and 1801 (2,634) that an average would not make sense at all.

<sup>42</sup> Sick and wounded to the first secretary of the admiralty, 14 Aug. 1759, NMM, ADM, F20.

<sup>43</sup> John Spurr, 'A profane history of early modern oaths', *Transactions of the Royal Historical Society*, 11 (2001), pp. 37–63, at p. 38.

<sup>44</sup> N. A. M. Rodger, 'Honour and duty at sea, 1660–1815', *Historical Research*, 75 (2002), pp. 425–47.

after the battle . . . The supplicants dare to expect and be worthy of the same grace, if all is needed to deserve it, to prefer honour to anything else in the world.<sup>45</sup>

Getting parole was a privilege, in the sense that it strictly conformed to the social hierarchies of the time. But these hierarchies were not carved in stone. While administrative procedures institutionalized the social pre-eminence of parole prisoners of war, they also reflected a finely grained sense of dynamic internal rankings. All prisoners on parole were not equal in status, and the regulations mirrored this. Indeed, the question of where to draw the line between honourable officers and the others was the subject of heated debate.

During the War of the Austrian Succession, for example, uncertainties remained as to which categories of prisoners should be paroled and what should be the boundaries of their dwellings. At first, only officers of a high rank, captains and their first mates were given their freedom against their parole of honour. At the request of the French commissary for the *Marine* in St-Malo, Jean-Joseph Guillot, the measure was extended in August 1745 to all 'commision [sic] officers taken in French men of war, and other ships or vessels belonging to the crown of France'.<sup>46</sup> In 1746, the same Guillot made a U-turn, expressing his suspicions towards officers from the lower decks and privateers:

One should not count on the parole of this sort of unrefined and ill-mannered people, who feel so little the obligations of a parole of honour, that a great number has deserted, and many have tried to do so . . . I believe My Lords . . . that this sort of people should not be left at large.<sup>47</sup>

Similar social prejudices prevailed throughout the period. In 1778, the lords of the admiralty wrote that desertions, which had been so numerous during the Seven Years War (1756–63), 'were chiefly to be ascribed to the too great extension of the parole list'. The commander in chief of the king's ships at Portsmouth was of the opinion that only officers 'of the superior ranks' and 'gentlemen of family' should be given their parole, while 'those of inferior rank did not appear to him persons whose honour was to be trusted to'.<sup>48</sup> Despite this apparent social closure, the population of prisoners on parole remained in practice socially diverse, not least because captains and second captains of privateers continually benefited from the system.

The parole not only reinforced French social hierarchies; it also underlined the distance which separated these officers from the surrounding English

<sup>45</sup> Letter from the officers of L'Auguste, taken on 20 Feb. 1746, NMM, ADM M394, item 86/3.

<sup>46</sup> 23 Feb. 1745, TNA, ADM 97/103, fo. 16. On the French commissioners' demands, see for example letters from Guillot, 22 July, 28 Sept., 8 Nov. 1745, *ibid.*, fos. 33, 47, 57–8. Guillot was in charge of the exchange of prisoners for the whole kingdom.

<sup>47</sup> Guillot, 22 Apr. 1746, TNA, ADM 97/103, fo. 83v.

<sup>48</sup> Lords of the admiralty to the sick and wounded, 22 July 1778, NMM, ADM M/406. From Oct., the parole list was accordingly reduced: Anderson, 'The treatment', p. 74.

population. Some prisoners for example clung to symbols of their social superiority, such as the carrying of swords. This could create tensions, as in Abington in Northamptonshire where the Frenchmen faced the wrath of local people in 1759, when they failed to deliver their swords, 'which having been returned them by the admiral's order, they mistakenly imagined they had a right to keep, & which happened to be seen, carrying with their baggage'.<sup>49</sup> Such misunderstandings were legion and illustrate the inherent tension in the status of the officer on parole as a captive with privileges. The notion of social hierarchy was at the root of the parole system, which mirrored the cascade of French naval ranks and privileges. The parole also delineated a boundary between the French and the English population, which was not physical, like the walls of a prison, but mental, relying on the acceptance of the social norms and beliefs which justified the privilege. These rules were challenged by the attacks against the prisoners, which were rooted in another conception of honour.

## II

These offences can be interpreted as clashes about what Julian Pitt-Rivers called the 'hierarchy of honour'.<sup>50</sup> The prisoners' honour was jeopardized through social challenges, which threatened their status and transgressed the protection which the parole system granted them. In the military and aristocratic worlds, the preservation of social etiquette was of paramount importance, as in the court society studied by Norbert Elias.<sup>51</sup> Dishonour happened precisely when there was a contradiction between an individual's self-image and the image which society attributed to him.<sup>52</sup> The prisoners faced such a situation when their social pre-eminence, evident in France, was denied in England. Consequently, these quarrels bring to light conflictual conceptions of honour. Honour as a quality based on inherited social pre-eminence had a specific significance for noblemen, but not all officers were nobles. Honour was also a symbolic capital, linked to the esteem which a given society could attribute to an individual, and was not an aristocratic monopoly. In this second sense, the officers' honour could be effectively challenged by local populations. The discrepancy between the officers' pretension to social superiority and their helplessness was exposed in several ways.

First of all, incidents typically happened in public places, on the streets and roads, or in a setting where the distinction between the private and the public was blurred, like the doorsteps of hotels. Private spaces were not completely safe either, as an incident which happened in Chipping Sodbury in Gloucestershire in January 1758, illustrates. Between ten and eleven o'clock in the evening,

<sup>49</sup> Sick and wounded to lords of the admiralty, 23 Oct. 1759, TNA, ADM 98/8, fo. 40.

<sup>50</sup> Julian Pitt-Rivers, 'Honour and social status', in Jean Peristiany, ed., *Honour and shame: the values of Mediterranean society* (Chicago, IL, 1966), p. 24.

<sup>51</sup> Norbert Elias, *The court society*, trans. Edmund Jephcott (Oxford, 1983).

<sup>52</sup> Pitt-Rivers, 'Honour', pp. 21, 24, 72.

several Englishmen attacked the house occupied by four Frenchmen, banging at the doors and windows. One of the assailants then entered their room, and 'started to look at them and count them as a mockery'. Mister Boquet, a lieutenant, was violently assaulted the same night, while standing 'at the door of his boarding house', and severely hurt. When the word passed on that the wounded had been brought to a neighbouring house in order to get bandaged, the assailants 'broke the windows of the lodging' with stones.<sup>53</sup> This pattern of violence conformed to a well-established ritual of crowd behaviour in eighteenth-century England.<sup>54</sup> These deeds aimed at preventing the prisoners from fully enjoying the privileges of their parole by contesting their freedom of movement in the public space. An incident in Basingstoke in 1757 illustrates the point:

We have not been safe from being insulted even inside our own houses, where six weeks ago a troop of young people came to break our windows and snap the trees in the gardens... The authors of these disorders do not merely insult us in town, and not content with heaping abuse on us when they meet us in the countryside, rain stones on us.<sup>55</sup>

This hostile conduct openly challenged the officers' cultural and social hegemony, something which, they claimed, would never have happened in France. While it is possible to wonder about a tendency of the emigrants to exaggerate the contrast between their homeland and their place of exile, these public encounters forced the prisoners to recognize their inferior status, by submitting to the Englishmen's precedence.<sup>56</sup> A Frenchman in Tenterden, Kent, for example stated that he was 'very nearly thrown in the mud' while walking on a public path, although he 'intended to give way'.<sup>57</sup> This officer's efforts to respect a code of polite public etiquette were to no avail. This incident may confirm that it was more usual for a newcomer to receive abuse while walking the streets of small towns than in Paris, London, and provincial towns, where norms of politeness were spreading. It seems however that the French

<sup>53</sup> Twenty-one prisoners to lords of the admiralty, 7 Jan. 1758, TNA, ADM 97/122.

<sup>54</sup> In times of celebrations of political or military victories, or while demonstrating support to a political champion such as Sacheverell in 1709 or Wilkes in 1768, it was common to march down the streets and break the unlit windows of political opponents: Geoffrey Holmes, 'The Sacheverell riots: the church and the crowd in early eighteenth-century London', in G. Holmes, *Politics, religion and society in England, 1679–1742* (London, 1986), pp. 217–48; George Rudé, *Hanoverian London, 1714–1808* (Berkeley and Los Angeles, CA, 1971), pp. 225–6.

<sup>55</sup> Belingant to 'Messieurs', Basingstoke, 12 July 1757, TNA, ADM 97/121.

