

Friedrich List and the Imperial Origins of the National Economy

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Abstract

This essay offers a critical reexamination of the works of Friedrich List by placing them in the context of nineteenth-century imperial economies. I argue that List's theory of the national economy is characterised by a major ambivalence, as it incorporates both imperial and anti-imperial elements. On the one hand, List pitted his national principle against the British imperialism of free trade and the relations of dependency it heralded for late developers like Germany. On the other hand, his economic nationalism aimed less at dismantling imperial core-periphery relations as a whole than at reproducing these relations domestically and expanding them globally. I explain this ambivalence with reference to List's designation of imperial Britain as the prime example of successful economic development and a model to be emulated by late industrialisers. List thereby fashioned his ideas on national development out of the historical experience of an empire whereby he internalised its economic logic and discourse of the civilising mission. Consequently, List's national economy culminated in an early vision of the global north-south relations, in which the global industrial-financial core would expand to include France, Germany, and the United States, while the rest of the world would be reduced to quasi-colonial agrarian hinterlands.

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The peculiar place of Friedrich List in the history of political economy is relatively undisputed. While twentieth- and twenty-first century interpretations of List differ on the choice of labels in categorising his theory, there exists a broad agreement that it is animated by the historical problem of late-development (Gerschenkron 1962), which it addresses through strategies of state-led industrialisation that are equidistant to liberal and socialist alternatives alike (Szporluk 1988).¹ For scholars of comparative economic development, List's both historical and contemporary relevance is rooted in his trenchant critique of asymmetric free trade (Chang 2003; Wade 2003, 2006), his emphasis on technological innovation (Freeman 1995) and his articulation of a distinct strain of 'nonliberal capitalism' (Streeck and Yamamura 2005). Viewed from a global perspective, the same arguments have been dubbed 'neomercantilism' (Gilpin 1987; Nederveen Pietersee 2001; Kirshner 1999), a theme that has gained salience with the emerging economies' record of interventionism and state-owned enterprises.²

The aim of this essay is to reconsider List's political economy from an unorthodox point of view. 'Unorthodox,' because the extant scholarship on List's economic nationalism often treats it in an international relations framework (Harlen 1999; Helleiner 2002; Levi-Faur 1997a, 1997b), whereas the analysis presented here is squarely anchored in the framework of *imperial economy*. I argue that the key to understand List's seminal theory of the national economy resides, paradoxically, not in an stylised international system of nation-states but in the uneven global terrain of colonial empires. List wrote in a world made by the 'first age of global imperialism' (Bayly 1998), which rendered the socioeconomic relations that he analyzed fundamentally imperial in nature. I contend that recasting List's 'national economy' in imperial light

pierces the boundaries between the nation, empire and free trade that we habitually read into nineteenth-century political economy. The arguments of this paper therefore hope to incite critical rethinking on economic development, state building and international relations.

At the center of my analysis is the ambivalence of List's notion of the national economy, which I argue incorporates both anti-imperial and imperial elements. On the one hand, List's economic nationalism staged a critical response to what has been labeled Britain's 'imperialism of free trade' (Gallagher and Robinson 1953; Semmel 1970, 1993). On the other hand, and perhaps more importantly, List's theory aimed less at dismantling the historical relations of 'colonial capitalism' embodied by the British Empire than at reproducing these relations nationally and expanding them globally so as to include late-industrialising nations like Germany and France in the industrial-financial core of the global economy. To unravel this ambivalence without indicting List of cynicism, I draw attention to Britain's distinctly imperial division of labor that constituted the historical referent from which List abstracted the theoretical tenets and policy prescriptions for his national economy. Despite his fervent declamations against British free trade policy, List consistently heaped praise upon Britain's industrial strategy and held it up as a model to emulate for building a national economy. The British economy, however, was by the second quarter of the nineteenth century a globe-spanning *imperial economy*, comprised of an industrial-financial metropole and agrarian colonial peripheries forced to specialise in the production of primary products. By fashioning his theory of autonomous economic development out of the historical experience of a colonial empire, List in effect inscribed imperial core-periphery relations of dependency

in the very concept of the national economy. If, as recent commentators (Levi-Faur 1997b; Henderson 1983; Roussakis 1968; Winch 2007) have suggested, List was a visionary of a liberal international world order based on economic reciprocity between independent and equal states, then this vision was braided with profound economic and political asymmetries since its inception.

The essay proceeds in two sections. The first section offers a brief overview of various intellectual influences on List's theory before reconstructing his critique of classical political economy as the ideological handmaiden of the British imperialism of free trade. I survey List's reflections on 'productive powers,' economic interventionism and infant industries, which undergird his contemporary image as the intellectual paragon of national developmentalism. The second section readjusts our analytic lenses to detect the inherently imperial parameters of List's political economy. I claim that the anti-imperial potential of List's theory was compromised by his adoption of the imperial features of the British economy as a developmental blueprint, complete with an imperial discourse of civilisation and savagery. By examining List's fears of a continental Europe reduced to quasi-colonial status under British hegemony, I demonstrate that List conceived of Britain's economic relationship to Germany, France and the United States in imperial rather than international terms. This led List to infuse the very definition of a 'normal nation' with an imperial content and thereby 'imperialise' the nation. Instead of gesturing at economic independence for European and non-European peoples alike, List's proposals culminated in an early vision of the Global North as the exclusive locus of techno-industrial progress and the protagonist of a civilising mission draped in the internationalist garbs of a 'world trade congress.'

I conclude that an imperial perspective on List's political economy compels us to think of the 'colonial empire' as much as a socioeconomic template for the nation-state as a politico-legal framework that was eclipsed by it. Economic nationalism as an institutional-ideological complex emerged from distinctly transnational and imperial contexts (Goswami 2004; Todd 2015). In order to grasp the historical origins of the national economy, therefore, we need to move beyond the nation-state as the principal unit of economic analysis.

I. Late-development, economic liberalism and imperialism of free trade

Problem of late-development and the critique of 'cosmopolitan economy'

It should be noted at the outset that List was not a professional scholar of political economy but a publicist whose self-proclaimed goal was to influence the economic policies of what he called 'second- and third-rate industrialised nations' like the United States, Germany, France and Russia in their endeavor to catch up with Britain (Henderson 1983: 143). After a brief and lackluster academic career at the University of Tübingen, List agitated for administrative reform in Württemberg, which earned him a prison sentence. Opting for exile, List traveled widely in continental Europe and spent considerable time in the United States, and his sojourns in these late-developing countries proved formative for his political economic thinking.³ While List declared himself to be 'cosmopolitan by principle,' his position on free trade was at best ambivalent before he relocated to the United States in 1825. In the US, List found inspiration in Alexander Hamilton and Daniel Raymond's advocacy of protectionism and addressed his *Outlines of American Political Economy* (1827) to Northeastern industrial interests (Tribe 1988,

1995; Notz 1926; Earle 1986). List's long-standing admiration of French protectionists like Louis Say, Antoine Chaptal, Adolphe Thiers and Charles Dupin came to its own when he penned 'The Natural System of Political Economy' (1837) as a contender for a prize offered by the French Academy of Moral and Political Sciences (Henderson 1989a). In addition to these immediate influences, the Russian effort at late-development indirectly found its way into List's theory through the writings of German-Russian economist Heinrich von Storch (Zweynert 2004, Adamovsky 2010). These theoretical threads readily resonated with the German economic tradition to which List belonged, with its characteristically productionist bias, skepticism of abstract theories and inductive approach to specific experiences of economic development (Reinert 2005). List's engagement with this heterodox theoretical heritage culminated in his *magnum opus*, *The National System of Political Economy* (1841).

