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Anna Sundelin
Åbo Akademi, General history

**Working title: Consumption and the emergence of consumer societies during the era of the slave trade: London and Jamaica in comparison**

During the last thirty years consumption has been of great interest to researchers of history. Throughout this period the focus has been slightly altered, earlier it was mainly on the production of goods, today the main interest lies on the demand. In the same time the methods have changed, interdisciplinary research has been more of a rule and new sources like diaries and inventories are used. Roy Porters and John Brewers anthology *Consumption and the World of Goods*, published in the beginning of the 1990’s, is generally seen as a turning point in the research about consumption in a historical perspective. It encouraged new approaches and gave the research about consumption in a historical perspective an upswing. One of the reasons for this being an interesting research field is that consumer society is the product of a long historical evolution, both material and mental. Our attitudes have a history and examination of their origins may be helpful in assessing contemporary life.

Consumption in the early-modern era has previously been seen as unthinkable, at least for others than the richest part of the population. Today research shows that new colonial products like coffee, tea, sugar and tobacco in time became almost necessities for the majority of Europeans. These goods spurred the trade in other things like china and porcelain for drinking the tea and coffee in. Other goods that circulated in the world wide trade were for instance different kinds of fine fabrics like silk and linen from Asia. There was also of course the intense slave trade. The new goods, that can bee seen as luxuries since they were not needed for the survival of the people were marketed by new methods, advertisements and eye-catching window displays. Even if there had for quite long been a global trade in luxury goods it was not until the end of the seventeenth and beginning of the eighteenth centuries that the global trade gave rise to product innovation in Europe in attempts to imitate and to make indigenous products that were manufactured in the advanced consumer societies of China and India. The Europeans did not import the technologies on which the Asian luxuries were based on but gave rise to a new form of industry in England. It was not however the increase in the consumption in general that provided the incentive for the big changes in productive resources, but a shift in tastes for novelties, fashion goods and luxuries. Luxury is important to the global history of consumption since it provides a key to trade and economic policy in the early modern period. A world economy, perceived during the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries through a trade in luxuries and exotics, provided a significant source of innovation in technologies, products marketing strategies and commercial and financial institutions.

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The luxuries brought from Asia were special to the Europeans, since they were associated with a civilized way of life, especially appealing to the middle classes.\(^3\)

When the consumption habits changed in Europe the culture also got more commercialised. The focus shifted from the court to the cities; coffeehouses, debating societies, galleries, concert halls and theatres became the new arenas for consumption. Culture became a commodity, something that could be bought and sold. Money became more important than privileges for those who wanted to gain access to culture in the form of theatres, concerts, the public gardens and literature.\(^4\) Colin Campbell talks about these changes as a “cultural revolution”. According to him this should be no surprise since the new ways to consume developed from alterations in attitudes and ethics.\(^5\) There is also a connection between the changes in the consumer habits and the changes in sociability. Some of the new goods, especially foodstuffs, tea, coffee, sugar, chocolate, tobacco, they were not just addictive, they were also consumed in particular cultural sites.\(^6\)

Consumerism started somewhere after the 1450’s when a global economy slowly began developing. The globalization of trade between the years 1450 and 1800 was an important change. China stood in the centre of this trade until about 1750 but also Southeast Asia, Africa, India, Japan, America and Europe took part. The growing contacts between different parts of the world led to new ideas and information that challenged existing intellectual, religious, cultural and political orders. These changes spread all over the world and were dealt with differently in different regions. In some parts of the world they were adopted while the resistance could be hard in other parts and lead to a reinforcement of the old knowledge and insight.\(^7\) The changes in society that the increasing trade and new consumer goods brought with them were so fundamental and became the cause of so great changes in society that some researchers today have started talking about a consumer revolution that took place in the eighteenth century.\(^8\) Although several other scholars have tried to tone down the revolution part there is no doubt that the changes were far reaching and fundamental.\(^9\) According to Peter Stearns it may be that Western consumer forms may turn out to be the most successful Western influence in world history, more eagerly sought than political democracy.\(^10\)

With the words of C.A. Bayly, the period from 1760-1830 can be seen as the first age of truly global imperialism. This is the first time when changes in America can be