<sup>56</sup> These officers were clearly idealizing the rigidity and deferential nature of the society they were coming from, because instances of anti-military riots were commonplace in France. Compare Jean Nicolas, *La rébellion française: mouvements populaires et conscience sociale, 1661–1789* (2nd edn, Paris, 2008), pp. 607–15. However, unlike the riots against the press-gangs in England, this has been less studied for the attitudes towards the French Marine Royale: see Nicholas Rogers, *The press gang: naval impressment and its opponents in Georgian Britain* (London, 2008).

<sup>57</sup> D'Helincourt to 'Messieurs', 4 Oct. 1757, TNA, ADM 97/121.

were specifically targeted, and similar encounters happened regularly.<sup>58</sup> Another prisoner at Tenterden wrote that he was repeatedly ambushed: 'this unknown man waited for me to come by in order to hurt me, being obliged to go past every day at the same time, to have dinner . . ., I cannot avoid to go out every day to go to my boarding house.'<sup>59</sup>

Stones, bundles of sticks, mud, dogs, knives, fists, cudgels, and pelted guns were used as assaulting weapons, and some of these encounters would occasionally result in very bad injuries.<sup>60</sup> More importantly for our argument, these were attacks both on the body and on the honour of the French prisoners. To be beaten with a stick was socially degrading for men who fought with swords: as Montesquieu remarked in *The spirit of the laws*, 'the baston was looked upon as the instrument of insults and affronts, because to strike a man with it was treating him like a villain'.<sup>61</sup>

Some gestures, like touching the face of an officer, were clearly intended as social challenges. This kind of offence was often mentioned in writing, as in Goudhurst, Kent, in May 1758: 'the Englishman hit him twice in the face, which has left him terribly scarred these are the facts as if you had witnessed it with your own eyes'.<sup>62</sup> Another French prisoner wrote, from the same place, in June: '[I was] hit in the face by this servant, which has led me to defend myself.' In both cases, the attacker was a servant, and the officer almost literally risked losing face. These actions diminished and lowered the victim below the social rank they aspired to.<sup>63</sup>

Verbal insults were also commonly used. In early modern societies, appearance remained a key element of social belonging and status, and what made the insult especially humiliating was its public character. The incident took place in front of a crowd of witnesses, not only of foreigners, but of alter egos. D'Helincourt, detained at Tenterden, thus requested to be sent to

<sup>58</sup> Penelope J. Corfield, 'Walking the city streets: the urban odyssey in eighteenth-century England', *Journal of Urban History*, 16 (1990), pp. 132–74; Robert B. Shoemaker, 'The decline of public insult in London, 1660–1800', *Past and Present*, 169 (2000), pp. 97–131, at p. 118.

<sup>59</sup> D'Helincourt to 'Messieurs', 22 Mar. 1758, TNA, ADM 97/121.

<sup>60</sup> Belingant to 'Messieurs', Basingstoke, 12 July 1757, D'Helincourt to the sick and wounded, Tenterden, 22 Mar. 1758, TNA, ADM 97/121; French officers at Crediton to 'commissaries for exchanging prisoners of war', 22 July 1758, TNA, ADM 97/122; prisoners at Sodbury to *ibid.*, 3 Jan. 1748, TNA, ADM 97/115; prisoners at Litchfield to lords of the admiralty, 15 Aug. 1747, NMM, ADM M 399; sixteen prisoners at Torrington to the 'general commissary', 24 Sept. 1757, TNA, ADM 97/122. A surgeon's certificate was attached to the letter addressed by a prisoner at Ashford to the sick and wounded, to serve as a proof of the veracity of his claims: 26 July 1758, TNA, ADM 97/119.

<sup>61</sup> Charles de Secondat, baron de Montesquieu, *The spirit of laws* (1748), trans. Thomas Nugent (2 vols., London, 1752), II, book XXVII.

<sup>62</sup> Beche Reneaux to 'Messieurs', 28 May 1758, TNA, ADM 97/119; P. Boutté to 'Messeigneurs', Sissinghurst, 11 June 1758, TNA, ADM 97/119. Saubat Contis complained from Tavistock, in 1748, that a constable had hit the face of a French captain with a stick: 16 Sept. 1748, TNA, ADM 97/125.

<sup>63</sup> See Erving Goffman, *Interaction ritual: essays on face-to-face behaviour* (London, 1972).

another parole town, 'where I won't be exposed to be again insulted, it being very hard for an officer to receive them so often while peacefully walking in the streets'.<sup>64</sup> Communication problems were an aggravating factor, and sometimes complicated the interpretation of each other's behaviour.<sup>65</sup> Provided their meaning was understood, the most humiliating words mixed a social, a moral, and a national connotation, as in Torrington in Devon in 1757:

One of them told us in good French that the Frenchmen are villains, an injurious term which conveys all the conceivable vices, and which was a thousand times more painful (*sensible*) to us than all the losses we suffered when we were taken, through the course of the war.<sup>66</sup>

This language was not only xenophobic, but also social, since 'villain', a French social-economic category dating back to the feudal times, meant both rascal and peasant – the very antitype to 'nobleman'. Another frequent thread of insults touched the sexual chord, as in Tavistock (Devon): 'Another Englishman who mispronounced French, started by saying a thousand foolish remarks uttered the worst swearwords, saying ah *jean-foutres* French *bougre*.'<sup>67</sup> Although the use of free indirect speech conveys the impression that these were the exact words used by the insulter, it is doubtful that the above-mentioned Englishman, whose command of French was described as fragile, really used those very insults. These words, which were the most common insults in eighteenth-century Paris, had both a sexual and a moral connotation: 'bougre' meant heretic and debauched, while 'jean-foutre' was built on the root of the word 'foutre', referring to semen, and meant lazy, useless.<sup>68</sup> Directed at a gentleman, such epithets were sure to hit their target.

The Frenchmen's attitude towards local women could also be perceived as offensive by Englishmen as well.<sup>69</sup> Arguably, a tension between different

<sup>64</sup> D'Helincourt to the sick and wounded, 30 Mar. 1758, TNA, ADM 97/121.

<sup>65</sup> In Goudhurst, a dispute unfolded between an English servant and the captain of a French privateer, both drunk, in a tavern. A French witness commented: 'How could they understand each other, the one speaking French and the other English, things heated up and soon shouts of "murder" were heard in the neighbouring houses': Beche Reneaux to 'Messieurs', 28 May 1758, TNA, ADM 97/119. Using these letters to know what were the exact words actually spoken by the assailants is problematic because of this language issue; moreover, petitioners may have had an interest in distorting what happened, as a rhetorical strategy to convince their addressees. The main significance of these insults lies in the fact that complainants care to mention it: Shoemaker, 'Decline of public insult', p. 98.

<sup>66</sup> Sixteen prisoners at Torrington to the 'general commissary in London', 21 Oct. 1757, TNA, ADM 97/122.

<sup>67</sup> Forty-seven prisoners to the 'commissioners of the admiralty in London', Apr. 1747, TNA, ADM 97/115.

<sup>68</sup> David Garrioch, 'Verbal insults in eighteenth-century Paris', in Peter Burke and Roy Porter, eds., *The social history of language* (Cambridge, 1987), p. 110.

<sup>69</sup> Elisabeth A. Foyster, *Manhood in early modern England: honour, sex and marriage* (London, 1999), pp. 177–8, 198; Michele Cohen, "'Manners' make the man: politeness, chivalry, and the construction of masculinity, 1750–1830", *Journal of British Studies*, 44 (2005), pp. 312–29; Pitt-Rivers, 'Honour', pp. 42–53.



conceptions of masculinity was also at stake in these encounters, especially in a context of war which strengthened traditional gender roles.<sup>70</sup> In 1757, in Basingstoke, a French officer tried 'as a joke' to kiss a girl who apparently did not object; a young Englishman who had witnessed the scene angrily reacted by abusing and punching the prisoner, who protested that 'it wasn't proper to use bad terms towards an officer who was not insulting anybody'.<sup>71</sup> Coming from an outsider to the parish, this was perceived as provocation, which led to well-known rituals of collective violence, such as hullabaloes and 'rough music'.<sup>72</sup> Indeed, by so acting, the Frenchman was tainting the woman's sexual purity and forcing the local men to protect her and defend their virility.<sup>73</sup> At a national level, war propaganda drew on similar themes: pamphlets and caricatures used sexual metaphors to illustrate the dangers of a French invasion, describing how the libidinous Frenchmen would ravish English women and corrupt the English nation itself.<sup>74</sup> In Tunbridge, Kent, for example, a French surgeon was accused and imprisoned for having made an Englishwoman pregnant. In a rather clumsy defence, he argued that she was a well-known whore, that the baby was born eleven months after he had sex with her, and finally, that, as a Frenchman, who was ignorant of the English laws on the matter, he could neither be blamed nor tried. He added that

If such a thing happened in France, as it happens every day, and that the woman dared to have recourse to justice, she would not be shown any consideration; in a word, Your Lordships, in France it wouldn't be understood that an English prisoner would be punished . . . for having screwed (*baiser*) a willing girl, above all by paying her.<sup>75</sup>

The decision of the lords of the admiralty was implacable: 'To be taken into custody.' In such matters involving women, the question of collective honour was at stake – not to mention that the child of this union was a French bastard.<sup>76</sup> Once more, captivity operated as an inversion of the usual norms of social relations: these military men were symbolically emasculated, losing their swords and their sexual domination. Whereas the military institution has traditionally the power to arbitrate questions of masculinity, the prisoner found himself at

<sup>70</sup> This has been particularly studied for the Seven Years War: Wilson, *The sense*, pp. 185–9; Matthew McCormack, 'The new militia: war, politics and gender in 1750s Britain', *Gender and History*, 19 (2007), pp. 483–500.