What united these diverse experiences and the economic ideas they spawned at the turn of the century was their 'provincial' status in a global economy increasingly dominated by the British Empire, whose policymakers openly propagated theories of comparative advantage and free trade. As Emma Rothschild (2004: 6) notes, provincialism was a 'source of extraordinary creativity' that gave provincial thinkers like List a 'willingness to question the established wisdom of an imperial or metropolitan world to which they were connected, but to which they did not belong.' List's theory of the national economy, with its twin pillars of 'productive powers' and 'infant industry protection,' took root in these heterodox reflections on economic development. In France, the fervent debate that raged over economic policy in the 1830s generated many of the themes that structured List's economic thought, such as the notion of productive powers,

the contrast between industrial autarky and industrial competition, and the specter of deindustrialization attendant to free trade policy (Todd 2015: 145-53).⁴ Similarly, List's sojourn in the United States proved momentous for the formation of a common theoretical position against British economics, whereby 'economics in Germany and the United States strongly influenced and fertilized each other' (Reinert 2005: 48).

List substantiated his program of the national economy in tandem with a three-pronged critique of the 'School of Universal Free Trade,' which he attributed to the teachings of the Physiocrats, Adam Smith and Jean-Baptiste Say. First, echoing Dupin's designation of classical economics as 'anti-political economics' (Todd 2015: 143), List contended that the Smithian school subscribed to a naïve theory of 'cosmopolitan economy' centered on the dyadic relationship between the private economy of individual transactions and the global economy as a whole. Cosmopolitanism overlooked the historical fact that human beings had always been organised in bounded polities that imposed an 'intermediate interest between those of *individualism* and of *entire humanity*' (List 1909a: 129). Accordingly, List maintained that the adequate framework of economic analysis had to be *national* and *international*, as opposed to individual and global. In fairness to Smith, List's depiction of cosmopolitan economy was a partial misrepresentation. As Istvan Hont (2005) has compellingly shown, a central preoccupation for Smith and other classical political economist was the 'jealousy of trade' bred by the competitive 'commercial reason of state.' In fact, as I explain below, List borrowed from classical political economy a key idea that the latter had devised to render commercial inter-state rivalry more peaceful, namely, the 'emulation' of successful economies by backward ones, which would have the effect of increasing

prosperity and civilisation for all (Hont 2005: 111-25). Where List dramatically parted ways with Smith concerned the mechanisms by which universal peace and prosperity could be achieved. Smith located these mechanisms in expanding circles of global commerce that would eventually attenuate national antagonisms and equalise the economic fortunes of different peoples (Smith 1981; Muthu 2008; Pitts 2005; Hill 2010). At the time List wrote, Ricardians had vulgarised this optimistic premise into a blanket defense of free trade based on comparative advantage (Walther 1984). List countered this position with a focus on national economic policy without which, he argued, unhindered global commerce would entrench, rather than mitigate, economic inequalities between different countries.

Secondly, List targeted the ‘dead materialism’ of Smith’s labor theory of value against which he pitted his theory of ‘productive powers.’ Smithian economics reduced wealth to its commodified form and labeled as unproductive those laboring activities that did not augment the stock of exchange value embodied in material things (List 1983: 37). This ‘mere shopkeeper’s theory’ occluded from view the crucial ‘immaterial forces of production’ that included knowledge, skill, education and political institutions that List subsumed under the category of ‘mental capital’ (List 1909a: 113; also see Blaug 1976). List was here extending the prior critiques of classical political economy developed by Chaptal, Louis Say and Storch.⁵ The latter had argued for a more capacious theory of value that took into account the social conditions of wealth creation that themselves could not be embodied or exchanged, which they variously called ‘utility,’ ‘personal capital,’ or ‘internal goods’ (Zweynert 2004: 531-2; Adamovsky 2010: 366; Henderson 1989a: 107). For List, productivity of individual labor and industry rested on the political and legal

constitution of societies, scientific learning and technological innovation, transportation and communication infrastructure, security of person and property and economic competition balanced by long time horizons in investments.

List not only deemed these conditions to be ‘infinitely more important than *wealth itself*’ (List 1909a: 106), but also, and crucially, conceived their establishment and maintenance as an essentially *political* project that had to be undertaken by the state (Winch 1998: 306). In one of the many commendatory references to British economic history, List found the sterling example of prioritising productive powers over exchange value in the eighteenth-century British policy of protecting the domestic textile industry from more competitive Indian imports. ‘The English ministers’ had thereby shown that they ‘cared not for the acquisition of low-priced and perishable articles of manufacture, but for that more costly but enduring *manufacturing power*’ (List 1909a: 59). On this last point, List diverged from Storch, who had an ambivalent position on industry and advocated an agrarian trajectory of economic development for Russia. By contrast, while List defended a balanced development of agricultural, commercial and industrial activities for an economy to be independent, he accorded industrial productive powers a privileged place. ‘Industry is the mother and father of all science, literature, the arts, enlightenment, freedom, useful institutions, national power and independence’ (List 1983: 66). On this point, he was in agreement with both Adam Smith and Alexander Hamilton who had noted the dynamism of manufacturing, especially the mass production of subsistence goods and its positive feedback loops with commerce and agriculture.⁶ Industry exponentially enhanced the national capacity to produce wealth and its nurturing required abandoning the classical doctrine of buying on the cheapest market.

National economy versus imperialism of free trade

Weaving these two premises together, List aimed his third and final critique at free trade orthodoxy and its growing popularity amongst the policymakers of continental Europe, exemplified by the warm welcome that the British economic emissary and lobbyist Dr. Bowring received in Prussia in 1839 (Henderson 1989a: 122). After the Napoleonic Wars,⁷ List observed,

people all over the world fell under the spell of theoretical economists, who argued that the doctrine of free trade should now be put into practice. Governments appeared to be willing to listen to these arguments. Russia, Scandinavia, Germany, Italy, Spain, Portugal, and the United States seemed to be ready to accept English manufactured goods in exchange for their own products (List 1983: 137).

Adherence to free trade doctrine and policy, List lamented, exposed European economies to Britain's free trade imperialism. This was not a figment of List's paranoid imagination. As John Gallagher and Ronald Robinson (1953: 9) have argued in a pioneering essay, the British strategy in this period was to convert colonial possessions into 'complementary satellite economies, which would provide raw materials and food for Great Britain, and also provide widening markets for its manufactures.'⁸ Bernard Semmel likewise notes that the strategy of combining industrial superiority with free trade found increasing appeal amongst British statesmen of the period, from Benjamin Disraeli to Robert Peel, who variously mentioned their country's 'manufacturing and commercial pre-eminence' and its status as the 'metropolis of the world' (Semmel 1993: 57, 72). The spirit was

epitomised by Edward Gibbon Wakefield's call to British policymakers in his *England and America* published in 1833 (1968: 411): 'The whole world is before you. Open new channels for the most productive employment of English capital. Let the English buy bread from every people that has bread to sell cheap. Make England, for all that is produced by steam, the workshop of the world' (also see, Semmel 1971). Less openly stated but firmly implied in this vision was the deindustrialisation of the non-British world and its reduction to the status of agrarian hinterlands and export markets. Set against such open proclamations of British economic expansionism, a politically fragmented Germany with complacent policymakers and woefully inadequate tariffs on British imports profoundly alarmed List.⁹ Unfortunately for List, he remained a 'lonely voice speaking out against the economic policy of liberalism and peripheral deindustrialization' (Reinert 2005: 60), and his efforts to raise collective German tariffs on British goods bore no fruit in his lifetime.

List might have been a lonely voice in the age of free trade sentiment, yet he did not regard his advocacy of protectionism as an anomaly or a throwback to an obsolete policy. In the *National System*, he made it clear that in advocating a 'manufacturing system,' he was 'far from wishing ... to revive the doctrine of the balance of trade as it existed under the so-called "mercantile system."' (List 1909a: 203). Instead, his was a program of *emulating* the successful British path to industrialisation through protectionist means and government intervention, which he argued remained 'in force at this day as it was in the days of Elizabeth' (List 1909a: 50).¹⁰ Since the early-seventeenth century, the English had promoted woolen industries, encouraged skilled immigration, concluded treaties that opened up foreign markets to English goods and supported shipping through

the Navigation Laws. By spurring urbanisation, domestic demand and economic diversification, these policies enabled the English to best the Dutch Republic and the Hanseatic League in commercial competition. Thanks to these aggressive strategies, Britain had now become ‘a land of factories and warehouses, ... a sort of metropolis which treated the whole world as if it were a mere English province’ (List 1983: 137).

