



PERSPECTIVES ON EUROPE

Council for European Studies Fellowship Report

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From May 24, 2009 to July 27, 2009, the Council for European Studies/Mellon Foundation Pre-Dissertation Fellowship funded my research trip to Paris. During this time, I worked at seven archives and consulted three leading experts in my subject area to mine sources and discuss the theoretical and methodological grounding of my project. As a result of my time in Paris, I was able to develop a strong dissertation proposal which I have submitted for several grant competitions to fund my dissertation research next year.

My project concerns the Dames des Halles during the French Revolution. My research focuses on the political activism and cultural representation of these Parisian merchants. During the Revolution, the Dames struggled to maintain their Old Regime position as ritual representatives of the people by appropriating revolutionary practices and discourse. Although the Dames des Halles proved to be critical political actors in several *journées*, historians have yet to undertake a comprehensive study of their revolutionary activism. In order to throw into relief the complexity of female political practice during the Revolution, I analyze, on the one hand, the economic, religious, ritual, and gendered elements of their political activism. On the other hand, I study how other revolutionary actors visually and textually deployed the Dames' image for their own political ends. The Dames' case is particularly complicated due to the literary *genre poissard*, which sought to capture the daily lives of the Parisian popular classes, particularly the Dames des Halles, in a boisterous and often hyperbolic form. This *poissard* image became deeply politicized as pamphleteers of contradictory political positions appropriated it to gain popular legitimacy. My dissertation investigates how the intricate relationship between the literary counterfeit and true Dames des Halles informed their collective public image. Working at the intersection of popular politics, popular culture, and economics, I intend to study the Dames des Halles' political activism and the simultaneous renegotiation of their public identity throughout the course of the Revolution.

During my summer research trip, I consulted several municipal, departmental, and national archives. I began at the Bibliothèque nationale de France-Mitterrand (BnF) where I surveyed the largest collection of *poissard* political pamphlets (most in the vast cote Lb39). In addition, I found several newspapers and plays written in the *poissard* dialect. The BnF will be a crucial site for my dissertation research. At the Archives de la Préfecture de Police, I recorded potential leads in the police commissioners' records as the registers and cartons are broadly categorized. I spent much time drawing up inventories in the Archives nationales. The extensive holdings of governmental petitions Series F7 and C proved the most challenging since they were the least organized. Recent register work in Series W allowed me to pinpoint the location of spy accounts of the marketplace. Since the subsistence records of Series F11 are organized chronologically rather than thematically, I will need to find the exact dates of economic legislation before I return to Paris. I should be able to collect these dates through the National Assembly records which are published in *Archives parlementaires*. Also in the Archives nationales, I discovered

SPRING 2010

VOLUME 40

ISSUE 1

that *territoires de roi* in series Q2 continue into the early years of the Revolution. I intend to use these records to analyze ownership patterns and the reorganization of places in the market on the eve of the Revolution. Much to my surprise, the Archives de Paris's collection of the justice of the peace records remains remarkably intact in D.4 U. Using these documents, I will study the interactions between the Dames des Halles and their neighbors to discern their economic reputation on a local level. The remaining pamphlet records of Les Halles at the Bibliothèque Historique de la Ville de Paris will help to elucidate the market women's relationship with communal groups. I located multiple visual representations of the Dames des Halles in the holdings of the Bibliothèque nationale-Richelieu series QB and also hope to explore those of the Musée de Carnavalet's Cabinet des Arts Graphiques. These images will help me determine how artists portrayed the Dames des Halles for political ends. During my visit to the Institut d'Histoire de la Révolution française, I had the opportunity to study several French dissertations on Parisian popular politics. These dissertations helped me think about alternative sources and methodologies for tapping into the Dames' activism. The Institut also possessed an impressive array of rare source collections and guides that I hope to take advantage of when I return.

While in Paris, I met with three leading historians of the French Revolution to discuss my project. I first consulted Professor Jean-Clément Martin. Martin was able to discuss the state of the archives for the Parisian sectional sources, whose registers remain vague and outdated. He informed me that the holdings at the Archives de la Police were rather scattered due to the records lost to the 1871 Commune fire, and indeed, I had only found a few surviving cartons for the neighborhood where the Dames des Halles worked and resided (Marché). He wisely suggested that I also pursue traces of the women's political activity in police records of sections which housed governmental assemblies, such as Tuileries. In addition, he advised me to go to the Archives de Paris (the departmental archives), where I found useful information in the records of the justice of the peace. Martin directed me to a French dissertation on another Parisian section to consider alternate neighborhood sources. We also discussed the theoretical strands of my project, especially those concerning gender and cultural construction. Our conversation helped me position my work alongside the current work on gender and the Revolution in French academic circles. Martin recommended that I consider all Parisian market women, along with those of the central market, in order to broaden my source base. Such considerations would allow me to clarify the socio-economic position of market women as a whole, while allowing me to point up the exceptional political influence of the Dames des Halles. Martin also gave me contact information for his colleagues who have worked with confraternity sources during the revolutionary era. Finally, Martin put me in touch with his ex-student Virginie Besakian, who had written a thesis on the Dames des Halles but decided to stop after her master's degree.

While I had also employed many of the more easily accessible sources Besakian used in her master's thesis, she was kindly able to direct me to a few more obscure archival documents which I had not yet come across.