<sup>71</sup> TNA, ADM 97/121, Belongant to 'Messieurs', 12 July 1757.

<sup>72</sup> E. P. Thompson, 'Rough music', in *Customs in common* (New York, NY, 1993), pp. 467–531.

<sup>73</sup> Pitt-Rivers, 'Honour', pp. 41–6.

<sup>74</sup> Stephen Conway, *War, state and society in mid-eighteenth-century Britain and Ireland* (Oxford, 2006), p. 120.

<sup>75</sup> Louis Ducung to lords of the admiralty, 5 July 1758, TNA, ADM 97/119.

<sup>76</sup> Contemporaries also assumed that prostitution, illegitimate pregnancies and births were a common feature of the areas where large bodies of British soldiers or militiamen were stationed.

the mercy of women, who could assault him and yet be defended by the local community.<sup>77</sup>

That shaming gestures or words were described as effective by the French officers shows that these skirmishes became the yardstick by which honour was measured. This put the prisoners in an uncomfortable situation: if the parole of honour had been respected, their superiority of status would have been recognized by all; but since these rules were openly and publicly scorned, they had to find a way to react which preserved their social standing.

### III

In the vast majority of cases, the prisoners did not fight back. At first glance, this was surprising from military men. Honour was associated with courage, and could not bear the slightest mark of contempt.<sup>78</sup> An officer who had, for example, refused a challenge, could be 'subject to peer group ostracism' and even court-martialled 'for conduct unbecoming an officer and a gentleman'.<sup>79</sup> Male honour relied on a capacity to defend oneself physically in the face of insults.<sup>80</sup> Even more than other men, soldiers, imbued with a culture of physical violence, were expected to follow the military code of honour.

However, in the context of captivity, refusing to fight back could also be interpreted as honourable behaviour. As prisoners on parole, the Frenchmen had to leave the affront unpunished, since they knew they would be prosecuted for breaching their oath. The French navy lieutenant Maupin complained in 1759, from Rumsey, that his hands were tied:

Prisoners of war equally lessen this strength of their own nation, and rigidly observe what they have engaged to do by their parole of honour, of abandoning every vocation that might render them useful to their country, and would be by this douceur less punished as military men, than they are by the frequent affronts to which they are exposed for want of meeting with esteem in a foreign kingdom. It is sufficient that in bloody engagement we preserve our honour as long as our lives, but it is too much not to be able to avoid the injurious treatment which we are obliged to bear in silence. . . . Here we are sometimes beat [sic], but we must as the Gospel says turn the other cheek.<sup>81</sup>

Although obeying the law was demanded by the authorities, it was not the most honourable solution, since it amounted to cowardice.<sup>82</sup> Other issues

<sup>77</sup> Dominique Godineau and Luc Capdevilla, 'Femmes et armées', *Clio*, 20 (2004), p. 5.

<sup>78</sup> Arthur N. Gilbert, 'Law and honour among eighteenth-century British army officers', *Historical Journal*, 19 (1976), pp. 75–87; Rodger, 'Honour and duty', p. 431.

<sup>79</sup> Gilbert, 'Law and honour', pp. 77, 80. See also N. A. M. Rodger, *The wooden world: an anatomy of the Georgian navy* (London, 1986), pp. 244–9; Rodger, 'Honour and duty', pp. 435–6.

<sup>80</sup> Robert Shoemaker, 'Male honour and the decline of public violence in eighteenth-century London', *Social History*, 26 (2001), pp. 190–208, at pp. 193–5.

<sup>81</sup> Maupin to the sick and wounded, 21 Jan. 1759, NMM, F19.

<sup>82</sup> Gilbert, 'Law and honour', p. 81.



### French prisoners of war in Britain and Ireland (1744-1783)

- Parole Towns
- Parole towns from where letters of complaints were sent
- Detention places of small size, mostly used during the War of the Austrian Succession and the Seven Years' War
- Prisons with POWs
- ▲ Main ports from where prisoners were exchanged

further complicated the situation. On the one hand, it was unbearable to be insulted by social inferiors; on the other hand, in such cases, refusing to fight was usually not considered dishonourable.<sup>83</sup> Looking for redress through a duel, for example, was inappropriate since it would have put the protagonists on an equal footing.<sup>84</sup> For all of these reasons, the French prisoners were torn

<sup>83</sup> As anthropological studies of honour have shown: see Pierre Bourdieu, 'The sentiment of honour in Kabyle society', in Peristiany, ed., *Honour and shame*, p. 200.

<sup>84</sup> By the same token, from the attackers' point of view, challenging the officers, and daring them to retaliate, was a way to deny that there was any hierarchy in their status. On duelling, see Donna Andrew, 'The code of honour and its critics: the opposition to duelling in England,

between conflicting loyalties: either comply with their oath of honour, or respect the ethics of their group and defend themselves. This resulted from the parole system itself, which was supposed to shield the prisoners' honour, but actually put it in jeopardy.

To escape this double bind, prisoners were left with no alternative but to ask for external redress, which allowed for a collective management of the crisis.<sup>85</sup> Several judicial and political courses of action were indeed available for solving such dissensions.<sup>86</sup> As a result, the social interactions which developed in the parole zone were not simply face-to-face encounters between French prisoners and English villagers. Locally, the prisoners were 'under the care' of the agent for the prisoners of war, who were supposed to watch over them and prevent strife with their English neighbours, playing the part of 'official mediators' between the conflicting parties.<sup>87</sup> However, the French almost always contested this arbitration, and lamented the agents' systematic bias in favour of their English opponents. From Goudhurst, some prisoners denounced 'the little support they found (not to say more) in the administrators of the laws in charge of executing your orders'. In this case, the agent, it was alleged, 'although he has been appointed to keep order in the area of this county, has declared he does not want to get involved'.<sup>88</sup>

The prisoners emphasized that their agents were much below their own social standing, and resented a partial justice, which they explained by the agents' personal interest in these cases: 'The commissaries of this country, sometimes a shoemaker, sometimes a tailor, sometimes lastly an apothecary, wouldn't dare to quell it [the populace revolting against us]; for fear of losing their customers, they prefer to sacrifice us to the people's whim.'<sup>89</sup> A plebeian, governed by individual motives, could not be the judge of conflicts of honour, as Chevalier de Tarade argued from Tavistock in 1779:

We probably would not have to complain if your intentions were followed, but, to fulfil private interests, the positions of commissaries, instead of being occupied by

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1700–1850', *Social History*, 5 (1980), pp. 409–34; Markku Peltonen, *The duel in early modern England: civility, politeness and honour* (Cambridge, 2003); Robert Shoemaker, 'The taming of the duel: masculinity, honour and ritual violence in England, 1660–1800', *Historical Journal*, 45 (2002), pp. 525–45; Pascal Brioiist, Hervé Drévilion, and Pierre Serna, *Croiser le fer: violence et culture de l'épée dans la France moderne, XVI<sup>e</sup>–XVIII<sup>e</sup> siècles* (Seysssel, 2002); François Billacois, *The duel: its rise and fall in early modern France* (New Haven, CT, 1990).

<sup>85</sup> Boltanski, *L'amour*, pp. 428ff.

<sup>86</sup> Steve Hindle, 'The keeping of the public peace', in P. Griffiths, A. Fox, and S. Hindle, eds., *The experience of authority in early modern England* (Basingstoke, 1996), pp. 213–48. Direct action, such as physical fights or economic boycott, was also an option: Keith Wrightson, 'The politics of the parish in early modern England', in *ibid.*, p. 12.