However, once Britain secured the pinnacle of industrial power, her statesmen suddenly discovered the free trade doctrines that British economic policy had been blithely ignoring three centuries. In Erik Reinert’s words (2005: 60), Britain ‘not only made it politically clear that she saw it as a primary goal to prevent other nations from following the path of industrialization, but also ... possessed an economic theory [in the economics of Smith and Ricardo] that made this goal a legitimate one.’ Under the veneer of fervent sermons on free trade, one could detect the familiar commercial reason of state. For instance, regarding Britain’s commercial treaties with newly independent South American states, William Canning (for whom List reserved special indignation) proclaimed, ‘Spanish America is free and if we do not mismanage our affairs sadly, she is *English*’ (quoted in Kaufman 1951: 178).¹¹ Based on these and other similar policy statements, List concluded that the US and continental European countries faced the ‘real danger that the strongest nations will use the motto ‘Free Trade’ as an excuse to adopt a policy which will certainly enable them to dominate the trade and industry of weaker countries and reduce them to a condition of slavery’ (List 1983: 24-5).

Despite his acrimony for the likes of Canning, List had only praise for Britain and her economic performance:

Let us, however, do justice to this power and to her efforts. The world has not been hindered in its progress, but immensely aided in it, by England. She has become an *example and a pattern to all nations* – in internal and in foreign policy, as well as in great inventions and enterprises of every kind; in perfecting industrial processes and means of transport, as well as in the discovery and bringing into cultivation uncultivated lands (List 1909a: 250, emphases added).

The point was therefore not to resent and resign in the face of the British success but to adopt it as a model. One first had to reject the idea of path-dependent economic specialisation whereby only Britain, by simply having embarked on the industrial path earlier, would keep walking it, while other countries would content themselves with producing agricultural commodities for export. Acquiescence by predominantly agrarian countries (like the United States and the members of the German Confederation) in theories of comparative advantage would amount to accepting the status of ‘hewers of wood and drawers of water for the Britons’ (List 1909a: 264). In order to escape economic inferiority, it was not only possible but also necessary for such countries to ‘emulate the pragmatism and ruthless egoism of the English people’ (Henderson 1989b: 118) by nurturing their productive powers through state-led industrialisation.

Turning the British strategy against itself, the *conditio sine qua non* of the project of industrialisation would be tariffs and duties on industrial imports that would shield the nation’s infant manufactures from British competition. This would be coupled with the removal of all obstacles to economic circulation *within* the national borders to stoke ‘internal competition [that] amply suffices as a stimulus to emulation among manufacturers and traders’ (List 1909a: 222, 265). To prevent protectionism from

breeding rent-seeking behavior, List advocated selective and flexible duties and prescribed their subsequent removal in proportion to the development of national industries. The competitive edge acquired by domestic producers would be sustained by exposing them to the pressures of foreign competition through incremental resumption of free trade. After a period of temporary and selective ‘de-linking,’ a late-developer had to ‘join the international market based on Ricardo’s comparative advantage’ for the benefit of competition to be permanent (Deckers 2007: 219).

The eventual reversion to free trade clearly shows that the objective of List’s national economy was not autarky. In stark contrast to Johann Fichte’s ‘closed commercial state’ and the position of French autarkists like Mathieu de Dombasle, List desired to ‘build up Germany into a truly international trading power’ (Hont 2005: 153).¹² As David Todd (2015: 151) phrases it aptly, ‘List’s nascent system of political economy amounted to an industrialist reinvention of jealousy [of trade].’ Much like Smith and Hume, List extolled international trade as ‘one of the mightiest levers of civilisation and prosperity’ (List 1909c: 301). However, whereas Smith had predicted the convergence of national fortunes through free trade, List held that the reciprocal benefits of free trade accrued only under the ‘greatest possible equalisation of the most important nations of the earth in civilisation, prosperity, industry, and power’ (List 1909a: 277). In the absence of comparable economic development, the discourse of free trade made a farce of the principle of reciprocity by hoaxing the underdeveloped to welcome their economic backwardness. A comparison of Britain and the US clinched the point, pitting national independence against economic hegemony:

English national economy has for its object to manufacture for the whole world,

to monopolise all manufacturing power. ... American economy has for its object to bring into harmony the three branches of industry, ... to be free and independent and powerful ... English national economy is *predominant*; American national economy aspires only to become *independent* (List 1909b: 167-8).

List's plan thus defended not national isolation but national equalisation, giving late-developers the opportunity to assume a dignified place in the international system, or in his more grandiose words, 'the universal society of the future' (List 1909a: 132).

II. Civilisation, development and the imperial origins of the national economy

Development as civilising process: List's imperial horizon

The national economy was therefore the necessary first step to building an international order of peace and prosperity amongst effectively independent, equal sovereign states, stamping List's thought with the features of nineteenth-century liberal internationalism.¹³ The cosmopolitan vanishing point of List's theory has led recent commentators to commend it as one of 'benevolent economic nationalism.' For instance, David Levi-Faur (1997b: 367) writes, 'List's nationalism embraces a world constituted by a society of nations, and he believed that self-determination on the basis of nationality is by its very nature progressive.' However, there exist good reasons to be skeptical of this celebratory picture, as not everyone was invited to List's 'universal society of the future' on equal terms. Roman Szporluk (1988: 126) astutely observes that List himself 'did not consider the possibility that a Listian nationalism could emerge [in those regions] which in our time is known as the Third World,' that is, what were in List's time the

colonies and imperial dominions of European powers. When it came to the economic prospects of the colonies, this arch-critic of cosmopolitan economy surprisingly proclaimed, 'here is a great opportunity to apply the principles of the doctrine of cosmopolitan economics in a practical way' (List 1983: 49). We are confronted by a formidable ambivalence between, on the one hand, fiercely critiquing cosmopolitan economy as the handmaiden of economic imperialism, and on the other, advocating it in the conduct of colonial policy.

The easy way of dispelling this ambivalence is to withdraw credence from List's principle of economic nationalism and recast him as a closeted imperialist who drew upon the trove of double standards amply furnished by nineteenth-century ideologies of imperial rule.¹⁴ However, the picture is more complicated. Above all, unlike early-Victorian British political economists and statesmen who espoused cosmopolitan economic precepts, List did not write from the seat of a powerful empire.¹⁵ Instead, speaking on behalf of continental Europe and America increasingly pressured by British economic policy, his case for effective national independence emphatically promised, in the words of David Armitage (2013: 49), an 'escape from the conditions of empire.'

As List's political economy eludes an easy categorization under either the imperialist or the nationalist camp, the ambivalence in questions has to be tackled in another way. I think a productive way forward is to abandon the imperial-national dichotomy altogether and look for the imperial undercurrents *within* List's conceptions of the nation and the national economy. I argue in this section that these imperial undercurrents manifested themselves, first, in List's stages-theory of economic development and civilisation, and, second, in his definition of what qualifies as a 'normal

nation.’ The interpenetration of national and imperial categories, in turn, stemmed from List’s designation of the British economy as the model to be emulated by late developers. The geographic and institutional structure of the British economy at the time was decisively imperial rather than national, and its adoption by List as the template for economic development insinuated irreducibly imperial elements into his economic theory.