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\(^6\) Berg, p. 98.  
\(^8\) Porter & Brewer (1993)  
seen as having some effect on Asia, for instance since the American Revolution forces changes in the trading patterns by making the English East India Company deepen its purchases of tea in China. Before this period in time something that Bayly refers to as “archaic globalization” took place. Archaic globalization stemmed from many sources and was underplayed by three general principles: the idea of universal kingship, the expansive urge of cosmic religion and bodily practice. In my research I am mainly interested in this third principle since the transmission of ideas encouraged the movement of goods, which in turn spread new ideas.\(^\text{11}\)

The focus of my research will be London, Great Britain and Boston in North America. Even though Boston was provincial in comparison with metropolises like London and Paris in Europe, the cities were much alike.\(^\text{12}\) Since I am interested in global networks I am also going to take a closer look on Jamaica and the Gold Coast, places that were connected with London and Boston by trade during the eighteenth century. My goal is to study the connection between consumption and identity in these places. I am also interested in studying how many people were involved in the consumerism at different levels, in other words, what appealed to whom and why? Even though the consumption became more “democratic” in time some goods were still only for the rich and wealthy. My research, which aims at a Ph.D. thesis, will be interdisciplinary since I am trying to make use of sociology and anthropology to create a picture of and understand the different consumption patterns. This because earlier research has shown that questions about consumption in a historical context are complex and can not be answered just by one discipline\(^\text{13}\). My research will be a continuation of my master’s thesis entitled “[---] and I had money enough to live like a gentleman. Konsumtion och identitet i 1700-talets London”.

It has been said that the most striking development in consumer buying during the early modern period was the mass adoption by the English and the colonials of certain non-European groceries.\(^\text{14}\) A growing market for sugar was the first signs of consumerism. Sugar has been called the world’s first mass consumer good. The purchase of sugar cannot be seen as full consumerism but it was a first step since sugar gave a taste for food that was by no means necessary. Also other kinds of purchases were made. People started spending on household furniture as early as the 16\(^{\text{th}}\) century. Tulips too were another novelty purchase for many people in the seventeenth century. Tulips, as well as other flowers, were also painted and new variants were developed. The enthusiasm for tulips did however not reach ordinary people and when it faded away it was not instantly followed by another trend which became standard when consumerism was fully installed. At he end of the seventeenth century expansion of colonial trade and profit spurred a boom. One obvious sign of the development of consumerism during the eighteenth century was the massive increase in the number of shops and the new ways which were used to get the consumers to buy the goods, i.e. advertising. The shopkeepers and their new ways became the first sign of a consumer society. Interesting window displays, the offering of credits, the use of advertisements and so on all aimed at getting


\(12\) Ben Fine, (2002), p. ix-x.

the consumers to buy goods that they did not need for their subsistence but for other reasons.\footnote{Stearns (2001), p. 16-17.}

The changes in consumer habits led to widely spread debate. The theories of the Dutch physician living in England Bernard de Mandeville can be seen as a turning point in the debate about luxury and consumption in the Early-Modern era. According to de Mandeville luxury was a common good. He thought that people by nature were egoistic, pleasure seeking and that luxury was a way of getting use of these traits. By being egoistic and consume luxuries those who could afford helped the trade to grow and created more work opportunities. The luxuries also got a new meaning as indicators of status. Persons who did not know each other before made assumptions by each others status by the way they were dressed.\footnote{Maxine Berg & Elizabeth Eger, 'The Rise and Fall of the Luxury Debates', \textit{Luxury in the Eighteenth Century. Debates, Desires and Delectable Goods}, Maxine Berg & Elizabeth Eger (red), (New York 2003), p. 8-10.}

Also the famous economist Adam Smith dealt with the changes in consumer habits in his writings. According to him a tax on tobacco, sugar and tea, goods that were considered luxuries among the lower classes put a strain on the workers possibilities to use them. This would make it possible for them to give food to more children that would grow up to become good workers. Smith also thought that the aristocrats got most use and pleasure out of their riches when they could show them to others. Beautiful and rare objects became worth even more if they were rare or if collecting them was something that the only the aristocrats hade the time and money to do.\footnote{Adam Smith, \textit{The Wealth of Nations}, (London 1904) p. 57, 173, 355-356.}

The consumer revolution was not only about economic statistics and technologic innovations, it also gave rise to deeply upsetting conflicts in individual and social value. Earlier people did not to a large extent have the economic funds or possibilities to consume a lot but as time went by more and more consumers had the possibility to choose what to buy and where. The growing time for leisure and the improved health standards as well as improved education where all reasons for these new possibilities to consume. The new ways for consumption were of course good in many ways but they also provoked remorse and guilt, craving and envy and uneasy conscience since people sensed that they had enough but still wanted more.\footnote{Williams (1982), p. 4.} These feelings are of course still felt by many today.