<sup>87</sup> According to the wordings of the parole certificates. See for example NMM, ADM M398, 157/1, undated and left blank; Thireau and Hansheng, 'Introduction', in *Disputes*, p. 33.

<sup>88</sup> Prisoners at Goudhurst to the lords of the admiralty, [9 Nov. 1757], TNA, ADM 97/119.

<sup>89</sup> The chaplain of count of Gramont to 'Monsieur', Ashburton, 29 Nov. 1757, TNA, ADM 97/122.

people of a decent profession, happen to be shared between three ordinary people... [None of us] would stop behaving according to the feelings of honour which every soldier must be imbued with, but these feelings themselves demand that we depend on someone who can value them, and not from a craftsman.<sup>90</sup>

The key word here was the French verb *apprécier*, which can be translated as either 'to value' or 'to estimate', blending the psychological and economic meanings. Honour was a commodity which could only be acquired through the judgement of others, but in this case the agent was not honourable enough to partake in this market in reputation. He was unworthy of settling the argument, because he could not be trusted: his low social standing implied the lack of a personal sense of morality. Such a man would only defend his community's interest, instead of acting as an impartial arbitrator. The language of credit and trust permeated the description of early modern economic relations, while this vocabulary would also be used to qualify the morality and worthiness of a person.<sup>91</sup> A man of credit was deemed to be trustworthy, because he would pay back his debts: as we saw, the parole of honour was rooted in similar social conceptions.<sup>92</sup> Resorting to the help of a 'man without any credit nor power in this town', as prisoners in Crediton in Devon put it in 1758, would downgrade their own reputation – dishonour them – without earning the respect of the rest of the population.<sup>93</sup> Lacking real means to implement his orders, confronted by men who refused to obey the regulations, the agent was also caught in the crossfire of the local gentry: 'our agent adds, that the gentlemen of the neighbourhood have censured him for not allowing the prisoners liberties which he is not warranted to do by his instructions'.<sup>94</sup>

When the agent's mediation failed, other solutions existed locally: mayors, for example, were frequently called to conciliate the different sides. Most of the time, these officials would take innocuous decisions, for example reading proclamations or sticking posters on the walls of the town forbidding insult of the French prisoners. These measures were usually ineffective, as in Tenterden in 1757: 'the poster has been torn down the same day another one

<sup>90</sup> 9 Apr. 1779, received in Mr Stephen's letter of 20 Apr. 1779, NMM, ADM M407.

<sup>91</sup> Craig Muldrew, *The economy of obligation: the culture of credit and social relations in early modern England* (Basingstoke, 1998), pp. 121–96; John Brewer, 'Commercialization and politics', in Neil McKendrick, John Brewer, and J.H. Plumb, *The birth of a consumer society: the commercialization of eighteenth-century England* (London, 1982), pp. 197–262, at p. 214.

<sup>92</sup> Craig Muldrew, 'Interpreting the market: the ethics of credit and community relations in early modern England', *Social History*, 18 (1993), pp. 163–83, at pp. 177–8.

<sup>93</sup> This is why these sixty-five men signed a reference letter to the sick and wounded, requiring that 'a person with weight and credit would be named as their agent': 22 July 1758, ADM 97/122.

<sup>94</sup> The prisoners in Chippenham, Wiltshire, did not want to respect the limits of their parole, and were supported by 'the gentlemen of the neighbourhood': sick and wounded to John Cleveland Esq., 9 Jan. 1759, NMM, ADM, F19.

has been put'.<sup>95</sup> The authorities were sometimes openly parodied, as in Sodbury in 1748:

Yesterday at five pm, a character of this town has gathered, at the sound of bells, some of the people who live there, and then said aloud that it was enjoined, following the King's order, not to accommodate the French prisoners past next Sunday, that those who after this period will admit them at their place will be punished according to the laws, and moreover that their houses will be set on fire in order to burn them with the prisoners.<sup>96</sup>

Again, the prisoners exposed a biased treatment, as in Basingstoke, where offenders were 'assured of the lack of justice we will find in all those who form the corporation of this market town'.<sup>97</sup> It was such accusations of local partiality which ultimately motivated the decision to call for help at a higher level.

In an aristocratic society where honour was the dominant value, having recourse to external justice – even to noblemen – was an admission of helplessness which could be interpreted as dishonourable. It was therefore necessary to use a rhetoric legitimizing the call for help. The prisoners wrote to the lords of the admiralty or the commissioners for the exchange of prisoners as a sort of tribunal of honour, who had the power to re-establish their social pre-eminence and their sense of distinction from the populace.<sup>98</sup> Their purpose was to convince their addressees of the justice of their claims, by using all the rhetorical means available to gather their support.<sup>99</sup> As we saw, a lot of these narratives underlined the prisoners' pain at being insulted and bodily assaulted by appealing to the sensibility and feelings of the readers. A side-effect of this, however, was to emphasize the humiliations suffered at the hand of the muggers.

Some prisoners thus preferred to use a different language of justification, based on rational arguments, rather than appeal to sympathy. Many letters denounced an injustice by showing the general significance of what had happened to them as individuals.<sup>100</sup> This universalization of particular cases was often coined in a juridical rhetoric, which illustrates the prisoners' uncertainty

<sup>95</sup> D'Helincourt to 'Messieurs', Tenterden, 4 Oct. 1757, TNA, ADM 97/121.

<sup>96</sup> Copy of two complaints addressed to the Sodbury justice of the peace, in lords of the admiralty to the sick and wounded, 25 June 1748, NMM, ADM M 402, item 183/1. Such rituals of political defiance were common in the eighteenth century; see E. P. Thompson, 'The crime of anonymity', in Douglas Hay, Peter Linebaugh, and E. P. Thompson, *Albion's fatal tree: crime and society in eighteenth-century England* (New York, NY, 1975), p. 278; John Brewer, *Party ideology and popular politics at the accession of George III* (Cambridge, 1976), ch. 9.

<sup>97</sup> Belingant to the lords of the admiralty, 12 July 1757, TNA, ADM 97/121.

<sup>98</sup> Some writers tried to make use of the impossible equivalence in French of the English notions of 'gentry' and 'nobility'. The captain of a privateer complained of being imprisoned with the rest of his crew: 'in France like everywhere else, gentlemen have the right to turn to the nobility when help is needed, you are one of the most eminent members of the nobility of your kingdom' (chevalier de Seissan to 'Monsieur', Foston, 21 Apr. 1779, TNA, ADM 97/124).

<sup>99</sup> Boltanski, *L'amour*, pp. 299–455; Didier Fassin, 'La supplique : stratégies rhétoriques et constructions identitaires dans les demandes d'aides d'urgence', *Annales HSS*, 5 (2001), pp. 955–81.

<sup>100</sup> Boltanski, *L'amour*, p. 301.

about how the English judicial system worked, about the exact nature of their rights, and ultimately their efforts of ‘legal imagination’.<sup>101</sup> In this respect, the language of the law of nations provided them with a sort of official template, and they repeatedly used formal expressions which gave their letters an appearance of legal and moral objectivity.<sup>102</sup> In the middle of the eighteenth century, these general legal principles, which entitled prisoners of war to be protected against maltreatments, were formulated in a rhetoric combining the just war theory inherited from Christian writers with the rights of humanity, in the spirit of the Enlightenment.<sup>103</sup> The Swiss legal theorist Emerich de Vattel for example described the parole system as ‘a usage which raises both the honour and humanity of the Europeans’, singling out the ‘generous’ French and English nations.<sup>104</sup>

These moral norms transcended social and national sensibilities, and the moral obligation to treat prisoners with justice and humanity was part of a European intellectual ‘consensus’ towards a more restrained and more civilized conduct of war.<sup>105</sup> In the officers’ language, the law of nations and the language of civility were two sides of the same coin. In 1747, in order to justify their call for help, officers in Tavistock described the ‘continuous persecution’ they were suffering at the hands of a ‘multitude of poor devils who every minute give convincing proofs of their barbarity and their rusticity against the law of nations (*droit des gens*) and of prisoners of war’.<sup>106</sup> The following year, a prisoner in the same place pointed out the absolute domination which local populations imposed upon them, thus raising the danger of civil disorder: ‘it is neither the intention of the state, nor yours, that we should be molested and tyrannized as much as we are by individuals inhabiting this place... The ill-treatment of a prisoner is out of place, given that the laws of war consecrate (*sanctifier*) him.’<sup>107</sup>

<sup>101</sup> I am borrowing the notion from Lauren Benton, who uses it to describe the legal practices and creativity of local imperial administrators: *A search for sovereignty: law and geography in European empires, 1400–1900* (Cambridge, 2009), p. 25. A prisoner at Sodbury mentioned ‘the trial that I currently have again this fellow before their honours the judges of Clochester [sic]: Marc Banquet to ‘the honorary commissaries for prisoners of war’, 8 Feb. 1758, TNA, ADM 97/119; prisoners at Chippenham mentioned that they had ‘several times complained to the justice of the place’: 14 Aug. 1779, TNA, ADM 97/124.