A major frame of historical analysis that shaped List’s ideas on development was furnished by the eighteenth-century conceptions of universal human progress which received their most systematic treatment in the Scottish Enlightenment’s ‘four-stages theory’ (Berry 1997). Structured by an imagined continuum stretching between ‘civilisation’ and ‘savagery,’ these stadial theories imposed a semblance of temporal-evolutionary order on the socioeconomic and cultural diversity that characterised an expanding world of colonial empires (Marshall and Williams 1982). We find these background assumptions reflected in List’s observation that ‘an infinite difference exists in the conditions and circumstances of the various nations: we observe among them giants and dwarfs, well-formed bodies and cripples, civilised, half-civilised, and barbarous nations’ (List 1909a: 132). What distinguished List’s theory from its eighteenth-century precursors was the ‘economic depth’ it gave to the idea of civilisation, ‘thus relating economic growth to other aspects of human progress’ (Adamovsky 2010: 363). On the one end of List’s spectrum was autarkic agrarianism characteristic of barbarous nations, and on the other, civilised nations that had attained ‘balance or harmony of the productive powers’ in industry, commerce and agriculture (List 1909a: 96, 22; List 1983: 46, 51).¹⁶ Echoing Smith and Hume’s commercialisation thesis, List

put the merchant before the missionary in stimulating backward, agrarian societies into economic development, thus endowing the extant discourses of civilisation and savagery with a secular economic substratum.

List's progressive imaginary was nowhere clearer than his discussion of agrarian societies like Russia. In contrast to industry's tremendous civilisational rewards, agrarian life was a deplorable thing. Consisting of 'primitive peasants who simply cultivate the soil,' agrarian societies lacked capital, knowledge and competitive spirit necessary for social division of labor and consequently generated no surplus that could be traded or invested in manufacturing (List 1983: 54). Their 'intellectual powers' always in the rot, stamped by 'inefficiency, prejudices, bad habits, and vices,' unable to appreciate or defend their liberties, with no capacity for self-government, agrarian populations invariably fell prey to 'slavery, ... despotism, feudalism, and priestcraft,' of which 'they could not rid themselves of their own accord (List 1909a: 151).¹⁷ Given the essentially static nature of agrarian primitivism, List had little faith in the spontaneous workings of self-interested behavior in bringing about social transformation.¹⁸ Once again, he turned to the state: 'It is the *task of politics to civilise the barbarous nationalities*, to make the small and weak ones great and strong' (List 1909a: 132). List's national economy represented not only a program for material development but also a theory of the 'civilising process' (Tribe 1988: 33)

This last point is crucial for the following reason. In early-nineteenth century European thought, the secular idea of the 'civilising mission' was chiefly an *imperial* notion.¹⁹ It had incubated in early-modern attempts to justify conquest, enslavement and empire in the Atlantic (Andrews et al., 1979; Pagden 1995), and by the 1830s and 1840s,

it had ossified into the ideological backbone of British ‘liberal imperialism,’ especially as exercised in India (Pitts 2010; Bell 2006; Mantena 2010). The salience of an imperial trope like the civilising mission in List’s ostensibly nationalist agenda appears puzzling and directs us back to the ambivalence noted earlier. This ambivalence loses some of its mystery, however, if we recognise that Great Britain, which List admired and extolled as a paragon of development, possessed a distinctly *imperial economy*. Britain was not and had never been a nation-state in the stylised sense of a self-contained polity with a homogenous legal interior bounded by power-tight borders.²⁰ Politically, like most European constitutional states, it was a ‘state empire’ that had ‘developed within global systems of imperial and colonial law from the beginning’ (Tully 2008: 200). Economically, it consisted of an industrialised imperial metropole and agrarian colonial peripheries harnessed together by global webs of commerce and finance. In other words, the ‘enviable balance between all aspects of economic activity’ (List 1983: 42) that List attributed to Britain was operative at the *global* level and ensconced in the politico-legal framework of the colonial empire rather than the nation-state. Within this imperial division of labor, England was less an autonomous island economy than a dominant hub specialising in industry and finance.²¹ To put it more starkly, London was perhaps first and foremost the metropole of an overseas empire and only secondarily the metropole of the English countryside.²²

In short, List’s cherished principle of ‘the confederation and harmony of the productive powers’ that the British economy embodied and which List suggested to late-developers as a model, was based on a fundamentally imperial structure. In these imperial features, from which List abstracted his principles of the national economy, we find the

key to unraveling the curious civilisational content of his economic program. The nineteenth-century discourse of the civilising mission pivoted on the assumed backwardness, stagnation and barbarism of colonial populations, which justified imperial rule and reform (Mehta 1990, 1999; Chatterjee 1993; Mantena 2010). List's thick contempt for agrarian life can be understood as fueled by his perception of the countryside in the image of the colonies and their subordinate articulation to the global economy: as agrarian hinterlands specialising in raw materials and foodstuffs and as dependent markets for the manufactures of industrial metropolises. Emulating the British *imperial economy* as the blueprint for *national development* was arguably the ideational conduit through which List transposed tropes of barbarism from the colonies to the European countryside. In the same scalar move from the imperial to the national level, the British metropole that stood as the beacon of progress, enlightenment and civilisation now ought to be reproduced in the form of national metropolises. Yet, there existed a crucial difference between the imperial and national organizations of the economic space, which concerned the legitimacy of economic asymmetry. Economic unevenness inherent in the imperial relationship lost its odium once it was recast as a national division of labor between manufacture and agriculture in the service of a unified *national* interest – the same national interest that List adduced to defend industrial protectionism against the charge of turning the nation into a captive market and aggrandizing manufacturers at the expense of domestic consumers and agricultural producers (List 1909a: 49).

Agrarian colonies not only furnished List with the civilisational content for representing the national countryside; they also structured the language in which List expressed Britain's relationship to the United States and continental Europe. The Anglo-

American economic relations confirmed that the United States had not yet ceased to be an informal colony,²³ as its dependent specialisation in agricultural exports dragged her into the ‘whirlpool of [British] agricultural, industrial, and commercial crises’ (List 1983: 56; List 1909a: 200). The British now strove to impress the same upon Germany, aiming at ‘nothing less than the overthrow of the entire German protective system, in order to reduce Germany to the position of an *English agricultural colony*’ (List 1909a: 272). Such economic peripheralisation portended a ‘colonial or quasi-colonial status’ (Deckers 2007: 218) under what Amiya Bagchi (2009) has labeled ‘export-led exploitation’ characteristic of nineteenth-century economic imperialism. Britain’s success in raising ‘her entire territory into one immense manufacturing, commercial, maritime city’ depended on making ‘all the peoples of the earth her tributaries,’ from which she did not spare fellow Europeans (List 1909a: 240).²⁴ As attested by the profound resonance and popularity with which Listian arguments were received by late-nineteenth and early-twentieth anti-colonial movements, List’s mobilization of colonial imagery was not mere literary flourish. It actually captured the structural and socio-spatial unevenness of the nineteenth-century global capitalist order as well as the anxieties it induced in the intelligentsia of the subordinate and peripheral regions (Goswami 2004: 216-21).

The threat went beyond economic precarity, dependency and unequal exchange. It implicated the very imagination of Europe as a beacon of civilisation in the world. If British economic predominance were to continue unabated, through inaction, complicity, or corruption of continental statesmen, it would end in a crushing and irreversible world empire. Sidelining ‘the benighted countries of the Continent,’ British capital and labor would flow to Britain’s colonies, whereby ‘Asia, Africa, and Australia would be civilised

by England, and covered with new states modelled after the English fashion' (List 1909a: 104). Potential consequences were truly depressing for List. In this English world,

the European Continental nations would be lost as unimportant, unproductive races. By this arrangement it would fall to the lot of France, together with Spain and Portugal, to supply this English world with the choicest wines, and to drink the bad ones herself: at most France might retain the manufacture of a little millinery. Germany would scarcely have more to supply this English world with than children's toys, wooden clocks, and philological writings, and sometimes also an auxiliary corps, who might sacrifice themselves to pine away in the deserts of Asia or Africa, for the sake of extending the manufacturing and commercial supremacy, the literature and language of England. It would not require many centuries before people in this English world would think and speak of the Germans and French in the same tone as we speak at present of the Asiatic nations (List 1909a: 104).²⁵

This dramatic passage demonstrates how List telescoped the present state of Britain's colonies, and especially of India, into a disgraceful image of the future of continental Europe: deindustrialisation and economic marginalisation, consignment to supplying luxuries and trivialities to the imperial metropole, demeaning mercenary employment of German citizens in Britain's colonial ventures (much like the British East India Company's Sepoy army) and, above all, the reduction of continental Europeans to the same status as the barbarous peoples of Britain's imperial dominions.²⁶ And just as List's anti-imperial critique drew inspiration from India's subordinate integration to global capitalist networks, Indian nationalists in the 1880s and 1890s would draw upon Listian

vocabulary to arraign British colonial rule for turning India into the ‘countryside of Britain,’ that is, into an agrarian hinterland and captive market (Goswami 2005: 228).