The increase in consumption during the 18th century has been explained in many ways by historians, anthropologists and sociologists. It is quite interesting to notice that no one knows even today exactly why people want goods, eve after several hundred years of thought on the subject.\footnote{Mary Douglas & Baron Isherwood, \textit{The World of Goods. Towards an anthropology of consumption} (New York 1979, 1996), p. 3.} Earlier the lower classes’ changing consumption habits were seen as a way for them to climb higher on the social ladder.\footnote{Georg Simmel, \textit{The Philosophy of Money} (London 1978), p. 224, 461-462, Thorstein Bunde Veblen, \textit{Den arbetsfria klassen} (1986) p. 34, 69.} Today the explanation is thought to be more complicated. There are several theories that try to explain the connection between consumption, status and identity. To show ones identity is generally seen as an important reason for consumption. During the eighteenth century the
impression that other people got of you was maybe more important than today. Good
taste, politeness and refinement were not worth much if you could not share them with
others.\textsuperscript{21} To be seen as a gentleman or -woman was important, both in England and in
the colonies. The rise of gentility and politeness after about 1700 was a question of a
philosophy, a way of life to which one committed oneself and the means to understand
oneself and one’s place in the world. Since it embraced every aspect of manners and
morals, it was a complete system of conduct. In the colonies the rise of gentility helped to
define a new social order in which a small minority of colonists began to build elaborate
homes, surround themselves with expensive furnishings, dress in elegant costumes and
carry themselves in more mannered ways. These same people began to identity common
interests and communicate with one another in new ways. Gentility developed alongside
a metropolitan print culture in the colonies, which carried news and ideas from London to
the maturing port towns like Portsmouth, Boston and New York. It depended on the
expansive network of manufacturers and merchants who supplied colonial ports with a
growing array of fine material accessories that made up the cultural universe of genteel
colonists, who defined themselves apart from their neighbours but in connection with
like-minded individuals.\textsuperscript{22} In ethnographic practice it is standard to assume that all
material possessions carry social meanings and to concentrate a main part of cultural
analysis upon their use as communicators.\textsuperscript{23}

During the eighteenth century England was the dominating commercial nation in
Europe with trade stations in many places, on the west coast of Africa, the West Indies
and in North America. The fact that the British Empire occupied a very large geographic
demographic space was a very important reason for the increase in trade. Already at
the end of the seventeenth century the British Empire could not make use of all the goods
that were imported, a big part of the goods had to be exported or exchanged for European
goods.\textsuperscript{24} As time went by trade with the colonies became more important for Great
Britain than the trade with Europe and a coherent Atlantic economic system developed.\textsuperscript{25}
There was a great exchange of goods but also people between Britain and the colonies.
The emigration to the colonies improved the chances of employment for those who did
not emigrate while the colonies got more manpower. The production of goods increased
and so did the consumption.\textsuperscript{26} With time the importance of India increased and India
became the most important colony. The colonies were established by private enterprises
and trade companies with private armies. The \textit{East India Company}, with monopoly on
India was a project that involved the whole nation since everyone could by a part in it.\textsuperscript{27}
The emergence of the British East India Company can be seen as an important force
promoting a shift in the focus of the trade more towards east from 1760 onwards. The
trade ships but also others, like the famous explorations of James Cook led to a new

\textsuperscript{24} Nuala Zahedieh, ‘London and the Colonial Consumer in the Late Seventeenth Century’, \textit{The Economic
\textsuperscript{25} Leos Müller, ‘Kolonialprodukter i Sveriges handel och konsumtionskultur 1700-1800. Historisk
\textit{Tidsskrift för Sverige’}. Nr. 2 2004, p. 231.
\textsuperscript{26} Zahedieh (1994), p. 258-259.
\textsuperscript{27} Philip Lawson, \textit{The East India Company} (London 1993), p. 74.
understanding of the world as the knowledge of geography improved and the maps became better and more exact. These travels also led to surveying and mapping of colonial wealth, political boundaries and town centres, significant to commercial relations and colonial power.  

Consumption in Early modern England is in itself not a new research field, since already the contemporary people were interested in it. They noticed that consumption had divided the society into three different groups, those who could not consume those who did consume too much and the group in between and that the different classes in society could be divided according to their consumption habits.