<sup>102</sup> Boltanski, *L’amour*, pp. 378–91.

<sup>103</sup> Dan Edelstein, ‘War and terror: the law of nations from Grotius to the French Revolution’, *French Historical Studies*, 31 (2008), pp. 229–62.

<sup>104</sup> Emerich de Vattel, *Le droit des gens ou principes de la loi naturelle* (2 vols., London, 1758), II, p. 117. See Michel Senellart, ‘La qualification de l’ennemi chez Emer de Vattel’, *Astéris*, 2 (2004), <<http://asterion.revues.org/document82.html>>.

<sup>105</sup> Best, *Humanity*, p. 38; David Bell, *The first total war: Napoleon’s Europe and the birth of modern warfare* (London, 2008), pp. 44–51; M. S. Anderson, *War and society in Europe and the Old Regime 1618–1789* (London, 1988), pp. 190–4; Edelstein, ‘War and terror’, pp. 236–7.

<sup>106</sup> Forty-nine prisoners to ‘Messieurs les commissaires de l’amirauté à Londres’, Apr. 1747, TNA, ADM 97/115.

<sup>107</sup> Saubat Contis to the lords of the admiralty, 16 Sept. 1748, TNA, ADM 97/125. A petition from Whitchurch declared that ‘enemies without weapons are human beings, the character of a prisoner is respectable and sacred, we are under your safeguarding’: sixty prisoners to the sick

A similar rhetorical strategy was used in the Seven Years War by prisoners in Goudhurst: these offences 'infringe on your authority, and violate the laws of the least civilized (*policiées*) nations, all the more so of the laws of a nation which is the glory of Europe'.<sup>108</sup> Behind the sycophancy lay a genuine subtlety: tolerating such actions towards unarmed enemies would put the English outside the boundaries of European civilization.<sup>109</sup> The prisoners' insistence on their ordeals testifies to the redefinition of the 'unbearable' which took place in the eighteenth century.<sup>110</sup> War was waged on the moral ground, opposing the 'inhumane' treatment of prisoners by the enemy to a humanitarian patriotism.<sup>111</sup>

Such arguments had every chance of hitting a raw nerve, since the letters' addressees were immersed in the same culture. In December 1749, for example, the duke of Bedford, who was first lord of the admiralty during the War of the Austrian Succession, wrote to the earl of Albemarle:

Certainly every Prince must reap a Benefit, from the Diminution of the Strength of his Enemy, but it is as certain, that Good Policy, as well as Humanity, has induced all civilised Powers, when at War, to allow . . . that the Misfortunes of their respective Subjects under those Circumstances might be made as easy to them as possible . . . Whilst I was at the Head of the Admiralty (which was the most part of the War), the French Prisoners were ever treated with the greatest Care and Tenderness.<sup>112</sup>

Another discourse was based on ideas of social differentiation.<sup>113</sup> French complainants almost always insisted on the deep social gap which separated them from their English assailants, who often were not defined as individuals.<sup>114</sup> To stand out from the blurry mass of their aggressors, the writers used

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and wounded, 15 Aug. 1779, TNA, ADM 97/124. This petition shows the blending of the language of the just war, the law of nations in its 'Enlightened' version, and references to specific wartime codes of conduct (the safe-guard).

<sup>108</sup> Memoir to the lords of the admiralty, [9 May 1758], TNA, ADM 97/119.

<sup>109</sup> These themes reworked a larger set of narratives which circulated in France at the time of the Seven Years War about French honour and British barbarism: David Bell, *The cult of the nation in France: inventing nationalism, 1680–1800* (Cambridge, MA, and London, 2001), pp. 83–95. The same rhetoric was used during the following conflict: see the petition of the prisoners at Chippenham to the 'commissaries for the French prisoners', 14 Aug. 1779, TNA, ADM 97/124.

<sup>110</sup> Didier Fassin and Patrice Bourdelais, dir., *Les constructions de l'intolérable: études d'anthropologie et d'histoire sur les frontières de l'espace moral* (Paris, 2005).

<sup>111</sup> Renaud Morieux, 'Patriotisme humanitaire et prisonniers de guerre en France et en Angleterre pendant la Révolution française et l'Empire', in Laurent Bourquin et al., eds., *Conflits internationaux et politisation, XVIIe–XIXe siècles* (Rennes, forthcoming).

<sup>112</sup> Duke of Bedford to earl of Albemarle, Whitehall, 7 Dec. 1749, BL, MS 32819, fos. 211v–212.

<sup>113</sup> Wrightson, 'Politics of the parish', p. 34.

<sup>114</sup> 'Humble folk', 'non-respectable people': prisoners at Goudhurst to the lords of the admiralty, [9 Nov. 1757], TNA, ADM 97/119; 'dreadful insults from a people without rules nor education': chaplain of count of Gramont to 'Monsieur', 29 Nov. 1757, TNA, ADM 97/122; 'uncivilised rabble': ten prisoners to the sick and wounded, Redruth, 26 July



what Boltanski has called 'techniques of grandizement', listing for example their titles and qualities, even minor ones, which proved their gentle status.<sup>115</sup> Following the same logic, prisoners might try to emphasize their proximity to their social superiors. A backing from honourable people, who would write a sort of character reference, might tip the scales in the prisoners' favour when the lords of the admiralty came to settle the dispute. Officers in Helston in Cornwall claimed to be 'continuously exposed to the insults of the populace . . ., if proofs of our conduct were needed, every notable in this town would be really pleased to subscribe to it [sic]'.<sup>116</sup>

What was the reaction of the local authorities to these pleas? In practice, solving altercations which opposed protagonists from different social and national universes proved to be complex, not least because the parole agreements did not describe the *modus operandi*. Rather than making a painful choice between the two parties, local mediators often preferred a more informal process. For example, in August 1778, five French officers on parole in the village of Kimpson, Hampshire, complained to the justice of the peace, Captain John Luttrell. At 6pm on Saturday 25 July, on the road from Alresford to the neighbouring village of Ovington, three men had struck them 'several times both with fist and cudgel'. A few hours later, the assailants came back with six other men 'armed with clubs, sticks and stones', and grabbed them again.<sup>117</sup> They were apparently robbed of their money because they had walked beyond the parole limits, and the villagers had taken it upon their hands to administer what they saw as justice.<sup>118</sup> The magistrate, stating that he was also an army officer, wrote to the lords of the admiralty to express his fear of disorder if such a situation was allowed to create a precedent. But, according to the instructions

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1779, ADM 97/124; 'rogues and wretches': forty-nine prisoners to the 'commissioners of the admiralty', Tavistock, Apr. 1747, TNA, ADM 97/115. The secretary of the admiralty translated this to his own language, talking about 'the mob': 21 Dec. 1747, Helston, NMM, ADM M400, item 434; 25 June 1748, Sodbury, NMM, ADM M402, item 183. When prisoners mentioned precise names and occupations, they singled out butchers, innkeepers, a navy drummer, a shoemaker, servants, millers, barbers, cartwrights, brick-makers, blacksmiths, customs officers, and bell ringers: prisoners at Sodbury to the sick and wounded, 3 Jan. 1748, TNA, ADM 97/115; D'Helincourt to the sick and wounded, Tenterden, 22 Mar. 1758, TNA, ADM 97/121; prisoners of Goudhurst to the lords of the admiralty, [9 May 1758], TNA, ADM 97/119; Beaufort to 'Messieurs', Harwich, 10 Sept. 1757, TNA, ADM 97/118.

<sup>115</sup> Boltanski, *L'amour*, p. 363.

<sup>116</sup> Letter signed by thirteen prisoners, [July 1757], TNA, ADM 97/121.

<sup>117</sup> 'The information of Alexander Tonsins de Kerger ensign in the naval service of His Majesty the King of France taken before us the Hon.<sup>ble</sup> John Luttrell and Harry Harmood Esq.<sup>rs</sup> Two of His Majesty's Justices of the Peace in and for the County of Southampton', 4 Aug. 1778, NMM, M406.