My conversations with Professors Dominique Godineau and Lynn Hunt proved fruitful for further conceptualizing my project. Godineau, whose own work on women in revolutionary Paris has been crucial to the field, explained to me the finer points of judicial and criminal administration levels. She also gave me new leads for work on Parisian processions and lay religious organizations during the Revolution. We also explored different ideas of female citizenship and discussed what work remains to be done on such legal and cultural constructs. On the other hand, Lynn Hunt encouraged me to consider the different power structures which underpin extrainstitutional political activism. For example, she asked me to consider what role violence played in alternate forms of political practice and how cultural judgments were tied to the gender, class, and occupation of the participants. She also expressed concern that my topic might be too narrow to garner a large source base and that I should consider the wider ramifications of the Dames'

actions. Finally, Hunt directed me to the vast image collections of the Musée Carnavalet's Cabinet des Arts Graphiques. Such alternative sources will expand my methodology to include non-literary sources as I study the cultural construction and representations of the Dames des Halles.

My experiences in Paris have allowed me to further refine the methodological and conceptual foundations of my dissertation. Since the majority of my sources will concern how others represented the Dames des Halles, I will need to draw heavily on their image as the source of their political legitimacy. I will

draw from the *genre poissard*, as well as journals, newspaper accounts, pamphlets, and visual representations. The Dames' multifaceted image will permit me to jointly engage the often separate historiographies of cultural representation and popular activism. The *poissard* literary works, *poissard* political pamphlets, and the actions of the living Dames des Halles existed within the same political and communal space, and they coalesced into a shared image. I will use the *marchandes'* position at this nexus to probe the exchange between female political practice and its cultural construction by different political groups. I will study how their political image developed as a complex result of both self-presentation and external appropriation, with each angle repeatedly informing the other. The Dames relied on their reputation as popular representatives to legitimize their activism. Yet, the power of their image partially depended upon the public reception and depiction of their actions. My socio-cultural reading of the living Dames des Halles and their *poissard* counterparts will investigate how the Dames des Halles carved out political spaces by relying on this collective image. In turn, I will analyze how authors' portrayal of *poissard* characters developed in dialogue with evolving public perception of the

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living Dames des Halles and their political position over the course of the Revolution. By examining the relationship between the Dames' actions and their literary image, my thesis will create new pathways in the historiography of gender and in the socio-cultural methodology of history. These various constructions will also shed light on the ways in which authors, playwrights, and pamphleteers deployed gender and women for political ends.

Since my time in Paris, I have continued to use my new understanding of the archival source base and the connections I made to plan my dissertation research trip to Paris in 2010-2011. Professor Jean-Clément Martin introduced me to Professor Pierre Serna, who is the current director of L'Institute d'Histoire de la Révolution française (IHRF) at the Université de Paris I - Panthéon-Sorbonne. Professor Serna read my dissertation proposal and has granted me affiliation with the IHRF during the year in which I return for my dissertation research. By auditing the seminars of the IHRF, I will be in dialogue with French scholars of the Revolution, whose gender theory and research methodology sometimes differs from their Anglo-Saxon counterparts' approach. While French historians currently engage gender history as "the study of relations between men and women,"¹ many Anglo-Saxon scholars stress the instability of these two "conceptual categories" and ask "how the meanings of sexed bodies are produced, deployed, and changed."² I believe that both approaches offer historians productive windows into how the revolutionaries reimagined society and, in turn, how men and women interacted within shifting gendered spaces. French doctoral students also use different methods in crafting their dissertation research. Most focus on mastering the content of a specific set of documents; and the organization of the archives often informs their topics. Through my discussions at the IHRF, I will be exposed to additional methods for mining the archives with precision.

I have also used my resulting dissertation proposal to seek further funding for my research. During the past semester, I applied to the Fulbright IIE (France), the Social Science Research Council International Dissertation Research Fellowship, the Bourse Jeanne Marandon (Société des Professeurs français et francophones d'Amérique), Bourse Chateaubriand (French Embassy), an Institute for Humane Studies Fellowship, the Theta Wolf Travel Fellowship and Majorie M. Farrar Memorial Award (Society for French Historical Studies), the Gilbert Chinard Research Fellowship (Institut Français d'Amérique), and the Ouisconsin Field Research Scholarship (UW-Madison Alumni, France Chapter). This semester, I will also submit applications for the Bernadotte E. Schmitt Research Grant (American Historical Association), the Millstone Fellowship (Western Society for French History), UW-Madison History Department Travel Fellowship, and the MAASS Research Grant (The Manuscript Society). I am certain that the detailed proposal which I developed as a result of my CES trip greatly strengthened my candidacy in these competitions. I will not receive any notifications until March, but I hope to obtain enough funding from a combination of these sources to conduct my dissertation research in Paris during the academic year of 2010-2011.

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Notes

1. Jean-Clément Martin, *La Révolte Brisée: Femmes dans la Révolution française et l'Empire* (Paris: Armand Colin, 2008), 6. Martin's recent work encourages his French colleagues to use this type of "gender history" to examine wider cultural questions which "women's history" cannot fully explore.
2. Joan Scott, "Unanswered Questions" in *American Historical Review Forum: Revisiting "Gender: A Useful Category of Historical Analysis"* 113, 5 (December 2008): 1423, 1426.