At this point, List’s conjectures about Britain’s treatment of ‘the whole world as if it were a mere English *province*’ appear in a more urgent light. Judged by the tight entwinement of economic development and civilisation in List’s thought, falling prey to deindustrialisation would spell nothing short of a ‘relapse into a state of barbarism’ (List 1983: 74). Shot through with imperial categories of civilisation of savagery, Britain’s economic supremacy portended nothing less than the *provincialisation of Europe*.²⁷

Imperialising the nation, internationalising the empire

The same colonial vocabulary in which List explained Britain’s relationship to Germany also structured his basic definition of the ‘nation’ and its coordinates in the international order. In a passage worth citing in length, List wrote,

A nation in its normal state possesses one common language and literature, a territory endowed with manifold natural resources, extensive, and with convenient frontiers and a numerous population. Agriculture, manufactures, commerce, and navigation must be all developed in it proportionately; arts and sciences, educational establishments, and universal cultivation must stand in it on an equal footing with material production. Its constitution, laws, and institutions must afford to those who belong to it a high degree of security and liberty, and must promote religion, morality, and prosperity; in a word, must have the well-being of its citizens as their object. It must possess sufficient power on land and at sea to defend its independence and to protect its foreign commerce. It will possess the

power of beneficially affecting the civilisation of less advanced nations, and by means of its own surplus population and of their mental and material capital to found colonies and beget new nations (List 1909a: 132-3).

Up until the last sentence, this definition fits the secular, Enlightenment conception of the nation prevalent in the ‘age of revolution.’ It combines ideational elements of ‘liberal nationalism’ influential between 1830 and 1870 (Szporluk 1988: 109-15; Hobsbawm 1990: 30-2),²⁸ traces of the ‘fiscal-military’ state carried over from the early-modern period (Brewer 1989) and basic tenets of German cameralism and ‘policy science’ (Tribe 1995; Wakefield 2014; Reinert 2005). What is more significant, however, is the inclusion in the ‘normal’ definition of the nation the capacity to ‘civilise less advanced nations’ and expand *via* settler colonialism, which suggests that List’s national economy represented not so much an alternative to imperial economy as a specific modulation of it.²⁹ This last point was reflected in List’s praise of colonialism as an economic strategy: ‘The highest means of development of the manufacturing power, of the internal and external commerce proceeding from it, of any considerable coast and sea navigation, of extensive sea fisheries, and consequently of a respectable naval power, are *colonies*’ (List 1909a: 192-3). Colonialism was therefore not incidental to the national economy. Rather than an auxiliary project that a fully constituted nation might choose to engage, it was forwarded as a vital process that entered the very construction of the national economy.³⁰

Thus conceived, the construction of the national economy proceeded in and through an international division of labor in which

The mother nation supplies the colonies with manufactured goods, and obtains in return their surplus produce of agricultural products and raw materials; this

interchange gives activity to its manufactures, augments thereby its population and the demand for its internal agricultural products, and enlarges its mercantile marine and naval power. The superior power of the mother country in population, capital, and enterprising spirit, obtains through colonisation an advantageous outlet, which is again made good with interest by the fact that a considerable portion of those who have enriched themselves in the colony bring back the capital which they have acquired there, and pour it into the lap of the mother nation, or expend their income in it (List 1909a: 193).

Under the surface of this abstract economic formulation lurked the historical experience of empire, especially that of the British in South Asia, which shone through List's justification of this asymmetric division of labor by once again resorting to the language of the civilising mission. Simply by virtue of free trade, colonial populations would be led by the 'civilised nations of the earth ... along the path of security of law and order, of civilisation and prosperity' (List 1909a: 191).

This argument was not original in itself. The 'Colonial Reform Movement' in Britain, with Wakefield at the theoretical helm, had been advocating colonisation on political economic grounds for some time, which would later inspire John Stuart Mill (1965: 372) to declare 'colonisation' to be the 'the very best affair of business, in which the capital of an old and wealthy country can possibly engage' (also see Bell 2010). The crucial difference was that both Wakefield and Mill defended the principle of colonisation on self-avowedly *imperial* grounds, whereas List enlisted the same to the cause of *national* development. For nowhere List expressly advocated the formation of a German or American 'empire' a term he reserved for the territorial empires of Turkey,

Russia, or Napoleonic France.³¹ He also eschewed advocacy of conquest and military might in colonisation and, echoing the nineteenth century ideology of liberal imperialism, restricted the means of colonisation to ‘trade’ and ‘settlement.’

Advocating an essentially imperial division of labor while maintaining a formally national paradigm, or more precisely, carving out a nominally national economic space out of the thicket of imperial economic relations, hinged on one further theoretical move: the effacement of the historical violence through which the British Empire had come into being. The British story could be presented as a model for emulation palatable to liberal internationalist sensibilities only if it were evacuated of ignominious violence of colonial dispossession, extirpation and enslavement. List’s strategy was to displace the imperial division of labor onto a *natural* division of labor and to imbue its progress with a sense of historical fatalism. ‘Both *international* and *national division of labour* are chiefly determined by climate and by Nature herself,’ wrote List and continued,

The countries of the world most favoured by nature, with regard to both national and international division of labour ... are *the countries of the temperate zone*; for in these countries the manufacturing power especially prospers, by means of which the nation not merely attains to the highest degree of mental and social development and of political power, but is also enabled to make the countries of tropical climates and of inferior civilisation tributary in a certain measure to itself (List 1909a: 123-4).

Since this division of labor was based on natural causes, there was no reason to expect that they would or should change anytime. Therefore there existed no grounds for claiming injuries from the ‘tributary’ relations in which European powers had placed the

peoples of the ‘torrid zones.’ List’s depiction of the international division of labor was in effect the imperial division of labor *redux*, with path-dependent specialisation now stamped by the immutable imprimatur of nature.

List adduced a stylised history of the British India to vindicate his point: ‘this exchange between the countries of the temperate zone and the countries of the torrid zone is based upon natural causes, and will be so for all time. Hence India has given up her manufacturing power with her independence to England’ (List 1909a: 192). He conveniently stepped over the question of whether India had lost her independence due to ‘natural causes,’ circumventing decades of military conquest, legal domination and forced deindustrialisation that had turned India into an agrarian satellite (Washbrook 1981, 1999; Sartori 2006, 2008). Instead, he went on to generalise from the Indian example about the inexorable fate of Asia as a whole:

Wherever the mouldering civilisation of Asia comes into contact with the fresh atmosphere of Europe, it falls to atoms; and Europe will sooner or later find herself under the necessity of taking the whole of Asia under her care and tutelage, as already India has been so taken in charge by England. In this utter chaos of countries and peoples there exists no single nationality which is either worthy or capable of maintenance and regeneration. Hence the entire dissolution of the Asiatic nationalities appears to be inevitable, and a regeneration of Asia only possible by means of an infusion of European vital power, by the general introduction of the Christian religion and of European moral laws and order, by European immigration, and the introduction of European systems of government (List 1909a: 282).