<sup>118</sup> The trespassing of the geographical boundaries fixed in the parole agreement was the starting point of many quarrels: see for example the case of Helincourt in Tenterden, 17 Nov. 1757: TNA, ADM 97/122. Other disputes involved attackers who collared prisoners who had exceeded the time of the curfew in order to get money, as in Helston: letter from Hugh Rogers, mayor, to Mr Kington, 1 Aug. 1757, TNA, ADM 97/121.

to the agents, 'the Persons seizing & bringing' those prisoners who had walked beyond one mile from home should receive a reward of 10 s. This created a legal imbroglio:

An idea has gone forth amongst the peasants, that to collar, strike & rob them comes within the limits of these instructions. What the extent of them really are, I confess myself at a loss to discover, for I can find no statute which gives such authority, and I think I may venture to say that it is against the common law of this land for one man to lay his hand upon another, therefore I do not at present see how a justice can admit as a plea to justify assault, that the party was out of distance from the place of his parole.

The judicial status of the prisoners on parole, thus, remained uncertain. John Luttrell suggested explicitly giving a magistrate the power to grant a warrant to apprehend such offenders, in order to remedy 'this evil' which pitted the country people and the French officers against each other at every opportunity. From the point of view of the assailants, these attacks were lawful, but the magistrate feared that 'infinite mischiefs might attend the execution of the rigour of the law'. Condemning the Englishmen for assault could only raise a feeling of injustice among the locals, however, and Luttrell was hesitant about how to guarantee public peace:

I wished (for various reasons) that it might not be necessary to bring the matter judicially before me and therefore recommended it to be privately intimated to the aggressors that they must return the money illegally taken and be very cautious how they were guilty of such an offence for the time to come.<sup>119</sup>

Solving the dispute privately in such a manner was in accordance with the local concept of order, which meant above all an 'absence of disruptive conflict locally'.<sup>120</sup> In this perspective, appealing to a third party might cause further violence and private retaliation by publicizing the disagreement.<sup>121</sup> This had happened in Torrington in 1757, where the prisoners managed to get their antagonists tried before 'Messieurs de la Justice' and obtained a favourable verdict. In effect, the trial only made the matter worse: 'We have today as enemies not only the rabble', the prisoners wrote, 'but also some of the main people in the town, who looked at us with a matchless wrath, blaming us because we had resolved to implore Your Lordship.'<sup>122</sup> The Frenchmen were guilty of breaching the local consensus and culture of conciliation and negotiation.

In order to express his solidarity with the prisoners, John Luttrell took to receiving them at his table, 'as a proof to the common people of the civility

<sup>119</sup> John Luttrell to the lords of the admiralty, 6 Aug. 1778, NMM, M406.

<sup>120</sup> K. Wrightson, 'Two concepts of order: justices, constables and jurers in seventeenth-century England', in John Brewer and John Styles, eds., *An ungovernable people: the English and their law in the seventeenth and the eighteenth centuries* (London, 1980), pp. 23–4.

<sup>121</sup> Hindle, 'Keeping', p. 214. <sup>122</sup> TNA, ADM 97/122, 21 Oct. 1757, item 16.

I consider them entitled to'. Rather than following the letter of the law, he thus resorted to a form of 'clientele friendship', to publicize that these officers were his protégés.<sup>123</sup> Such a practice displayed the social cohesion between the elites of two enemy countries, and illustrates how the context of the captivity zones could shift the rules of the social game.

#### IV

The preceding explanatory framework has been built upon the actors' own categories of understanding. The fact that complaints clustered in particular periods indicates that general 'external' factors might also have been at work. Economic stress was always a consequence of war, and prisoners might be held responsible for this. During the War of Austrian Succession, most letters (twenty-one out of twenty-five) were sent in 1747–8 – years when contentious war taxes were levied, while food prices were high.<sup>124</sup> During the Seven Years War, forty-four out of fifty-three letters were from 1757–8, in the wake of the most violent food riots England had ever known. In Goudhurst, the galloping inflation was attributed to the prisoners: 'Every day the inhabitants blame us and say we are the cause of the high prices of their foodstuffs.'<sup>125</sup> These economic grievances therefore often combined with political factors. Those same years saw a surge of military, anti-aristocratic, and anti-French patriotic tropes, which came together during the militia riots of 1757.<sup>126</sup> The majority of the grievances raised during the following war (thirteen out of sixteen) dated from 1779, another *annus horribilis* in the English localities, when the fear of a Franco-Spanish invasion was interwoven with rising food prices.

If this political and economic context certainly played a part in explaining why and when the disputes happened, the question of how they unfolded can

<sup>123</sup> Jean-Louis Briquet, 'Des amitiés paradoxales: échanges intéressés et morale du désintéressement dans les relations de clientèle', *Politix*, 12 (1999), pp. 7–20.

<sup>124</sup> Taxation (particularly excises and land taxes) always increased in time of war. Between 1740 and 1741, prices per capita went up 25 per cent, and another 20 per cent between 1742 and 1743; but they remained stable between 1743 and 1746, before taking another rise of 15 per cent in 1747–8. For detailed figures, see B. R. Mitchell, *British historical statistics* (Cambridge, 1988).

<sup>125</sup> Prisoners at Gourhurst to lords of the admiralty, [9 May 1758], TNA, ADM 97/119. On the food riots of 1756–7, see Andrew Charlesworth, ed., *An atlas of rural protest in Britain, 1548–1900* (London, 1983), pp. 86–8; Nicholas Rogers, *Crowds, culture and politics in Georgian Britain* (Oxford, 1998), pp. 58–75. Prisoners also complained of the high cost of food and rent: four captains and officers on parole at Wye to the sick and wounded, 20 May 1757, TNA, ADM 97/121. The abundance of letters in some years probably also had to do with the mechanics of exchanges, which would sometimes seize up, making the prospect of a liberation less likely: this happened in 1747–8 and again from August 1757 to the autumn of 1758. On the contrary, from 1744 until the end of 1746, officers were almost always granted their freedom to return to France on parole: see for example the numerous letters for 1746 in NMM, ADM M392. This may account for the sparse number of complaints in those years.

<sup>126</sup> Wilson, *The sense*, pp. 190–6; McCormack, 'New militia'.

only be answered by adopting a local perspective. As in the French Mediterranean villages studied by Julian Pitt-Rivers, 'there was no 'general agreement...as to who was superior socially to whom' in these English localities.<sup>127</sup> Between a French officer prisoner and an English shopkeeper, the pecking order was not obvious. Nor were attitudes neatly determined by the categories of status or nation. The French officers often chose to explain the violences against them in reference to a general lack of respect to the social order. Antoine Voizard thus wrote from Okehampton, Devon, in 1758:

M<sup>r</sup> l'Ecuyer Luxemore . . . was also insulted for trying to establish the peace, and also said, like other Messrs from here, that I was lucky not to have been killed given that the populace was angry with me and that these people do not respect nor fear, the influential people of this town, on the contrary they threaten them.<sup>128</sup>

However, in a given town, the choice of one side over the other did not automatically follow social status. Neither the 'crowd' nor the 'elite' were coherent groups, and attitudes towards the French could vary significantly depending on the local balance of power. Vertical solidarities were sometimes at play, and gentlemen could be found cheering on the demotic assailants: 'the so-called Poupe who can be considered to have been brought up with education & likewise full of possessions, ordered his servant to beat two of the supplicants up with sticks'.<sup>129</sup> Patronage also played a part, because collective honour was at stake when the head of a group was targeted, while the actions of a social inferior reflected on his protectors.<sup>130</sup> While the conflict often started between two individuals, they were frequently subsequently joined by supporters. Servants would defend their master's honour, a ship's boy his captain, or a husband his wife.<sup>131</sup>

On the contrary, because these incidents could be seen as endangering hierarchies of rank, local elites sometimes sent warnings to the French officers, as on 14 June 1748: 'the observations which the most notable [sic] of the town of Sodbury daily make to us . . . on the risk we run, night and day, to be murdered'.<sup>132</sup> Cross-national alliances were not restricted to the social elites,

<sup>127</sup> J. Pitt-Rivers, 'Social class in a French village', *Anthropological Quarterly*, 33 (1960), pp. 1–13.

<sup>128</sup> Voizard to 'messieurs les commissaires generaux de la Cour de Londres Nos Seigneurs', Okehampton, 1758, TNA, ADM 97/120. He was certainly referring to 'Esquire' Luxmoore, a member of a wealthy family of notables: Lewis Namier, 'Okehampton', in idem, *The history of parliament: the house of commons, 1754–1790* (London, 1964).