The eighteenth century was, at least in comparison with the earlier centuries an relatively calm period in the history of England. The disturbances caused by the restoration had calmed down in London and the plague had stopped pestering the city. No huge fires troubled the city and the enormous increase in the population stopped some. London did still continue to be the biggest city in England and in Europe.

The process of inventing new consumer goods to substitute for Asian luxuries was not just about connections between Europe and Asia, but included Africa and the Americas. In Britain’s case the colonies in West India and North America had a great significance for both exports and imports. The goals which incorporated West Africa, the Caribbean and North America into the production and distribution of global luxury were about merchants’ search for imports – for manufactured goods and colonial groceries, but also for dyestuff for the woollen and linen industries, for high-grade iron and other metals for metalworkers, for clays and kaolin for potters, for potash, for sulphuric acid for glassmaking, bleaching and soap production, and for flax and cotton. In order to achieve a blooming trade, the English established Free-trade areas and bounties which provided new opportunities for developing British consumer goods.

From an historical point of view American consumerism was an imitation. The colonies-soon-to-be the United States became influenced by the consumerism in Western Europe and copied it from there. As we all know the United States were in time to become world leading in this field, a consumer giant. Therefore it is of great interest to notice that America was quite well prepared too copy the commercialization, no other society seized on the consumer revolution nearly as readily.

The Atlantic Colonies of North America were closely tied to Western Europe, particularly England, in trade. They were generating some commercial wealth, mainly through products, like tobacco and furs, sold to Europe. The colonial territories would provide sources of exotic raw materials alternative to those formerly brought from the East, and places of experimentation in developing the materials for new British consumer and luxury goods. Cultural links were close as well, on the part of white settlers. Colonists in back country America could see themselves as “English people who happened to live in the provinces”. They could consume the same wide range of British and oriental commodities as could those who shopped in the English countryside. It was hardly surprising that Europe’s exploding consumerism spilled across the ocean. It was

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31 Berg, p. 133.
white Americans who provided the longer lasting basis for American consumerism, and in this group as well important changes occurred during the eighteenth century. Here too new European good proved very appealing. The number of stores did increase and peddlers mined the more remote areas. A sense of new necessities developed, particularly among people of middle income in the cities as well as among southern planters. Of the consumer items current in Europe, certain food luxuries, and particularly tea and coffee, plus the array of tableware and selected household furnishings gained ground the most. Clothing fashions and related products had an audience as well, but there were fewer changes than in Europe. American consumer spending had a family context, which made the new household goods particularly relevant. The new consumerist ways met a great deal of resistance, the biggest reason being that the new ways were imported. During the 1760s when protests against British taxation and other policies mounted various patriotic groups tried to organize consumer boycotts of British goods. In the course of the eighteenth century, the British Parliament used its right to make laws for the Empire as a whole and try to increase trade by legislation and administration. The changes were all made in a mercantilist atmosphere, increasing the restrictions on the freedom to trade and manufacture. Also the Navigation Acts of 1660, 1661 and 1663 restricted the transport of goods in a negative way for the inhabitants of the American colonies. The changes in the ways of the trade weighed heavy on the shoulders of the American colonists, the costs were raised and the flow on non-British imports was reduced. Earlier consumer goods had flooded America and everyone could participate, because of the credit system you did not actually need money to do so. Ordinary Americans had had the possibility to shape their identities and to fashion themselves in new ways. The new laws and legislations stopped this and this then led to the American Revolution. Breen thus sees a link between consumer experience and political ideology. The American Revolution becomes an important breaking point in formation of an own culture in among the Americans. Since a majority of the Americans were of European origin the European culture and way of life became a natural point of reference for them. In the same time the Americans had to form a culture of their own after their independence in order to build a own nation.

Most people in the soon to be United Sates were rural and many dealt only rarely with money. Material standards were high, on average, since there were more resources than people. There was relatively plenty of food; the life expectancy was quite high as was the birth rate in comparison to European norms. This did however not lead to precocious consumption since the American economy was largely non-commercial. There were two other constraints. First, the causes of European consumerism were simply not as well developed. There was an absence of a full range of shops and shopping lure,

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but also to the fact that that Americans were not faced with erosion of traditional social and gender standards to the same extent as their European cousins. The absence of a commercial economy reduced the threats to established status and identity and the American women’s work roles were far more fundamental than in England. Second, American culture, with its strong religious emphasis supplemented now by a nationalistic desire to preach American virtue against European corruption was less fully attuned to the possibility of consumerism than was the case in Europe. The American economy did become rapidly more commercial after about 1800. Use of money expanded dramatically, in the market oriented countryside as well as in the growing cities.37