In this narrative brimming with imperial confidence, List attributed the deindustrialisation, peripheralisation and subordination of the subcontinent solely to the organisational and technological superiority of Europeans that enabled them to invade South Asian markets with cheap commodities.³²

By contrast, the same natural causes that obviated the question of national independence in the torrid zone necessarily gave rise to the same question in the temperate zone. For instance, American colonies had seceded from Britain as soon as the imperial ties of dependency frustrated American aspirations to local industrialisation. ‘Canada will also secede after she has reached the same point,’ and ‘independent agricultural manufacturing states will also arise in the countries of temperate climate in Australia in the course of time’ (List 1909a: 193). The question of national independence *via* economic development was therefore confined to relations amongst European polities and settler ‘neo-Europes’ (Belich 2009) where economic dependency represented ‘a condition of slavery’ that affronted liberal and civilised sensibilities. In contrast, the same relations of dependency between (neo-)European polities and the rest of the world, far from being a moral aberration, constituted the very mechanism of historical progress of mankind, as ‘experience shows that the barbarous or semi-barbarous peoples of Asia, Africa, and South America who have become civilised have always been those whom the industrialised states have provided with stable administrations, protections of persons and property and freedom of trade (List 1983: 49). It followed that the same cosmopolitan doctrine that had to be combated in Europe ought to be promoted in economic dealings with the colonies by abandoning those national jealousies characteristic of the old mercantile system. While List conceded that ‘it might, at first sight, appear to be asking

too much of England to open her colonies to the commerce of all nations,' he deemed the liberalisation of colonial trade to be essential 'for the future prosperity of both advanced countries and backward and barbarous peoples' (List 1983: 49).³³

List's respective assignment of national and cosmopolitan doctrines to what we today call the 'global north' and the 'global south' would suggest that his theory of economic nationalism was not antithetical to the economy of empire. Rather, the national economy historically presupposed and theoretically subsumed imperial economic relations. It constituted less a universal path out of tributary subordination to the British industrial-financial metropole than a strategy for late-developers like Germany, France and the United States to gain entry to an expanded global circle of industrial and financial powers. By positing protectionism at home and colonisation abroad as the twin pillars of national economic development, List in effect promoted the political *internalisation* rather than the displacement of the imperial core-periphery relations. Put differently, List's theory took empire out of imperialism by substituting the nation for it. His program for the internal unification of Germany was intimately wedded to a program of external expansion that he expressed in unambiguous terms in the 'unalterable laws of nature by which civilised nations are driven on with the irresistible power to extend or transfer their powers of production to less cultivated countries ... population, powers of mind, material capital attain such dimensions that they must necessarily flow over into other less civilised countries' (List 1909a: 100). As Robert Brady (1943: 121-2) notes, expansion and *Machtpolitik* were inherent in the strategy of economic organisation List advocated. Like Krupp and Bismarck after him, List found himself 'talking the language of empire without scarcely knowing it,' and in his proposals for the peaceful conquest of markets

and raw materials, ‘imperialism went “underground.”’

This last point brings us full circle to the problem of the ‘jealousy of trade’ that List placed at the center of his critique of cosmopolitan economy. The inevitable mobility of capital, commodities, people and technology from developed to underdeveloped countries once again raised the problem of inter-state rivalry and conflict.³⁴ As Rothschild (2012) and Hont (2005: 6) have both argued, Adam Smith had avoided outlining an international political-institutional order for governing inter-state commercial rivalry. List confronted this problem with a two-step solution. The first was to establish a balance of wealth between major European and neo-European powers through industrial policy and strike economic alliances initially between continental nations against Britain and subsequently between Britain and European powers against the economic giants of the future, the United States and Russia.³⁵ Building on the first, the second step would be to construct an international treaty framework of ‘federative political associations,’ which would provide ‘political coverage to the entire world market’ (Hont 2005: 153).³⁶ List struck an optimistic tenor on this point, since he glimpsed an enlightened cognizance of economic interdependency in the ‘congresses of the great European powers,’ in which ‘Europe possessed already the embryo of a future congress of nations’ (List 1909a: 100).

List’s own proposal to nurture this embryo was to set up a ‘world trade congress’ composed of European and neo-European states. The congress would function as a platform for negotiating ‘how the common interests of the various nations can be best served,’ including ‘regions and societies at different stages of economic development – such as industrialised, agrarian, colonial and primitive societies’ (List 1983: 126). List

brought under the roof of the same international organisation the enlightened principle of equality and reciprocity between independent nations and a doctrine of tutelage over colonial societies. By *politically* entrenching global economic relations of core and periphery and vesting in a congress of ‘civilised nations’ the power to decide the fate of the ‘barbaric peoples,’ the world trade congress in certain measure sought to ‘internationalise’ imperial relations.³⁷ It also disclosed, once again, that the nations for which List sought a rightful place under the sun were, actual or potential, imperial nations. Belying its avowed nationalism, the politico-legal framework for List’s theory of economic development was not the nation-state but the colonial empire.

Conclusion

Based on the foregoing exposition it is tempting to conclude that List was yet another nineteenth-century imperialist who clothed his imperial agenda in the nominal anti-imperialism of the national principle. Yet such a dismissal would be hasty. List’s theory *was* animated by a genuinely anti-imperial sentiment, as attested by his reference to Britain’s colonies as the living proof of the dangers of economic peripheralisation, indignity and injustice that hovered above continental Europe.³⁸ On the other hand, its anti-imperialist edge hardly warrants celebrating List’s theory as one of ‘benevolent economic nationalism’ (Levi-Faur 1997b: 367) or as a humanist corrective to the shallow materialism of classical political economy (Winch 1998). As we have seen, by substantively predicating the national economy on imperial relations of production and exchange and by positing the ‘civilising mission’ as central to internal consolidation and external expansion, List effectively confined the national principle to European states and

their neo-European offshoots, denying the possibility of independent national development to the rest of the world. What carried the emancipatory promise of List's theory beyond Europe was not its universal and inclusive principles, but its practical appropriation by late-nineteenth and twentieth-century decolonisation struggles as a weapon against European imperialism.³⁹

As Manu Goswami (2004: 220) argues in a brilliant study of the birth of economic nationalism in colonial India, 'it was precisely the promise of formally replicable, self-engendered, and territorially delimited economic development, which underwrote Listian national developmentalism, that helped propel its increasing popularity.' While the success of Listian strategies in the US, Germany, and Japan certainly reinforced their appeal to anti-colonial and post-colonial developmental ambitions (Goswami 2004: 221), the reason for the *National System's* 'profound resonance' in the Indian context is to be sought in the structurally analogous position of Germany in the first and India in the second half of the nineteenth century in the global expansion of capitalist networks dominated by Great Britain. As I have argued, List articulated his account of Anglo-German economic relations in the image of quasi-colonial dependency and peripheralisation, whereby India's present portended Germany's future. Thus it is not surprising to see Indian nationalists like Dadabhai Naoroji (1825-1917) and Govind Ranade (1842-1901), who likewise assigned India's poverty to its status as a 'dependent colonial economy,' to find inspiration in List's anti-imperialist motif of economic independence (Goswami 1998: 615). Like List before them, they were engaged in the effort to carve out and call into existence a distinctly national space from the transnational and imperial political-economic structures in which their imagined

communities were enmeshed. Even List's stadial-universalist equation of 'civilization' with industrialization and development would insinuate itself into Indian nationalist thought (Goswami 1998: 628).

Yet, List's ideas did not travel to colonial contexts lock, stock, and barrel but were pushed in radical directions where List himself did not venture. Ranade, for instance, despite being the 'chief exponent of List' in India, declaimed against the politically anodyne, climactic version of the imperial division of labor that List snuck back into his theory (Goswami 2004: 211). Extricating national developmentalism from the imperial tapestry into which it was originally woven owed less to an internal theoretical critique than to its circulation in contexts and deployment for political purposes that were not intended or even imagined by List himself. List had called upon the statesmen of 'second-rate industrialising countries,' like Germany and the US, but his call was also heard and answered by the colonized to whom it was emphatically *not* addressed. Consequently, national developmentalism morphed from a crypto-imperial strategy into a crystallized expression of anti-imperial animus. As Goswami notes, 'by refracting and reworking the problem of political-economic autonomy and development with specific reference to colonial unevenness, they [Indian nationalists] radicalized its political signification, deepened its social reference, and transformed the "original" in turn' (Goswami 2004: 280). The long 'radical afterlife' of List's theory, its subsequent adoptions and reformulations in the service of various anti-colonial struggles and post-colonial projects, can also explain how it has shed its imperial baggage over the course of the twentieth century such that the nation-state could emerge as the political unit of analysis of economic development. The theoretical genealogy of the 'national economy'

is thereby partly the record of the ideological-institutional reformulations that have effaced the assumptions of economic unevenness and logics of peripheralisation that List had originally built into his theory of economic nationalism.