<sup>129</sup> Thirty-eight prisoners on parole at Goudhurst to the sick and wounded, n.d., TNA, ADM 97/119.

<sup>130</sup> Pitt-Rivers, 'Honour', pp. 36, 52–3.

<sup>131</sup> Beche Reneaux to 'Messieurs', Goudhurst, 28 May 1758, TNA, ADM 97/119; prisoners' petition to the sick and wounded, Petersfield, Hampshire, 22 Dec. 1757, TNA, ADM 97/121; prisoners to commissioners for the sick and wounded, Sodbury, 3 Jan. 1748, TNA, ADM 97/115.

<sup>132</sup> Eighteen prisoners to 'Monsieur', Sodbury, 14 June 1758, TNA, ADM 97/117. Similarly, the servant of an innkeeper carried a message, on behalf of her master, to warn the French to

however, as a petition signed by nine, including a tailor and an innkeeper, demonstrates. These men expressed their sympathy with the French by delegitimizing their aggressors in strong moral and social terms:

We the Inhabitants of the Parish of Goudhurst certifie that we never was Insulted in any Respects by the French Gentlemen nor to our Knowledge have they caused any Riot except when they have been drawn in by a Parcel of Drunken ignorant scandalous men sake of a little Money. Us Witness our hands at Goudhurst the 9<sup>th</sup> of November 1757.<sup>133</sup>

As the case of Captain Luttrell showed, in a society of patronage, invitations to dinner and balls by the local gentry could also constitute a display of protection towards foreigners. Those French officers who belonged to the nobility partook in this polite sociability: the country gentlemen ‘normalized’ their presence on the English soil, by treating them as their equals and welcoming them to their homes. These demonstrations of solidarity emphasized that, despite the context of war and the crossing of international borders, social hierarchies remained fundamentally stable: a noble officer, captive or not, was superior to plebeians and civilians. Conversely, lower down the social scale, the officers of privateers were not entitled to the same empathy.<sup>134</sup>

Local belonging offers another set of explanations. Many Englishmen and women were reluctant to accept the premises of the parole system itself, which was imposed upon them and was disconnected from their own concepts of honour and justice.<sup>135</sup> The French officers were assaulted because they transgressed a set of customs and traditions, embodied in the notion of ‘neighbourliness’, which none – even rich and privileged foreigners – could free himself from.<sup>136</sup> The honourable behaviour expected from the prisoners was not explicitly defined in the parole certificates, and sheer ignorance could lead to a transgression of local norms of acceptable conduct. Playing cards and

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remain in their rooms: prisoners at Goudhurst to the lords of the admiralty, [9 May 1758], TNA, ADM 97/119.

<sup>133</sup> 9 Nov. 1757, TNA, ADM 97/119. Likewise, ‘the nobility of the vicinity and most of the habitants of Alresford’ committed to punishing the offenders Chevalier Goupillon de Bélisal to ‘Messieurs’, Alresford, 6 July 1779, TNA, ADM 97/123/9.

<sup>134</sup> The steward of the duke of Bedford, marquess of Tavistock, criticized their ‘impudent and audacious’ behaviour, calling them ‘the very dreggs of the people, of desperate fortunes’: copy of a letter of J. Wynne, 23 Oct. 1747, in lords of the admiralty to the sick and wounded, 30 Oct. 1747, NMM, ADM M399, item 339. Likewise, one Ch. Vyvyan expressed his reluctance to see the parole extended to ‘the lower orders of the French prisoners’: copy of a letter to the lords of the admiralty, Fremear near Launceston, Cornwall, 31 July 1779, NMM, ADM M408.

<sup>135</sup> This interpretation is inferred from Wrightson, ‘Two concepts’.

<sup>136</sup> Wrightson defines neighbourliness ‘as a relationship based on residential propinquity and involving both mutual recognition of reciprocal obligations of a practical nature between effective if not actual equals, and a degree of normative consensus as to the nature of proper behaviour amongst neighbours’: ‘Politics of the parish’, p. 18. See also K. Wrightson, ‘The decline of neighbourliness revisited’, in Norman Leslie Jones and Daniel R. Woolf, eds., *Local identities in late medieval and early modern England* (Basingstoke, 2007), 19–49.

drinking on a Sunday, for example, instead of respecting the Sabbath, could be the pretext of violent outrage.<sup>137</sup> Blowing hunting horns and oboes could seem like an innocent pastime – but when the performance was held in an enclosed pasture, property rights were at stake, and this roused the landlord's ire.<sup>138</sup>

In these cases, as in the incidents involving women, the French officers' lack of compliance to local norms underlined their condition of 'extraneousness'.<sup>139</sup> Their actions singled them out as outsiders to the parish, which, as Keith Wrightson has described, was a dynamic 'unit of identity and belonging', which was 'perennially defined and redefined by processes of inclusion and exclusion'.<sup>140</sup> A strong sense of place and loyalty to the parish lasted at least until the end of the nineteenth century in England, and sometimes resulted in attitudes of 'local xenophobia' directed against outsiders coming from neighbouring parishes, which were 'shared across local social hierarchies'.<sup>141</sup> The Frenchmen's language, their Catholicism, their status of enemy and their distant geographical origins were all variables which, in a conflictual context, could flag their imperfect blending in the local social fabric. It is therefore difficult to reconstruct the specific part which national hostility played in these incidents.<sup>142</sup>

It is certainly not coincidental that in the letters, all the references to discourses of national xenophobia dated from the late 1750s, when chauvinism and 'formalized anti-gallicanism' reached an unprecedented scale in England.<sup>143</sup> However, it must be remembered that this language of national antagonism always appeared as a *French* explanation of the violent encounters, and served to demonstrate the unlawful purposes and the hatred they faced from the populace. As one Mirabert from Crediton tautologically put it in 1758: 'the common people who live in this country are considerably irritated against the French, because of the Nation'.<sup>144</sup> Since these complaints had the specific function of delegitimizing the attackers, they should not be taken as literal and neutral descriptions.

<sup>137</sup> Forty-nine prisoners in Tavistock to the 'commissioners of the admiralty', Apr. 1747, TNA, ADM 97/115.

<sup>138</sup> Prisoners at Goudhurst to the lords of the admiralty, [9 May 1758], TNA, ADM 97/119.

<sup>139</sup> Simona Cerutti, *Etrangers: étude d'une condition d'incertitude dans une société d'Ancien Régime* (Paris, 2012), p. 11.

<sup>140</sup> Wrightson, 'Politics of the parish', pp. 11–12.

<sup>141</sup> K. D. M. Snell, *Parish and belonging: community, identity and welfare in England and Wales, 1700–1950* (Cambridge, 2006), p. 73.

<sup>142</sup> Although Snell points out the similarity of attacks against local outsiders and more distant foreigners, such as Irishmen, he does not elaborate: *ibid.*, p. 54.

<sup>143</sup> 'Explaining in precise terms that they wanted to kill the French': twenty-one prisoners to the 'commissioners of the admiralty in London', Sodbury, 7 Jan. 1758, TNA, ADM 97/122, item 30; 'we think they wanted to attack some Frenchman which they did': petition of fourteen prisoners, 26 July 1758, TNA, ADM 97/119; 'the man named Rartly, ... who could not control his bad intentions, openly declared that he would knock out the first Frenchman he would meet': memoir to the lords of the admiralty, [9 May 1758], TNA, ADM 97/119; Wilson, *The sense*, p. 190.

<sup>144</sup> Mirabert to 'Monsieur', Crediton, 22 July 1758, TNA, ADM 97/122.