There are numerous possibilities of sources for my research. The starting point for my research will be the National Archives in Kew, England. The national Archives have several interesting collections for me, starting with their collection of wills made before 1858. Up to 1782 it was the obligation of every executor or administrator of a will to compile an inventory of the deceased’s goods. From these inventories it is possible to find out about the deceased’s leases, chattels, debts owed and owing, cash, crops, stocks, slaves and so on. These inventories do not give any information about the estate but that I will be able to find out in other parts of the national archives.38 The national Archives do also have several collections of different kind of correspondence, military and private, several descriptions about ways of life, dress and habits both in the Caribbean and in England. My aim is also to study diaries and travel accounts from the places in question. Also pamphlets and other printed materials will be of great interest for me since the changes in consumer habits caused a lively debate in newspapers and the new fashion in clothes spread with the help of printed images. From the second part of the eighteenth century onwards the printing industry spread rapidly. In the hundred years from 1750 to 1850, after controls and constraints had loosened publishing expanded rapidly. A guide to printers, stationers and booksellers in England shows that there were 650 businesses in the metropolitan alone in the 1780’s (1785).39 During the end of the eighteenth century and the beginning of the nineteenth the most sustained source for the English workers aesthetic experience and visual information was provided by printed images. Mainly though it was the middle classes who primarily benefited from the pictorial publishing. Both groups in society got in contact with the images in places like Coffee-houses, while the children could see pictures in the Sunday school books.40

Since my research will be linking to studies on consumption, networks and identities on Jamaica I am also interested in source material from there. In the Public Record Office in Spanish Town, Jamaica, there are inventories, testaments, tax rolls and other documents from the years 1674-1927 that can give important information. Also the national library of Jamaica has a collection with diaries, letters and documents from the 18th century that has belonged to the British governors and their wives.

Also religion and the legislation will be of interest for my research. Even though religion became much more of a personal thing in England during the eighteenth century

and the churchgoers decreased it still played a big part.\textsuperscript{41} Much of the criticism overall of consumption was based on a pious hostility towards worldliness. Religious critics wanted the people to reject the new worldly consumerist ways for a pious life of Christian devotion. And their big concern was people who confessed to be Christians and regularly attended church but still enjoyed consumption in the form of theatre, visiting balls and other leisure activities. According to many preachers pleasure was rank hedonism and sin and therefore jeopardised salvation. There were also moralists who condemned cheerfulness as different entertainment from the serious business of life and believed that luxury would undermine social discipline and morale.\textsuperscript{42} These worries were partly well founded as several diaries and other eyewitness accounts tell us that the Pleasure gardens were frequently visited by prostitutes. Theatres and playhouses were largely seen as places of sin and vice. This not the least since there was a proximity between the theatres and houses of ill fame in London during the eighteenth century. Consequently playhouses raised issues of public order as well as of sexual morality.\textsuperscript{43}

Many of the debaters about consumption during the 18th century saw the new colonial goods and the luxury that these brought with them as dangerous for the morale of the people. The globalisation of trade also had an impact on the religions of the world. Many local religions disappeared and others were submerged into Christianity where, as in the Americas, political power fell quickly into the hands of Christian Europeans. The trade with the colonies also gave rise to changes in the legislation, some of which I have mentioned earlier. What consequences did this and other laws have on consumption? I will also look at how the political changes that occurred in the world in the eighteenth century affected the consumerism, especially the Revolution in America in the 1770’s. I am also interested in the changes in the social order that the changes in consumer habits gave rise to. All over the world the landed classes were surrendering their military roles in the same time as the importance of commerce grew. Rich men of commerce normally sought aristocratic status, at least for their sons.\textsuperscript{44}

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\item \textsuperscript{41} Roy Porter, \textit{English Society in the Eighteenth Century} (London 1990, p. 168.
\item \textsuperscript{42} Roy Porter, 'Material Pleasures in the Consumer Society' \textit{Pleasures in the Eighteenth Century}, Roy Porter & Marie Mulvey Roberts (eds), p. 23.
\item \textsuperscript{43} Brewer (1997), p. 72-73, 350-35. James Boswell, \textit{The Diary of James Boswell}
\item \textsuperscript{44} McNeill & McNeill (2003), p. 185, 205.
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