Post-revolutionary debates on ‘socialism in one country’ (Bukharin and Preobrazhensky 1969) and postwar theories of ‘stages of economic growth’ (Rostow 1960) would be obvious cases in such a genealogy of the national economy. But perhaps more illustrative of the imperial erasure in the field of political economy is the recent turn in institutional economics to histories of colonialism as an explanatory factor in contemporary levels of development (Acemoglu et al. 2000; Diamond and Robinson 2010; Acemoglu and Robinson 2012). Put summarily, these studies correlate different colonial heritages with divergent national economic performances in the present, linking the two through the historical continuity of growth-enhancing or growth-inhibiting institutions. What tend to get screened out in these accounts are processes of expropriation, extraction and exploitation that were constitutive of these colonial lineages. In particular, the treatment of ‘neo-Europes’ (Anglophone settler colonies) as exemplary cases in the continuity of growth-enhancing institutions looks past histories of extirpation and extreme marginalisation of the indigenous populations and their non-capitalist social institutions.

Broadening our scope from the nation-state to the colonial empire in political economic analysis suggests that if one leg of the developmental ‘ladder’ stood on innovation, industry and liberal institutions, the other rested on colonial dispossession, displacement and exploitation. Taking the nation-state as the principal political unit of economic development sequesters economic development from imperial histories of

coercion, leaving us with etiolated correlations between such sanitised variables as ‘direct rule,’ ‘indirect rule,’ and ‘economic growth’ (Lange 2009). Excavating the imperial moorings of the national economy discloses the historical embeddedness of the nation-state in enduring colonial lineages and call for critically scrutinising our categories of economic development, state-building and international relations.

Secondly, we can still discern ambivalences attendant to economic nationalism in contemporary debates about development. List’s arguments were rekindled in the long winter of neoliberalism by a number of development economists who challenged the ideological tide of the Washington Consensus (Chang 2003; Wade 2003, 2006; Weiss 2005; Kohli 2004; Amsden 2007). While these neo-Listian efforts are valuable in highlighting the neoliberal intensification of economic dependency and calling for enlarging the policy space available to developing nations, they ignore what Ben Selwyn (2009: 167) calls ‘List’s dark side,’ namely, labor repression that accompanies late-development attempts through ‘state capitalism.’ Selwyn’s argument can be amplified by being placed in the imperial framework developed in this essay. If List’s scheme of a national economy is indeed inspired by Britain’s imperial division of labor, then it becomes possible to view many postcolonial state-led industrialisation attempts (Scott 1998) as partaking in a mode of ‘internal colonialism’ whereby the countryside is subordinated to the imperatives of urbanisation and industrialisation.⁴⁰

Finally, List continues to resonate with debates in international political economy over neomercantilism, be it in the domineering performance of Germany’s export economy or in Chinese interventionism to achieve the same effect. In another ironic twist of history, the same Germany that List feared would be provincialised by British

supremacy has emerged from the 2008 crisis as the leading ‘core’ European economy, preaching the virtues of innovation, competitiveness and fiscal discipline to the ‘peripheral’ economies of southern Europe. The precocious vision of a ‘united Europe’ attributed to List (Roussakis 1968; Reinert 2005; Winch 2007) has come to pass in the form of European customs and monetary union, though not without reproducing the core-periphery relations that List sought to exorcise from the continent.⁴¹

NOTES

¹ Lionel Robbins (1998: 240) in his acclaimed LSE lectures compared List only to Adam Smith and Karl Marx in terms of the influence he exerted on the economic policy of his time.

² See, for instance, the report on ‘state capitalism’ published in *The Economist* (Woolridge 2012); Stephen Halper’s (2010) neologism, ‘Beijing consensus’; Ian Bremmer (2010) and James McGregor’s (2012) portents of the ‘end of the free market’ and the rise of ‘authoritarian capitalism.’ The opinion is succinctly captured by Clyde Prestowitz (2012), who writes ‘most of Asia, much of South America, the Middle East, Germany and parts of Europe are playing neo-mercantilism.’

³ For an authoritative personal and intellectual biography of List, see Henderson 1983.

⁴ List spent considerable time in France, first in 1822, then in 1831 and 1837-1840. The latest and longest phase of his residence coincided with the wake of the French national controversy on free trade in 1834. For an excellent reconstruction of nineteenth-century French debates on protectionism and free trade, as well as the impact of these debates on List’s political economy, see Todd 2015, especially chapter 4.

⁵ Dupin also used the term “productive forces” in referring to the development of industry, though he and List arrived at these cognate concepts independently. Todd 2015: 149.

⁶ It should be noted that Smith held an ambivalent position on the relationship between agriculture and manufactures. On the one hand, he contrasted the “unnatural and retrograde” urban-commercial development of Europe with the “natural course” of opulence in agrarian American colonies. On the other, he expressly conceded that division of labor, the principal force of productivity, found greater room for

improvement in manufacturing than in agriculture, and that civilised and wealthy countries were distinguished from their barbarous and poor counterparts by their advancement in manufactures. See Smith 1981: 308-11; Hopkins 2013.

⁷ List frequently adduced as support to his protectionist advocacy the continental blockade during the Napoleonic Wars, which cut off trade with Britain and forced France and Russia to develop their own manufacturing capacity. He reserved special praise for Count Karl Nesselrode in Russia and Antoine Chaptal in France as practical statesmen who oversaw the industrial policy of the two countries and grasped the centrality of industrial independence to economic independence more broadly. Chaptal, in particular, represented for List the revival of Colbertian policies, which List wholeheartedly supported and which earned Chaptal the reputation of ‘a Colbert of the nineteenth century.’ List 1909a: 80-1; Henderson 1989a: 106.

⁸ Gallagher-Robinson thesis has not been without its detractors. For a frontal criticism, see Platt 1968.

⁹ A major obstacle to effective tariffs was the preponderance of Prussian agrarian interests that preferred a more liberal trade regime than demanded by Rhenish and south German manufacturing concerns. For a brief and instructive account, see Henderson 1935. List was familiar with effects of fragmented economic interests on the obstruction of tariff policy, as he had observed a comparable dynamic play out between the Southern planters and Northeastern industrialists in the United States prior to his return to Europe.

¹⁰ For an instructive historical account of English protectionist strategies, see Chang 2003: 19-24; O’Brien 1998. Reinert (2005: 49) also notes the similarity between the German economic tradition and pre-Smithian English economics.

¹¹ List trained his sights on George Canning and William Huskisson as early as his *Outlines of American Political Economy*. There he wrote, ‘the seeming adherence of Messrs. Canning and Messrs. Huskisson to Messrs. Say and Smith’s theory is one of the most extraordinary of first-rate political maneuvers that have ever been played upon the credulity of the world.’ List 1827: 178.

¹² For a detailed examination of Fichte’s theory of closed commercial state, see Nakhimovsky 2011. List’s writings on the American economy in the late 1820s betray an autarkist streak, which can be attributed to the uniquely continental scale of the US economy that suggested self-sufficiency as a viable idea. By the

late 1830s, List openly distanced his position, very much like Thiers, from autarky and free trade alike. Todd 2015: 146.

¹³ Duncan Bell and Casper Sylvest (2006: 211) define liberal internationalism as the belief that ‘it was possible to build a just order on the basis of existing patterns of cooperation between distinct political communities.’ List’s theory belonged to this species of thought by virtue of its equidistance to utopian cosmopolitanism and ethnocentric nationalism.

¹⁴ On nineteenth-century ideologies of imperial rule, see Pitts 2005, Mehta 1999, Moloney 2001.

¹⁵ Although List was very knowledgeable in British economic history and political economy, he did not spend any substantial time in Britain. He paid only two visits to the island towards the end of his life, which do not appear to have had a major impact on the principles of his political economy. See Henderson 1989b.