Just like the English, the French prisoners were split over many issues which cut across national solidarity. Many presented themselves as spokesmen for the whole group, 'in the name of all the officers of the French royal navy and of all the other Frenchmen detained here', 'in the names of all the prisoners in general', and 'in the name of all these Frenchmen we are beseeching you'.<sup>145</sup> But this discourse of unanimity hid internal divisions. From the prisons, low rank officers such as boatswains or privateer captains protested about being mixed up with those they described as their social inferiors. On 16 December 1746, prisoners on parole at Portchester, Hampshire, remarked that 'no distinction is made between them and common prisoners'.<sup>146</sup> A second lieutenant of frigate, imprisoned at Plymouth, used similar terms:

To be reduced to be in a prison among people of all sorts, and of all kinds, and seeing myself equal to them, a thing which I cannot bear, and which make me fall ill... Whereas I see petty officers, people who are below me in France, go to Tavistock, where they have their liberty.<sup>147</sup>

Paroled officers themselves craved for further social distinctions from each other, and requested special treatment.<sup>148</sup> Higher officers in the navy claimed and often obtained a wider walking limit than others: instead of one mile, which was the rule, a Monsieur Duval, for example, asked for an authorization to go '5 miles of Faringdon [Oxfordshire]... to go to search some ladies to dance in the neighbourhood'.<sup>149</sup> Chevalier Prince de Rohan, on parole in Hampshire, asked in 1758 to be 'indulged with more extensive limits than the ordinary prisoners of war'; he justified his demands by reference to the superiority of the French navy officers, who being titled gentlemen should not suffer 'any comparison with the merchants and privateers'.<sup>150</sup>

Disagreements among the French were sometimes explicit. Thus, in Tenterden, in 1779, a petition signed by thirteen men, including five captains

<sup>145</sup> This letter from Alresford only bore the signature of the chevalier Goupillon de Bélisal, 6 July 1779, TNA, ADM 97/123/9; fifty-five prisoners at Seven Oaks to the lords of the admiralty, n.d., ADM 97/120; 'The French officers at Pontefract' to 'Messieurs', 16 Oct. 1779, TNA, ADM 97/124.

<sup>146</sup> Secretary of the admiralty to the sick and wounded, 16 Dec. 1746, NMM, ADM M396, item 292.

<sup>147</sup> Louis François Faure to the lords of the admiralty, 17 July 1748, NMM, ADM, M402, item 196/1.

<sup>148</sup> Lords of the admiralty to the sick and wounded, 4 July 1744, NMM, ADM M388, item 598.

<sup>149</sup> Request from the sick and wounded to the secretary of the admiralty, 3 Mar. 1760, NMM, ADM F20.

<sup>150</sup> The sick and wounded to the secretary of the admiralty, 24 May 1758, NMM, ADM F17; same to same, 5 July 1758, NMM, ADM F18; chevalier de Rohan to the agent for prisoners of war, Rumsey, 4 July 1758, TNA, ADM 97/119. The spatial boundaries of the parole were always greater for higher officers: they were extended to five miles in 1744 (lords of the admiralty to the sick and wounded, 4 July 1744, NMM, ADM M388, item 98), and reached eight miles in 1778 for the ranks above volunteers 'if gentlemen of family' (sick and wounded to lords of the admiralty, 5 Sept. 1778, NMM, ADM M406).

and one baron, stated that 'the French prisoners on parole in the town of Tenterden' requested to be transferred to Crambrook, where they hoped they would not be molested by the soldiers and that life would be cheaper.<sup>151</sup> Two days later, another letter, signed by three officers, contradicted the previous one, stating that

if that demand has been made to you as the general wish of all the Frenchmen who live here, we are assuring you of the contrary; . . . we have experienced an affable and generous treatment on the part of the principal inhabitants of this place . . . , and we can only say in the name of everybody . . . our plea is that of all those who are not named in the petition.<sup>152</sup>

These rhetorical tactics, where the defence of a particular interest was hidden behind a universalistic rhetoric, were common enough for some parole agents to prohibit collective petitioning altogether: 'I am only speaking for myself knowing that you have forbidden speaking for others.'<sup>153</sup> These contests for the appropriation of silent voices confirm that the nation was only one way to identify oneself in the context of captivity. Rather than an all-encompassing solidarity with their fellow compatriots, officers would sometimes prefer to underline the distance which separated them from their compatriots. In Tavistock, five French officers denounced one Jean Guillaume, a volunteer, who had 'called all the officers like us cloven-hoofed seamen, although they [sic] know the contrary since we were their superiors on board the ship'.<sup>154</sup> These officers of the 'Grand Corps' could not stand that this 'blue officer' should contest their pre-eminence in the chain of command.<sup>155</sup> Likewise, in 1779, the marquis of Ransanne, prisoner in Alresford, described the inappropriate conduct of his former secretary on board the frigate *Las Pallas* who, 'for the third time . . . said impertinent remarks to me'. The marquis explained 'how essential it was to make an example which would keep the others within the rules of subordination so necessary among soldiers'.<sup>156</sup> What was at stake here was the upholding of social hierarchies which pre-existed captivity. Just as in the attacks from English villagers, the officers' status might be put to the test by their own subordinates, who used the new situation as an opportunity to challenge those who were their superiors in France.

## V

War had repercussion in the depths of England. As a configuration characterized by shifting social relations, the parole zone brought together

<sup>151</sup> Prisoners at Tenterden to the lords of the admiralty, 4 Feb. 1779, TNA, ADM 97/123/6.

<sup>152</sup> Same to same, Tenterden, 6 Feb. 1779, ADM 97/123/6.

<sup>153</sup> Baly Jeune to the agent for prisoners, Callaington, 26 July 1758, TNA, ADM 97/121.

<sup>154</sup> Letter to 'Monsieur', [1757], TNA, ADM 97/119.

<sup>155</sup> See n. 24 above.

<sup>156</sup> Ransanne to the secretary of the admiralty, 12 Aug. 1779, NMM, ADM M407.



local, national, and international issues, intertwined primarily in the language of honour. Ultimately, this language did not only describe these interactions, but also constituted them, revealing a struggle for classifying and defining the very terms of group relations.<sup>157</sup>

At the local level, a whole range of attitudes could be observed. These disputes could help to strengthen the ties of local communities behind the defence of neighbourliness. But interactions with outsiders could also be divisive and accentuate local tensions. Some attacks could indeed be read as an expression of the anti-aristocratic and patriotic sentiment which developed in England from the 1750s: the French officers were targeted because they belonged to a transnational aristocratic class which the parole system made only too visible.<sup>158</sup> In this perspective, these events can be analysed as 'public transcripts', disclosing fault lines which ran across English society but would not have been expressed in normal times.<sup>159</sup> But in other instances, some English people openly supported the Frenchmen, while yet others adopted a middle ground, writing to the authorities while yielding to the pressure of the majority.

With respect to the French officers, these events display the sensitivity of the preservation of their honour, which relied on their social rank, and would often take primacy over other forms of collective belonging such as the nation. Ultimately, however, their letters evidence both their failure to impose their preferred representation of the social world on to the host society and their own internal divisions. There was no systematic alignment of class and national discourses and actions, while the precise standing of these Frenchmen on the social ladder was constantly challenged and debated. The resulting quarrels therefore show a series of social inversions: dominant groups in France, in terms of social prestige and power, were in many respects dominated in England. Rather than being a mere reflection of pre-existing social hierarchies, such micro-incident reinvented them, albeit in the limited time and space of the captivity.

These distant echoes of international conflicts in the localities were not always heard by the government, which raises the problem of the relations between the central state and the peripheries in eighteenth-century England. Despite receiving so many complaints from the Frenchmen, in which it was described how their official orders were defied, the usual reaction of the lords of the admiralty was to do no more than admonish the offenders. This can be explained in three ways. First, the central government needed to enlist the co-operation of local elites and authorities to implement its decisions.<sup>160</sup> While parole agents lacked legitimacy, local authorities, such as mayors or magistrates,

<sup>157</sup> Pierre Bourdieu, 'Social space and symbolic power', *Sociological Theory*, 7 (1989), pp. 22–3.

<sup>158</sup> Newman, *The rise*; Wilson, *The sense*.

<sup>159</sup> James Scott, *Domination and the arts of resistance: hidden transcripts* (New Haven, CT, 1990).

<sup>160</sup> David Eastwood, *Government and community in the English provinces, 1700–1870* (London, 1997).

often had their own agendas: in particular, keeping the peace locally was their main preoccupation, while in the context of war the government too was strongly concerned to contain disorder rather than inflame it. Coercion was thus never the preferred option for the central authorities, and when the go-betweens chose the assailants' side, the admiralty had little room for manoeuvre. Second, it might be argued that these disputes often helped to reduce local divisions on the home front. As complete outsiders, the Frenchmen were perfect scapegoats, and thus some degree of violence towards them was tolerated. Finally, however, the onslaught on the French may be seen as just another example of the extensive toleration of violence in eighteenth-century English society which persisted well into the following century. From this perspective, this level of violence was not specific to the attitude towards foreigners, but was rather typical of everyday relations in a non-metropolitan and market-town context. The Eliasian civilization process and the culture of civility had not spread to all the English localities in the eighteenth century.

In the end, the shift of the social balance of power, where aristocrats were at the people's mercy, was only made possible because of the international context. English attackers often got away without serious punishment, because these Frenchmen were official enemies of their own sovereign. But local authorities and gentility were ambivalent and divided: while encouraging rioting could be dangerous, defending French enemies was never an easy choice.