¹⁶ It is worth noting that List did not spare European countries from the civilisational hierarchy of his theory of development. He placed Spain, Portugal and Southern Italy in the barbarous first stage of economic progress. List 1909a: 96.

¹⁷ List saw the absence of an enlightened and entrepreneurial middle class as both the cause and the sign of a country’s socioeconomic backwardness. He adduced the economic stagnation of Russia and the demise of Poland as evidence for this observation (List 1909a: 82, 139). List was in fact echoing a broader agreement amongst Western European philosophers and political economists who indexed civilisational advancement to the growth of a robust ‘third estate’ located between the leisurely aristocratic classes and the mass of poor peasants and laborers. See Adamovsky: 2010.

¹⁸ On this point, List prefigured Marx (1978a, 1978b) and Marx and Engels (1978), who would pour scorn on the peasantry as ‘a sack of potatoes’ who languished in the ‘idiocy of rural life,’ and who had no hope of redemption until national bourgeoisies of continental Europe would stand on their feet and bring upon them the calamitous but progressive transformation that the British rule wrought in India. Also see Semmel 1993 on Marx and Engels’s engagement with theories of economic nationalism.

¹⁹ This is not to imply that ‘civilisation’ itself was an inherently imperial concept, though it lent itself to be employed for justifying claims of imperial tutelage over colonial populations. For a detailed study, see Mehta 1999. Secondly, ‘civilising mission’ could rest as much on agrarianist arguments as industrial ones,

as attested by John Locke and Thomas Jefferson's denial to Native Americans proprietary rights in America until they enclosed and 'improved' the land. See Arneil 1995.

²⁰ There exists a substantial literature that critiques the Westphalian paradigm from political, legal and economic angles. See, for example, Benton 2010 and Teschke 2003.

²¹ List saw the agricultural protectionism of the Corn Laws as a colossal anomaly to Britain's propensity to become the 'industrial metropolis of the world' and attributed this aberration to British landowners' lack of vision. List 1983: 138.

²² For a theorisation of the colonial empire, rather than the nation-state, as the politico-legal framework of commercial-capitalist relations, see Ince 2014. On the importance of colonial commerce in developing capitalist techniques of mass production, processing and consumption in early-modern England, see Pincus 2009: 82-7; Zahedieh 2010.

²³ Marx would reiterate this argument in *Capital* (1976: 931): 'The United States are, speaking economically, still only a colony of Europe.' Gallagher and Robinson (1953: 10) restrict this colonial relationship to the southern states of the US.

²⁴ On the profound, if under-acknowledged, influence of List's theory on neo-Marxist critiques of imperialism, see Semmel 1993: 165-6, 188-9.

²⁵ These notes of alarm closely mirrored the concerns of French protectionists like Dupin, who warned that 'absolute liberty' in foreign trade would leave France with 'one or two industries.' Todd 2015: 126.

²⁶ Further dramatising the colonial imagery, List (1909a: 264) wrote, 'the islanders would not even grant to the poor Germans what they conceded to the conquered Hindoos ... In vain did the Germans humble themselves to the position of hewers of wood and drawers of water for the Britons. The latter treated them worse than a subject people.'

²⁷ The tacit reference here is to Dipesh Chakrabarty (2000). I argue that List offers us a glimpse into another aspect of provinciality of Europe, which eludes Chakrabarty's optic of 'historical difference' and cannot be accessed without due attention to the language of political economy in which vagaries of imperialism were articulated.

²⁸ List was not an ethnocentric nationalist. His American citizenship aside, he addressed his works equally to American, French and German audiences. He also distanced himself from essentialist conceptions of

race and blood, which he deemed irrelevant to economic development. Yet, the secular Enlightenment understanding of the nation to which he subscribed also entailed a standard of viability in terms of size, population, and resources. On these grounds, List deemed Netherlands and Denmark to be unviable nations and envisaged their eventual annexation by a unified Germany. See List 1909a: 56-7, 133.

²⁹ ‘Less advanced nations’ (*‘minder vorgerückter Nationen’* in the original) also included backward, agrarian countries of Southern Europe (see footnote 16 above). Yet List nowhere makes a case for imperial tutelage over these countries the way he deemed necessary and inescapable for Asia. Reasons for this differential treatment are discussed below.

³⁰ List’s case for late-industrialising nations and his defense of colonial expansion as economic strategy explains his enthusiastic support for the French occupation of Algeria, further illustrating his preference for a *European*, as opposed to narrowly German, cause for catching up with Britain. He even obtained a commission from his friend Thiers for his son to serve as a military officer in Algeria (Todd 2012). For German colonial expansion, List personally recommended Central and South America. The American experience of compounding formal independence from imperial Britain with ongoing settler-colonial expansionism appears to be a major inspiration here, formed during List’s American sojourn.

³¹ List frequently spoke of Russia, Turkey, and Napoleonic France as ‘empires’ (*‘Reichs’*) – *‘die russischen Reichs,’ ‘die türkischen Reichs,’ ‘das französische Kaiserreich.’* His invocations of “German Empire” (*‘deutschen Reichs’*) are strictly restricted to the Holy Roman Empire. Curiously, he refrained from coupling ‘English’ and ‘British’ with ‘empire,’ except for ‘her great Indian Empire’ (*‘sein großes ostindisches Reich’*). List 1909a: 42, 51, 59, 73, 82.

³² Here List once more foreshadowed Marx and Engels (1978: 477), who would attribute the economic penetration of Asia to mass-produced, cheap European commodities that ‘batter down all Chinese walls.’

³³ List’s consistent referral to colonial populations as ‘peoples’ rather than ‘nations’ would appear not to be accidental. The idea that backward colonial populations would attain national consciousness thanks to the political tutelage of advanced nations was the backbone of nineteenth-century liberal imperialism.

³⁴ According to Ian Clark (2011: 114), a paradoxical source of instability of nineteenth-century British hegemony was that Britain’s capacity to lead its European contenders by the force of example also proved to be the primary push behind the race to colonisation and militarisation.

³⁵ In 1846, List penned a memorandum addressed British Prime minister Sir Robert Peel, proposing an Anglo-German alliance against the inevitable economic ascendancy of the United States and the aggressive foreign policy of Russia. See Henderson 1989b: 124-5.

³⁶ Once again, the United States provided List with the resources with which to build projections of a federated Europe and even a federated world in which capital, commodities and labor would flow freely. List 1909a: 103.

³⁷ List's vision of a World Trade Congress can be interpreted as prefiguring the Mandate System of the interwar period that juridified the nineteenth-century colonial discourse of the civilising mission by instituting the 'dual mandate' of promoting economic development and material welfare in mandate territories. See Anghie 2005; Rist 2008.

³⁸ Without accounting for the emancipatory promise of Listian ideas, we cannot explain their appeal to many nineteenth-century developmental projects on the periphery of Europe, where 'Adam Smith was regarded as the equal of Friedrich List – where authors such as Carey, Hamilton or St. Simon ... were believed to provide superior guidance on the path to growth, than Mill and Marshall' (Psalidopoulos and Mata 2002: 6).

³⁹ List's influence permeated the economically and politically peripheral countries of Europe at the same time it extended to extra-European contexts. In the hundred years following its publication, the *National System* was translated into a dozen European languages. Even in countries where it circulated only in its German original, like the late-Ottoman Empire and post-Ottoman Turkey, it left a significant intellectual impact, especially amongst the modernising elites. Todd 2015: 153.

⁴⁰ This is more than an imagistic analogy. The radical *swadeshi* activist Radhakamal Mukherjee *did* extend the critique of colonial division of labor to the town-country division within the nation-state and argued that 'skill, enterprise, knowledge, and wealth' drained from the village to the city. Goswami 2004: 239.

⁴¹ It is suggestive that some of the European countries criticised for their lack of competitiveness today, like Spain, Portugal and Italy, were included by List amongst those backward and 'barbarous' regions that would benefit from the civilising impact of free trade with the advanced countries. List 1983: 50.

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